

THE LAZY SWORDMASTER

BOOK 01

Green Car

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The Lazy Swordmaster

(나태한 소드마스터)

by

Green Car

(초록차)

Synopsis

I finally managed to kill the demon lord. Can't I rest a bit now? Just leave me alone. Let me rest.

A hero from a modern world is reincarnated in a new world. He just wants to lead a peaceful new life, but his troubles begin when his family begin choosing their new successor.

Meanwhile, new enemies are rising from the shadows...

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Chapter 1 - A Certain Butler's Diary

Today is an auspicious day.

The Finn Iphelleta house had its third son delivered.

His black hair had a striking resemblance to his mother's.

His name is Riley.

"At least I have enough strength left to name him!"

Lady Iris smiled brightly.

Age 0.

The child spoke.

It was a word other than mummy.

He mumbled, "Finally..." What does he mean?

We never taught him that word...

Age 1.

I have secretly inspected Young Master's body.

To check his talent.

...

I have never seen anyone with such talent in my 60 years.

My head was filled with excitement and envy.

Not as a butler, but as a swordsman.

Is it because I've seen talent that surpasses genius?

I could not fall asleep that night.

Age 2.

The first-born, Master Ryan has won second place in the Novice Swordsmanship Tournament.

His competition were all around the age of 14-15.

He defeated them at the age of 9.

The maids of the mansion are clamoring that he may surpass his father.

Fools, the true 'genius' is here.

Age 3.

Even if their mothers are different.

Watching his brothers train everyday should arouse some curiosity.

But the Young Master shows no interest in the sword.

Simply watching this talent go undeveloped, driving me insane.

Age 4.

Maybe I'm getting impatient due to my age.

I have given him a wooden sword.

Unlike his usual intelligent self, for some unknown reason, he bawled his eyes out, screaming because he did not want to hold the sword.

In the end, he never even swung it once.

Was I too early?

Age 5.

The Finn Iphelleta house has a bloodline that has been blessed by the sword.

After the First son, the Second born Master Lloyd has done well in the Novice Tournament.

As I carefully mention the idea to the Young Master Riley, he replied with a smile, "Not doing it."

Age 6.

Hah..... Just why?

Age 7.

Master Ryan has already learnt to imbue Mana into the blade.

Within the Mana was a pure and powerful essence. Therefore, his father gave Master Ryan the title of “Geuk-Geom”.

Master Riley showed no reaction to the story.

Hah, if only he would just hold a sword.

(TLN: Geuk-Geom = Strong blade)

Age 9.

I am disheartened.

I am sure there will be great achievements.

Even if I ignore my bias as his servant.

Even if i ignore his talent for the sword.

He is a truly intelligent boy, and it crushes me.

....

Today, Master Lloyd was given the title of “Sok-Geom”

His speed was extraordinary, even beyond Master Stein's.

Suddenly....

"Did I see it wrong?"

This thought occurred to me.

(TLN: Sok-Geom = Quick-blade)

Age 10.

Master Stein finally made a decision.

He suggested that the Young Master competes in the Novice Tournament.

....

On that day, Master Riley disappeared from the Mansion.

Everyone in the mansion searched for him.

One day, two days, one week.

In the end, when the competitors of the tournament were decided, the Young master showed himself.

"Hide and seek is fun! Isn't that right?"

He smiled brightly.

Everyone in the mansion laughed nervously.

"My eyes weren't wrong."

That’s what I believed.

Age 11.

He naps in the apple tree in the gardens. Eats his meals.

Reads a few books and goes to sleep.

That’s his daily routine.

Sleeping 12 hours a day. Never touching a sword.

Even Master Stein has given up on Master Riley.

Age 12.

For fuck’s sake.

Why won’t he hold a sword.

Age 13.

Master Riley’s laziness has reached the pinnacle of laziness.

Even Master Stein has had it and went to give him a beating.

Yet Master Riley has disappeared miraculously.

Master Stein could not even find him.

Wow...

Age 14.

One day, I decided to complain to the young master.

"Why won't you learn swordsmanship?"

Was he sleep-talking?

He replied to my question.

"I managed to kill the demon lord, so I can take it easy right?"

I couldn't understand his answer, and sighed.

Age 15.

Master Riley may be lazy, but there are times when things change.

When he talks with his mother.

The book I read was so interesting.

I had a strange dream.

Lady Iris always replied with a smile.

Always mentioning that his happiness is the most important to her.

Age 16.

It's been a long time since all members of the Finn IphelletaHouse has gathered together.

Master Stein.

His two wives.

The 3 sons.

After dinner, Master Stein made an announcement.

"I should start deciding the successor."

Master Riley was never mentioned in the discussion.

Age 17.

For the first time in my life, I have seen Master Riley seething with rage.

Someone who wouldn't bat an eye for countless insults towards him.

It was when his mother was ridiculed by the other sons because of Master Riley, as he was declared illegible as a candidate to be the successor.

In that short moment, I saw the potential in his eyes.

Master Stein also saw them.

Age 18.

During her meal, Lady Iris collapsed after coughing blood.

As the table turned red with blood, Master Riley's face changed dramatically.

And today.

He raised a sword…

Chapter 2 - Heroes Exist To Save The World

Heroes exist to save the world.

...Those words make me sick.

By luck, no, by horrible luck, I was blessed by the holy blade and forced onto the path of killing the demon lord.

I had everyone's attention on me, and their hopes became the sole reason for me to push ahead..

With the weight of the world on my shoulders, I pressed on, never resting.

What was the reward for my deeds?

To be idolised?

To be an inspiration?

I didn't want any of it.

Another man could say, your reward is your adventure and the memories of your companions.

Don't make me laugh.

Memories of your companions?

Let me say it again.

Heroes exist to save the world, not to save their companions.

The fate of my companions was always destined to be a cruel one.

In order to defeat the demon lord who will destroy the world.

Whether it was before or after he rose up in power.

Of course, as a hero, as an individual, I tried my utmost to save those who are important to me.

But the results have always been disastrous.

The pain I felt as they whispered to me with their dying breaths,

"At least you managed to make it out alive."

The path of a hero is filled with more sorrow than happiness.

I could not fail to live up to their expectations.

Even when I wandered on the borders of insanity, the people would put their hopes on my existence.

Those days would continue as I fought on with blood in my mouth.

Heroes may exist to save the world,

but I fought for the eternal peace of death.

I'd had enough of this life.

The mysterious monsters who would invade our homes.

The villains who dared to harm my friends.

I have slain many,

and saved the lives of many more from the jaws of death.

And in the end...

I managed to slay the demon lord.

How high up was it?

The clouds were laid out below him as he fell from the skies with a giant.

With red skin and a giant horn.

The demon lord.

"Kuuuh...."

Countless wounds were visible on his colossal body.

He gritted his teeth and stared at his foe, struggling to retain consciousness.

In his foe’s right hand, the holy sword shone brightly.

"..."

His foe was standing on top of his forehead. The hero who slayed the demon lord.

"What is going through your mind right now?"

The demon lord asked the Hero.

Although he felt nothing but fury towards him, he had no choice but to acknowledge his power.

So he asked his foe, his equal, out of curiosity.

"If you're asking for my thoughts."

The hero spoke.

His face seemed somewhat pale as he fell towards certain death.

"..."

After a small pause, he replied quietly.

"I'm tired."

The demon lord could not understand his answer.

"What?"

Yes, this is enough right?

That was what he truly thought.

Why?

'If it's not you, if you're not here, if you can't...'

He's heard it a million times.

'Only you can do it.'

'It's impossible unless it's you.'

'Only you can save them.'

'You must protect them.'

To act as the symbol of their hope, to live up to their wishes.

It had taken its toll on him.

"I’m just really tired."

It was so hard to meet those gazes that were trying to hold onto what little faith they had.

"Honestly, I don't want it anymore."

As he remembered all the lines about heroes that had been said to

him, he looked down. He was falling.

"..."

As he fell from the insane height, his clothes fluttered uncontrollably.

The stars shone at the edge of his vision, and the cold winds swiped at him.

'Finally...'

It was difficult to keep his eyes open, so he half-closed them.

The clouds that had been far below him now caressed his body.

The ground was getting closer.

"... I'm almost there."

The hero could see the ashen black buildings made of concrete.

Every time he blinked, they became closer. It was moments before the final impact.

"Aaah, this is the end.'

At this height, even the hero could not avoid instant death.

He would become unrecognisable.

With all the injuries and curses on him, resurrection was also impossible.

"...?"

The demon lord tilted his head in curiosity.

Even after saving the world, after so much sacrifice, only death awaited him. Yet the hero was smiling.

As if, it was his greatest peace.

"Huh? They are falling!"

He was almost there.

Through the people’s shouting, he heard the demon lord's head hit the ground, letting out a sound like a tomato being crushed.

And it was his turn soon after.

And so…

The hero fell.

"The successor?"

"In the famed Iphelleta House."

In the crowded inn, people were talking about the rumors about the selection of the Iphelleta House’s new successor.

"Yeah!"

The Finn Iphelleta House, which was famous for its swordsmanship, had three sons.

The first, Ryan the Geuk-Geom, famous for his strength.

The second, Lloyd the Sok-Geom, famous for his speed.

The third, however…

(TLN: Geuk-Geom = Strong Blade)

(TLN: Sok-Geom = Quick Blade)

"The successor will be one of those three sons!"

"Only one of them will be chosen right?”

"Of course!"

"Wouldn't it be Ryan, the eldest?"

"Well, who knows? I heard that the second-born, Lloyd is quite sharp too."

"I thought they were blessed to have three sons, but having so many has its troubles, too."

"It’s a problem for all high-class families, especially such high nobles."

"For us peasants, sons are always better!"

"Who knows, you might win something big if you have a beautiful daughter."

"Hahaha! With your face? Dream on, brother."

Iffa village, a territory ruled by the Finn Iphelleta house. The inn was full of speculations about the new successor.

"From the sounds of things, it’s either going to be the First or the Second, is that right?"

"Yeah, thats true."

"What about the Third?"

"Ah, well, apparently he is completely useless."

"He was born that way."

"..."

A certain butler, who looked out of place in this inn, tightened his grip on his beer, as if he was trying to shatter the glass.

“He’s a noble and yet he’s known as the “Lazy”. In a way, he’s more famous than the other two.”

The Third.

Famous within the Iphelleta house for his awe inspiring laziness.

Titled, Na-Geom

Riley.

(TLN: Na-Geom = Lazy Blade)

“… Na-Geom?”

“HAH. Never heard such disgrace in my life.”

“You know how the Iphelleta house is famous for its swordsmanship? Well apparently, he’s never swung a damn sword in his life….”

“Basically, he’s beyond hopeless.”

The others nodded in agreement.

“So, what’s the reason for it?”

“Well, I heard he gets a seizure when he does.”

“Nah, I heard he’s got some allergy to it.”

“Apparently he’s more of a vegetable and can’t even move. I heard he just lies on his bed all day.”

“…!”

The old man who has been listening suddenly stood up, furious. His face was as red as an apple.

“You fucking sons of bit…!”

Chapter 3 - Riley is...

The boy yawned, lying against an apple tree in the mansion grounds. To him, it was just another bed.

"... Ah, I want some Coke."

He was the third son of the Ifelleta house, Riley.

"It's becoming more frequent. My dreams of the past."

A world with concrete floors and skyscrapers..

It was a reflection of his past life.

Since the day he unintentionally pulled the holy sword from the ground, there were only battles. To prevent the destruction of the world with the coming of the demon lord, he had to slay countless monsters.

Instead of being able to attend school with his friends, he had to force his way through numerous battles.

He sighed as he remembered his past life from his dreams.

"It always comes back right when I’m about to forget."

He scratched his head, remembering his phrase, 'I want to have some coke.'

"Coke, huh..."

It was his favorite drink back in the 'past'.

Sadly, he did not know how to make it.

"Tsk."

How I long for the burning sensation of the carbonated liquid pouring down my throat, but that’s impossible now...

As he thinks to himself, he locks his fingers and stretches out his arms.

"Well, there's no need to repeat my past."

I will live this life in peace.

With his memories still intact, that was what he had thought upon being reincarnated into this world.

To fight with a blade, to save the world...

To become idolised, to be relied upon...

It was unneeded.

He would avoid any obstacles in his path.

Thankfully, he was now the third son of an important noble family.

Perfect for a lazy and carefree life.

"...Young master, Young master!"

If only there weren't any obstacles.

"Dear lord! Are you sleeping again?"

'Christ.'

Although he had just woken up from a nap, he closed his eyes again to avoid this situation.

It was to appeal for his sleep to not be disturbed.

"It is already past noon and the sun is starting to set! How are you supposed to sleep at night?"

If a man tries, he can sleep all day.

Almost like a vegetable, although not quite.

'Being drowsy at day and sleepy at night are two different things.'

As he makes his answer in his mind, he snored loudly.

An act to show the butler that he was still in the land of dreams.

"Time may have taken much from me, but I can still tell between truth and lies."

"..."

"I have been serving you for almost 20 years. You should stop that act of yours and get up."

He may have talked like that, but Ian had a way of discerning the truth. At this point, he was just pleading for Riley to get up.

"Haah. It is almost dinner time."

Ian shook Riley's shoulders.

"Ahh, is that so?"

Riley stood up, unable to resist the sad voice.

He didn't want the old man to cry.

"It seems... you did not train today, either."

Riley did not respond to Ian.

"I am sure you will see your potential, if you would just try."

The nagging began.

Again.

Riley began to doubt whether waking up was the right action.

"Just, what is the reason?"

"Hey, what do you think today's dinner will be?"

"In terms of wisdom, you would easily surpass both of your brothers!"

Ian once evaluated Riley to be 'too mature for his age'.

In a good way.

As a baby, he acted in a way which did not fit his age, due to his old memories.

"Others may be oblivious, but I know! That Young Master is ..."

"... Lazy?"

Riley responded with a smile.

"No! Not at all!"

Ian's face was dyed red, with steam coming out of his ears.

"Ha... honestly! Do you know how angry I was at those bastards in Iffa village!"

Ian closed his eyes, and pounded his chest in anger, only to realise Riley has already distanced himself from him.

Ian followed, mumbling foul words as he did.

"Honestly, Lady Iris! Please discipline Master Riley. He still will not even touch the sword... It is as if he is trying to become a wizard."

"What's so wrong with that, Ian?"

Within the second dining room of the mansion, there were two... no, three people at the table.

The woman smiled towards her son who was sitting opposite to her.

"Heheh."

Riley smiled back at his mother when their eyes met.

His mother was the only person in the mansion who would understand him.

Iris.

She would listen attentively at his absurd stories about his dreams.

A great mother who truly wished for her son’s happiness, despite his lack of effort to learn the swordsmanship of the house.

If Riley were to pick his greatest treasure, it would undoubtedly be her.

"Haah. The same goes for you, my lady."

Ian sighed at the two.

"Oh? What do you mean?"

"Young master is already at the age of 18. He is an adult. How long will you continue to accept his childish behaviour? It is time to be a bit more strict with him. And there is also the issue about the successor."

Ian pressed his finger between his eyebrows as he said those words. Just remembering about it gave him a headache.

"Are you not angry? Both the sons and Lady Orelly would visit you in their spare time, just to ridicule you. Those rude ingrates."

(TLN: The honorific that the butler uses here specifies that Lady Orelly is the first wife of the Iphelleta family, and the mother of the first and second sons. Lady Iris is the second wife and also Riley's mother.)

"Ian, watch your language. We are still in the mansion..."

"No, I will say it. The two of you... need some ambition. Do you not want to get back at them?"

Ian began his complaint.

"Instead of talking about that weird dream of yours!"

The dream Riley always spoke of to his mother. When Ian shouted at him that he should be talking about swords instead, Riley replied,

"Weird dream you say. But it's still interesting right?"

"Huh? Yeah it is interesting... Wait, that is not the point!"

Ian began to appeal to Iris about Riley's good traits.

"You know how smart young master is the most, my lady."

At a young age, Riley was the fastest at learning how to write and speak.

That was not the only thing he could say.

There were countless more.

"And?"

Riley's problem solving skills were beyond his age, and whenever danger would approach, he would disappear from the mansion, using 'hide and seek' as an excuse.

He would only reappear once the danger had passed.

"I am still..."

Iris knew perfectly well just how different Riley was from an average person. The dreams, the way he spoke... Each word and action he took seemed saturated with maturity.

"His wisdom can be put to use for the sword as well! I have spoken to you before about his unprecedented talent..."

"Ian."

Iris cut Ian's words.

"I am happy as long as Riley is."

Even so, she was not bothered by Riley's actions.

Because she was his mother, she would only wish for his happiness.

"Haaah..."

Ian's shoulders dropped as he realised he had failed to convince her again.

He felt a little smaller than before, as if all of his muscles underneath had shrunk as well.

"Ian, it's my life, so I'll take care of it."

Riley snickered as he took a mouthful of soup, knowing he escaped Ian's nagging thanks to his mother.

"Cough!"

Iris suddenly began coughing.

Did her food go down her airway?

Was there too much pepper in the soup?

"Cough, Cough!"

The coughs seemed quite rough.

Riley's face began to darken, as the coughs did not stop, even after some time had passed.

"... Mother?"

Iris covered her mouth with one hand, while waving the others to tell that she was okay.

But Riley noticed something on her shaking hands.

"Mother, your hand..."

"Cough! Cough!"

Her expression worsened when she looked at her hands.

Red.

Blood soaked her hands and dripped down onto the table.

"Mother!!"

Riley stood anxiously, but quickly turned his head when he noticed someone was watching. At that moment, his eyes changed to that of a predator’s, but quickly returned.

"Huhu..."

The laugh was quite distant, but Riley could hear it, and then he saw it.

"Please wait, I will bring a doctor immediately!"

"..."

Leaving only a laugh of ridicule, the first wife of the Finn Iphelleta family faded into the distance.

Chapter 4 - The Poisoned Soup

"Young Master?"

Ian stretched his arm towards Riley, who would not say a word.

He found it strange that Riley would not turn to look back at his beloved mother, even though she was in such a state.

"Where are you going? You must sta..."

As a man who had practiced swordsmanship under the Iphelleta house for his entire life,

he could feel a sudden change in Riley’s aura.

His curiosity rose.

It was similar to the time when the first and the second sons of the Iphelleta house ridiculed his mother.

Ian thought he could see his potential once more.

"Ian."

"Ah, yes?"

Riley's cold tone made Ian realise just how selfish his thoughts were.

It was not the time to try to read the atmosphere or Riley's emotions.

"Watch my mother."

After giving this brief order, Riley immediately left the dining room.

Without even looking back towards his mother.

There was a reason as to why Riley did not look despite his love for her.

The expression on his face was as cold as stone, filled with anger.

His mother may be unconscious, but Riley did not want to show such emotions in front of her.

Riley slipped out of the dining room, sped through the corridor and stopped.

"Oh?"

Clack, clack.

A woman in heels appeared from the corner and confronted Riley with an unsurprised 'Oh'.

"Riley? Is that you?"

From the vanity of her clothing, to the white face powdered with makeup.

With just one look at her luxurious appearance, one would be able to tell that she was someone of importance in the mansion.

"Hello."

Riley smiled brightly at her with his rage burning within.

The woman was the first wife of the house.

For Riley, she was another mother to him.

'Orelly Finn Iphelleta' was her name.

"I thought you were having dinner with Iris. You seem to be in a hurry. Do you need something from me?"

Orelly tilted her face, with a innocent look.

"Yes, um... I forgot to greet you earlier."

As Riley lowers his head, she waved her hand with a laugh.

"Oh, there is no need."

Riley looked into her eyes and saw the burning desire within them.

Eyes burning with malice and ill intent.

An average person may not notice, but Riley had seen such eyes in his previous life.

"Lady Orelly, may I ask. Where did you go just before this?"

"Hmm?"

"This smell, it does not seem to be from your dinner. It smells more like that from the kitchen."

Orelly tilted her head once more.

"Nice nose you have there. Yes, I was simply curious as to what the menu is today. I have not yet eaten dinner, you see."

"Haha, that does not seem to be like your usual self."

"Hoho, oh you! I could say the same to you Riley. I'm surprised you are actually on your feet instead of lying around."

She stared into Riley with her narrowed eyes.

It seemed as if she was looking down on him.

Her gaze looked kind at first, but Riley could see the hidden meaning in it.

“Move, bitch. Get out of the way.”

A phrase he knew from his previous life that best described the situation.

It was a warning.

Telling him to not try anything rash and act like a corpse just as he always had.

She must have been quite agitated due to the recent talks about the successor.

"Oh Master Lazy Blade, it's good that you are showing such manners but your mother must be getting worried. Shouldn't you go back?"

Orelly whispered to herself as she turned her back to Riley.

"Oh wait, is it the other way around? My bad."

"..."

"Who cares, right?"

Riley entered his mother’s room, and questioned Ian who was looking after her.

"How’s mother?"

"She is alright. For now."

She had made it through the worst of it.

That thought sank deep in Riley's heart.

With an expression as serious as Riley's, Ian put his hand on Riley's shoulder.

"Young master, may I have a word with you?"

Ian whispered with a grim face.

He was wary of the possibility that someone would be eavesdropping.

"The truth is, in the soup..."

Riley cut Ian's words before he could finish.

"There was poison right?"

"...?!"

Ian nodded in surprise with cold sweat running on his back.

He was wondering how Riley managed to find out, but that was not an important matter.

"... Yes, the poison is not strong enough to significantly harm a normal person, but Lady Iris is a special case. Her body is already weak from her genetic condition. It must have been a combination of both that caused her to faint."

Riley stared at his sleeping mother.

"..."

It bothered him that he could not do anything but watch his

mother fall.

"Therefore, someone in the mansion tried to assassinate Lady Iris. She is being targeted. We have already captured the maid who was in charge of the dinner. She will be questioned soon. And..."

Ian fixed his tie and bowed to Riley.

The action showed Ian’s feelings of guilt.

"I am sorry. This old man was not aware of this until it was too late."

Ian had looked after Riley ever since he was born.

He had neglected housework in order to try to convince Riley to train his swordsmanship.

The result was Lady Iris's poisoning.

If he had been on guard, it would not have happened.

Ian was prepared for the punishment.

"Ian."

"Yes."

"About the dream I had, in that strange world."

"..."

"There's a saying like this."

"Yes?"

"Don't wake the sleeping lion."

Riley spoke while opening and closing his hand.

"Where's my wooden sword?"

"Young... Master?"

Riley continued as he walked out the bedroom.

"I must go to the training room."

Today, Riley's eyes burned quietly, as he thought of his mother.

Chapter 5 - Nightly Guest (Part 1)

In the training ground of the Iphelleta mansion.

Within the dark field, a black-haired boy stood.

The way he held the wooden sword was a little awkward.

"Hoo..."

The boy sighed while staring at the dummy.

It was a dummy filled with straw, without any sort of internal mechanisms; it was purely for novices.

'Shall I test it?'

He mumbled to himself as he spread his feet to shoulder width.

This stance was quite different from that of his two brothers.

After controlling his breathing, he charged toward the dummy, striking it.

"Huwaap!"

Smack!

The strike made a dull noise.

"..."

A new mark could be seen on the dummy.

The mark was very faint, but it was a good strike nonetheless, considering it was his first time swinging the sword.

Yet, it was hard to count it as a strike from the Iphelleta House, the house that was said to be blessed by the sword.

"Young... master?"

Ian, who saw the strike happen, spoke uncertainly.

It was... severely lacking compared to his expectation.

As far as Ian knew, Riley had more than enough talent to cut the dummy's head in a single slash.

The situation now looked worse than ever.

"P-please, try again!"

Ian shook his head and pleaded once more.

He thought to himself repeatedly that his eyes did not deceive him.

"This should do..."

Riley muttered faintly.

He then proceeded to cast away the wooden blade upon the ground.

"Young master?"

"That's it. I'm bored."

Surprised, Ian stretched his arm towards him.

"W-where are you going?"

"The library. I'll just read myself to sleep."

"Young master! Please, just one more time!"

Ian bit his lips as his eyes gazed upon the wooden blade lying on

the ground.

"Kuu..."

A warrior throwing his blade away?

Ian knew how heavy of a meaning it carried.

Although Riley would not have had a clue what it meant.

"He changes his mind like a girl does changing her clothes."

"Really?"

In a room, shrouded in darkness.

A woman wearing a white dress turned her head.

Behind her was a hooded man, who had his head lowered. Dressed fully in black, he followed her like a shadow.

"How was his skill?"

The woman asked while looking out through the moonlit windows.

"His skill was..."

The hooded figure paused momentarily.

"Atrocious."

"..."

"I do not know if these words would fit a man of the Iphelleta House, but his talent for the blade was nonexistent. The strike he displayed was a perfect example of a novice."

The woman smirked upon hearing the man's report.

"Well what did you expect? He is the famous Master Lazy Blade."

As she spoke to herself, the man tilted his head as he asked a question.

"Then are the rumors true? That he has never swung a sword?"

"Yes. It is true."

"Huh."

The man, an assassin hired by the woman, sighed in disbelief.

Anyone in the Iphelleta House could become successful by wielding a sword.

In that family, he was born a third child, and did nothing.

And when he finally changed his mind at the age of 18, he threw away the sword realising it had little effect.

How useless.

How pathetic that child is.

"It didn't seem like he has a weak body either. How shameless."

The man stood up while clicking his tongue.

His mission here was complete.

Mission one, deliver the poison for the soup.

Mission two, stalk the third son.

Those were the missions he was tasked with.

"Then, I shall take my leave."

"Yes. Well done. Do send my regards to Father."

"He has been complaining about not being able to see you more often."

"Alright, I'll visit soon."

As the woman waved her hand, the hooded man disappeared, as if melting away into the floor.

The woman laughed while gazing up at the moon.

"I was worried for nothing, silly me."

Orelly smirked.

The flames of jealousy in her heart seemed to have calmed down a little.

In a corridor of the Iphelleta mansion.

After leaving Lady Orelly's room, the hooded man sneaked through the corridor in order to avoid being detected by the Master of the house.

He then turned his head, feeling an intense bloodlust behind

him.

'...What was that?'

He was one of the top three within the organisation.

Even the mansion's master, Count Stein could not avoid being detected by him.

"..."

If Lady Orelly was correct, he should still be in his office, in the middle of all the paperwork that needed attending to.

The hooded man called upon all of his mana within to detect life in the mansion.

As expected, Stein was still in the office.

Since his presence was settled there, this bloodlust crawling on his back could not be his.

"Who is it?"

The man turned and asked.

There was no answer.

"Am I mistaken? No, it can't be."

As a veteran in this line of work, there is no way he would mistake such intent.

The hooded man lowered his stance and increased his guard.

Tension filled the air in the dark corridor.

The hooded man, on the edge of his nerves, frowned in frustration.

This stabbing sensation of bloodlust was getting closer.

'Who is this fool? Is he trying to call the Count here too?'

With such thick killing intent filling the air, not only Stein but even the First and Second sons would come running here as well.

And they would surely be cut in two.

"Oi, if you keep this up, both-"

The hooded man tried to speak, but held his breath in the next instant.

"Aaah..."

"...!"

A voice came out from the end of the corridor, breaking the silence.

"I thought a rat got inside."

Step, step.

The footsteps started to become louder.

"A nightly guest?"

"..."

"If I recall correctly, there weren't any arrangements for guests to arrive at this hour."

There was only one reason why the hooded man held his breath with his eyes wide open.

Even though the voice and the footsteps could be heard, the presence could not be detected.

'I-is there another like me?"

How is it possible, when it seemed mana was not being used at all?

The hooded man considered the slim chance that a great senior in his line of work was also stationed in the estate.

"It seemed like you came out of Lady Orelly's room."

The man behind the voice showed himself.

He sounded rather calm and leisurely.

"... Y-you are?!"

The moonlight from the windows revealed the man's foot, his clothes and finally his face.

The hooded man's jaw dropped when he realised who it was, stretching the mask covering his face.

"Let's have a chat."

He was the same man the hooded man could not understand.

'Riley?'

His eyes opened wide, unable to believe the scene that was happening in front of him.

Chapter 6 - Nightly Guest (Part 2)

'Why is Lazy Blade...?'

The black haired boy in front of him was the same person that he and Lady Orelly had deemed pathetic.

"Really? I thought you wanted me to reveal myself?"

Riley questioned the hooded man.

Riley continued to walk towards him until he was only inches away from him.

"What, did I frighten you that much?"

The man was armed with a dagger, but Riley remained as calm as ever.

In fact, he went so far as to knock on the man's forehead with his right hand.

As if asking him to not just stand there, and speak.

'This...'

It was hard for the man to believe this was the same person who

cast away his sword after a single strike in the training ground.

'Is this really the same Riley?'

The hooded man did not dare to make even the slightest movement.

He felt as if any sudden movement would result in his body being torn to shreds.

"It’d be boring if you don’t have any reaction."

Riley continued speaking in a leisurely manner while clicking his tongue.

"I guess it would be difficult to have an intelligent conversation with an untimely guest."

Riley folded his arms, glanced at the dagger on the man's side, then gave him a cold look as he spoke again.

"I'll ask you once. There'll be no second chance."

"..."

"If you answer, I'll let you go."

He had just seen the pathetic strike Riley had made a few moments ago.

And now blackmail?

What a joke.

Yet...

He could not let out a laugh; instead his entire body was frozen in fear.

"What I want to know is..."

His cold eyes grew narrow.

Feeling his heart pounding, the hooded man swallowed his saliva.

He was finally allowed to do so.

"...Why did you visit Lady Orelly's bedroom?"

"..."

The hooded man's lips had already began to tremble before he noticed.

The calm moonlight that lit the corridor slowly began to fade away.

Late in the evening, in the library of the Iphelleta mansion.

"Young master! Where are you? Young master!"

Ian entered the room abruptly, searching for Riley.

There were signs that something had happened here, and Ian took a closer look at the room.

"Young master!"

Riley, who was lying on a couch with a book on his face, groaned and turned his body.

"Young master, wake up!"

"Ah, what? What's it now?"

Riley looked at Ian while rubbing his eyes drowsily.

He frowned, as if to ask 'Why did you bother my sweet nap?'.

"If you want to talk about the sword again..."

"I will get back to that later. But that's not important right now!"

Riley, who was expecting an endless lecture from Ian, tilted his head curiously.

What is it then?"

"A body was found in the mansion."

"Hmm?"

"A body! A corpse!"

Riley looked at Ian as if he had gone crazy.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

The Riley Ian saw now was nothing like how he had been when Iris had collapsed.

"Haaa..."

His eyes had potential when he grabbed the sword, although the result had ended up being disappointing.

Ian sighed as he remembered the expectations that he had before.

"I'm glad I made it in time."

When Ian mumbled to himself, Riley's face turned even sourer.

"A better explanation please."

"An unknown man dressed in black was found. In front of Lady Orelly's room."

"Huh, really?"

Riley asked, as if he could not believe it.

"It seems that Count Stein has heard of Lady Iris' condition as well. The entire mansion is being turned upside down."

A stranger had managed to sneak into the mansion.

And poison had been found in the soup.

Although a body was found, it was hard to say whether there was only a single invader.

The reason Ian mumbled 'I made it in time' was because he needed to ensure Riley was safe from the unknown assassins.

"In any case, it is dangerous for you to be alone."

Ian spoke with a bittersweet expression on his face.

"I do not believe you could win against an assassin."

He hoped that this might stimulate Riley to take action.

But...

"Hmm."

Riley lazily turned his eyes towards the book that was on his face.

"I guess it's got nothing to do with me then."

"Pardon?"

"You can go. I hope you didn't leave Mother alone."

"Y-Young master, did you listen to what I said?"

"Yeah, I heard it. But it's got nothing to do with me right?"

Riley nodded without even turning his head to Ian.

"..."

His carefree attitude showed no interest whatsoever in what Ian had just told him.

Ian could not stop his anger from rising at Riley's indifferent attitude.

"Just what is ...!"

"Ah, wait!"

Ian stopped.

"I almost forgot."

Riley snapped his fingers then produced something from his pocket.

"Here, take these."

"...?"

Riley conferred to Ian a handful of seeds which Ian had never seen before.

"These are...?"

"Use it to make some tea for Mother. It should be pretty effective. Don't lose it, it's quite rare."

Riley rolled his shoulder then pointed to the book he was holding.

The title was 'Encyclopaedia of Medicinal Seeds'.

It was surely for Iris, who had collapsed.

"W-when...?"

"Just now. I was tired from trying to find these so I tried to take a nap... and then you came all of a sudden. How do you think I felt?"

"..."

"I'm going back to sleep."

Riley went back to the couch as he ordered Ian not to disturb him again.

"We have searched every nook and cranny of this estate, even with our senses. He is the only invader."

The first son Ryan spoke while looking down on the corpse.

The second son Lloyd followed the conversation.

"To invade on his own, and without a weapon as well, he must have underestimated us quite a bit."

Count Stein, who had been listening to his sons, scanned the area for any evidence. He thought of another possibility.

"Or perhaps, there’s another accomplice within the mansion."

"..."

The body was found right in front of Lady Orelly's room, so she had no choice but to join in on the detective work.

'Impossible...'

She looked pale with worry, as if asking 'what's going on?', but what her mind was going through was the complete opposite.

The assassin she had called in secret has been killed instead, and placed in front of her room.

It was no small matter.

"Judging from the way he is dressed, he is likely a thief or someone from the Assassin's Guild. Should we start from there?"

"Of course! Search all the lands, starting from Iffa village! How dare they challenge us by setting foot in the Iphelleta mansion!"

Count Stein grinded his teeth and swore to catch the person responsible for this.

'Just how did this...'

Lady Orelly gulped in fear.

While she was afraid of her temperamental husband, the worst thing was that something was missing from the body.

A dagger with the Guild's seal on it.

The dagger which should have been on his waist had vanished.

'Just... who?'

It would have been convenient if the evidence was destroyed by the assassin himself, but there was little chance that had

happened, judging from the state of his body.

Then who?

Who could have taken the dagger?

Chapter 7 - Just Who...?

Morning, at Count Stein's office.

"So, Riley had a go with the sword?"

"Yes."

Ian reported to Stein what had happened yesterday.

Yesterday, Riley had gone to the training grounds after watching his mother collapse.

Ian added that the lazy atmosphere that usually surrounded Riley had vanished for a moment.

"Well he did have a go, but..."

Although it was good news that the lazy child displayed potential to some extent, there was an additional piece of information that would counteract the former, with room to spare.

"He lost interest immediately."

"Immediately?"

"I assume he was disappointed with the power of his swing."

That meant that his swordsmanship was beyond pathetic.

"Hmm."

Stein who had been tapping on his desk nodded.

"Alright. You may leave."

"Master, perhaps you should give -"

"I'm already having a headache with the rat that infiltrated the manor. I had already surmised that Riley would only amount to that. There is no reason to teach the swordsmanship of the Iphelleta house to someone who lacks any form of motivation. I'm sure my ancestors would think the same."

After finishing his words, Stein flicked his hand to shoo Ian away.

Ian turned to leave with his head lowered ruefully.

Riley managed to find the perfect angle to lie down on his preferred apple tree.

This was the sort of angle he found only once a fortnight.

If he were to move now, it would be lost for the rest of the day.

Therefore, Riley would not move from where he was.

"I wonder if that will fall anytime soon."

He had been licking his lips while staring at the apple which had been dangling on the tree.

For a while now, he had been waiting for it to fall on its own.

Perhaps by the wind,

Perhaps due to a worm,

Or perhaps a bird would land on it.

He was waiting in anticipation for the single apple directly above his head to fall to him.

Were he to stand and take it himself, he would be forced to relinquish his perfect position.

"Ha. Young Master..."

Riley, who had been counting the number of leaves around the apple, turned his attention away.

The words that came from behind were equivalent to sighs of dismay.

Naturally, the man who spoke those words was a dejected Ian.

"What’s up? You seem pretty down."

Riley rolled his eyes to glance at Ian.

"..."

"Ah! I see! Is it raining today? Your back and knees must be aching."

Ian began to give Riley a glare.

"..."

"Right?"

Riley scratched his head and looked up at the sky.

The sky was blue, with not a cloud in sight.

"Was I wrong?"

"Young Master!"

Ian suddenly shouted at Riley.

"Geez, you surprised me..."

Riley almost flinched out of his perfect position.

"Will you really give up after that?"

"What about it?"

Riley replied as if asking what the problem was.

Ian continued speaking with his hands curled into fists.

"I will give you praise for finding those seeds for Lady Iris; she has recovered considerably thanks to them!"

Of course.

They were no ordinary seeds.

Riley had placed special enchantment on the seeds.

"But, to give up after only one swing! That’s… That’s….!"

Ian's words began to falter.

As the first man to have had seen Riley's potential, he was also the one to be most the devastated by his lack of motivation.

He wondered if his lifespan had shorted from watching so much potential wither away. Or perhaps it had given him cancer.

"Well, if I can't win with a sword, I'll just become a mage. I like reading better anyway."

At least cancer could be cured, with some luck.

Ian screamed in frustration.

"What, you think becoming a mage is…"

Is that easy?!

Just when he was about to ask, Riley turned his gaze elsewhere.

It was directed above him, between the leaves of the apple tree.

"What are you looking at?"

"An apple."

"Why?"

"I thought if I became a mage, I could take that apple without standing..."

"Young Master!!"

"..."

Riley shut his mouth.

Overwhelmed by Ian, Riley muttered after building up his courage.

"... Your shouting is hurting my ears."

"Don't change the subject. This time, I'll surely change your -"

"Hm? Wait Ian! Look, over there! Is that the glint of a blade?"

"What are you on..."

Ian told himself that he would call Lady Iris as reinforcements if

Riley was misleading him again, and then he looked up.

"Hm?"

But what was this?

Just as Riley had said, a blade could be seen within the leaves.

It was not a long sword or a double edged sword like the ones used in the house.

It was a dagger.

One without a sheath.

'A dagger?'

Ian was quite interested by the peculiar purple grip it had, and jumped toward it.

As he landed on the branches, he carefully took the dagger out from the tree.

'It seems familiar.'

It was a dagger with a crescent-shaped blade.

Ian widened his eyes in realization.

'Wait... Is this...?'

The shape of the blade would fit perfectly in the sheath that was currently in Stein's office.

"What? What's going on? Show me as well."

Riley did not want to move, but he was curious, too.

Therefore, he took the option of ordering Ian.

Ian dropped next to Riley and handed the dagger to him.

"I believe this belonged to the dead man we found yesterday."

"Huh? How do you know?"

"The shape is identical to the sheath he had. We should be able to find out soon."

Ian took the dagger back from Riley.

"Then I shall go to see Master Stein."

"Huh? Alright then."

Riley nodded in agreement as Ian spoke with a serious face.

He got to skip out on all the nagging, and there was nothing he was missing out on.

"..."

As Ian left in a hurry, Riley began to tap the tree with his foot.

"Well then."

Riley talked to himself.

Although his eyes still looked as lazy as ever, the atmosphere around him changed completely.

"How are they going to react?"

Riley closed his eyes and spread his senses far and wide across the mansion, keeping his own presence concealed.

"Number 3 is dead?"

"Yes, sir."

Inside a dark room.

The candle suspended from the ceiling burned faintly.

This was the hideout from which the hooded man originated.

"How did he die?"

A man who was dressed differently from the other hooded men asked for a report.

As expected of an experienced assassin, the reply came in a dry manner.

"We have no idea."

It would mean that death of No.3 was not a suicide.

"And the body?"

He bit his lips and asked another question.

"It is being held in the Iphelleta House."

"Huh."

The situation was bad.

It had happened in the famous Iphelleta House.

If any evidence was found from the body, not just the hideout but everyone in that room's lives would be in danger.

"Orelly's in a bad position."

He scratched his beard as he thought about his 'daughter'.

"What will you do?"

As the hooded man asked, the man stood up from his chair.

"I will go."

"Directly?"

"Well, we mustn’t be found out. We leave this evening. Make preparations for a stealth mission."

"As you wish."

The hooded man bowed and disappeared.

"Well then."

Standing alone in the room, the man grabbed a mask on the table, and placed it in his pocket.

"It's been a while since I last paid a visit to my son-in-law."

Chapter 8 - Just who...? (Part 2)

It was a dire situation.

News had just arrived, mentioning that the butler Ian had shown the dagger to Count Stein.

It was originally thought that the issue of the assassin’s dagger had been taken care of, as it was nowhere to be found on the body. But, that was clearly not the case.

'The job must be completed... by today at the very latest, just to be safe.'

Lady Orelly, first lady of Iphelleta House.

Though it was not known to the world, her father was the head the Assassin's Guild in secret.

If one were to mention the problem at hand... then it would be the fact that the Iphelleta House despised such people, and Orelly was now at risk of having her family's secret exposed.

What if this information were to be found out?

Then, the situation would get ugly.

The marriage between Orelly and Stein was purely for business

purposes.

'If... If they find out the poison for Iris was from me...'

Orelly gulped audibly.

If word of this got out, then her fragile relationship maintained by her two sons would shatter completely.

She did not want to lose the man, Stein.

Definitely not to his concubine.

That was what she was most afraid of, rather than her secret being exposed.

"...-ther?"

'No, that cannot happen.'

"Mother!"

The second son of the house, Lloyd was shaking her shoulders.

"Hm? What is it?"

"We were talking about Riley. Are you alright mother?"

There was worry shown on his face.

Perhaps it was due to his mother not looking too well.

"No, no. I am doing fine."

"You seem quite sick."

"It might be due to lack of sleep. What happened yesterday, it was simply too much for me."

Orelly lied as if she weren't aware of what was going on.

She hadn't revealed even to her sons that the body in front of her room was related to her.

"Even in death, he brings such harm to us. Of all places, to die in front of your room."

Lloyd grumbled.

"Have some rest mother. I will stay by you."

How could she tell him that she is the daughter of a cruel assassin?

Impossible.

"No, there's no need. I'm more interested in our previous conversation. It was about Riley right?"

Orelly smiled back at her worried son.

"Ah, yes."

Lloyd nodded.

"Apparently, Riley had a go with a sword yesterday."

"Oh, Riley did?"

"It was before the body was found."

Lloyd scratched the back of his head.

"Well... It was probably because of the poisoning that happened to Lady Iris. That seemed to be the reason. I guess the lazy child became quite enraged that time. Haha."

"So? How was it?"

The edges of Orelly's eyes twitched, albeit faintly.

She was already well aware of the story, told to her yesterday by the hooded man.

But, hearing it from her son had a different feel to it.

"...It was abysmal."

This time, she had a faint smile on her lips.

"Oh, is that so?"

That was it.

The proof that she is superior to the concubine Iris, that she should be the one who received the most love.

Iris' son was a pathetic, useless plebeian, while Orelly's sons were both able swordsmen.

This alone was enough to prove her presence in the house.

"Hoho, that's how it is."

Orelly's eyes turned towards the windows.

Outside, she could see Riley sleeping on the apple tree in the garden.

It was as if the thought of learning swordsmanship was out of question.

Late afternoon at Iffa village.

For some reason, there were multiple carriages lined up within the village.

They all looked quite luxurious.

"What is it? Why is the 'Mythril Carriage' of the Tes Trade Guild here in the village?"

A villager asked, pointing towards the shiniest of all the carriages.

"Who knows?"

"Did they find a gold mine nearby?"

"As if it's a gold mine. If they actually did find one, I'll give you my wife."

"How come the bet seems favourable to you?"

It didn't seem like any of the villagers knew the reason.

All of them had a curious look.

It was one of the biggest trade guilds in the continent.

The fact that the head of the Guild's personal carriage was here was a big deal for the villagers.

"Um... it's just a rumour, but it concerns the wife of the Iphelleta House."

"Hm?"

Remembering a rumour, some of the villagers began whispering amongst each other, with their hands masking their mouths.

"What was her name, the first wife... Ah! Lady Orelly. Apparently, she is the Guild Head's daughter."

"What? That’s the first time I’ve heard of this!"

"Hey, think about it. Why would Count Stein agree wearing a ring for the not-so-pretty Lady Orelly? He would seem to be on the losing end, no?"

The villager who had been talking about Lady Orelly used his hands to create a round shape with his thumb and index finger.

"This must have been going back and forth."

"Wow..."

The villagers made a sound of shocking when they heard those words. As they did, the members of the trade guild turned their heads toward the villagers.

"Shh, watch your mouths..."

"..."

Even when they were quiet, they could still hear them?

With the Tes traders glaring at them, the villagers quickly left the area with their mouths covered.

"Then, why is the Mythril Carriage all the way over here?"

"Well? Maybe he wants to see his daughter?"

The two villagers continued to gossip as soon as they left the sight of the traders.

"Then he could just go straight to the mansion. Why stop at the village? It wouldn't even take 30 minutes to go by the carriage."

"Iphelleta is quite the difficult house to meet you know. Even the highest nobles would need to arrange a time to meet them."

"Ah, I see."

"They probably sent a messenger to the mansion to warn them in advance while they stop the carriage here."

The two villagers who had been talking about Orelly and the Iphelleta House could not sense the bloodthirsty looks which were directed at them.

"That dream again..."

Riley sighed as he woke up from his long nap, that had lasted up until the sunset.

"... Haaa."

He was in a bad mood.

There were three reasons for this.

First, his 'perfect angle' was lost.

Second, it was that 'dream of his previous life'.

Third...

<No. 2 first, then 4 and 5 next. Make no mistake.>

He could hear unfamiliar voices in his head.

It was the reason why he woke up.

"Tsk... It's not what I wanted."

Riley mumbled with a frown.

What he expected was that the dagger Ian had shown to Stein would act as a significant piece of evidence, which would prevent the culprits from taking further actions in the mansion.

Basically it was to prevent any more incidents from happening, but it didn't seem to work as he planned.

"Well, it was a 50/50 chance anyway."

Riley stood up and patted off the dust that was on his pants.

<Are you ready?>

'Jeone Um'

He had a skill that intercepts the 'Jeone Um' between people. He could listen in to whatever he wanted to hear.

<First, make sure that the tools are all ready by the time I get inside. We have to get the job done faster than ever before.>

These words that were tickling Riley's ears could only be transmitted by those who can control mana, like a messenger.

TLN: Basically Jeone Um is a skill that consumes mana, it allows the caster to communicate with others, without verbally doing so. Riley is able to intercept this. All Jeone Um conversations are enclosed with the < > tag.

<We have a single objective, to retrieve no 3's body.>

Only one voice could be heard.

Most likely the leader of the mansion's invaders.

<Try not to get detected by the servants in the mansion. Not even by the the maids or butlers. They were all warriors before working here.>

"…Tsk."

Riley clicked his tongue again.

It seemed like the leader was quite familiar with the Iphelleta House.

<Then, let’s begin.>

<…Wait, before that.>

Just before their mission started, Riley joined in.

Using Jeone Um, a skill that required using significant mana.

<…?!>

Silence came.

Only the shaking of the leaves could be heard in the air.

Even as Riley was thinking about what to say, the other was not sending any messages back.

Most likely being on guard, realizing that all his messages were being intercepted.

<I just have one thing to say.>

<...>

<I don't care what you do in the mansion. Just don't make a situation where I have to act. Consider this a warning.>

There was no reply, but the Jeone Um was definitely sent.

There was a change in the atmosphere after Riley's warning.

<Don't.>

Riley stepped forward as he continued.

<Annoy me.>

He walked towards Iris's room.

<Well, let's just respect each other's personal space.>

Although Riley wasn't sure if they knew what he meant by personal space, he meant to convey that they should simply respect each other and just move on.

Chapter 9 - Tampering With Evidence

The hooded men who snuck into the Iphelleta House.

None of them could move a muscle any longer ; this was due to the mysterious stranger who just spoke to them.

'Just then...'

It was more than enough to shock them when the stranger managed to detect, listen in and intercept their Mental Message.

TLN*: Mental Message was previously translated as "Jeone Um".

After further consideration, we would like to clarify that Jeone Um allows a person to speak and make it so that what is said can only be heard to whom the speaker wishes, like telepathy. We couldn’t quite decide on what to go with for the previous chapter but from now on we will translate it as “Mental Message”.

'How...'

Not to mention he had managed to send the message to every single one, who were all hidden meticulously.

It was understandable that all of them were stunned.

'...And where?'

The leader of the hooded men, Tes quickly turned his eyes around.

No matter where he looked, he couldn't find the Mental Message's point of origin.

Which meant there was a clear difference in ability between them and the stranger.

'The Iphelleta House had someone who could hide his presence this well?'

As far as Tes knew, the Iphelleta House did not consider assassins as equals.

In fact, the house was a congregation of people who despised and wouldn’t hesitate to get rid of them if they ever saw one.

'It's as if...'

Tes gulped nervously.

Considering the skill of the Mental Message, the stranger was at least as skilled and powerful as himself.

It was not easy to remove such a powerful presence.

But... he couldn't sense him at all.

'I'm seeing a ghost...'

Presence, or mana.

Or anything else.

Along with such power, there are distinct features which get left behind. They can be used to distinguish them immediately from the rest.

But even those features could not be found, as if it really was a ghost.

This was a feat only the most skilled assassins could accomplish.

'Tsk.'

Underneath the mask, Tes frowned.

He did not like it.

The situation he was in.

The fact his daughter was cornered, that he flinched against some random stranger.

'I don't know who's joke this is, but there must be something holding him back if he decides to hide like this.'

Otherwise there is no reason for him to remain in the shadows.

If he wanted to continue threatening them, he should of kept sending that killing intent at them.

That's what Tes believed.

'Don't... annoy me?'

Tes clutched his dagger as he remembered those words.

He had no intent on annoying him.

In fact, he hated such situations.

All he needed was his colleague's body and the dagger.

Quietly.

Then, all their business in the house would be done.

<We are moving.>

He had come all the way here to help his troubled daughter.

They had to move now, otherwise the mission would be impossible to complete before they began.

The warning from the previous Mental Message hadn't come back since then.

There was no time to waste.

<I will go to the 'son's office' where the dagger is.>

Tes jumped out of the bush he was hiding in.

As he slips into the mansion like the wind, his subordinates gain heart and follow behind him.

The hooded figures begin slipping into nooks and crannies of the mansion like rats.

<No. 2 to 10 will take the body.>

Tes ordered though Mental Message.

<The rest will make some noise to gain the mansion's attention. If in danger, remove all evidence through suicide.>

Bang!

As soon as his second order was given, an explosion occurred somewhere in the mansion.

It seems the fight had already begun.

"You sons of bitches!"

The old man shouted.

He was wearing butler's clothes and held a straight sword in one hand.

It was a normal sword, but it was made of good steel and boasted superior hardness.

The old man swung his blade.

"Uuuck!"

"Kuuck!"

How could a man well into his 50s have so much strength?

With but a single strike two hooded men were knocked back.

"Where do you think this is!"

The old man swung at them once more.

The blade suddenly glowed blue and showed its power despite the gap between them.

"...!"

The aura blade.

The blue light was shot from the blade and cut through the hooded men along with their daggers.

"Hm! Were they just grunts?"

The old man shook his arm and turned around.

"Ian-nim!"

"Sera!"

Sera.

She was one of the maids serving in the mansion.

It seemed the chat for reunion will be cut short, as the sword she held also had blood on it.

"I will take care of Lady Iris' room. Ian-nim should go protect Young Master!"

It meant to find and bring Riley back from the garden.

Ian understood and nodded in agreement. He moved immediately.

"Alright, don't push yourself! I'll be right back!"

It would only take 10 seconds for Ian to reach the gardens from Lady Iris's room.

If there weren't any obstacles.

'Young master, please...'

Riley would often play 'hide and seek' in times of danger.

Ian ran through the corridor.

Praying that Riley would once again show that ability and get

himself to safety.

'Please be safe!'

1 second...

5 seconds...

7 seconds in, Ian met with an obstacle.

"Tsk!"

Ian's facial expression crumbled.

From his presence, one could tell this was not your run-of-the-mill fighter.

It would likely take some time.

Time that could determine Riley's life or death at any moment.

This wasn’t what Ian wanted.

"I do not like to run my mouth too much, but I'll let you live if you leave now."

Ian threatened the hooded man.

His sword glowing blue with killing intent.

"..."

Even so, the hooded man stayed silent.

He simply tucked his chin, and pulled his dagger.

He didn't know Ian's intention, but he wasn't letting him pass.

"You bastard."

From the reaction of his eyes, the hooded man was not deaf.

Ian grinded his teeth in anger as the man ignored his warning.

"I have no time-..."

Ian stopped mid sentence and charged toward the man, and the sword and dagger met.

Bang!

Sparks flew and Ian's arm engaged with the hooded man's.

"...-to play with you!"

Ian shouted as he twisted his body.

Just when some distance was made between them, Ian's and the hooded man's weapons swung at different angles.

Aiming for each other's lives.

'Ku?'

Was it due to the fact that two blades imbued with mana clashed?

The two mana blades' trajectories faded slowly.

Afterwards, Ian's shoes could be heard sliding on the carpet.

"Fuck!"

Ian swore as he was pushed back.

The match was a draw.

In strength, of all things.

'What power from such an old man...'

The same was the case for the hooded man.

He was just as surprised as Ian.

As one of the 5 strongest people in the guild, he didn't expect to be pushed back like this.

Thankfully the mask was hiding his emotions right now.

"Move you lil' bitch!"

"..."

Ian had been watching his tongue since he began working as a butler, but his habit from his mercenary days was starting to show.

"Move it... no move your mute ass out of here! Just fuck off!"

At this point he was swearing like in the old days.

His face turned red like the face of a demon.

That's how desperate he was.

Any more time wasted, and there was no telling what might happen to Riley.

'I can't... let this man pass.'

The hooded man cracked his wrist which was still shaking from the strike before, and fixed his stance.

He believed this old man was nothing short of extraordinary.

'That asshole...'

Ian tucked his chin in.

If he could kill a man by glaring, the hooded man would of died a hundred times over.

Sadly, he didn't have such powers.

The hooded man was quite the adversary.

'Young master! Wait for me... just hold on a little longer!"

Ian grinded his teeth.

'These old bones will come and get you.'

Chapter 10 - Tampering With Evidence (Part 2)

How many minutes had passed?

1 minute?

3 minutes?

Perhaps even 10 minutes had passed.

Yet the duel didn't seem anywhere close to concluding.

'Damn it, damn it, damn it!'

Veins began to show on Ian's forehead, along with a film of sweat covering his whole face.

His old body has reached its physical limit from the prolonged, intense combat.

'I can't waste any more time!'

It was for Riley's safety.

And considering his condition, allowing the fight to drag on any longer would be dangerous.

'The next strike... I'll finish it with the next strike.'

Ian tightened his grip on his sword.

He was preparing himself for a perilous gamble.

If he lost, his life might be at risk, but there was no other choice.

'No risk, no reward!'

Ian focused his gaze and dashed forward with a different stance than before.

The hooded man noticed Ian's desperation, and reacted without any hesitation.

"Kuuk?!"

In the end, Ian's decision turned out to be a mistake.

The enemy had already anticipated that move.

Ian's sword parted the empty air, and the hooded man managed to slip through his defenses and attack from behind.

'Fuck!'

Would this be where his life ended?

Ian's sweat dripped in the air.

At that moment, Ian felt as if the world had stopped.

Perhaps it was a flashback? Ian's brain acknowledged his upcoming demise and began to show his past.

The days working as a mercenary...

Retiring and working in the Iphelleta House...

Meeting Riley.

It was a life rife with danger and excitement.

'Young Master, forgive me...'

Ian apologised, for he would die before fulfilling his duty to Riley.

Ian had given up on his life.

"...!'

Woosh!

A dagger flew from an unknown corner and drove itself into the hooded man's shoulder.

"Kuk?!"

The hooded man was startled.

That dagger just now belonged to his comrade.

Was there a traitor?

...Then who?

Even before that... How could a third party who could neither be seen nor detected manage to hit him with a dagger?

That was something even his superior could not do.

'...An opening!'

Ian did not miss the brief moment, and his eyes glinted with

hope.

The deciding factor between a winner and a loser was paper-thin difference when it came to a duel between two masters.

That moment changed the flow of combat.

"...Uck!"

Instantly.

Ian's sword sliced the hooded man's neck.

The hooded man clutched his throat.

Blood spilled through his fingers, and he fell on his knees.

Then he his chest slammed onto the ground lifelessly

"Huck, Hoo, Hoo...."

Ian, who had just escaped certain death began to rein in his wild breathing.

He wasn't sure what had just occurred, but all that mattered was the objective that remained.

He had no time right now to think about the duel that had just taken place.

"... Young Master!"

Ian ran through the corridor, driven by his worry for his lazy master.

Hhmmmm...

A murmur could be heard from the corridor.

Riley was the one who made the uttering.

"That's odd..."

Riley looked down at his hand, with which he had just thrown something with all his strength.

The result wasn't what he had expected.

"Why did it miss?"

A knife throw.

That is what it would be called in normal circumstances, but what Riley had just performed was nothing short of a miracle.

"I was going for his heart..."

Riley's blade throw had ricocheted from the wall...

..Twice.

He had calculated the angle for the throw so only the handle would hit the wall.

After that, it had indeed landed on his target, but not where he had wanted it. This was why Riley was not satisfied with the result.

"I guess that's to be expected?"

The knife throw was his most used skill back in his previous life.

Although blessed with the sword, he lacked talent for any skills with range such as archery or magic. Therefore, this was one of his compromises to deal with such a disadvantage.

"This body is different from before, and quite a lot of time has

passed."

Riley stretched his hands open and closed as he spoke to himself.

If an average person had heard it, they would lose consciousness on the spot.

There was a possibility of 'friendly fire' if he were to miss, not even to mention the distance between him and the target.

Yet Riley was confident.

That he would never hit Ian who was in combat, and that it would only hit the hooded man.

That was backed up by skill and experience equivalent to his confidence.

Although it was all gained in his previous life.

"Well, it was a dagger as well."

Riley gazed under him.

The previous owner of the dagger and his companions and were all on the ground with their mouths agape.

They were all dead.

'Woops, too many useless thoughts.'

Riley rubbed his shoes on the carpet to remove the blood stains on them, realizing that Ian may enter at any moment if he were to stay idle.

It was to get rid of the proof.

If anyone from the mansion were to see Riley standing atop the corpses of assassins, or find any proof of his corresponding actions, his leisurely life would end at that moment.

That's not what Riley wanted.

"Ahem, ahem!"

Riley cleared his throat to clear the atmosphere and quickly exited the area.

"...Hm? Ian?"

"Y-, Young Master!"

At this moment, Ian remembered why the word ‘reassurance’ existed.

It was all thanks to the boy who was rounding the corner.

How thankful he was to meet the master who had irritated him so much before.

"What's going on? You're sweating quite a bit."

"Young Master..."

"What? Did you go for a run?"

"No, it's nothing."

Riley asked with a smirk and Ian shook his head with tears in his eyes.

Riley tilted his head in reaction to the old man's face of salvation.

It were as if he didn't know anything.

"...?"

"Where have you been? Weren't you at the gardens before?"

"Hm? Ah, about that..."

Riley flinched at the unexpected question, but Ian showed no signs of noticing it.

"I was in the bathroom, but why? Is something happening?"

Riley asked as if worried about the sweat-covered Ian.

Ian answered with a serious look on his face.

"The assassins have invaded the mansion."

"Assassins?"

As Riley acted surprised, Ian nodded his head.

"Yes. It must be about that incident before."

It concerned that situation that had taken place previously.

The discovery of the body of an assassin must have been the reason they had come to the mansion.

"The situation now is different from before. This time, staying

alone is really dangerous."

"This is... not a joke?"

"I am dead serious."

Riley started to look around the area as if unable to believe it.

The mansion seemed too quiet, but there were occasional sword clashes that could be heard from afar.

It was the proof that Ian was speaking the truth.

"What in god's name is happening..."

As Riley swallowed his spit, he quickly turned his head and asked Ian.

"Ian, what about Mother? Is she alright?"

That was the first thing he was worried about.

The rumours about his laziness might have been widespread, but his love for his mother was second to none.

Ian's face relaxed at the boy's concern.

"Sera is defending her. It should be alright, since she's quite the energetic one."

"Is that so? Ha, that’s good."

Riley made a sigh of relief.

"We should reconvene with Sera now."

Ian spoke after observing the corridors.

The bloodthirst in the mansion was getting thicker.

It was likely that Stein had finally entered combat.

Both Ryan and Lloyd must have been be making use of their blades as well.

"Right now, we are the most vulnerable party in the entire mansion."

Riley was the weakest within the Iphelleta House.

But!

That's why he had to be protected.

To protect the seed that had not yet sprouted.

One that he would watch the moment it bloomed with both his eyes.

As Ian steadied his resolve, he looked kindly towards Riley.

"I'll take the lead. Make sure you stay right behind me, since we don't know what’s going to happen."

"Ian, wait."

As Ian was about to move with his sword unsheathed, Riley raised his and to stop him.

"Now that I think about it... I saw something weird in the toilet."

"Something weird?"

"Maybe, it's connected to the invaders in the mansion."

Ian turned curious after hearing those words from the boy.

Ian had looked after Riley since he was an infant.

Maybe he was pointing to something special, just like his previous 'hide and seek.'

That thought crossed his mind.

"I brought it with me just in case."

Riley's hand moved to his right pocket.

Just what had the boy discovered?

As Ian tried to speculate what it could be, the object showed itself.

"...Young Master, that is...?"

Ian's brows furrowed after laying his sights on the object in question.

Chapter 11 - Popcorn

That which Riley had found...

They were pieces of ripped paper which had been put together.

Ian looked dumbfounded at the paper, and spoke.

"Young Master."

"Yeah?"

Riley answered seriously.

"...Why are you presenting me used toilet paper?"

"What?"

Riley held tightly onto the paper as his eyes wiggled for a moment.

His aggrieved face looked as if there was a misunderstanding.

"No, that's not it!"

‘Who does he think I am?’

In order to clear the misunderstanding, Riley sent a sharp glare as he placed his clenched fist forward.

As Riley moved his chin about, Ian put his hand forward with his lips shriveled.

Riley opened his hand and its contents fell onto Ian's.

"Check it."

Ian, who had been examining the paper observantly, carefully opened it.

Thankfully, no brown stains could be found on it.

"Phew."

"..."

As Ian made a sigh of relief, Riley's eyes squinted once more.

"Hm?"

Ian's eyes looked closely at the paper, and found something.

There were some words written on the paper.

But what's this?

The handwriting was quite familiar to Ian.

"This handwriting...?"

"Can you tell?"

As the paper was ripped, there was no way to figure out everything that was written on the original, but it did contain a certain 'ingredient'.

'No, impossible.'

This familiar handwriting...

Coupled with the ingredient which was most likely put into the soup recently.

Only one person came into mind from taking these two facts into account.

If you were to grab any bystander, and ask who was the strongest

combatant in the Iphelleta House, nine out of ten people would say it was the master of the house, Count Stein.

"I've got to admit, you're a sly rat."

"..."

Surprisingly, a lone hooded man could last against him for quite a long time.

Naturally, it was Tes.

He was the chief of all the invading hooded men.

Whenever Stein's mana blade was discharged, he would dodge it by a hair's length and simply harass him back from a distance.

'As expected of my son-in-law.'

If this were a close-quarters combat situation, Tes would most definitely lose.

'There's no way I can beat my son-in-law.'

It was obvious who the winner was in terms of skill, but Tes's objective was not Stein's head.

Were he seriously trying to take Stein's life, he would much rather ambush him or poison his food rather than brazenly fighting him out in the open... Taking such a differing approach was the assassin's way, and much more effective.

His objective now was simply to buy time.While his subordinates retrieved their comrade's corpse located somewhere in the mansion, he would keep the strongest swordsman, Count Stein, at bay.

'We've got the dagger. Now we just wait for them to retrieve the body.'

Tes spun his wrist around to ease the ache as he created distance versus Stein's powerful lunge.

If things were according to his expectations, he just had to withstand this for another two minutes and he would win objectively.

"...Tsk."

Stein clicked his tongue at the hooded man's agile evasive maneuvers.

He figured out what his opponent was aiming for.

"Are you trying to buy time?"

"..."

Tes did not reply.

As he hadn't changed his voice, he might be found out if he were to reply.

As the master of the Tes Trade Guild, he had seen him once when he was younger.

His daughter's wedding had been their second meeting.

Although he had only seen him twice in his life, Stein would most likely remember his voice.

He had to be careful because he was still his father-in-law.

Right now he wasn't acting as the master of the Tes Trade Guild, but as the chief of the Assassin's Guild.

"It seems I've been underestimated."

The situation didn't seem like it was getting any better.

Stein's sword simply could not touch his opponent.

Stein spoke with his brows furrowed, as if irritated.

"I can tell that you lack the skills to kill me. A pathetic man who is skilled only in fleeing."

Therefore, Stein changed his mind.

His objective went from the man’s capture, to his death.

'Shit.'

Tes felt cold sweat dripping from his face as he realised the situation had suddenly changed for the worse, and put all his nerves on high alert.

A moment of carelessness would be the end of him.

'One bad move and I might actually die now.'

‘Although it won't be long, let’s buy some more time.’

As Tes made such a decision, he was about to use the smoke screen device hanging on his waist when…

"Hm?"

Tes flinched as he heard the anxious footsteps coming from

behind the door.

None of his subordinates would make such noise.

That meant that the owner of those footsteps would be...

"...Master!"

Bang!

The man who came barging through the door was an old man in the garbs of a butler.

His face was covered in sweat, as if he came while hurrying.

"Ian?"

Why was Ian here, when Stein thought he was protecting Riley at his side?

As Stein was getting worried his eyes glanced behind Ian.

There was another familiar face accompanying him.

"Hm?"

"...?!"

The person who came to Stein's office was not just Ian.

Although it didn't seem intended, there was one more visitor.

"Ian? W-, what are you doing?"

Wearing a dress, her pride on full display.

Her orange hair was tied to the back.

Lady Orelly was the second visitor.

It seems as though she was forced to come, as she tried to escape Ian's grasp.

She seemed desperate to run away from here, unable to hide her look of inconvenience.

"Master, Lady Orelly... Lady Orelly!"

Stein took a glimpse at the hooded man after hearing those words, then put his sword down.

As if even more surprised than him, the hooded man stood there like stone, losing all will to fight.

"Riley! Are you okay? You're not hurt are you?"

"Yes, don't worry."

"Dear lord, what a disaster this is..."

After coming to Iris' room, Riley sent Ian to Lady Orelly, and proceeded to hug his mother to prove his well-being.

Currently, the maid Sera was watching pleasantly at the reunion from the sidelines as she guarded them.

Thankfully, no assassins came to this room.

"Uh, Sera."

Riley slowly turned his head towards Sera after the hug.

"Yes, Young Master?"

Sera quickly came back to reality and bowed her head.

Although she had thought that Riley looked entertained for a

moment, she quickly dismissed the thought.

"Do you have any popcorn?"

"Huh?"

"Popcorn."

"Pop... corn?"

Popcorn?

Sera tilted her head, unable to understand the question.

'...Ah, do they not have any of that here?'

Riley scratched his head realising his mistake, when Iris asked:

"Riley, what is popcorn?"

"Ah, that's..."

Realising that the snack he had enjoyed back in his previous life wasn't here, he thought of how to avoid the question then gave up and began to explain.

"It's something like a snack... You make it with some corn and butter."

"A snack?"

A snack when assassins had invaded the mansion?

There was a limit to being so carefree.

Sera made an empty look as her shoulders dropped.

'What I heard from Ian-nim was just the tip of the iceberg.'

Sera who had heard complaint after complaint from Ian, finally felt as if she could understand his feelings a little and made a bitter smile.

"Riley... A snack isn't bad but, do you have to eat it now?"

Even Iris who would always reply with a smile to anything related with Riley, didn't seem like she would let this one go.

Therefore, her face turned serious as she prepared to scold her son.

"Huh..."

As Sera's and Iris's eyes turned toward him, Riley finally showed some sign of worry and quickly made some excuse.

"But, there's going to be some entertainment soon... I'd like to eat something with it..."

"Huh?"

"What did you say?"

Unable to hear the small voice, Sera and Iris asked for him to repeat himself

Riley awkwardly smiled.

"Ah, no. It's nothing. I'm sorry. I'll think about what I've done. I'm sorry Sera. Bothering you like this."

With a quick apology from Riley, Iris who was ready to scold him and Sera who was confused looked at each other.

"But, Sera... There's some corn in the kitchen right?"

"..."

Sera's jaw dropped.

She could finally understand.

A little... no, a lot.

She could finally understand Ian's feeling.

Chapter 12 - Popcorn (Part 2)

"Ah, he's here."

How many minutes had passed?

Ian's exhausted body dragged himself back to Iris's bedroom.

Riley, who had been sitting in a leisurely manner until now, stood up to greet him, as if he had been waiting for a while.

"How was it?"

"..."

Riley asked Ian who looked as if he could not believe what had happened.

As if he was out of his mind, Ian could not muster a reply.

Both Iris and Sera who did not know what the boy was asking about, could only tilt their heads with puzzled looks on their faces.

"Ian-nim, where have you been? You left so quickly after returning with Young Master."

"Ian, are you alright? You don't look too well."

"Well, that's..."

How should he explain?

Ian continued to open and close his mouth repeatedly, until he finally managed to make a sound.

"...It was Lady Orelly."

"Pardon?"

"What?"

"It was all Lady Orelly's doing."

Ian covered his frowning face with his hands and continued to explain.

He did so while mentioning to himself that he simply could not believe what he had just seen.

"The 'poison' which was put inside Lady Iris's soup..."

"Huh?"

"...?"

There was only one conclusion one could arrive at after hearing this and the words that were cut off from before.

Lady Orelly...she was the one who had poisoned Lady Iris' dinner!

"..."

Ian, who had said those words.

Iris, who had heard those words.

Both stood as silent as statues.

This was a matter that would turn the mansion upside down.

"... It can't be, right?"

"Lady Iris..."

"Ian, surely...Lady Orelly would never."

Iris who was tucked inside her bed firmly held onto the edge of the blanket.

Even if she had often received scoldings from Lady Orelly, as a woman who shared the same husband, Iris believed she would be the last person to be responsible for it, and thus she pressured Ian once more.

"Mother, it's alright."

Riley held onto his mother's shoulder.

She calmed down, stopped questioning Ian and bit her lip.

"Ian."

Riley called his butler.

"..."

Ian nodded with his jaws clenched at the call of his master.

The serious face he was making was to show nothing he had said was false.

"Impossible."

Iris' shoulders dropped at the shocking news.

At the same time, Sera's jaw dropped.

Lady Orelly's jealousy and hatred toward Lady Iris was something all the maids in the mansion knew... but they never expected that it was significant enough to attempt an assassination.

"What about Father?"

Riley asked Ian with a calm attitude, as if he had expected it.

Since he was the first one to find out the truth himself.

"He is currently holding a discussion."

Ian's weary voice made a reply.

It had been a long time since he had last fought.

And with such shocking news on top, even the most experienced swordsman would be tired both physically and mentally.

"It was the paper. Master Riley found certain pieces of paper in the mansion and..."

Ian leaned onto the door and continued speaking.

It all started with the scraps of paper Riley had 'found'.

"The handwriting on the paper was Lady Orelly's. So, after reading it..."

"No..."

"...The letter made a request for poison which could be used against Lady Iris. And..."

"Wait, Ian-nim."

Sera cut Ian's words.

The cold sweat appearing on her face showed just how nervous she was.

She could guess .

What would come after that was something much worse than mere poison.

That was her expectation.

"... It's a lie, right?"

"..."

Ian fell silent.

The atmosphere in this place was as chilly as a wintry night.

"Why?"

Stein asked after looking blankly at the paper in his hand.

Orelly could not answer.

"Why did you poison Iris' soup?"

Count Stein asked once more, his tone condemning.

The question was not directed to Orelly this time, but rather to the hooded man.

"..."

The second question was also met with silence.

Although the hooded man's face was still hidden, considering both he and Orelly were standing close together they seemed to be

on friendly terms with each other.

"I don't think there would be any reason for such an action."

"..."

As there was no answer, Orelly clenched her fists.

She seemed furious.

"...Orelly."

Finally, the hooded man spoke.

Within the voice fraught with worry, Stein scowled as the voice seemed familiar.

"This voice...You're-!"

Realising his cover was blown, the hooded man raised his hands.

The black cloth covering his face fell back slowly.

A face which Stein knew all too well appeared.

The man who was the master of Tes Trade Guild, and his father-

in-law.

"Father...?"

"..."

Stein's face which that had been regaining calmness twisted once more.

He felt betrayed.

By the famous Tes Trade Guild....

By his family...

"Hah..."

That they were intimately close with the much-despised Assassin's Guild...

That he was not aware of those facts...

"I feel like a fool."

"A...fool...?"

A wavering voice replied after the word fool.

Orelly who had been silent until now opened her mouth.

"I'm the one who feels like a fool, me."

Stein's cold stare turned to Orelly.

Orelly slowly raised her head with tears in her eyes and looked back at Stein.

Her face displayed an aggrieved emotion as if she didn't deserve any of this.

"If you had looked at me just once...after the wedding. Was there ever a time when you gazed at me with love?"

She began to make a deluge of complaints; it was as if a dam was bursting out.

She spoke with her fists close to her chest, trembling harder than her voice.

"Not just me, but Ryan and Lloyd too! Have you ever been nice to your two sons?!"

Stein did not reply.

He continued to look at Orelly, his gaze unchanged.

"What wrong did they do to deserve it! What did I do wrong! Compared to that useless Riley, that bitch Iris! I am much more...!"

Orelly began to frantically gasp for air, as she had run out of breath, then added that it wasn’t over.

"I got everything I wanted. I could get everything I wanted. I will get everything I want. So, so..."

Orelly's eyes began to shake.

Her original message disappeared, replaced by something hideous within that had been building up since she was young.

As the daughter of the famous Tes Trade Guild, she got everything she wanted, and did everything she wanted.

The ugly life she had lead displaying her greed to its fullest was finally breaking out from its shell.

"Your heart too, I will...I will-!"

Orelly who was making a heated speech suddenly closed her mouth.

She could feel a killing intent from in front of her.

A Stein she had never seen before was standing in front of her.

"Is that all?"

"..."

At last....

The thought 'Did I raise my daughter poorly?' finally crossed Tes's mind.

"No..."

Orelly slowly stepped back, finally coming back to her senses.

With a pale face, she realized the mistake she had made in her head.

"No, no...No! No! I-!"

Then, she began to rip her hair furiously.

She grabbed at her hair with such force, that her fake fingernails

began to fall onto the carpet.

"I...I never wanted this..."

Stein issued a command to Orelly who seemed at a loss.

"...Get out."

Leave.

Begone from this place.

"What?"

Orelly replied with a stupid look on her face.

"..."

Stein did not reply.

He simply sent a look indicating that if she did not listen, he would kill her right here and now.

Such was the killing intent swirling all around him.

"Father! The assassins have retreated-..."

In the room which felt as though it would explode any second...

The first and second sons of the house entered the office.

They looked like they were in combat up until recently, with their clothes being in utter disarray.

"...Father?"

"Y-, you were here too mother. But...why does the atmosphere in the room seem off?"

"It seems as though it has finally begun."

How angry must he be for it to be like this?

Even at a distance, Ian was shaking as he could feel Stein's killing intent as clear as day.

It finally seemed like the persecution for the hidden deeds of the past had started.

"Young Master?"

Where Count Stein was...

As Ian was imagining what the view was like beyond the wall, he slowly turned his head as he couldn't feel someone's presence anymore.

"Young Master?"

"Riley?"

As there was no reply after Ian called out, Iris began to look around the room to locate her son.

He had been sitting on the bed while licking his lips just a moment before... and now he had disappeared.

"...Huh?"

Sera also realised Riley had disappeared, and opened her eyes wide.

"Young Master!"

"Young Master!"

"Riley!"

Riley had vanished into thin air.

At a moment when assassins could still be skulking about in the mansion.

The word 'kidnapped' came into all three of their heads.

Chapter 13 - Popcorn (Part 3)

She was banished.

And in glorious fashion, no less.

In front of her two sons, Orelly was banished from the Iphelleta house.

"No. It's a lie..."

"..."

Her father, Tes, followed Orelly from behind and watched her walk in despair.

A wave of regret swept over his mind.

Her spoilt upbringing had come back to bite them in the back.

<...Retreat.>

Tes sent the Mental Message with a dismal look on his face.

He had ordered a full retreat for all the assassins who had invaded the mansion.

"It...must...be a dream. When I open my eyes again, I will be on my bed. Yes...Yes!"

Tes bit his lips, watching his daughter escape from reality.

Suddenly, a thought struck him.

If he had decided not to visit the mansion today, could they have avoided all of this?

He considered it..

At the end of the thought, he shook his head and rejected the idea.

'Even if it wasn't today, it was bound to happen sooner or later.'

There is nothing that can be hidden forever.

Tes knew that well.

His daughter's banishment was just the same.

The truth was bound to leak into the world eventually.

'This is a good thing.'

It was better to be punished earlier.

If they could learn from this, they could get through the situation well.

Tes was a man who had the money and power to make it happen.

'They won't spread the news everywhere, since it involves their honour as well.'

Tes who had finished organizing his next moves put his hand on his daughter's shoulder.

"Father, this is not true right? There's no way. My husband would never abandon me like this! He would never do such a thing when there's Ryan and Lloyd as well!"

"It's alright Orelly. We can still salvage the situation."

Tes tried to reason with her, but she still seemed out of her mind.

"This...this is all her fault."

Her father's words did not reach her as she swore vengeance with her eyes burning with rage.

"Iris...It's because that bitch Iris seduced him!"

Orelly's thoughts carried on beyond certainty, to the point of zealous conviction.

The Lord Stein Finn Iphelleta's concubine;Iris was the cause of her expulsion.

Orelly was convinced that she herself had done nothing wrong to deserve it.

"If she's dead...She just needs to die! That's it!"

Orelly began to emit bloodlust around herself.

A shadow appeared on Tes' face as he witnessed his daughter's menacing look.

'She's going to have a hard time.'

To bring her sanity back.

To re-educate her from the ground up.

To change her lover's mind.

Tes sighed as he judged that none of those will be easy to do.

"... Ah."

For how long did they walk away from the mansion?

A boy's voice abruptly came from in front of them.

"...?"

Both Orelly who had walked with a raging face, and Tes who was following her from behind, stopped.

"Huh, what's this? Did all the fun stuff finish already?"

From out of their sight, the voice inquired.

It was directed at Orelly and Tes.

"...Who is it?"

The night had set and it was difficult to see around the area.

Tes, with his nerves on the edge, sent a question back with a frown.

"Hmm."

Bushes rustle with a different sound when a person walked through them.

Within the peace and quiet, a noise sounded as if searching for something.

It was not harsh, but it wasn't soft either.

"It seems like it's finished."

The voice came from the front, saturated with the feelings of remorse for missing out on the incident.

And once more the footsteps followed.

Munch, Munch

The voice within the darkness seemed to be eating something.

"Wait, this voice... Where have I heard it before?"

Tes' brows twitched as he stood in front of his daughter.

He remembered hearing this voice very recently.

Where was it?

Where...

'...'

Tes' body froze like stone when he recalled.

The voice was identical to the Mental Message he had heard before the invasion began this afternoon.

"Oh Father... He has a surprisingly soft side to him. How annoying."

The footsteps came closer.

As the noise continued, a boy who had a bag full of 'white cotton' appeared in front of them.

"It’s...you?!"

Orelly who was behind Tes pointed her finger with her eyes wide open when she found out who the boy was.

He was someone Orelly knew all too well.

"Why are you here?!"

It was Riley.

In all of Iphelleta's history, he was the most useless, the most lazy and the most idle man there was, 'Lazy Blade'. He was the third son of the house.

A boy who couldn't even manage to swing a wooden sword properly.

"Hm..."

A handful of cotton balls left inside the bag.

Riley finished the remaining ‘cotton balls’ and replied after swallowing.

"... I wanted to see something interesting."

"What..."

Orelly gave an unbelieving look toward him.

'Do you so desperately want to meet your end here?'

Orelly wanted to ask that, but the question could not come out of her mouth.

Tes took his dagger out, fully intent on killing the boy.

The same intent could be felt all around the area.

They were the assassins under Tes' command.

"I wanted to sort out my personal problem."

Riley moved his hand as he continued.

Swish!

Riley chucked the bag behind him and stretched his neck left and right, his gaze increasing in intensity.

He warned them.

"You guys... I can forgive you guys since you didn't come here to piss me off. I'm letting you guys go this time for listening to my warning previously."

The truth was Riley himself had killed some of the hooded men who were attempting to use him as a hostage, but that fact wasn't all that important.

"... It’s annoying too."

Riley opened and closed his fists as he continued.

"But... not Lady Orelly."

He added that at the end; Lady Orelly couldn’t go unpunished.

"Ah! Hold on, you're not Lady Orelly anymore."

Riley quickly noted his mistake.

He believed it was poor manners to call her 'Lady' since she was banished today.

"What should I say. Hm..."

Even in this dire situation, Riley pondered his head then asked in a relaxed tone, with a smile.

"Ms. Orelly?"

"...You!"

In a fit of rage, Orelly took Tes' spare dagger from his belt and threw it at Riley.

As if she had inherited her talent as an assassin from her father, the dagger went straight toward Riley's lips.

It was to split his cocky mouth in half.

"Yeah, I can't let Ms. Orelly go that easily."

Riley continued as he dodged the dagger by tilting his head.

'H-how did he...?'

For that lazy child to dodge the dagger, and so effortlessly at that?

Orelly opened her mouth wide as she could not hide her surprise.

Meanwhile, despite being surrounded by assassins, Riley looked completely relaxed.

"You...need to pay dearly for hurting my mother. You can always come back for revenge too."

Riley's voice suddenly sunk low.

The leisurely atmosphere around Riley changed, and cold winds began to blow around.

Like sharp daggers, the winds cut deep.

"What...the...?"

Orelly and Tes stood still, unable to believe what they were seeing.

Suddenly, the boy was holding a single wooden sword in his right hand.

Chapter 14 - Popcorn (Part 4)

'Is this the first time in this life?'

Riley thought to himself as he surveyed the area.

He had done it countless times before in his previous life, but this was the first time in this life.

Using the sword, that is.

'I wonder how much I can do.'

Riley's fingers twitched around the wooden sword.

As if checking all of his fingers, he moved them all one by one until he was satisfied and tucked his chin in.

The air was so thick with killing intent that it could explode at any moment.

"...Kill him."

Orelly who had been looking blankly at Riley opened her mouth.

Her shoulders were still shaking from the shock caused by the aura Riley was putting out.

Whether the shock led to hatred or fear was unknown.

"I said kill him!"

She bellowed.

She had ordered her subordinates to kill Riley who was standing in front of them.

Although she was banished from the mansion, she was still the daughter of their master, and so they quickly moved to follow her orders.

Their first course of action was throwing their daggers.

"Wait, sto-!"

Tes who remembered the Mental Message incident before the attack tried to shout, but it was already too late.

Ten or so knives were thrown, and the fight had begun.

'Ah...'

The thoughts of his past came as he watched the daggers fly toward him.

Riley bit his lip silently as he was reminiscent of his previous life.

They weren’t the most pleasant memories.

'It's bringing me back.'

In his past life,he had once lost his loved ones to assassins.

It was because of the belief that a hero saving the world should avoid taking lives.

Thinking of them as people with families rather than criminals, he had shown mercy and let the assassins he had himself captured go free.

And then…tragedy struck.

What came after was a betrayal of his trust, and the lifeless bodies of those dear to him.

'This situation…'

In the darkness…

The knives which had been thrown all around him by the hooded men, and the situation he was in now…

It reminded him of all the incidents that occurred because he was too soft back then.

'Well, I can't repeat the same mistake.'

Riley slowly moved forward.

He quickly spun his eyes around, counting the number of knives and analysing the angles at which they were flying in, then twisted his torso by moving his shoulder in a diagonal angle.

"What is he up to?"

Everyone’s eyes were focused on him as, instead of reflecting the knives back with his wooden blade, he held it pointed down onto the ground.

"Huh?"

It seemed as though Riley, who was standing so defenselessly, would quickly turn into a pincushion with countless daggers in him.

But...

Not a single knife managed to pierce him.

All of the daggers had unfathomably managed to miss by a hair’s breadth.

'What?'

Because so many daggers were thrown at once, it appeared as if some had indeed succeeded in scratching the clothes he was wearing... but the important fact was that not a single dagger managed to hit him.

"You guys remember now, that it was self defense."

Riley spoke.

It was them who attacked first.

Although he never had the intention to let any of them live from the beginning, but...he wanted to have an excuse for possible feelings of guilt that may come afterwards.

"Don't go around spreading rumours in hell."

With his strength focused on his toes, he kicked off the ground he was standing on.

Riley disappeared and a small hole was made upon where he previously stood.

"...?!"

Then Riley, who had vanished, appeared in an instant in front of the hooded man that was closest to him.

The hooded man made eye contact with the black-haired boy, felt chills going up his spine.

'Huh?'

...And when he was about to shudder...

'Why...is my sight...?'

Within the cold night...

The hooded man who wanted to tremble perhaps from the killing intent realised that he could not move his body.

Then, his vision simply moved up into the air.

The world spun.

"..."

Thud

When the hooded man's sight fell onto the ground, his consciousness was no longer there.

His head was rolling on the ground, with his eyes devoid of life.

"What? What just happened..."

Nobody had noticed his movements.

In an instant, one of the assassins had lost their head to the boy.

Not with a sharp metal sword, but to a training sword normally used against a dummy.

They weren't sure what had happened but they knew that there was clear disparity in skill.

'This is hopeless!'

The sight they had just witnessed was so shocking, that all of the hooded men thought the same thing.

So, the desire to escape...flooded their minds.

Their eyes were filled with fear as they lost all will to fight.

'Wait, my body...'

The ability to flee from one’s current location;it is without a doubt one of the most important skills an assassin should have.

Another emotion began to well up in their eyes as they prioritised their survival.

Confusion.

Their bodies simply did not move.

'What's up with my body?'

Is God messing with time?

While some of the assassins who were rooted began to think that...

Riley continued to move alone.

'I can’t move!'

The hooded men couldn't even twitch their fingers or toes.

Helpless...

That was the word that would best describe them now.

'This... this can't possibly be happening.'

Amidst the hooded men who were frozen like statues, Riley jumped from one person to the next, mercilessly swinging about his wooden sword.

With every slash, another head landed upon the ground.

They were unbelievable for strikes coming from a mere wooden sword.

"I'm not really into this kind of thing...and I'd rather not show any mercy for you guys, okay?"

Riley spoke as he recollected about his mistakes in the past.

"Don't take this too hard."

One by one, the assassins fell.

Riley spoke quietly to himself as he watched them fall with a frown.

"Sorry, but I won't live like my past anymore."

‘I will avoid tragedies born from leaving any trouble behind.’

Riley had told himself that phrase again and again.

He was no longer the hero with the holy blade, and didn't need any of the responsibilities that came with it.

"Leaving any 'seeds' behind will just end up as nuisance."

I will do what I want.

Rest as much as I want.

This is my life.

In this life, that will be my path.

Such had Riley decided upon.

"So that nothing annoying will happen."

But...

There was one exception.

"So that I will never lose those who are dear to me."

If it had been the past.

If it had been...

Then he would have shackled himself to a path with the least number of deaths for other people.

As the chosen hero, he could not take the weight of lives lightly.

But he lived as 'Riley' in this world.

So...

"So let me..."

Riley continued as he wished to lie on his soft bed at home.

"...Let me live an easy life."

Riley swung his sword once more.

'How, just how?'

Tes was staring with bloodshot eyes, shocked from Riley's ability to defeat all of the assassins effortlessly.

Thankfully, although his hands and feet were paralysed like his subordinates, he could still move his eyes.

'How can he not have any hesitation in killing someone? Is that really…someone who’s never fought with a sword for 19 years?'

Riley's blade didn't contain a single speck of hesitation.

It was hard to believe even after seeing it with both eyes.

'I don’t…believe it…'

Tes may not have known it, but this was not the first time… Riley had cut another person.

If you included his 'past'…

In fact, if you were to compare between the two, the number of assassins he was cutting through like butter now was drastically lower than to back then.

"Young Master! Hah...where did you run off to?"

After the storm that was Lady Orelly's banishment, the Iphelleta mansion had gotten rowdy once more.

Riley who was having idle chit chat in Iris' room until now had suddenly disappeared.

'Did the assassins really kidnap Young Master? Was it to use him as hostage?'

There was no way he would be playing 'hide and seek' at this point in time.

Ian was speculating that Orelly who was driven into a corner had taken Riley away to plot a scheme.

Then he crossed his head.

He did not want to consider the worst case scenario.

As Ian bit his lips, searching every nook and cranny of the mansion, a voice came from behind.

It was the maid Sera, who had been defending Iris' bedroom together with him.

"Ian-nim!"

"Sera."

"Have you found Young Master?"

"I... have not."

Ian who had replied looked at Sera intently.

Ian's eyes were asking 'Have you found him?'

A shadow appeared on Sera's face as she read Ian's eyes.

"Neither have I."

"Damn it."

"He's not here. No matter where we look. Maybe Young Master is already... no longer in the mansion..."

"..."

It had happened even though they were on alert.

Ian's face crumbled at the fact that he lost Young Master even

though he had been right next to him.

It was the same for Sera.

She could not hide the guilt and helplessness for being unable to defend Riley on her face.

"Now is not the time to be glum."

"Ian-nim?"

Ian turned his body and began to walk.

If he couldn’t be found in the mansion, then there was no choice.

They will look outside the mansion.

"Ian-nim! Wait! What are you planning to do outside the mansion? They were assassins! They are the elite assassins who managed to make the Tes Trade Guild which was nameless...into the famous guild everyone knows, in just 30 years! Assassins of such skill... would never leave any evidence behind of kidnapping! And it is night time. If you were to go out without preparation..."

"Then..."

Sera's voice which was gaining volume was cut short.

It was because Ian turned his raging face at her.

"Are we supposed to wait with thumbs up our asses?!"

Ian roared at her.

Sera's shoulders flinched at the old man whose face resembled that of a demon.

"..."

"Kuk...I apologise. That, was unlike me."

'I cannot be the only one who is mad.'

Ian apologised for his slip of the tongue.

His fist had been shaking for a long time.

"No. I understand."

Just like Ian.

Sera who had been biting her lip, angry at the fact that she could not do anything, realised something and called Ian with both her

eyes wide.

"Wait...Ian-nim."

"...?"

Ian looked at Sera with a question mark above his head.

What went through her mind was how the kitchen looked.

"There was something...which bothered me in the kitchen."

"Something that bothered you?"

"I overlooked it before, but, the crate filled with corn...was open. Only that box, nothing else."

"Just the corn crate?"

Ian's brows twisted.

Corn?

Why corn?

"What about it?"

"Oh yes, Ian-nim was not here."

Just before, Riley had talked about 'corn' in Iris' bedroom.

'It's something like a snack...You make it with some butter and corn.'

He had said those nonchalant words which did not suit the serious situation.

"I guess it's a woman's intuition? We should search there again!"

Reporting all that had happened before, Sera began to urge Ian to search the kitchen once more.

"Maybe we might find some evidence for Young Master's disappeara-..."

"What is this?"

"...?!"

"...?!"

Both Ian and Sera flinched.

"Riley disappeared?"

Behind them…stood Count Stein and his two sons.

Chapter 15 - Popcorn (Part 5)

On the path connecting the Iphelleta mansion and Iffa village, there was a forest.

If someone were to ask the state of the forest right now...

"Uh... uuuh..."

It was filled with stench of blood.

The pools of blood made by the headless bodies of the assassins would make anyone turn back in horror.

'Am I dreaming right now?'

The boy who was walking toward him as he swung the blade in the air...

It was a sight that made Tes convinced that he was dreaming.

It was Riley.

The lazy, slothful boy he never had any interest in as the master of the trading guild was now edging closer after killing countless assassins like a demon.

"Now two."

Riley mumbled.

He was telling them they were next.

Tes and Lady Orelly were the last ones left.

"...!"

Tes' eyes began to roll around as he regained his conciousness.

Just as Riley has stated, there weren't any assassins left around them.

'I can't die like this.'

It seemed that Riley never had any intention to let any witnesses live.

That is what Tes believed.

Not even as an assassin, but as a merchant, he should be able to figure that much out.

He was also aware that he needed to put everything he had on the line to be able get out alive.

If he can't, then at least his daughter...

"R-..."

Did the gods send him help?

Tes's lips slowly began to show movement.

He began to stutter on his words.

"Master Riley."

Riley who was standing in front of them with his sword held up high stopped at Tes's voice.

"P-, please."

Riley's eyes narrowed.

Tes swallowed loudly at his stare.

He had seen many people as the master of the trading guild, but he was unable to read the thoughts of the boy in front of him.

In contrast to Riley’s young age, Tes could see maturity and

experience behind those eyes.

"You, you may kill me."

Tes's eyes shifted to the side.

What his eyes were following was the daughter who was behind him, Orelly.

She may have grown up a little twisted, but she was his only child.

"You may kill me, but my daughter...let Orelly live."

Tes looked at Riley convinced of his own demise, while his daughter whose lips quivered in fear had her body paralysed.

"The limit of my restrain was 5 minutes... no, 4 minutes?"

Riley mumbled to himself in response to Tes's pleading.

Tes blinked his eyes, unable to hear those words, then began to beg once more.

"It is true the child has done wrong, but she wasn't as bad as now before. She was a nice girl. Just, just-!"

Let the daughter live.

Please let her live.

"It's as I expected."

Riley replied.

Tes's eyes shook slightly after hearing his reply.

As he expected?

What did he expect?

"..."

Before he could reply back, Riley's wooden sword cut through the wind.

"...Uh."

"...Ah."

It was the greatest mercy Riley could give them.

Riley has chosen to take their lives at the same time, to not let

them see each other die.

'Finished.'

The father and daughter collapsed onto their knees and fell forward.

Riley's face began to darken as he saw the bodies grow cold on the ground.

Riley was staring at the two bodies as if contemplating something, then turned his head.

Unlike 5 minutes ago, there were bodies everywhere.

"Haah..."

Riley's face began to worsen as he stabbed the wooden sword on the ground.

Riley pressed his temples as if having a headache, then leaned forward and covered his mouth with his hand.

"Uuub...!"

As if he was feeling nauseated, Riley began to throw up.

It wasn't because of the guilt of his actions.

It was because he released his mana in order to stop all the assassins, Tes and Orelly from moving.

It was the side effect of 'restrain', which made his ki flow eratically.

"...Ha-ah, ha-ah."

Riley who just threw up all the popcorn he just had recently eaten on the ground stopped his hand that was about to wipe his mouth.

He thought he might garner some suspicion if he were to leave any strange marks on his clothes.

'I can say these cuts were made from the kitchen, but this is different.'

Other than the cuts on his clothes, he didn't have any blood on him.

In order to not leave any evidence, he made sure to be careful for every strike he made on the assassins.

After all the trouble he had gone through, taking all the most difficult actions, it would be quite unfair if his capabilities were to

be found out from the puke he had produced.

'No, I could say I got sick from eating too fast?'

It's nothing like blood.

As he began to think, he determined this was acceptable enough and began to wipe his mouth with his sleeves.

"Well, this body is different from before. And this body is too young to store anywhere near the amount of power I had before... I guess there’s nothing I can do."

Riley's hands were shaking from the adverse effect of using his power too much.

Riley began to talk to himself again as he clenched and unclenched his hand.

"This was something like a test... but I don't think I can use mana for a while. If I'm moving, I should just use the sword."

His opponents were assassins this time.

Not just any assassins, but the elites who were masters of escape which he could not leave any behind in order to keep his secret.

It was quite violent, but Riley's choice now was the most efficient one he could have chosen.

"Then, shall I go back?"

He already had a plan for cleaning the bodies.

So he checked his appearance once more and began to walk.

"Ian would've gone nuts at this point."

Riley made a bitter smile as he decided an apology was needed.

The cold night's winds began to blow on the corpses in the forest.

***

The incident of Riley's disappearance had finally reached Count Stein's ears.

Sera and Ian who were trying not to anger Stein who had exploded before because of Lady Orelly gasped loudly and then began to make hiccups.

"Tell me again carefully Ian. Riley has disappeared?"

"That is..."

Riley was already being treated like trash in the mansion.

What would happen if the words 'he has likely been kidnapped by the assassins' were said when Count Stein was completely furious already?

"..."

"..."

Ian and Sera who did not want to consider the consequences shut their mouths and looked at each other.

Hypothetically, Count Stein was likely to say these words:

'What? He's been kidnapped by the assassins? Pathetic, there is no need to look for him. The Iphelleta house does not need such a failure.'

...then Riley would be in similar situation to Orelly who had just been banished.

Which meant, they wouldn’t be allowed to save the Young Master.

"That is..."

Ian who had little talent for words began to squeeze his brain for ideas.

How can I get through this crisis?

What excuses do I make?

Just when his dry lips were about to open...

"...Did you call for me?"

"...?!"

A familiar voice emerged from Ian's back.

Chapter 16 - Hide And Seek (part 1)

"Young...Master?"

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

Ian turned his head and stared at Riley who had appeared behind him.

Riley shrugged his shoulders at the stares he received from Ian and Sera, who looked as if they were possessed.

"Well, it seems like you were talking about me..."

Riley turned his eyes from beyond Ian's shoulders to Stein.

His father was standing with a serious face and his arms crossed, as if he were annoyed with something.

"Young Master!"

Ian and Sera's faces suddenly entered Riley's view as he was exchanging looks with his father.

Riley shrugged his shoulders at their sudden impulse.

"Huh, yeah?"

"Where...just where have you been?!"

"Yes! Do you know how worried Ian and I were?"

Their faces were filled with worry.

Funny thing was, Ian and Sera's expressions were completely different.

Ian's face had gone red, as if he were about to cry.

Sera's face had gone blue with hysteria.

Riley's lips began to twitch, as the faces they made seemed opposite to what he thought would happen.

"...Haha!."

Riley suddenly burst out with laughter.

As it seemed Riley wasn't aware of how worried they were, red-faced Ian's hand was shaking in the air as he continued to talk.

"L-, laugh? Are you laughing?"

"Young Master, are you really laughing right now?!"

"Ahahaha! Sorry, but...your faces were totally out of sync."

Sera puffed her cheeks in anger.

"That's rude!"

"To laugh in this situation...Do you have any idea..."

How many times had his heart stopped beating?

As he was thinking that his heart won't last long at this rate, Ian's body began to show warning signs.

"...Uck?!"

All of a sudden Ian's right hand was grabbing at the back of his neck.

"I-, Ian-nim!"

"Ian!"

There's a saying that time takes its toll on everyone.

As Ian was about to collapse, unable to endure all the excitement he went through today, Sera who was next to him quickly came to support him.

"I-, is he alright?"

Riley, who seemed worried, stepped forward and asked Sera.

Sera who was holding Ian up from collapsing checked his pulse, then sighed as if she had done all she could have.

"Haah, he's just unconscious. Oh dear..."

The old butler who would shoot swear words like a thug when no one was watching fainted because his master laughed?

Sera was so dumbfounded that she forgot to scold Riley, then slowly peeked behind her.

"..."

Because Count Stein who had yet to leave the place was still standing in place.

Sera addressed him with a bow.

It was a gesture to forgive Ian's shameful display.

"Riley."

"Yes."

In response to Stein's voice, Riley killed his smile as much as possible, and replied instantly unlike his usual self.

It's because he thought it would be annoying if he were to anger his father right now.

"What's that?"

"Huh? Ah, this?"

Stein questioned the paper bag Riley was holding on his left hand.

It seemed like something was inside, as it made a muffled sound whenever the bag moved.

It was...

"It's popcorn."

"Pop...corn?"

Stein tilted his head in response to a word he never heard before.

"It's a snack made of corn, and I wanted to eat some today so I made some. I was intending to give some to my mother...but would you like some as well?"

"Young Master, for that you'd go to the kitchen..."

Watching Riley hand the popcorn bag with such an innocent face, Sera who was holding Ian mumbled with a little melancholy.

The thought that it was a good thing that Ian was not awake crossed her mind.

It seemed it would not have ended so easily if he was awake.

"But, there was no one when I went to the kitchen... Young Master wait, what's that?"

As she was pointing out the fact that the kitchen was empty when she went there she tilted her head in query.

There was something dirty on Riley's sleeves.

"This is...I ate too much too fast. So I threw up."

As if embarrassed, Riley's face went red as he replied while

avoiding Sera's eyes.

He also added the fact that he cleaned his mouth with his sleeves, and quickly apologised to Sera before she could scold him.

"Maybe you missed me when I was off to the bathroom. Sorry, for trying to eat it all myself."

"That's not what you should apologise for..."

"...Stop."

Before she could correct Riley's words, Sera's speech was cut short.

It was because Stein who was standing behind opened his mouth.

"You may go back in the room Sera."

"But..."

Sera bit her lips with worry that Master Riley was going to be severely punished by Count-nim.

She continued to fidget in order to stay behind to leave some words in defense of the Young Master, but Stein was having none of it.

"You can't hold up Ian forever. Right?"

"..."

Sera rolled her eyes about and looked at Stein from the front, and Ryan and Lloyd who were standing besides him.

Especially at the two brothers' eyes, that looked far more malicious than Stein's.

It had to be due to the incident with Lady Orelly before.

"Right?"

Stein asked Sera once more.

"..."

It was worrying.

Although she wanted to help.

But...since she cannot disobey her master.

...As Riley would be harmed more by such actions.

"...Yes."

Sera finally nodded and began to move.

"Young Master, please don't anger them too much...you know what I mean right?"

Sera whispered to Riley as she she walked past him.

Riley sent her away as he replied that it would be alright with a smirk.

"...Riley."

With Sera gone, Riley who was standing alone on his side of the corridor removed his smile and replied with a serious face.

"Yes."

"From what I've heard, that 'paper' Ian brought to me...It was you who found it."

Since it wasn't much of a secret anyway, Riley replied honestly.

"That’s right."

In order to show utmost respect to his father, Riley stood with his hands clasped behind him.

As his hands moved, the popcorn made muffled sounds.

"You..."

As if he was annoyed with the muffled sounds, the second son Lloyd came forward with a strained face.

"Our mother has just been banished, and you think it's alright to eat snacks?!"

‘Mother.’

If it’s the mother Lloyd was talking about then it would mean Orelly, whom Riley had just recently 'dealt' with.

They were most likely oblivious as to her disposal, but Riley had already thought of a plan wherein he acted oblivious.

Therefore, he replied with a question with his eyes wide open.

"Ba...nished? Lady Orelly?"

"Don't act dumb! Riley!"

"No, what just happ-..."

"Riley!"

"..."

Riley flinched, as if showing his innocence at Lloyd's shout that was filled with ire.

If someone who didn't know Riley were to see, it would simply seem like a lazy child who was scared of his older brother.

"That paper, didn't you fabricate it yourself?"

But...

To Lloyd who had gone mad with rage, logic and reason was out of question.

Chapter 17 - Hide And Seek (Part 2)

"F-, fabricate it?"

Riley quickly shook his head and looked at Stein who was standing to the side with a pale face.

The face was full of innocence.

"That’s right. You've made up lies on paper..."

It seemed the message was well received, and Stein cut Lloyd's words as he frowned.

"Stop."

As if he still had more words to say, his lips continued to move as he pointed his finger at Riley.

"But father! He-!"

"I won't repeat myself, Lloyd."

"Kuk..."

As he could no longer push his words at Riley due to his father's interference, Lloyd's face crumbled as if he had tasted shit.

"Riley."

"Yes, Father."

"It is late now, go to your room."

A sound originating from the grinding of teeth could be heard next to Stein.

Considering the situation, it was definitely from Lloyd.

"And..."

"...?"

As he was about to go to his room after saying his farewells to his father and brothers, he stopped and turned to look at Stein.

"Tomorrow. I have some words to say so as soon as you wake up, you are to bring yourself to my office."

As soon as you wake up...

Count Stein has ordered Riley to come 'the moment he's awake'.

The reason why he didn't choose a time of the day was likely because he knew Riley would most likely be the latest to wake up in the mansion.

"...Yes."

Riley replied.

Come for what? He didn't ask such a question.

He was tired from the workout before, and didn't want to drag out the conversation.

His only thought was to quickly lie down on his bed.

His brother Lloyd's anger only felt like a nuisance to him.

"Then, good night."

Riley bowed once more to his father and brothers.

Despite Sera's worry, there weren't any clashes in the meeting of the brothers.

"...What are your thoughts?"

As Riley disappeared from the corridor, among the 3 remaining

men left, the first son Ryan asked Stein.

It was about Riley.

"What do you think?"

Stein asked in return.

After a pause, Ryan replied as he watched Riley's back recede further into the distance.

"I do not think...he is lying."

As Ryan spoke of Riley's innocence, Lloyd could not withhold himself and spoke up.

"Brother!"

As he could not believe Ryan's speculation, Lloyd spoke with clenched fists.

"To read the man's eyes is an ability every great swordsman must have. You must be able to determine right from wrong, and it allows you to read your opponent's attack and so plan out your future moves."

Ryan's cold eyes were pointed at his brother.

"Losing mother was...unfortunate, but there is nothing we can do. We cannot let our emotions cloud our judgement for this incident. To have an assassin among the Iphelleta house, truth be told I am...ashamed. I almost want to send words of gratitude to Riley."

"Brother! How could you say that!"

"Then are you saying I am wrong? That you would prefer that those facts never came to light?"

Lloyd dropped his head and his fists shook.

There was nothing he could say back.

"That's not the case, it's Riley..."

"Hoh, so what I saw was not the truth? Is that what you want to say?"

"..."

"Lloyd. It was bound to come out. It's better that it was exposed now. There is nothing you can hide forever."

"But Brother, Mother... what about Mother!?"

Lloyd who was so eager to talk back closed his mouth.

It was different from Lloyd, but Ryan was also angry.

That his mother was an assassin.

That his brother wouldn’t listen to him.

"You are standing in front of your father."

Ryan's last words were a warning.

At his brother's quiet voice, Lloyd could no longer nag and closed his mouth.

His best course of action was to bite his lips in frustration.

"If you are going to continue acting like a child, then you are better off staying silent. There is a saying-inaction can get you halfway."

"..."

The usually kind, gentle brother seemed a great deal stricter today.

As feelings of betrayal, frustration and rage made his heart pound faster than ever, Lloyd clutched his chest and dropped his chin.

It was to acknowledge the warning and keep the silence.

"Firstly, I have the same thoughts as Ryan. Riley does not seem to be lying."

Stein, who was watching the tension between the two, spoke.

He also did not see any sense of falsehood in Riley's eyes.

"But..."

"...?"

"No, it is nothing."

Stein who was looking at the path Riley took shook his head and turned back.

***

"...Brother."

Lloyd called Ryan who was ahead of him.

Although he did get angry before, Ryan stopped and turned to see

his brother as it didn't seem like he wanted to ignore him.

"Do you really think Mother was wrong...Is that what you think?"

In response to those shaking words, Ryan's stiff face turned to a gentle one and walked towards Lloyd.

Ryan's right hand raised.

"Uck?!"

‘Is he going to hit me?’

He closed his eyes expecting a slap to the face, but then opened them in surprise when the hand landed on top of his head instead.

"Lloyd..."

"Brother?"

As he patted his brother’s head, Ryan continued to speak.

At his gentle words, Lloyd's mouth opened.

"The successor has not been decided, yet."

The successor to the house...

It was talked about before, but as Ryan has said, the successor to the Iphelleta House had not yet been decided.

It might have been because Stein was still in perfect health but some had speculated that Stein still had some expectations from his third son.

"Mother's incident can still be solved after the successor has been decided."

"Brother...then?"

"Yes."

He was talking around it, but if Ryan's words were to be summarised in one sentence...

He will win the successor battle.

He was planning to move after he had received the Iphelleta name.

"Brother...!"

Lloyd's green eyes began to shine.

Ryan chuckled at his brother's gaze of respect.

"I would never give Riley the position of Family Head just because I angered father. It's true he's lazy as hell, but we can't deny that father still sees promise in him."

It would not have been odd if both of them were also banished after the Orelly incident, but thankfully they could stay in the mansion as they had received the family's swordsmanship.

Not to mention, they weren't dropped out from the successor race so they needed to aim for it.

"Let us think about mother afterwards."

"Yes...yes!"

Lloyd nodded twice at those words.

Just as his brother, who was weeping from the emotions inside him, turned his gaze toward the ground...

"..."

Ryan's gentle smile quickly twisted into a sinister one.

***

The next day...

Past lunch and late in the afternoon, Riley rubbed his eyes and stood while he was shook left and right in front of Stein's office.

Next to him was Ian who was sweating nonstop.

"Young Master, how can you fall asleep now? Wake up! Now!"

"Ah, alright. Man...I'm so tired too."

Riley continued to complain about his lack of sleep, as he could not go to sleep until his mother's scolding was done.

"Master has ordered you to come personally. Oh dear, I should not have let my guard down at that moment...Damn it."

Riley, who could no longer stand Ian's nagging, placed his hand on the door knob.

As promised, Riley had come to Stein's office as soon as he woke up.

"Young Master, this may be an opportunity. Lady Orelly has been banished from the mansion. You can finally aim to compete for the successor’s seat..."

Knock knock

Before Ian could finish his words, Riley knocked on the door with one of his hands.

"Enter."

It seemed the sound had reached him, and Stein's reply came from within.

"I'm going in."

"Y-Young Master!"

Just as he was about to turn the knob, Riley turned his head to look at the man who was calling him.

'Good luck!'

Although he didn't say it, he moved his lips in such way as he clenched his fist toward Riley.

It was a fighting pose.

Riley shook his head in disbelief and moved into the office, ignoring Ian.

"Riley."

As Riley entered the room, Stein who was doing paperwork on his table called him without even taking a glance.

"Yes."

What does he want to say?

Riley reluctantly replied as he was getting a bad feeling and scratched his cheek.

"Leave the mansion."

"Huh?"

Among the many documents piled on his table he snatched one of them and handed it to Riley after scribbling some words onto it.

"...That's it?"

Chapter 18 - Hide And Seek (Part 3)

‘Was I too distracted by the paper and misheard it?’

Riley couldn't believe what he had just heard and asked back.

"No, wait... What did you say? Leave?"

"..."

Stein did not reply.

He was simply waiting for Riley's response with his right arm still extended.

"No, just..."

Riley, who had his brows furrowed in shock, narrowed his eyes and stared at the piece of paper Stein was holding out.

"What is that?"

Stein was wordlessly shaking the paper in front of him.

It seemed it was originally a rolled up message, seeing as the sides of the paper were curled inwards.

"Hm, the capital?"

Riley mumbled to himself the word which stood out the most on the paper.

The capital.

The large city located outside the Iphelleta's domain.

In the centre was a large palace and outside its white walls, the citizens, merchants and nobles lived in a beautifully decorated city.

[Information Regarding The Capital's Swordsmanship Tournament]

[At our 17th tournament starting next week, we invite one of the sons of 'Finn Iphelleta,' widely acclaimed for their swordsmanship. We would be honoured if you were to attend and set an example for this event.]

The words were difficult to see from afar, so Riley approached Stein’s desk and took the paper to read its contents.

"..."

In summary, the message on the paper contained what Riley despised the most.

‘Leave the mansion.’

This was most likely the reason why Stein has said such words.

To compete in the swordsmanship tournament.

'I mean, even if you were to be a man of few words...'

You, go to the capital's swordsmanship tournament.

It would have been much easier to say it that way, and there was no reason for him to say 'leave the mansion' now was there?

Riley, who was complaining in his mind, placed the paper back on the desk and began to slowly walk backwards.

"Hahahah..."

"Riley."

"Father, you know what my answer is right?"

"It will be a good experience."

"But I don't need experience?"

"Your brothers have been there too."

"Why don't they go one more time? It's a nice place."

"This letter was for you."

"What, no way."

"It's what they refer to as a love call."

"..."

What did he say now?

Love call?

To think such words would come from the hard-headed Stein.

When Riley stopped his backwards pacing as if he was struck by something, Stein pushed his chair back and stood up behind the desk.

"I... won't go."

At the sound of the chair scraping against the floor, Riley's mind came back and he shook his head as he stated his thoughts.

Crying will not work since he's not so young anymore.

Therefore he must state his intentions clearly.

"I won't go to the swordsmanship tournament."

"For how long will you live so self-centredly? You should put an end to such a lifestyle soon.

"I don't have talent."

Riley looked at his hand and replied with a tired tone.

"I'd tried it last time with a wooden sword. I was worried about my mother. I wanted to defend her. But... my sword was pathetic. Ha! You should have seen Ian's face that time, father. What a sight that was!"

Some of it was true, some of it was false.

Although it was unknown if Stein could find out which part was the lie.

"..."

"I know. I've always known. That I have no talent for

swordsmanship. So I'm giving up. Let me give up. Please don't force me on this path anymore."

‘Because I really like reading. If anything, I'll find a path to become a wizard,’ Riley added in his head.

It felt like Stein would give up after hearing those words.

‘I just want to live a leisurely life. I want to avoid receiving high hopes from others.’

Riley bit his lips because the vow he had made and kept ever since he was born anew was about to slip out.

"Riley."

Riley flinched at Stein's voice.

An average person would not have noticed it, but under that bland dry voice of Stein’s was a small hope.

"..."

Riley's five fingers which were pointing down began to twitch.

His hand was damp with sweat.

'If it's you...'

'We believe in you...'

'You can do it. Because it's you'

'Of course you can! You're the hero!'

The voices of his past companions echoed in his ears.

He could remember their bloodied bodies with their gaping mouths in his head.

Riley swallowed loudly.

'Don't look...'

Don't look at me with those eyes.

Riley's mouth was gaping as he thought to himself.

Slowly, Riley began to step back with cold sweat on his head.

"Riley... There's a difference between a novice's tournament and the capital's tournament. When we told you to compete in the novice tournament... You made all sorts of excuses to not go."

Stein grabbed the paper titled 'Capital Swordsmanship Tournament' and walked toward Riley.

"But, this place is different. You have come of age as well, so I won't go easy on you anymore. You have to attend to at least show your face to the king..."

Creak.

Stein opened his eyes in surprise as he heard the door open during his lecture.

It was because Riley managed to sneak his way to the door without him noticing.

"... Uwah!?"

After the creak of the door, a scream came.

It was Ian's.

"Ah, no! I wasn't eavesdropping at all! The door felt really good so I just had my cheek on it!"

It seemed Ian was curious about the conversation and tried to snoop in, as you could see a clear red mark on one side of his face.

"Huh? Y-young Master? Where are you going?"

Ian tilted his head questioningly at the sight of Riley who was slowly retreating without lowering his guard.

"Ian. I leave father to you!"

"Young Master?!"

It seems the door had excellent soundproof quality and Ian couldn't listen to the conversation, as Ian was confused to what was happening.

His actions of pressing his ear to the door was for naught.

"Ian, grab Riley!"

‘I will discipline him later.’

Stein ordered Ian who was lying on his chest.

"Sorry?"

As Ian replied in confusion, Stein shouted.

"Grab Riley!"

Again.

He's going to play hide and seek again.

Stein knew very well that whenever Riley was driven into a corner, he would hide himself in the mansion like a herbivore and reappear when everything has ended.

Therefore, to not miss him, he had to catch Riley before he lost him.

'This is like-'

Isn't it just like the assassin which the mansion despise?

For the child of his lover to act like an assassin.

Stein frowned and grinded his teeth in anger.

"Riley, you better stop now!"

Cunning child.

Considering his lack of interest in the sword, he was an unusually bright child.

There was no weakness to use against the third child.

If anything it would be his mother Iris.

But that's someone Stein cannot touch either.

Riley knew that too.

Therefore-

"Riley!"

-he can ignore his father's words and run like this.

"Damn it, Sera!!'

Stein shouted at Sera who ran into Riley just around the corner.

Sera flinched with surprise.

"Huk?! Master?!"

"Riley, get Riley!"

"T-the Young Master?"

She had no idea why, but it was her master's order.

Because she couldn't ignore it, she turned around to grab Riley but then widened her eyes in shock.

"Huh? He was just here..."

Just three seconds ago he was standing next to her.

Riley had disappeared all of a sudden.

"Just... a moment ago?"

Chapter 19 - Hide And Seek (Part 4)

"Phew..."

Somewhere within the mansion, Riley sighed as he leaned his back in a shady place.

"I've accidentally given some advice."

During his escape from Stein, Riley had run into Sera, who was training with a broom in each hand, and gave an unsolicited suggestion.

"Was I being too nosy?"

In reality, it was closer to a teaching rather than a piece of advice.

Riley spoke in a questioning tone, saying 'Isn't doing this better than that?' to her who was squeezing in her training during her cleaning duty.

It's not even a joke.

For someone who is both lazy and has nothing to do with swords to correct her?

Unthinkable.

"Tsk."

Riley remembered how Sera's face went blank after hearing Riley's words of teaching.

It was embarrassing.

And what gave him the idea to put his index finger on his lip and say 'Shh' after correcting her?

"...Uuuh!"

At his mistake, and the embarrassment that followed it...

Riley furiously scratched his head with his face going red, not knowing what to do.

The good side was that no one was watching his current state.

He was currently in one of the secret rooms hidden within the mansion.

"It's because of my memories of my previous life..."

Riley mumbled.

The stress from resurrecting with his memories intact was quite significant.

The advice he threw at Sera was one of the bad habits he had before.

How his mouth wouldn't stop running when he sees others swinging their swords.

"And that's why I tried so hard not to go to the training grounds..."

In the Iphelleta House, even the maids would fit their training in the slightest gaps in their schedule.

Previously, he was blessed and received the Holy Sword.

Making his accomplishments as a hero, throwing countless swings of his sword.

He could never ignore those who would put so much effort into it.

Therefore...

He tried not to see, or create any such situations since he was young.

"And it had to come out today."

His memories of the past were a lot clearer than usual just then.

Perhaps his conversation with his father forced the memories out of his head.

While he was running, Riley who was seeing his past play out before his eyes ended up giving advices to Sera.

'Oh? Master Riley? What brought you here...'

'How about you use the fingers? If you change the angle to a reverse grip in the middle, the next move can become much smoother.'

'Sorry?'

'Your finger. Roll the sword.'

'...?'

'Ah, no... It's nothing. Sorry, I'm quite busy right now. Act like you didn't hear anything.'

'...Damn it, Sera!!'

'Huk?! Master?!'

'Uh oh...'

'Riley, get Riley!'

'T-the Young Master?'

Riley wrapped his face in his hands with a sigh as he remembered what had just happened.

Sera may not have the loudest of mouths, but she's still a maid.

A maid who liked a good gossip.

If she were to try spreading what happened just now...

'Then, with my own hands.'

He may end up in a situation where he would 'taking care' of Sera.

Personally.

Riley sighed again as he wished as hard as he can for that situation to not arrive.

"Haa..."

As he dropped his hands which were on his face, he closed his mouth which was open from that sigh.

At the same time, he also shut his eyes completely.

"..."

As he leaned on his back, Riley's Ki sense widened.

A few seconds later Riley began to breath deeply.

It was not the one people of Iphelleta House learnt, but his own breathing technique.

He learnt it in his previous life, and modified as he saw fit... it was Riley's original breathing technique.

The faint mana floating around him slowly began to gather toward Riley.

The recovery was, rather than being efficient, it was more like devouring his surroundings.

The mana of high density gathered, while the chaotic mana was

pushed back.

Was that the reason?

The pitch black space began to light up with what seemed like fireflies.

It was mana.

As if surprised at Riley's presence, mana that had lit up began to absorb into Riley's body.

'Now.'

As he sensed the mana flowing into his body...

Riley opened his eyes slightly and thought to himself.

'Shall I hear what's happening?'

Riley's 'hide and seek' has begun.

***

"Young Master"

"Master Riley!"

The Iphelleta Mansion had become rowdy once more.

It was turned upside down because of Lady Orelly yesterday, and another incident had happened now.

Thankfully it was much less serious compared to Lady Orelly's banishment.

"Haa, where did he go?"

The situation could be summarised in a single sentence: Riley had disappeared again.

His 'hide and seek' had begun.

A game of hide and seek that everyone who lived within the mansion knew.

Everyone was aware that once he began to hide, the third son would not show himself until many days later.

Therefore, everyone was expecting that this time would not be any different from before.

"Haa, how are we supposed to find him when even Master Stein

can't either?"

Sera pouted with her chin on the broom.

She was scolded greatly by Stein.

There had been a chance to catch Riley before he disappeared, but she could not catch him

That was the reason.

"It's because Young Master said something strange..."

While Sera was embarrassed at being found out on her attempt to train during cleaning, Riley had said some strange words.

Giving her a piece of advice to do it differently as if he were a teacher.

'How about you use your fingers?'

Fingers?

Sera took her chin off the broom and looked at her fingers.

Her head had begun to spin slowly as she recalled Riley's voice.

"Hmm..."

What Sera spun her head to look at was another broom that was leaning onto the wall.

She was a dual-wielding swordswoman who relied on speed and fought with a sword in each hand.

Therefore...

In order to keep up her training during her cleaning duties, she would always take two brooms with her to fulfil her duty.

Today was no different.

Although she was holding only one broom now, if you counted the broom next to the wall she had brought two brooms with her.

It was for training.

"Just once..."

An advice from her Young Master.

Although it is rejected by everyone else in the mansion, for some reason Ian would always say 'Our Young Master, the best! Young

Master, so cool!'.

She was curious.

Why would Ian praise the lazy master so?

Maybe the answer lies in that advice he gave?

As those thoughts reached her, Sera grabbed onto the spare broom on the wall as if she were possessed.

"...I'll try it out?"

With her legs at shoulder width.

As taught by the Iphelleta's swordsmanship manual for servants, she would swing the swords...brooms by switching her hands as if she was dancing.

It was a practice Sera did often.

Recently she was facing a difficulty at the 3rd step of the following move.

'Here!'

At the spot she's stuck on.

As told by Riley she spun the broom with her fingers and her eyes widened.

"Huh?"

The move became much sharper.

Sera's jaws dropped as she went from the 3rd step to 4th so comfortably.

‘But I've been stuck on it for so long? How can just using fingers make it so much easier?’

"Wait, one more..."

Unable to believe how easily she connected the moves, she got back into stance.

Is this what the others would call an epiphany?

As Sera continued through the moves with her lips apart, she swallowed her spit.

The method now was not written anywhere on the family's manuscript.

'It works? What? How can it be so easy?!'

Swoosh! Swoosh!

The two brooms made a somewhat sharp noise through the air.

All she did, was use the fingers to connect the moves.

But it was different.

It was simpler, and faster than before.

"...!"

She suddenly got the creeps.

Sera could feel the nerves creep up her back and shook as she dropped the two brooms.

She could finally understand a little... the feelings of the old butler who would always sing praises of the Young Master.

Chapter 20 - Hide And Seek (Part 5)

One more.

One more time.

As Sera grabbed the broom on the ground, she repeatedly said 'one more time' seven times.

She changed the angle of the broom slightly each time she repeated the move while talking to herself, then startled herself when she felt someone behind her and turned around.

"...Sera? What are you doing here?"

It was Iris, who walked into the room which was to be cleaned.

She had no ability to hide her presence.

Therefore, Sera sighed in relief as she watched Iris walk slowly towards her.

The mansion was still on high alert after the recent assassin incident.

"Haah, Lady Iris."

“Puhup! What is that? That weird pose?"

"This is..."

Sera's face went red as she was standing in a strange way due to stopping midway in her training, and pulled the two brooms into her chest.

"Ahahaha...I was training. I have shown you something embarrassing."

She grabbed both brooms with one hand and lifted the end of her skirt with the other as she bent her knees slightly.

It was clumsy, but it was a curtsy that still retained its proper form.

"It's alright. It is nice to see someone make such effort to improve themselves, no matter how it looks. In fact I should be embarrassed myself. It seems like I've interrupted your training."

"Please refrain from saying improving myself. It hurts."

"Hurts?"

"Truth is, I was slacking off."

Sera smiled shyly as she replied.

She may not be able to answer to Stein this way, but it was okay for Iris.

If Ian was responsible for Riley, Sera was responsible for Iris.

The servant who spends most time with her was Sera.

Talking like friends is just another daily occurrence for them.

"Slacking off?"

"Well...Master Riley disappeared."

Riley, who had disappeared yesterday, disappeared again?

Iris's face went pale with the worry that there may be assassins still left in the mansion.

"Riley has?"

"Oh, it's not what you're worried about. Truth is...Master Stein called Master Riley in. It's the tournament season. I believe it's because of that."

"Ah."

Iris nodded as she made an expression of understanding.

"Is it hide and seek?"

"Yes. And I'm supposed to find him but...my focus turned to training halfway."

Sera awkwardly laughed.

When the third son of the mansion hides, no one can find the boy.

That was the truth.

"Oh Riley..."

"Well...Is there nothing you want from him?"

"Want from him?"

"Yes. It seems like Master Stein wants to make Master Riley do something. But Master Riley would just run away... Yet you seem different from him. Aren't you bothered? Like that talk about...the successor."

This was a question which was asked often by Ian as well.

Even the now-banished Lady Orelly was quite strict with her children.

But Iris was the complete opposite.

No matter how lazy her son was, she would just smile warmly back at him.

"Um, I don't think that's the case."

"Really?

"I've scolded Riley just yesterday as well. Weren't you watching too?"

‘I know the popcorn you've made yourself tastes nice, but how can you worry everyone around you so much?’

It was Iris who forced Riley to apologise to Ian, Sera and herself.

"Well, I think I can safely say it was too soft."

"Then..."

Sera's words could not be finished.

It seemed Iris still had something to say, and continued.

"I...have been taught that...a mother must understand what her son's thoughts are. Of course I'm no psychic, and I can't read what he's thinking but...I can understand just what emotion he's going through. As his mother."

She smiled bitterly when she expressed what she thought a mother should be, and then continued to explain how she saw Riley, as a mother.

"Sometimes...I can see his eyes shake, or see an endless sadness on his face. I've wondered many times why he would make such face but I could never find out. So I've asked him privately. ‘Is there anything making you sad or causing you pain?’ Do you know what Riley said?"

It was something Sera, who was always next to Iris, never noticed.

Sleeping or reading.

Or just consuming food.

The Young Master who would hum as he leaned on the apple tree would show such a face in front of his mother?

It was unexpected.

Sera asked in a surprised tone.

"What did he say?"

"He acted like he knew nothing about it. That it was nothing, that nothing like that happened."

"It was...nothing?"

"Yes. Even while he made a worried face as if he was being scolded. It seemed like he was trying to hide it."

Iris began to play with her fingers.

"It hurts me that he won't tell his mother about it but...I guess it means he's thought about it as well. I'm sure it's to not make me worry."

Her bitter smile began to change into a gentle, calm smile.

Although still a little young to call herself a veteran mother, it was a smile that made her look so gentle...you could feel the warmth radiating from it.

"There must be something. In a place I don't know, when I couldn't see him, something happened to Riley. Something that would make his eyes tremble, and make a sad face as if he's

shouldering the weight of the world...something like that."

‘If I was next to my son for 24 hours a day, 365 days a year... Would I have found out?’

The answer did not come.

Therefore Iris decided to be strong.

"As his only mother, I have to understand."

Even if the people of the mansion showed hostility.

Even if they pounded their chest in frustration.

"So...at least I won't force him to do something."

‘At least I won't be like them. Let's believe in my son.’

That is what Iris decided.

And she believed that her son would also believe in her one day.

"I will wait for him."

‘Because I'm his mother.’

"I just...wish for Riley's happiness. More than anyone in the world."

"..."

Iris was a good mother.

Sera convinced herself.

‘When I get old, get married, and have a child, I will become a mother like her.’

That is what Sera decided.

"...Is something on my face?"

With Sera staring with such a satisfied smirk on her face, Iris questioned her.

"No, I was just... admiring."

"Oh Sera... You're making me blush."

Sera who was considering whether she would need to tell Iris about Riley's advice, tightly held the broom in her hand.

There is no need to tell Iris.

That's what she decided.

'Shh, act like this never happened.'

It was Riley's personal request as well.

So she decided to keep her silence.

"..."

"Then Sera, work hard."

Iris turned away after encouraging the silent Sera.

"Um, Lady Iris."

"Hm?"

"Are you, perhaps, going off somewhere?"

As the maid serving Iris, it was part of her duty to know about her whereabouts.

Sera was going to follow her after her cleaning duty was finished.

"Well..."

Iris stopped at Sera's question.

As if trying to hide something, she had a playful face on her.

"Perhaps...to the bathroom?"

"Sorry?"

"Huhu, it's a secret."

Iris then continued to walk away.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to hide like Riley."

***

"...Phew."

Riley sighed inside his hiding spot.

Thankfully, after finding out the situation with his mana, there didn't seem to be a need to silence Sera himself.

'Well, mother does have a good eye for judging people.'

Iris is not just kind.

What Riley thought was her real strength was her ability to judge others.

Sera was a good example, although he was still worried.

'Now that I think about it, she also made Ian look after me.'

The thought of the butler whose face would sometimes go red with rage, then cry like a little girl made Riley laugh a little.

He was thankful for having someone so entertaining with him.

'...I've gotta respect my parents.'

Filial piety.

It was an obvious decision for the mother who would love and trust her son.

Although he could not do so in his previous life, he would perform it with utmost faith in this life.

As he reconfirmed his thoughts, Riley remembered Count Stein's

eyes.

Likely, Stein must have seen what Ian had peeked into as well.

That must be the reason.

The reason why he sees Riley with eyes full of expectation.

'Father...'

Stein.

To Riley he was his father...therefore, his parent.

If he were to respect parents, Stein is also someone to whom he must show his respect.

'The capital...'

Awkward with his words.

He could only speak harsh, cold words but he holds deep thoughts within him.

That was Riley's father, Stein.

Today was also the same.

It was, perhaps, in order to keep Riley away from Lloyd who was furious with Orelly's incident that he was given the invite to the swordsmanship tournament.

'I don't think I'll be able to avoid fighting if I went.'

Riley frowned.

Let's say he accepted his father's wishes and went to the tournament.

Then what?

He doubted that he would be able to hide his old habits from the past for the entire duration of the tournament.

'Then again...'

Riley shook his head as he remembered his past.

Then.

The mana being absorbed by Riley began to tremble.

Knock. Knock.

Afterwards, someone began to knock.

"...Riley?"

He extinguished the glowing mana around him.

Riley who was crouching looked up.

The door began to open with a creak.

"Mother..."

Riley spoke blankly at the sight of his mother coming over to his hiding spot.

"Were you hiding here again?"

"I'm sorry. I just...had something to think about."

Where Riley was hiding in was Iris's closet.

It was one of the few places Riley could hide in the mansion.

It was here that Riley polished his mana, eavesdropped on Sera, and contemplated on his father's talk of the capital.

"Don't you know this is bad? As I've told you yesterday, everyone will worry if you do this."

Iris bent her knees to look at Riley on equal grounds.

"Something to think about… Is it the capital?"

Even though Riley was simply throwing a tantrum, Iris's face was still filled with warmth.

It seems she had some inclination to believe that her son wanted to perform his duty as a son.

"…"

Riley simply nodded his head without an answer.

"Why?"

"I'm just scared of the sword."

Unlike the other times, Riley answered as if relying on his mother.

An answer hiding his trauma of the past or the expectation that followed.

He’s scared of the sword.

It was a rather honest answer.

"Hm, I see."

With a small pause, Iris tilted her head then continued to speak.

"Then how about a vacation?"

"...What?"

Riley's eyes went wide with surprise.

She was smiling brightly.

"A vacation. With your mother."

"...?"

With a warm smile, Iris added.

"Your mother will help."

Chapter 21 - Journey To The Capital (Part 1)

"Have you two packed everything you need?"

"Yes, seems like it."

The mother and son duo were standing at the mansion's gate, wearing clothes suitable for travelling.

It was Riley and Iris.

"But... Will Sera and I really be enough?"

"That is right. In my opinion, I wish for...two more to follow us."

"Let's just get going, you two will be more than enough."

It seemed it was difficult for him to stay in the sun for too long, and so Riley took his first steps toward the carriage.

Ian sighed at the ground as he watched Riley shamble his way into the carriage.

"The capital...capital...I mean, it's good that you're going. But why must you act so..."

"Ian-nim. Please. One thing at a time."

Sera gave Ian a sneer as she poked at him with her elbow, then bowed her head.

Stein had come personally to the gates in order to bid his farewell to the two leaving for the capital.

"Are your preparations finished?"

"Yes!"

Iris replied before Ian and Sera could answer.

"Hm, there was no need for you to go too."

As if unsatisfied, Stein’s face crumbled as he looked at Iris and the carriage.

It seemed like Riley was already lying down inside the carriage, as he could no longer be seen.

"That was the condition right?"

Contrary to what Stein had wanted.

Unable to hide her smile, Iris began to console her husband to not be so down.

"It's my first vacation with my son, so please don't break the mood with your jealousy."

"Who's jealous..."

"You are jealous. Aren't you?"

"...Hng!"

Stein snorted with his arms crossed.

"Since you're going with him, make sure Riley actually competes..."

"Stein."

Iris narrowed her eyes and called Stein's name.

Stein, with his sentence cut short, looked at Iris' eyes and flinched.

For a woman who'd never practiced swordsmanship to have such charisma, it was not fair.

"I won't force him to do it. It’s a vacation. We're just going sightseeing. As I said before, wasn't that the condition?"

The condition for Riley to head to the capital; it was not for Riley to 'compete', but rather to 'watch' the tournament.

Thanks to Iris' negotiation, Riley could see the wide world, take his mother for a vacation, and leave the mansion.

It meant he didn't need to swordfight.

"Well, I will suggest it to him."

"Ugh."

Iris made a small laugh as she stepped onto the carriage.

All of the servants behind Stein began to bow simultaneously.

It was time to leave.

"Then, Ian. Sera."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"I leave their safety to you."

As Iris got onto the carriage, Stein called on the butler, Ian, and the maid, Sera, who were standing by.

Ian and Sera bowed and answered at the same time.

"Yes, even at the cost of my life."

"Yes, even if it will cost my life."

That was the servants' determination to protect them.

Filled with loyalty, the two answered without hesitation and unsheathed their swords slightly to Stein, then began to move the baggage.

Even though it was a Count's family trip to the capital, the baggage was rather light.

"...Then we shall take our leave."

It seemed they decided to take turns leading the horses, with Ian on the driver's seat and Sera inside the carriage.

With the crack of the whip, the two horses began to move.

***

The carriage heading to the capital had a simple design to it.

The current season was neither summer nor winter, but spring, and thus the windows were left open.

It was a carriage made just for spring.

It was designed so the passengers could feel the spring breeze as they travelled.

"It's been a while since I visited Solia, I'm excited."

"Solia?"

"Ah, I forgot to tell you. Solia is the name of the capital. The capital has a name, and it's called 'Solia', kind of like 'Iffa' for Iffa village."

"Oh? I wasn't aware. I thought it was just called ‘the capital’."

"Well it's expected as you'd rarely left our domain. You better get used to it soon. When we arrive, you will hear ‘Solia’ rather than ‘the capital’ a lot more."

Sera began to explain Solia with a bright smile, as Iris remembered something.

"Now that you mention it, Sera, you're from the capital right?"

"Yes."

Twenty minutes had passed since they had departed from the mansion.

Riley, who had been looking out the window with his chin on his hand, glanced at Sera.

It seemed like her story about the capital sounded much more interesting than the view of Iffa village from out the window.

Sera was already smiling with excitement.

"Everyone’s so lively, and there's so many things to see. This is the first time you two are visiting Solia right?"

As Sera clapped her hand with the question, Riley answered.

"Correct."

"Then you should look forward to it. Solia is a really good place. I can assuredly affirm it will be a wonderful memory. With your permission, allow me to act as your guide!"

Riley accepted Sera's favour with a laugh, then posed his first question.

"The capital...no, Solia should be filled with people right? I'm not good with walking through crowds."

"Hm, it is true the central plaza is crowded. It is a four-way intersection which splits the capital into four districts, and it is the best place to hear the most recent gossip of the castle. Other than that, it should be fine. Young Master should be able to handle it."

"Four districts..."

The capital...

The current destination for the party of four, 'Solia', was so large that it was divided into upper, lower, left, right sections for the sake of organization..

The right, left and lower districts were where most commoners and merchants lived.

"I remember seeing it in a book."

A picture of a circle that was split into four equal parts.

He remembers seeing the map which had the upper area denominated as 'the Palace'.

"So where did you live, Sera?"

Among the baggage they brought was also a map of Solia, and Iris handed it to her along with her question.

As she looked at the map Iris handed her, she pointed her finger with a grin.

She was pointing to the 'left district'.

"Here, the Left Solia."

"Left Solia?"

"It was termed as such to make it easy to organise. Where I pointed is called the Left Solia."

Sera's finger trailed left then down, and down to left again.

"This is called the Lower Solia. And this is the Right Solia. Ah! The upper is an exception. We just call it the Solia Castle. That is where our objective, the tournament, is held."

"Wow, so it's that large?"

"It is a city, not to mention the capital! A major city holding the

palace! You can't compare it to our mansion or Iffa village."

As Sera gave a devious smile to boost their anticipation, Ian who was driving the carriage peeked behind him and joined in on the conversation.

"I have been to the capital a few times myself. Not only are there things to see, but delicious food to have had as well."

"Really?!"

Iris' cheeks turned red with anticipation.

"Hmm..."

Unlike his mother, Riley made a somber face with his chin locked onto his hand.

"Actually, concerning that 'dream' you told me about before, Young Master."

"Hm?"

The carriage was driven over a bump with a dull thud.

It seemed like the wheel had gone over a large pebble, but it didn't affect their travel.

But, it was enough to change Riley's face.

"Among the snacks in Solia is something similar to what you've told me...about the dream."

"Something similar?"

Ian who was expertly leading the horses looked around the surroundings then moved his eyes to the back.

"Yes, what...what was it? Carbonated drinks, was it?"

"...?"

"When you drink it, you can feel the bubbles pop in your throat. You always talked about how it's sweet, cold, shocking, and when you drink it with ice...that you could almost feel like you’re going to heaven."

Cola.

Sprite.

Carbonated drinks.

"...Y-yeah what about it?"

As Riley remembered the three soft drinks, he asked with a big gulp.

‘Why am I sweating so much even though it's not summer?’

"You did say it was a dream, so I'm not sure if it's the same as what you'd told me but…there is something like it."

"…"

"I guess you'd call it a sweet beer where you don’t get drunk? No, it was more like a drink that seemed to pop more. The colour was…black…"

"…It’s cola!"

Riley quickly stood and pressed his face toward the driver's seat.

"Riley?"

"Y-Young Master?"

Iris and Sera flinched with surprise.

'T-there’s coke… here?'

Riley's jaws dropped.

Right now.

The thought of wanting to drink it right now was so strong that he was almost having withdrawal symptoms.

Chapter 22 - Journey To The Capital (Part 2)

"Y-young Master? Is there a problem?"

Ian, who could not look back as he was driving the carriage, began to drip cold sweat.

It was because Riley suddenly leaned in towards the driver's seat with two sparkling eyes.

"W-what you said...is it true?"

As Riley stuttered his question, Ian also stuttered his answer.

"A-about the black sugar beer?"

"Black sugar beer?"

"Yes, that is the name of the drink I've told you. That's how it is called in Solia."

Iris showed a reaction to the word 'beer.'

"Beer?"

She was aware that her son had never drunk alcohol before.

Although, that was excluding the previous life he had.

As Iris only knows the Riley of this world, her thoughts weren't entirely wrong.

"You're going to make Riley drink beer?"

Sons first learn how to drink from their father.

That is what Iris thought was norm.

"Haha, there is no need to worry. As I've said before...you cannot get drunk by drinking the black sugar beer. There is no alcohol in the drink itself. Even children aging five drink it without a problem in Solia."

"Even five-year-olds?"

Of course.

That's how Coke should be.

A drink everyone wants on a hot day, regardless of age and gender.

It's so devilishly addictive that you could even believe it was made by the gods.

Although they say you gain weight and rot your teeth if you drink too much.

Riley loved that drink over every other food and drink in the world.

Ah, that fizziness.

"You drink it with food made from potatoes right? Or a sandwich, perhaps a burger."

"...?"

Ian looked back after Riley's question.

Because the carriage began to knock about as Ian looked back, he quickly looked forward and answered Riley's question.

"Yes, you seem to know it well?"

‘Was what he saw in his dream so clear?’

Ian scratched his head as his Young Master who had never seen black sugar beer before seemed to know about it better than he did.

"Well, it's as you say. The sweetness cannot be compared with the

likes of fruit beer and it goes well with salty food. Not to mention it's quite cheap, so the children love it. It is delicious."

Even Ian who had worked as a mercenary before had tasted the drink very rarely.

The black sugar beer was something you could only obtain in the capital, Solia.

"Well, the nobles don't seem to like it very much though."

As Sera joined in on the conversation with those words, Riley quickly turned and looked at her.

"Why?!"

"It feels like peasant food."

"Dumbasses!"

Iris frowned at the unintentional swear words.

"Riley! Watch your language!"

"Ah, sorry."

Riley quickly apologised as he scratched the back of his head

sheepishly and took his seat again.

"It's just a surprise that what I dreamed about actually exists here."

Black sugar beer.

A drink called Coke in his previous life.

Truth be told it wasn't simply his imagination manifesting in his dream, but something he remembered from his past.

Riley simply talked his way around it as there was no need to complicate things.

"Well, there are many things to see other than that. You can look forward to it."

"Can't you tell us more beforehand?"

As Sera promised them with a sly smile, Iris began to ask for more stories with a face full of curiosity.

"Hmm, I could tell you more..."

Sera's face became mischievous.

"But wouldn't that take the fun out of your vacation with Young Master?"

"Haha! I agree with Sera. It is always exciting to discover new things. Solia's peculiarities will make for good memories."

"Come on, are you really going to be like this?"

"I will be your guide. But, I shall only watch."

Ian looked after Riley's back, while Sera looked after Iris'.

Truthfully...

For Iris and Riley of the Iphelleta House they serve,they wanted to see the two of them wander the city with joy.

It crushed their hearts to watch them be oppressed by Lady Orelly and her two sons... So they at least wanted to show them some happiness.

"Hmph, alright! Fine! So mean..."

Iris turned her nose with a “Hmph!”

Although her voice was sharp, there was a smile on her face.

'Coke... Coke...'

While everyone was smiling, Riley was the only exception.

With a serious face and a finger to his mouth, he was thinking.

Thinking about the black sugar beer.

He was excited.

Among his past life filled with pain and regrets it was one of the few redeeming factors.

He wanted to drink it soon.

***

"Mmm, Coke..."

The boy sleeping on Iris' lap began to sleep talk and wriggle his fingers.

Iris, who was lending him her lap, playfully poked at the boy's cheek, and the sleeptalk stopped.

It was Riley.

"My lady, isn't it tiring?"

"No, I'm fine. I could ask you the same."

"We've only just swapped, it's alright."

Even during the night, the carriage continued without stopping.

It was thanks to the special horses pulling the carriage.

Not only that, on the roof there was also an invention made by the wizards, a creation made thanks to their sweat and blood which allowed for safe travels even at night.

"How long until our arrival?"

Iris turned and faced Ian who was sitting across from her.

"There is still some distance. You should sleep as well."

Ian, who was sitting with his arms crossed, looked at the map after Iris' question and answered.

“At the latest we should arrive by tomorrow night. If we arrive earlier then we need to have a tour with Young Master."

"That sounds nice, but shouldn't we register for the swordsmanship tournament first?"

Although Riley wasn't competing, watching the tournament also required registration.

In order to be registered, they must send news of their arrival to the castle in Upper Solia, and request for a pass.

"That can be done by either Sera or me."

At Ian's reply Iris changed her question with a sorry face.

It was about rest.

"Shouldn't you be sleeping too, Ian?"

Ian held out his hand at Iris' question.

"There are times I've been awake for a week straight during wartime. This much is a walk in the park for me."

It was during Ian's prime days.

He began to work as a mercenary when he was a teen, and participated in many battles.

Comparing the days he spent next to a corpse with all his senses sharp and unable to sleep, this truly was a walk in the park.

"But that was in the past."

He may have been like that in his prime, but Ian was beyond seventy years old now.

Thanks to the training of his body and mana, he was healthy compared to others of his age, but Iris could not hide her worry at the sight of Ian's white hair.

"My lady, how could you? I am still on active duty."

"Haah..."

‘Is this how most swordsmen are like?

It's good to rest when you can but they are too stubborn.’

After arriving as Stein's concubine, she was so busy trying to recover from her sickness that she, who hadn’t learned swordsmanship, couldn't comprehend many of their aspects.

"If you can't sleep, then how about a chat?"

Ian began to search through their packs to prepare a good tea to

drink before sleep and handed one of the cups to Iris.

"Ah, thank you."

It was the tea made from the seeds given by Riley.

Iris had a proud smile on her.

"My lady."

While they were waiting for the tea to cool down, Ian asked Iris a question.

"You...are not going to change your mind right?"

"About the tournament?"

"Yes."

Ian, who was as excited as Stein that Riley was going to compete in the tournament, lowered his eyes as he grabbed the cup's handle.

Iris paused for a short moment then answered.

"...No."

Although she knew nothing about the sword, she gave an answer so unwavering, it was as if she would never back down on this matter.

"My decision won't change. If Riley does not want to compete then I don't want to force him."

"I...see."

"Ian. If you truly serve Riley, you shouldn't push him into this. You should support him."

Iris tried to convince Ian.

"You know, don’t you? That Riley is worried. That he's worried about how everyone looks at him."

Ian had always been next to Riley.

Even when he would doze off on the mansion's apple tree.

Even when he swung the wooden sword at the dummy and casted it away.

Ian knew that Young Master was reading the atmosphere.

And he also got the feel that he was hiding something.

"...I guess with age comes anxiousness."

Ian broke the silence in the carriage.

"Although I've just boasted that I'm still on active duty, I am in truth worried. I don't know when I'll disappear."

"Ian..."

Ian's face became bitter, as he seemed to remember the time he collapsed before.

"There's nothing I can do. There's nothing I can do but have hope in the Young Master."

‘I saw the possibility.

I saw hope.’

When he had first seen the talent in Riley that could not compare to Ryan, Lloyd or even Stein, he was unable to sleep for three days.

He was excited, and delighted that Riley would attain what he could never achieve.

"You just told me, right? That I shouldn't push him into this, but support him instead."

Although he was a servant, it was advice from an elder.

Iris nodded her head.

"I am the same as you my lady. It may not be identical, but it is very similar. Just as you were resolute on declining his spot in the competition, I was hoping for his participation."

‘Why would you go so far?’

Iris's eyes seemed to ask that question.

Ian replied with a detached look on his face.

"...Placing hope on the next generation is the duty of the old."

As Ian muttered those words.

Dulkung!

The carriage was knocked about.

"...?!"

At the sudden shaking, Ian and Iris looked at Sera who was driving the carriage.

"...Ian-nim."

Sera had a sharp look on her face, which wasn't her usual look.

"It's an ambush."

"..."

Riley who was sleeping on Iris' lap narrowly opened his eyes.

Chapter 23 - Way To The Capital (Part 3)

"Calm, calm down..."

With the swords already drawn...

Sera could not hold on to the reins and controlled the horses with her heels.

Although there was some initial confusion among the horses due to the sudden stop, their ability to calm down after Sera's words showed how well-trained these horses were.

'It's crude, but the trap's made by someone with intelligence.'

Just a few inches away from the hooves was a taut rope.

It was tied to the nearby trees and, as if intended to be used at night, was painted black.

Thankfully Sera managed to sense the danger beforehand and skillfully stopped the carriage, otherwise it could have lead to a huge accident wherein the carriage overturned.

"Which bastards..."

Ian stood up with his foul words.

"Ian-nim. Take care of the carriage."

After calming down the horses, Sera stood up and requested him to oversee the protection of Riley and Iris.

The carriage was stopped in the middle of the forest.

Although there was a path which allowed carriages and men to travel through, to the sides were bushes and trees whose leaves fluttered in the cold night wind.

'Is there...nothing more to the trap?'

Sera looked about.

She began to sniff with her nose as her eyes could not see far in the darkness.

'It's not done by humans. It's faint, but there is the stench of a beast.'

If humans are excluded, there aren't many species that could perform such a feat.

As Sera began to narrow down the likely candidates she looked down at the taut rope which was blocking the path.

'Should I cut the rope and continue on?'

The rope was simply painted, and didn't seem too difficult to cut.

It would easily split in two even without the use of mana.

'I must hurry, before the trappers come.'

At the moment the culprits could not be seen.

The decision was quick.

It was just when Sera was about to come down from the driver's seat.

"...Kilkil!"

From the darkness a snicker could be heard, and daggers coated with green liquid flew at Sera from her blind spot.

'Behind?!'

Sera quickly pulled her sword back and spun her body.

Sera's face was filled with frustration, realising she was a tad late.

'Kuk, it's annoying to fight with a blow from the...'

“...Uah! Coke!!"

Ting!

A teacup flew towards Sera, and the dagger which was flying at Sera's back ricocheted.

'...start?'

As if he was having a strange dream, Riley woke up with a scream and knocked the teacup from Iris' hand.

"R-Riley? What's wrong?"

"...Ah."

Iris could not see the dagger before and looked at her son with surprise.

"Well...I just had a weird dream."

"Phew, you surprised me."

'...?'

From inside the carriage.

Ian who was looking blankly at Sera's back blinked his eyes repeatedly.

Such an amazing coincidence?

At such a perfect timing?

At such a perfect angle?

For Riley to knock the teacup in his sleep and hit the dagger midair?

'Coincidence? Is it a coincidence?'

Although the dagger came from behind, Sera, who managed to avoid it with a miracle, looked back at the carriage and nodded her head.

She was planning to go to the spot where the dagger was originally thrown from.

"What the...? It's stopped? Why did we stop?"

Sera came down from the seat, and Riley who just woke up looked around in confusion and asked Ian.

"The truth is..."

"...Huwap!"

Before Ian could explain, there was a shriek following Sera's battlecry.

The scratchy voice didn't seem human, and sounded more like that of a monster.

"What's that noise?"

Riley was reassuring his mother who was worried, and looked out the window to see what was happening.

When his eyes adjusted to the dark, Riley could see Sera, who was fighting against midgets with green skin.

"They are...?"

"Goblins."

Ian replied.

Goblins.

Riley remembered seeing them in his book.

With a short stature, amber eyes, and sharp teeth like that of a shark’s, they were monsters who had the intelligence of a 10-year-old child.

"Goblins..."

Riley narrowed his eyes, not knowing before that they really existed.

'So they are here too... Monsters.'

For them to really exist, and not just in the books.

Half curiosity.

Half reminiscent of his past.

After seeing their appearance and their movements, Riley found them quite similar to the lesser demons he hunted back in his previous life.

"It seems the goblins made a trap with a rope and waited for a carriage to go by. And we fell right into the trap. Thankfully Sera

noticed it and saved the carriage, and so we are in combat now."

As Riley watched Sera fight, Ian provided a brief explanation of the current situation.

"Is she alright...being alone?"

"With her skill, a few tens of goblins are nothing. She could fight against same number of orcs. It would be different if they were ogres."

"Orc? Ogre?"

"Well, it's not very important right now."

Even if Sera was hit by the dagger from before, it would have been no problem for her.

Even if there was poison on the dagger, it was a crude one made by goblins.

At Sera's level of mana control, she would have been able to fight while suppressing the effect of poison using her mana.

It would of been a minor annoyance, but not a problem.

"There is a chance some may come from behind and threaten

Young Master or Lady Iris. So I must hold my position here."

"Hmm."

"Believe in Sera. Young Master has yet..."

Ian stopped his words.

He didn't know what words he should add.

'...to become strong?'

Those words flew into his head, but Ian shook his head immediately.

He didn't want to say any words that could disappoint Riley.

Ian still remembered the time Riley struck the dummy back then.

"Anyway, our job is to wait for Sera. It may take twenty... no, about thirty minutes. They tend to become more feral when there is a full moon."

During the full moon, monsters become slightly stronger.

Riley also remembered reading about that in a book.

But Riley could not say 'I know that.'

"..."

Because he was watching the way Sera was fighting.

With an uncomfortable look in his eyes.

"Riley?"

Iris carefully called her son's name.

But Riley did not answer again.

'Slow...'

Riley's face was changing from uncomfortable to agonizing.

Perhaps because of the memories of his past? Watching Sera fight felt as if he was shoving potatoes down his throat.

'Is she being careful because of the dark? Why is she so slow?'

Sera was taking some time to kill the goblins.

'Uuh, slow... It's too slow.'

Now is not the time to be stuck here.

In a place not so far there was the drink he craved so much, the so-called black sugar beer.

Just when he was about to have it...

It frustrated him so much that he was rooted to this place.

'It would end much faster if Ian were to join in.'

Riley rolled his eye to the side and looked at Ian.

Ian was also watching Sera fight with a serious face.

For the reason he mentioned before, he stayed behind to protect Riley and Iris.

The Riley that Ian knew had no knowledge about swords at all.

'But if I were to tell him to join, things would get complicated.'

In a situation where he was desperate for some fizzy drinks, to watch Sera fight was...

'Damn it... Maybe I should have brought a few more bodyguards.'

Riley frowned, since he brought only Ian and Sera in order to avoid annoyances as much as possible.

'... Should I just finish it?'

Although Riley was tempted to move on his own, there was something holding him back.

It's the secret he had been holding onto until now.

"...Hmm."

‘If it’s Mother, it doesn't matter.’

Even if he were to show his skills, as she is oblivious to the way of the sword she would simply smile proudly at her son.

The result wouldn't change even if she did know swordsmanship.

It was Ian and Sera who were the problems.

'If it’s now...'

Riley closed his eyes.

Ian,and Sera.

The two people who had watched over him for such a long time.

Some of the only people whom he could trust.

They had also helped him from his birth.

When there weren’t any eyes from the mansion…

Maybe displaying some skill wouldn't hurt?

Riley thought as such and stood up, unable to hold his frustration.

"Uh, Ian."

"Yes?"

"Let's go take a look."

"Y-Young Master?"

"Riley?"

"It's good to rest, but when else can we see something like this?"

He had decided to give a hand if the situation was really bogged down.

Hiding such intentions, Riley grabbed onto his mother’s hand and stepped down from the carriage, with Ian following hurriedly behind.

Chapter 24 - Way To The Capital (Part 4)

Sera, who was currently engaging in combat with the goblins, turned her head when she felt a presence, and opened her eyes wide in surprise.

"...?!"

There were three people coming to her.

Those who should have been waiting until her fight was done were now making their way towards her.

"Young Master and Lady Iris too... Why?"

A goblin charged towards Sera to avenge its fallen comrades, whom Sera had easily cut in half. She then proceeded to look back at them.

'There's still so many left.'

He wasn't aware of the original number of goblins, but from what Riley could see, it would take not just thirty minutes but at least an hour for the carriage to start moving again.

"I came...to have a look."

Riley answered with a forced smile on his face.

"A look?"

Sera made a dejected expression as if she couldn't believe what she had just heard, and gave a warning as she cut down another goblin approaching her.

"W-well it's good to have a look, Young Master, but it's dangerous here. In the middle of the forest... there might be more ambushes."

Ambushes.

After hearing Sera's words, Riley extended his mana secretly to everyone else, and scratched his chin as he confirmed that there weren't any hidden enemies in their surroundings.

"Hmmm..."

Ian agreed with Sera and pointed towards the carriage.

"Sera is correct. It's not a good sight anyway, so we should head back to the carriage."

Riley ignored Ian's words and glanced at his mother.

Iris was asking...

'What will you do?'

...with her eyes as she looked back at Riley.

It meant that she would respect his decision, no matter what Riley chose.

"..."

Riley fell into silence as she watched Sera fight the goblins.

Because of the darkness, Sera was being too cautious and only attacked the goblins who approached her, unable to charge amidst the fray herself.

That was the reason for the prolonged battle.

'It's not just frustrating when I watch up close.'

If what he saw from the carriage was like shoving a potato down his throat, watching up close felt like shoving a sack of potatoes down his throat.

Riley twitched his fingers as he felt his throat dry up in frustration.

He needed a drink.

He needed a fizzy drink.

'Coke... I really want to have it soon. And not be stuck here because of something like this.'

Riley's eyes sharpened as he was becoming more impatient.

'Ah... Why's all this happening, just when I've decided to take it easy in this life.'

Riley's gaze turned away from Sera and settled on the goblins instead.

As he watched them, only looking for an opportunity in the dark from Sera's blind spots, Riley's patience had finally reached it's limit.

Now it would take not one, but two hours to finish.

'...Do they just want to mess with my life?'

On second thought, they didn't just ruin his journey to drink Coke.

He was also having a sweet dream on his mother's lap.

They ruined that too.

"..."

"Young Master?"

Restlessness.

Frustration.

Annoyance.

Riley could not hold back his habit from his past and walked to Sera.

"Young Master, where are you going? It's dange-..."

Where Sera was fighting...

Ian quickly reached his hand out, worried about Riley who was walking directly towards the goblins.

"Ian."

"..."

But Ian's hand could not reach Riley's.

He saw them.

The eyes which were about to explode from frustration.

The glistening eyes silently telling him to watch.

'Young Master...'

With a flinch, Ian looked blankly at Riley's back.

"...Sera."

Finally.

Riley approached Sera and spoke.

"Y-Young Master? Why? It's dangerous. Please go back to..."

Because Sera was unaware of Riley’s approach, she quickly told Riley to return as his voice could be heard just behind her.

"Sera, do you..."

"..."

Riley asked without a concerned or threatening tone in his voice.

As if he wasn't aware of Sera's feelings.

"Do you not use your legs in your moves?"

"Sorry?"

"Ah, f-... This is frustrating! Seriously! Give them here!"

Riley crumbled his face as Sera didn't understand his words, and stepped forward after snatching her twin swords.

"Y-Young Master! Stop!"

"It's going to take the whole night at this rate."

As he disregarded Sera's words, he adjusted the grip on the two swords and looked at the goblins in the dark.

Just a quick glimpse, and he could tell that they were similar to the lesser demons he'd cut down in his previous life.

'Now then... How much should I show them?'

Riley had a quick thought about what to do.

As he'd pushed the body to it's limit from the fight with Tes, he's decided to fight purely with his swordsmanship this time.

'This much should be alright.'

And, it can teach Sera as well.

With those thoughts Riley began to speak again.

"Use your legs. Your legs. It’s frustrating. Are you trying to refrain from looking too far ahead? I can't tell, whether you don’t know or don't want to...."

"Young...Master?"

"Sera, you’re acting like there's a circle around you and you don't want to move out of the circle. That's the feeling I get. Then there's no way for you to take the initiative yourself. It takes too long."

There was no reply from Sera.

Riley realised that she was simply staring blankly at him, so Riley scratched his head and began to take action.

"So what I mean is, if you use the legs..."

Riley moved forward.

If it was her from the past, she would have never allowed Riley to act as he was now.

It was clearly dangerous.

But...

There was that other time she received advice from Riley.

She remembered how he told her to keep it a secret.

She couldn't stop Riley.

“Maybe.”

That was all she could mutter.

"..."

"Kiek!"

Iris gripped her hands together into a fist as she watched.

As Riley charged at them, and the goblins began to rush forward with a shriek in kind to avenge their brothers.

'Huh?'

Riley pushed in while dropping the two swords in a slight angle.

His foot slid on the ground, and when the goblin was right in front of him...

"Kuek?"

One.

No, two goblin heads flew into the air.

"...you can-..."

Riley's hands and feet continued to move.

More heads flew in the air, as Riley continued to speak.

"Kiek!"

Riley continued to move his feet as he parried the dagger coming at him from the side.

And number eight.

The eighth goblin head flew into the air.

Sera's jaws dropped.

'What..is that?'

It was an art.

Riley began to move his fingers as he moved forward.

One of the two swords he was holding was flipped and clutched in the reverse grip.

It was slow compared to Sera's practice, but much more stable.

"...apply it like this."

As Riley spoke, the remaining two goblins charged at him simultaneously.

Their shrieks were much louder than the others, as if determined to avenge the dead.

But... Riley did not allow their weapons to reach him.

"Kek!"

Thud!

A dull sound could be heard.

Riley had used his leg.

The kick didn't have mana in it so it didn't have the power to kill, but it was enough to push the goblin back and gain some distance.

'The last one.'

With the distance created.

He stabbed the sword he was holding in reverse into the goblin's head and rushed at the goblin who was kicked away.

As if it were a dance.

Riley dashed past the goblin's side.

"..."

Riley's sword was not strong like the Iphelleta's Strong-blade(1st son), or fast like the Quick-blade(2nd son).

It had no clear strengths.

That was obvious.

But...

"Well, this is how you do it."

Riley stabbed the sword into the ground as he finished talking.

Then the goblin he dashed past began to fall.

"..."

"..."

Ian looked at Riley as if he was possessed.

Simply...

The potential Ian saw in Riley was simply the 'affinity to mana'.

It was the potential which would allow him to use the aura blade

which imbued mana onto the sword with the greatest efficiency.

But...

What he just saw was more shocking than mere 'affinity to mana'.

'What did I just see...?'

His affinity with the sword.

Genius was not enough to describe it, but something more.

"Now, let's go."

After cleaning out the goblins in a flash, Riley put his hands in the pocket and walked back to the carriage.

Chapter 25 - Arrival At Solia

“…Did you know?”

Ian asked Iris who was on the seat across from him on the carriage that started to move once more.

Perhaps it was because he was tired due to exterminating the goblins, but Riley was exploring dreamland while using his mother’s lap as a pillow, just like before.

“What?”

Iris tilted her head with a question mark as if saying that she didn’t understand Ian’s query.

“About Young Master.”

As if he still didn’t believe what he saw, Ian’s face was complicated.

Sleeping peacefully after that amazing display of skill.

He was so shocked that he didn’t even feel like waking him up and asking.

“I don’t know…”

As she didn’t know anything about swordsmanship, Iris didn’t understand what Ian was asking about so she continued speaking after blinking a few times.

“How should I reply… I don’t know anything about swordsmanship.”

Although she came into the Iphelleta House which was famous for its swordsmanship as a concubine, she had never held a sword before because of her unceasing attempts to cure her illness.

Therefore, Iris didn’t know how great a skill her son showed just before.

But, she knew that it was awesome.

And she felt relief at the fact that her son was safe and uninjured.

“I also felt my heart sink when Riley charged at the goblins too, you know?”

When looking at how Riley was fighting before, she had clenched her fists so hard that marks of her fingernails were as clear as day on her palms.

“I…see.”

Iris looked down after Ian replied blankly.

She was gazing at Riley, who was sleeping in her lap.

“My Lady, about this…”

“Keep it a secret.”

About to open his mouth while clenching the sides of his pants, Ian flinched.

“…Huh?”

“Keep it a secret, don’t tell anyone in the mansion. Not even the Count.”

“W-Why?”

Sera who was driving the carriage from the driver’s seat glanced back inside.

It wasn’t an overreaction for Ian to be puzzled.

She too felt the same.

But she didn’t ask ‘Why?’

This was because she was also asked the same thing from Riley.

“Because, Riley wanted it.”

“My Lady!”

“Shush.”

In front of Ian whose voice was raising, Iris raised her index finger to her lips and made a ‘Shh’ sound.

That action didn’t only entail worry about Riley waking up.

“Please, Ian.”

“…”

How could mother and son be so similar?

Sera snorted while looking back at the road at Iris’s action.

It was because Riley had made the same gesture last time.

***

The capital, Solia.

The weather here was sunny, and the atmosphere wasn't that bad either.

Sera smiled at the mother and son pair after leaving the carriage which they rode all the way from the Iphelleta house at the carriage house.

"Now! Welcome to Solia!"

"You look like you're excited."

"Of course, it's been a long time since I've come home."

Currently the 'three people,' including Riley, were standing in Left Solia.

It was a place that Sera knew well.

"Anyway, I feel a bit sorry for Ian. I feel bad that we sent him to Castle Solia on his own."

It had started with four people, but only three people remained.

Only Ian couldn't be seen in their party.

The reason was because he needed to get the admission tickets for the capital's swordsmanship tournament.

"No, my Lady. It was for the best to send Ian-nim."

Sera rolled her eyes to the ground, muttering at Iris's worry.

Riley nodded as if saying that he agreed.

"…"

If the one who went off to get the tickets was not Ian but Sera, it would be terrifying.

He would definitely go 'Young Master this, Young Master that' and follow Riley around all day making a fuss as he tried to talk about what had happened the evening before.

"Then where should we go first?"

"Obviously…"

A bead of sweat rolled down Riley's cheek.

It's Riley whose throat was burning to a crisp when the carriage entered Solia.

The first destination had already been decided.

“Cok-... no, black sugar beer! We need to go drink that!”

As if knowing he was going to say that, Sera smiled and started walking.

“There’s a café near here that I used to visit frequently. It should still be selling what Young Master wants so let’s go there first, might as well avoid the sunlight.”

Although the sky held no clouds and it was a cool day, it was too hot to walk around outside. Sera, who was holding a parasol to cover Iris, looked around her surroundings.

It was because she had to be prepared for unknown threats because Ian had left, and she was alone in escorting the two people.

“How is it Sera? Has it changed a lot from before?”

“There don’t seem to be any big differences. If there was something that changed, wouldn’t it be the posters that advertise the soon-to-open swordsmanship tournament?”

Sera replied after seeing the swordsmanship posters stuck around everywhere.

The capital’s swordsmanship tournament.

A festival that not only nobles, but also commoners show great interest in.

It was because the nobles from all the different territories gather in one place.

To the nobles it becomes a market of amity, and to commoners it's an event which allows them to see the future leaders of their territory.

"Now that I look around, they're stuck everywhere."

"Well, it seems that Young Master doesn't have an interest in it though."

Riley who was walking with both his hands stuck in his pockets turned to Sera, and started to bother her about when they were going to arrive.

"Just walk a little further. There, do you see that orange roof?"

At the sight of glass cups filled with black liquid in the midst of people who were gathered under the roof that Sera pointed to, Riley's eyes went wide.

"Oh!"

At Riley's appearance the two women went 'pfft', and chortled.

"You have the same thoughts as Riley right? About the swordsmanship tournament."

Sera asked Iris.

"Yes. I, too, don't really..."

Iris also didn't want to force Riley into the tournament if he didn't want to.

It was because if she forced him to participate, then she would be breaking her promise since they didn't come to Solia to participate, but rather to spectate.

"Haah, it would be nice if we could watch it and return without any problems... The issue is Ian-nim."

If he accidentally touched on Young Master's sensitive part and a hide and seek started in Solia, forget about spectating or whatever; they'd all be absolutely screwed.

[Shock! The third Young Master of the swordsmanship family, the Iphelleta House runs away from home!]

[Searching for a stray child. Black hair, a relaxed face.....]

Those kind of posters would be put up in Solia.

“That wouldn’t possibly happen right?”

“Ha, haha……”

“……?”

Riley, who arrived first and was ordering black sugar beer from the clerk turned around and raised a question mark as if asking if they called him.

***

“Kh, This…actually existed.”

After the black sugar beer which had bubbles floating up came out, Riley who kept on mumbling the word ‘Coke’ before drinking it had teary eyes as soon as he drank a sip.

It couldn’t be said to be the same taste that he was reminiscent of, but it was still able to get rid of the thirst he had for so long.

“…”

The customers near Riley looked at him curiously, as if asking if it was that tasty.

“Mother, can I drink one more cup?”

“Go ahead.”

Riley who already emptied one cup and had its ice rattling asked Iris and went to the clerk straight away.

As Riley’s hand went up, the tactful clerk brought out one more cup of black sugar beer.

As if saying that even the dew on the cup was lovely, Riley, who was looking at the newly brought out drink as if he was in a trance, chugged it.

“…Kh!”

“Young Master, you sound like a grown-up man.”

“What can I do when my throat is stinging?”

Although he claimed that it was stinging, that it was hurting, the edge of Riley’s mouth went up.

‘…Mm?’

Sera, who was smiling at the appearance of her Young Master

who looked happier than ever, narrowed her eyes as she spotted some suspicious individuals while keeping an eye on their surroundings..

“…What are you doing? I’m telling you I didn’t do it!”

“Who do you think you’re lying to, bitch?”

There was a posse of grown men, and one girl.

It didn’t look like they were going to show hostility towards them, but what Sera saw was a scene where a group of men who looked quite frightening dragging away a girl who looked to be about sixteen years old by her wrist.

“T-this… Hey! Someone help me!”

The girl who was caught by the men started to cry out for help.

It was an emotion which showed naiveté.

“Don’t bother. This bitch got caught while trying to pickpocket our wallets.”

“I never did such a thing!”

As the girl shouted and the people all looked at them, the men

waved their hands dismissively as if telling them to stop paying attention.

In contrast with the girl's sincere pleas for help, the men's faces contained bits of malice.

'Those bastards…'

Straight away figuring out the situation…

As Sera who was just about to explode out of her seat because she couldn't take any more of the brazen lawlessness, Riley gave her a piece of advice.

"…Sera, don't bother."

Sera's shoulders flinched even before she could get off the seat.

Iris tilted her head as she too couldn't understand why Riley stopped Sera.

"That's all an act."

"Huh?"

Riley turned around and called to the clerk.

“Auntie!... That’s not right.”

Riley who accidentally called out to the clerk like he did in his previous life quickly changed his words.

“Clerk lady. There are straws here right? Please give me a straw.”

“Yes, I’ll bring it over right away.”

Although he liked putting the Coke to his mouth and chugging it, Riley who also liked to use a straw and suck it away ordered a straw and leaned his back on the back supporter of the chair.

“Young Master, what do you mean...‘an act’?”

Sera, who was looking again closely at the situation that was still escalating, asked quietly.

It simply didn’t look like an act.

“Their eyes were chasing Sera’s sword.”

“...?”

“Well, I don’t know what they’re planning but... Ah, thank you.”

Riley, who received the straw from the clerk and placed it in

between the ice in the black sugar beer, started to suck the drink and looked at the men and the girl in the commotion.

“Come here!”

“L-let go!”

They were still getting further away.

It felt like if they were left alone the men would just end the girl’s life.

“If that girl was going to ask for help, if those men were going to do something to her... Their eyes and their heads should’ve been spinning around. But.”

Riley swallowed a few mouthfuls of Coke and continued.

“Their eyes were only directed on Sera’s sword. What might that mean?

Riley made a face that said that he felt alive after draining the cup of all of its contents via the straw and jangled the ice.

“Puha! Let’s not get entangled in such annoying matters.”

Chapter 26 - Arrival At Solia (Part 2)

A dark and damp place.

The six men and one woman who emerged into their hideout were arguing.

“I told you I had a bad feeling about the left side today. See, I was right!”

“Shut up, fool.”

The location they arrived at was the sewers.

Sewers, where polluted water flowed and mice lived in.

“You said that we’ll get some money from those ignorant noble bastards who came to the capital, but what’s this?”

“So do we only fail? We did succeed a few times. Why are you complaining?”

“There’s no harvest today! Today!”

There was only one place in Solia where there were sewers.

Bottom Solia.

In Bottom Solia, a place where rejects who were thrown out from Solia gather, there were beggars who decided to get some money from the capital's swordsmanship competition.

How do beggars earn money from a nobles' event?

"I disguise myself as a poor girl surrounded by tough men and enact an unjust scenario! Then! The noble bastards like to step forward saying 'what are you doing to a lady!?' Then I trick the nobles, darting in and out!"

As a woman, who was the most outstandingly dressed among the beggars due to her role as 'bait,' flicked her tongue in and out like a snake; a man who was walking next to her clicked his tongue.

"Tut."

"Oh? Why are you clicking your tongue? Today's work, if we think about it, didn't we fail because of your acting Hemil?"

"We failed because of me? No! That's not right!"

The beggar called Hemil by the woman rebutted.

"Beta, what am I supposed to do about your crappy facial expressions?"

“Hah?”

At Hemil’s rebuttal Beta, who was the bait in the group, filled her face with killing intent and threatened.

“Won’t you shut up? I’ll stitch up your mouth you rat?”

“What? Rat? Has this bitch gone crazy?”

Hemil didn’t lose and fired back.

The rest of the beggars shook their heads at the two people gritting their teeth.

It seemed that they were used to this sort of thing.

“Anyway, if we keep going like this then we can’t fill the quota. If we’re going to use that reject properly then we have to succeed at least twice tomorrow you know?”

A beggar who had just barely calmed the two down pointed at someone who was crouching in the corner of the hideout.

“Ah, yeah... It’s a reject from the magic tower that we went through a lot of trouble to get.”

It was a woman who was crouched down sitting.

Her hair was wet with effluent water.

Her facial skin showed signs of damage from chemical substances.

She had hands that were missing around two fingers, as if they were cut off…

The person, who had an appearance so bad that if someone were to look at her they would be cursed with all kinds of bad luck, was the beggars' joker card.

"Trash is trash, so we need to quickly use it before the expiration date."

If the prey that they seduced by 'darting in and out' was too big to fit into their mouth…

She was a card that allowed them to swallow it forcefully.

The person who was sitting in the corner with a horrendous appearance was a secret weapon that they could use to swallow up the foolish nobles that they tricked.

"Che, that bitch… If only she wasn't the trash of the magic tower, we would've used her instead of Beta as bait."

“What? Who would show interest to a bitch who can’t even wear a ring due to her missing fingers?”

“Ha, that’s true too!”

The beggars looked at their ‘tool’ and laughed.

***

“…Oh, you’re here?”

The best inn in Left Solia.

Riley, who came back to his room after finishing his tour, saw Ian, who was sitting on his bed drinking black sugar beer, and sent a greeting.

“Young Master…”

Ian who was drooping his shoulders turned around and looked at Riley.

There wasn’t enough alcohol in the black sugar beer to intoxicate someone.

At Ian’s face which was somehow flushed, Riley’s shoulders shook.

“Why are you doing this?”

The men and women were separated

Because they rented two rooms, currently there was only Riley and Ian there.

It was somehow awkward.

“...Ian?”

Was he going to ask about what happened yesterday evening?

Or was he angry about how they had left him behind for the entire day and went off to play in Left Solia?

“Maybe...”

Riley wished that if it was one of the two, it would be the latter, and asked.

“Are you angry?”

“No, what do you mean angry? Why would I get angry? Just because of that.”

Next to Ian’s bed there was a clothes hanger.

Riley who went towards it to hang his outer clothes realised that the area near him smelt of alcohol.

‘Ugh, the smell of alcohol… He did drink.’

“…”

Riley discovered the ‘Capital’s swordsmanship tournament spectator ticket’ in Ian’s jacket pocket and looked at Ian again.

“Really… I wanted to bring the ‘Competing ticket’ but… Keueug!”

As if he was keeping himself from breaking down, Ian brought the black sugar beer to his mouth again.

Glug! Glug!

As if his throat didn’t even sting, Ian swallowed the drink which was still over half full in a single breath and went ‘puha!’.

“You did well.”

Although Riley congratulated Ian, Ian’s expression didn’t loosen.

Instead, it was changing as if he was about to cry.

“…Do you know what happened at Castle Solia today?”

Castle Solia.

Something must’ve happened to Ian who went there for the spectating tickets.

“Listen. In the afternoon…!”

Riley who was tired due to touring Left Solia for half the day was about to lie down in bed but was caught by the shoulder.

“…Eug.”

At the same time Ian’s breath reached Riley’s nose.

As if he was reminiscing, he started to talk about what had happened.

‘Capital’s swordsmanship tournament, sp-spectator seats… four tickets please.’

‘Excuse me, but where are you from?’

‘I came from the Iphelleta House.’

‘I-Iphelleta? Did you really come from Iphelleta?’

‘Yes…? Here, it’s the letter from the Count and the family’s seal.’

‘Spectator ticket… Are you sure you want the spectator ticket?’

‘…Give me the spectator ticket.’

“Aah, yeah. Well done.”

Riley cut off Ian’s reminiscing and tried to get out.

“You did good. Now just…”

“Really, I was so embarrassed that it wasn’t the competing ticket but the spectator ticket! The problem is…that wasn’t the end! Keuheug!”

“Gah, just let off me a bit…”

As if he wouldn’t let go Ian held onto Riley’s clothes and started sniffing, then started to talk again.

‘Oh? Who’s this? Isn’t it Ian?’

‘…Hmm?’

‘Mercenary hero Ian! Right?! It’s been a long time huh?’

‘Haha! Seeing as how well you are, it seems that it’ll be quite a while until you go huh? Wow… It’s like the time when our names were famous as mercenaries was just yesterday!’

‘Haha! To you too!How are you doing nowadays? Looking at your outfit and timing… Have you come for the swordsmanship tournament too? It doesn’t seem like you came because your son had a problem with competing…’

‘…Yeah. I currently work as a butler in the Iphelleta Family. I’m not a noble.’

‘Yeah… You didn’t look like the type to have and raise a kid. You didn’t care about commanding either. From the very onset of the Great War you had a one-track mind.’

‘It is regretful but it is also to atone for my sins. Falling in love with someone and raising a kid, I am not suited for such a life.

‘Well, let’s stop talking about the past, friend… It’s a waste being sad on a nice day. Anyway… The Iphelleta Family huh? I thought that you’d have a spot in Castle Solia being a mercenary hero but a butler… Yeah, if you’re a butler of the Iphelleta Family then who are you serving?’

‘E-Eh?’

‘Strong-sword Ryan? Quick-sword Lloyd?’

‘…’

‘No? Ah! Then you must be serving Count Stein?

‘…’

‘Is something wrong?’

‘No, it’s… Sorry. I just remembered something urgent so I need to go.’

‘No way… not any of them?’

‘Keuheum! When are the spectating tickets coming out? Is it far?’

‘Spectator…tickets? Wait! Don’t turn around Ian! Now that I think about it I heard some years ago that a third son was born in the Iphelleta Family.’

‘…!’

‘The name was… Ah, right! Riley! His nickname was… What was it?’

‘That’s…’

‘Lazy Sword? Was it Lazy Sword? Because he’s slothful…’’

‘Stop.’

‘That’s enough.’

Ian’s reminiscing ended suddenly.

Riley didn’t really cut it off.

“…Heueoeoeong!!”

It was cut off because Ian started crying loudly.

“You wouldn’t know how embarrassed I was! In front of my old companion! The humiliation! Who would look at a person called the mercenary hero with those pitying eyes! Eoheuheoeong!”

Who said that a old man’s tears were like the ocean?

Riley’s expression slowly scrunched up as it seemed that Ian’s complaints wasn’t going to end.

“Because my Lady said to keep the secret I couldn’t say anything about how great Young Master was and my chagrin… My chagrin! Heueoeong!”

‘…Ah.’

Riley sighed as he buried his face in his hands as he didn’t know when he could sleep anymore.

Chapter 27 - Right Solia, Bottom Solia (Part 1)

"Ah, Young Master! Did you sleep well?"

Morning.

As if he didn't entirely get rid of the exhaustion he gained from yesterday's tour, Riley, who came down to the first floor of the inn, waved his right hand with sleepy eyes at Sera who greeted him.

"Yeah..."

"Woohoo! Tomorrow is the start of the swordsmanship tournament. Because it's the first time I'm watching this, I'm getting excited."

Sera, who was talking about how she was fired up about the tournament as a person who also wields swords, checked Riley's face and tilted her head.

"Hm? Young Master, did you not sleep well?"

"..."

Riley could not answer Sera's question, and sat at the prepared table for four.

Then he fell straight forward and started to recharge his sleep meter.

“Ah, right. Ian-nim…”

Sera spotted Ian come down following Riley with a horrible face and scratched her head.

It looked like Ian could not sleep well either, but unlike Riley’s eyes, which had dark circles, his eyes were red.

“Oh wow, did Ian experience girly emotions?”

“Don’t even say it. He kept on repeating the same thing every thirty minutes due to the alcohol… Sigh.”

Riley made an act of waving a white flag with his right hand as he heard his mother’s laughing voice.

“Ahem, good morning.”

“Good morning to you too, Ian.”

As if he wanted to hide the fact that he cried through the entire night due to the alcohol from the two women, Ian who was the last to join them on the first floor of the inn coughed once and sat down next to Riley.

‘Young Master.’

Riley who was spread out turned his head, his eyes meeting Ian’s.

Ian wriggled his eyebrows and asked with his eyes.

‘Keep what happened last night a secret?’

‘Yeah. I didn’t say a word.’

Riley followed Ian’s example and replied with his eyes.

They were eyes which radiated annoyance.

“Ahem, sorry. I drank a lot yesterday.”

Maybe he didn’t know that he was already found out by his red eyes, but Ian maintained a poker face that didn’t even suit him and drank a glass of water.

“It’s nothing, we’re also sorry because we went off to play without you.”

“Ahaha…”

As Iris replied with a bright smile, Sera who was watching from behind started laughing as if she couldn't take it anymore.

"Ahem!"

At the end of the commotion, Sera also sat down at the table after barely calming down.

"I just asked, and they said it would take about five more minutes for breakfast."

Sera informed them about their breakfast as soon as she sat down before turning around and starting to inspect the area where the inn's kitchen was located.

Due to Sera's eyes, which looked anxious as if she had something to worry about, Iris asked Sera.

"Sera, why are you so nervous?"

"How do I put this, I feel good but I also feel like something bad is going to happen. Because normally I always set up breakfast. And also we're all eating together... What if I'm an annoyance..."

"You're wrong, Sera."

"Just think comfortably, comfortably."

As if he decided that it was too late to sleep, Riley started to drag his hands over his face, then looked at Sera through his fingers.

“Now that I think about it, where are we going today?”

It’s Sera who said yesterday that they had basically seen all the good places to see in Left Solia.

Therefore, Riley predicted that they would go to another location today and questioned.

“Ah, today we’re going to Right Solia.”

‘Now that we’ve seen Left Solia, won’t we go to Right or Bottom Solia?’ Riley who thought this replied.

“Right Solia?”

“Yes, actually if we don’t go today then we probably won’t be able to go there. Because starting tomorrow, for three days the swordsmanship tournament will be ongoing.”

“Then we aren’t going to Bottom Solia?”

“Mm, that’s… It’d be better if we didn’t go to the Bottom.

“Why?”

When Riley asked for the reason, Ian replied instead of Sera.

“It’s because it’s not a good place to see things.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s dirty. It’s dangerous. In many ways it’s not a good place. There won’t be any reason for us to step foot in Bottom Solia on this visit to the capital.”

“Yes, what Ian-nim is saying is correct. I lived in Solia before, but the Bottom… It’s a place that I’ve never been to.”

“Really?”

After hearing the tales of Bottom Solia in which you couldn’t even see a hint of good, Riley accepted.

If the people around him were stopping him, then Riley didn’t really have any thoughts of going there.

It was annoying too.

Clap!

“Anyway, after eating breakfast our destination is Right Solia!

Today we're also going with Ian-nim! You don't have a hangover right?"

Clap!

"Yeah."

As Sera clapping her hands together to freshen the atmosphere, Ian grinned.

"...Hey, did you hear? About the Tess Trader Company's downfall?"

After their breakfast came out, Riley who was looking at the menu which was arriving to their table raised his ears.

"Tess Trading Company? The Tess Trading Company fell? There isn't any way that a trading company of that size could fall right?"

"Just listen, from a few days ago... Apparently the leader of the company just disappeared. Because of that, the industry over there made a lot of noise."

"Wow..."

"Apparently, we can expect a huge storm from that direction soon. Get ready! Hey, this... This isn't information that you can get easily, right? You need to be really thankful to me."

Riley's expression was thoughtful as he took a bite of his sandwich for breakfast.

***

Although Solia's capital swordsmanship tournament was starting tomorrow, the Left and the Right... Except for the Bottom, all of Solia was currently in a festival mood.

There were balloons or posters about the swordsmanship tournament hung everywhere, and anywhere you went it was very cheerful.

"Woah..."

Starting from Left Solia.

Past the central plaza where there were many people.

Climbing the well decorated stairs.

"There are so many goddamn people."

Upon reaching Right Solia, Riley, who was barely able to move his foot, wiped his forehead with his sleeve and complained.

“Three days before the start, the Three days during the tournament, and the one day after the end… During this one week, Solia will be constantly in a festival mood. Seeing as how the tournament begins tomorrow there’ll be four days left.”

Sera, who was supporting Iris while walking, smiled shrewdly and explained the situation.

“Four more days… Amazing.”

“Once we’ve arrived in Right Solia, we won’t have to worry about the surging crowds. Although there’s a cheerful atmosphere due to the festival, Right Solia is comparatively more solemn than Left Solia or the central plaza.”

“Solemn?”

At Ian’s words Riley tilted his head and looked around.

Sure enough, as they ascended the stairs and stepped into Right Solia, the noise ringing through their ears was reduced by a lot.

“It’s quiet.”

“It’s because the Magician’s Tower is located here. Also known as the Magic Tower.”

“Magic Tower?”

“Yes, there are many magicians and scholars who study or research literature called magic in Right Solia. Therefore there is an unwritten law about not creating a loud commotion here in order to avoid disturbing their research.”

It was a world in which it could be said that a country’s strength was defined by the number of functioning magicians they had.

To be a magician you needed talent.

It wouldn’t be a stretch to say that a fourth of the population in Right Solia were people who were related to the Magic Tower.

“The reason why the loud noise from the plaza is being blocked is because of the Deafening Stone… It’s thanks to an invention of the Magic Tower’s scholars.”

Ian pointed to a green stone that was installed at the entrance of Right Solia.

It seemed that one of the two stone floating in the air was the Deafening Stone.

“It’s fascinating.”

“We didn’t just come here because of the Magic Tower. Young Master, do you remember why we came to Right Solia today?”

“Mm?”

Sera smiled and gave a question to Riley who was staring at the Deafening Stone.

It was to perform a guide’s purpose.

“It’s to heal mother. Wait… Ah, then?”

Riley thought back to the conversation they had while eating breakfast in the inn and looked at his mother.

“Yes, correct. Not only is the Magic Tower here but Solia’s Temple is also located in Right Solia. Therefore this silence is also meant for the priests and priestesses who pray to the goddess Airenathsa.”

Temple.

It’s a place that heals and protects people by the use of a force different from mana, called divine power.

“I see, I understand what kind of atmosphere it is.”

Although the festival mood could still be felt in Right Solia, Riley who learned why it was much quieter than the rest of the capital nodded.

“I also understand why Right Solia is situated on a hillier location.”

“Right?”

At Right Solia’s entrance, you could see all of Solia due to the higher ground.

“Riley? What are you doing?”

“I’m coming.”

Riley who was standing there followed behind Iris and Sera with Ian as they walked to the temple.

Chapter 28 - Right Solia, Bottom Solia (Part 2)

Solia temple.

Using the powers imbued by the Goddess Irenetsa , they provide treatment to those who are sick and injured, as well as provide prophecies for disasters that have yet to come.

"Ho, quite the fancy place."

The first spot they had decided to tour was here.

Iris had received treatment from the priest of the Solia temple before, so it was both a tour and a visit to thank them at the same time.

Riley frowned as he stretched his neck and gazed at the high ceilings of the temple.

'Temples, huh...'

The Temple.

A place for those who borrowed the powers of the gods.

Riley was not fond of the place.

'It seems the atmosphere is the same as back then.'

Riley was remembering the temples he saw in his previous life.

For those who were new to temples and had never heard of them before, it would not matter to visit them... But for Riley who had all the memories of his previous life, temples reminded him more of bad than good memories.

'Does this temple have a gathering of those who serve and follow god, to the point of being zealous enough that they wouldn't hesitate in burning themselves as well?'

Although the names of the gods they served were different, what Riley was thinking was about correct.

This temple contained the priests and paladins who strived to fulfil their god's wishes.

It was also the place the priestess received god's words.

"...Huuh, it seems the sickness has gotten much better than before? This isn't such an easy sickness to recover from."

"Is that so?"

"Well it's a good thing anyway. Congratulations Lady Iris. It

seems Irenetsa has given you her blessings.

"Thank you, Archbishop Libesura. By the way, is there anything that concerns you?"

""Well, the only concern is that our priestess has just reached puberty."

"Oh dear..."

"Hahaha... Well, your son was just a baby when I saw him last, but he has grown into a fine man it seems."

The Archbishop had once traveled to the Iphelleta mansion to treat Iris before.

As the eyes of Libesura met with Riley, Riley slowly turned and walked away.

"Young Master, where are you going?"

"It seems their talk is going to take a while. I just wanna have a look around."

As Riley began to walk, Ian made gestures to tell Sera that he was leaving, and followed Riley closely.

"It seems to be built well."

"There are countless priests who travel far and wide to visit the Solia temple. It's no wonder you would think so."

Ian agreed with Riley as he stroked his beard.

Within the Solia temple, from the floor to the pillars and the ceiling, there were beautiful decorations made by master artisans such that everything they looked at deserved great compliments and praise.

"Hm?"

How long had they walked within the temple?

When Riley found the large statue within the inner gardens of the temple, he stopped and looked around the area.

"..."

The statue...

It seemed to be modeled around the Goddess Irenetsa, a statue of a woman with her eyes closed.

Riley looked deeply at the statue then averted his eyes

downward.

"Who is that..."

Ian tilted his head when he found someone who was wearing a gown which resembled a white dress.

She seemed rather special compared to others, kneeling and praying unlike the other priests who simply milled around her.

"Ah?"

It seemed she noticed them.

The person stopped her prayers and turned to look at Riley.

"Hello?"

She stopped kneeling on both knees, stood up and sent her greetings with a slight bow.

She was a girl with a veil covering her face.

"...Ah, hello?"

Ian who was so absorbed by the aura she had stared blankly until he could quickly reply.

"..."

But Riley would simply glare at the girl as if he wasn't fond of her.

"Young Master? Where is your response?"

"Why?"

"W-well..."

Ian looked between the veiled girl and Riley nervously.

The atmosphere appeared tense.

The priests and the paladins who were around were eyeing Ian and Riley, finding fault with their manners.

"Well, if she wants a reply tell her to show her face first."

Despite the looks he received Riley made his decision.

The stinging stares now became so sharp that they could almost cut..

"Y-Young Master... She seems to be of high standing in the temple."

"I'm an important son of an important family as well?"

The girl snickered at Ian and Riley's conversation.

"You are quite funny."

The girl, who looked at Riley with interest, greeted him and moved her hands to the veil.

The white cloth that hid her face was raised with a muffle, displaying her chin, then her nose, and finally her forehead.

It was a look befitting of an angel.

"Huk!"

Ian held his breath.

"Priestess Pricia!"

Ian blushed as he lowered his face away from the beautiful girl.

It was to be courteous.

"Forgive me, I never realised."

She was a priestess.

Although she looked even younger than Riley, she was one of the most important members of the temple along with the Archbishop, Libesura.

"Young Master, where are your greetings. It’s the priestess! The priestess. The youngest priestess in Solia in history!"

Ian quickly gave his advice to Riley, who still stood frowning without a bow.

Solia's priestess, Pricia.

Just one look at her was enough to make any devout followers of Irenetsa shed tears of happiness.

"Does this place also have the shitty habit of praising the priestess too?"

"Sorry?"

"No, I was just talking to myself."

Riley closed his eyes.

The priestess.

Riley truly didn't like the beings called 'priestesses'.

Rather, he despised and hated them to his very core.

'You have been chosen by the holy sword.'

Receiving the words of the gods...

It was the priestess who made Riley grab onto the holy sword.

‘Take the blade.’

‘Defeat the demon lord. That is your path, which we will believe in.’

'We beg you. Hero.'

.

.

.

‘Why the hell did I accept back then.’

Remembering the past sent Riley's mood down even further.

It sent shivers down his spine.

"...Hello. Miss priestess."

He returned her greetings with a quick flick of his right hand and turned around with not a speck of hesitation.

"Y-Young Master? Where are you going? You need to leave a good impression on the priestess!"

"What impression? Just looking at her pisses me off."

Riley disagreed as he replied what he was thinking in return to Ian's whispers.

Ian dropped his jaw in astonishment.

"...Sorry?"

It was the priestess.

The woman chosen by the gods.

Her beauty was enough to bedazzle anyone who saw her, but looking at her pissed him off?

Ian could not comprehend at all.

"Let's go back, Mother should be done with her conversation by now."

"...Excuse me!"

As Riley attempted to walk back to the path he came from, Pricia, who was looking blankly at Riley and Ian, called out to them.

"Huk?!"

Ian gasped at the sight of the priestess who was briskly walking towards them with her hands holding her skirt.

It was an act that made him feel like it was a sin to simply breath the same air as her.

"Excuse me."

"...?"

As Pricia called out to Riley, he stopped and frowned in complete frustration, then slowly turned around.

By the time Riley was looking at her, his face had somewhat calmed down.

Just barely suppressing his anger was the best he could at this point.

"Are you..."

What's she trying to say?

Is it just like last time?

Riley held his silence, while his thoughts were that he was ready to go absolutely nuts if she were to ask anything like to take the sword and go kill the demon lord.

"...Are you impotent?"

"..."

The unexpected question left a frown on Riley's face.

Chapter 29 - A Strange Guest

“…What?”

“I asked if you are impotent.”

Pricia, the priestess, asked Riley right to his face if he was ‘impotent.’

As it was such an unexpected question, not just Riley, but Ian too had his mouth wide open in shock as his stare alternated between Riley and Pricia.

“If that’s not it, then is it this? You prefer men?”

With her arms folded behind her back, Pricia leaned her face towards Riley.

In light of this, the holy temple’s priests panicked. Not able to stand still, they eventually started to make hastened steps to call the high priest.

“If that is not it, how could you have that look on your face after laying your eyes on my visage under the veil? Isn’t that unusual?”

Pricia was looking at Riley with a certain expression, half of which was reflecting her interest in him, and the other half displaying her unbounded confidence in herself.

In contrast, Riley's expression was showing more disgust than ever before.

He was facing Pricia as if he was looking at something absolutely abhorrent.

"Why should I be subjected to such a question?"

"That's because, don't you see that I am a priestess? Solia's priestess! The youngest in history!"

'So what?'

The look on Riley's face could be summarized in those two words.

"Ha..."

Is she really still a child?

Among the words said by the high priest Libesra, Riley recalled the word 'puberty' casually tossed out in the middle. Riley sighed and asked,

"So what?"

Instead of using formal language, the unrespectful form of speech effortlessly spewed out from Riley.

“Huh? Now that I think about it, you are spitting out words in informal form. Excuse me sir, but are you hard of hearing? Did you not hear me say I am a priestess?”

“What about it?”

This time, the look on Pricia’s face became hollow as if she had just taken a blow.

“That is, what I am saying is…”

“What about it? So what? Is this when I am supposed to be mesmerized after looking at a priestess? Ian, is that how it is?”

It was a tense situation as it was, so Ian was keeping his head down, trying not to get on anyone’s nerves. Ian’s shoulders shivered due to the blunt question launched at him.

“Yes? No, that is…”

Before Ian could even respond, Riley continued.

“Ugh, no matter how I look at you, you are ugly as hell.”

“…Huh?”

Due to the height difference, Riley was able to stare down at Pricia. Now he was sending a contemptuous glare toward her.

Not just Ian, but other priests nearby listening to the conversation as well, made a ‘Hup?!’ sound as they gasped for air.

“Are you deaf? You over there. I’m telling you that you are hideous. Now I want to turn the tables and ask you a question instead… How do you expect me to have my face turn red from a little girl who isn’t even my type? It’s not like you are a dumbass, are you?”

“Uh, u…”

It was most unexpected.

Upon hearing such harsh words that she had never heard before in her life, Pricia was gradually starting to cringe.

Her face was still the same, pretty and becoming of a priestess, but teardrops were moistening the corners of her eyes.

“What now? Are you crying? So you are crying. Why? You are the runt who slapped me first, so why?”

The tone of his voice suggested that he was trying to protest and

say that he was the one being treated unfairly. Riley looked around and asked the priests nearby.

“I responded because she asked me if I was impotent, so is it still my fault?”

“Pri... priestess!”

Riley didn’t get to hear a response.

The priests only rushed to Pricia’s side and handed her handkerchiefs.

Her cheeks swelled up like a balloon.

“It’s fine! I don’t need them!”

Some of the handkerchiefs offered were swept away by the back of her hand and fell to the floor.

“Oh my, if you are ugly, you should at least have a pretty personality, but it looks like that’s not the case either here?”

“Ugh...!”

The classy atmosphere from the beginning left the scene somehow.

Instead, the phrase ‘unrefined little brat’ was a more apt description for Pricia’s current demeanor. She tightened her fists and started to glare at Riley.

The teardrops barely hanging on at the tips of her eyes were on the brink of falling along her cheek.

It was definitely a look fitting of an adolescent girl in puberty.

“What? What are you glaring at me for?”

Riley stared down at her once again with contempt-filled eyes.

It was an act displaying the whole truth without an iota of falsehood.

To be honest, Riley wanted to strangle the priestess by her neck, but he was holding himself back. Riley’s hatred and anguish were to the extent of feeling better after watching this little girl cry.

Riley didn’t have it easy in his previous life.

“Ian, let’s get going.”

“M-Master?”

“What are you doing? Nothing good will come of us tarrying around here any longer. So let’s get going.”

Riley cringed as if he was trying to say that he couldn’t stand looking at Pricia on the verge of shedding tears. He turned and started to march away.

“…Ha!”

After Riley left, Pricia, who was just standing there aimlessly, shed a tear that rolled along her cheek. She crossed her arms and said,

“Really…what ridiculousness, seriously!”

Perhaps she was too embarrassed to cry in front of the priests. Pricia raised her eyes and trembled slightly.

“Wh-why are we having a guest like that?”

The priests who were watching from the side were breaking out in cold sweat.

They wanted to wipe the tears off of the priestess’s face, but nobody could step forward for the task.

This was because a priestess was someone they were not allowed to touch. Therefore, none of the priests dared.

“Excuse me! Mister!”

“Yes, yes! Lady priestess!”

“Am I…really ugly?”

“…Come again, my lady?”

“I’m asking if I’m really ugly!”

Pricia yelled.

“Ah, no way! That’s not…”

The priests shook their heads and denied the harsh words that Riley spewed out a moment before he left.

“Lady priestess, you are the most beautiful one under the Irenetsa. You are so beautiful that it makes one wonder if you might be the physical manifestation of the Holy One’s vision of an ideal beauty.”

“There is no need for you to heed to what that Young Master said.”

“That’s right! That’s right!”

Ever since she had devoted herself to the temple at a young age, Pricia lived her life without ever once having the word ‘ugly’ being directed at her.

It was understandable for Pricia to be shocked by the harsh words that Riley tossed out.

“That’s it right? There’s something wrong with that guest’s eyes right?”

‘That’s right, Pricia. Just finish the prayer you were reciting…’

After forgetting everything about Riley through great effort, Pricia was about to continue the prayer she had paused a while ago, but then she suddenly opened her eyes wide.

‘…Uh?’

In order to pray, Pricia was facing the altar, but she shivered as she felt an invisible force flowing down her back.

“Lady priestess?”

Pricia did not respond to the call. Instead, she quickly turned her head as if she was mesmerized by something.

“…”

It was a possession by a divine entity.

With her eyes dyed in golden light, Pricia gave a piercing stare towards where Riley had stood a moment ago.

*

“Riley, did something happen inside?”

Iris tilted her head as she asked if anything happened while she was having a conversation with the high priest.

“Nothing in particular?”

“Is that so?”

Iris asked again because Ian’s face looked pretty disturbed for someone who supposedly just walked out of a room where nothing in particular happened.

“...Ian.”

“Ouch?!”

Crunch!

As if he was trying to tell Ian to get a grip, Riley firmly stepped on Ian's foot with the heel of his boots and conveyed the following with his eyes,

'Act with some tact, please.'

As if Ian read what Riley's eyes were trying to tell him, Ian broke out in cold sweat and smiled.

"...Yes, beautiful, I mean the inside of the temple."

Sera made suppressed laughing noise as she watched Ian's awkward smile.

Based on the atmosphere, Sera judged that the situation must not have been that serious, and she took the lead with Iris. Sera looked back and said,

"Our next destination is the Magic Tower."

"Oh, the Magic Tower?"

"Since you heard a rough explanation about the Magic Tower while we were entering Right Solia, I won't go over that again. Ah! Now that I think about it, Master Riley, you said you were interested in magic, right?"

Riley nodded in response to Sera's question.

“Yes! To think it is possible to move objects without using your hands… Wow…how convenient is that?”

“People don’t learn magic for that purpose though.”

Ian was dragging his feet.

His shoulders were low as if he had no energy, and the devious look in his eyes said he had a lot to unload from his mind.

“A mage from House Iphelleta? This is so ridiculous and unprecedented…”

“Oh, anyway!”

As Ian was mumbling at the back, Sera clapped her hand loudly and brightened the mood.

“At least we can visit that place.”

There was a tall tower not far from where the four were headed.

Surrounding the ivory-colored building, a ring of blue light floated around and circled the building. It seems that that place was the Magic Tower that Sera spoke of.

“That place, it feels different from when we looked at it from Left Solia, doesn’t it?”

“It does, doesn’t it? When you get closer, they say it feels different, starting with the air around it. I heard it is because mana of high purity is accumulated here, but I do not know much about the specific details.”

“Mana is?”

“Yes, that ring of light is the device.”

“Oh?”

Riley looked intrigued. He looked up and filled his sight with the rings of light circling around the Magic Tower.

‘The so-called magic…’

Not having had much experience in magic, Riley’s eyes were completely filled with curiosity.

This was because humans, including Riley, had either a curse or a blessing when they fought monsters to defeat the Demon Lord.

‘If it is as described in the books, it is said you can shoot fire, lightning and icicle spears from one’s hands. Is this true? Moving objects with one’s will is a given, and one can even fly through the

sky freely.'

In Riley's entire life, he only had a blessing that was related to blades. He never had any other blessings like the ability that allowed for breathing fire, creating ice, telekinesis or flight.

That made Riley all the more curious about magic.

He was wondering if it really was possible to use such abilities without a blessing.

"Ah, that's right! Would you like to try it when we head into the Magic Tower?"

Sera, who was leading the way, looked like she just recalled something and asked Riley.

"It?"

"It's called mana measurement. There is a device that can measure a person's mana capacity. It is a test that those aiming to join the ranks of mages in the Magic Tower get to experience at least once."

"...What's that again?"

"Young Master, you should try it now that you have this opportunity."

The Iphelleta family's first and second borns, Ryan and Lloyd also proceeded with having their mana capacities measured in order to use the 'Aura Blade,' a technique that enables the user to wield a blade enveloped in mana.

"You have a lot of things going on, so you won't have much time for a chance like this to come by again."

When Ryan was twelve, and when Lloyd was fourteen, they had already mastered mana.

"That's right. Riley, you should try it too."

Riley still had not had the mana measurement done until now due to various excuses. It was like he was playing hide-and-seek with it until now.

It appeared Iris too was wondering about the mana measurement result. She was looking at Riley with eyes filled with wonder..

"Um."

"..."

Riley was scratching his head with an impudent look on his face, and there were eyes glaring at the back of Riley's head. They belonged to Ian, who was exhausted from the commotion at the

temple.

The old man's eyes were regaining life once again, glowing.

'As expected of him...'

Ian, the mercenary hero...

Among all mercenaries who wielded blades during times of the world war, he was one of the best at utilizing mana.

Ian, the first one in the mansion to realize Riley's 'potential,' had gleaming eyes.

Chapter 30 - A Strange Guest (Part 2)

“This is the Magic Tower?”

Because it was a tower-shaped structure, Riley thought it would be quite narrow inside, but once he entered the tower, it was surprisingly expansive..

“It is more spacious in here than I expected,” Iris murmured aimlessly as she looked around inside the tower.

“It is similar to the Right Solia entrance which has a Soundproof Stone installed. I heard it is more spacious in here than outside because of a special magic device. I don’t know the specifics because it’s just something I heard in passing.”

In light of Sera’s supplementary explanation, Riley interjected,

“The more I look at it, the more miraculous it seems.”

It felt convenient in a different way from the science that Riley had experienced in his past life.

The first floor of the Magic Tower had inventions made by mages and their famous articles on display for the visitors.

“Anyway, it really is a Magic Tower. How should I put it... everyone here looks surreal,” Sera murmured as she looked around

the place.

The few people working in the Magic Tower, walking around in their thin fabric cloaks waving in the air, reminded them once more that this was indeed the Magic Tower.

“Excuse me. What brings you here today?”

Riley was giving dazed stares to marbles of glass and white square bricks floating around the first floor, but then he turned his head as he heard a voice from the rear.

The person that stroke up the conversation was a young man with a thin fabric cloak wrapped around his shoulders like the others, making it apparent that he may be someone associated with the Magic Tower.

“We are here to just look around,” Ian responded for the group.

“The Magic Tower is not a place that anyone can enter. By chance, do you have anything that you can present to prove your identities?”

“Yes, here.”

Ian showed the marker that proved their identities as people from the Iphelleta House. The young man, who appeared to be an associate, took a good look at the marker and nodded, satisfied.

“Ah, you are from the House of Iphelleta. Welcome to the Magic Tower. We will allow you to look around the first floor, but please do not go up to second floor or handle any objects without permission… Ahah?!”

The associate was continuing his explanation, but then he became bug-eyed and pointed toward somewhere with his finger.

The direction he was pointing was where Riley stood.

“Th-that! Please do not touch that!”

“…?”

The associate rushed forward and pulled Riley’s arm away.

“Ah, this…is it something I am not supposed to touch?”

It was one of the inventions created by the mages that were on display in the first floor.

Riley was brushing a ‘blue boulder’ with his right hand. He scratched the back of his head as if he felt awkward.

“Ugh, you are a Young Master from a Count’s House, but still, you mustn’t! This is not an ordinary object…”

“This boulder, what could it possibly be?”

“I cannot tell you that.”

The young associate was breaking into a cold sweat over the possibility of the boulder having smudges from Riley’s hand. He immediately examined the parts of the boulder where Riley touched and confirmed that the item was fine. The young associate sighed in relief.

“Phew… Most of the objects on display must not be touched. As for the ones that are ok to handle, they have signs that say so, so please keep that in mind. Other than those ones, you must not touch anything! Please enjoy them with your eyes alone.”

Riley beamed a smile and nodded.

“…Phew, still, I am glad you understood me. Thank you.”

The associate added that it was common for people to fire back and tell him ‘just who the hell do you think you are?’ The associate sighed bitterly.

“There are more than a few nobles that acted outrageously like that and went straight back to their residences. Of course, whenever that happens, I am the one that has to clean things up…”

His face was smeared with grievance.

As if feeling sympathy, Iris tilted her head to the side gently and asked him for a favor.

“Then could you please guide us through the Magic Tower? We don’t know about this place all that well.”

“Ah, if that’s what you would like, I will gladly!”

As if he was waiting for the request, the associate promptly responded.

“My name is Peruda. You can call me Peruda.”

As they listened to Peruda’s story, they learned that the associates took turns to protect and provide guidance in the Magic Tower’s first floor.

Peruda, the one that Riley’s group ran into today, was the one in charge of the task for the day.

“Mages, magic technique scholars, alchemists, and others... If I tried to sort them in detail, there would be endless varieties of mages in the Magic Tower. If I tried to sort them further down to the very specifics and explained, it will take more than a whole day.”

“Oh?”

“This is the manual for the basics of magic given to the apprentice mages. With this, you can use light circle magic such as energy bolts. Ah, what I mean by a circle…”

“Oh!”

“With this round device, you can pour water inside. If you wait a certain amount of time after pouring water in it, it comes out as ice. It works thanks to the magic circle drawn inside which activates when it comes in contact with water. The type of magic circle is…”

“Um, it is like a refrigerator.”

“A refrigerator?”

“Oh, it’s nothing.”

Perhaps an hour or two passed since the group made rounds around the first floor of the Magic Tower.

Thanks to Peruda, they were able to look around the first floor with efficiency. Riley crossed his arms and murmured his impressions.

“Hum, it looks like even mages don’t have it easy all the time.”

“Please come to visit again. If you go through the proper procedures, you can visit the second floor as well.”

“What’s on the second floor?”

“Um, that floor is best known for being able to spectate the apprentices practicing magic. For instance, the fireball that master Riley was curious about.”

“That’s intriguing.”

“…Master, over here, here.”

While Riley was having a conversation with Peruda on various things, Iris and Sera had already made their way to another place and called for Riley.

Ian too was already over there and looking at Riley from the other side.

“Um?”

“It’s for mana measurement. You said you wanted to try it once.”

“…”

With excitement, Ian's eyes lit up as Riley walked towards them in acquiescence.

"Okay, okay."

Unlike other objects in the Magic Tower's first floor that must not be touched, the mana measurement device had a blue orb placed in plain sight with a sign that said it was fine for anyone to use it.

"Peruda, how do I use this?"

"Just place your hand on top of the orb. Ah, are you left-handed by chance?"

"No, I am right handed. Why?"

"In that case, just place your right hand on the top. When you do, the orb will glow briefly, and then it will fill with water to the extent that reflects the amount of mana measured from you, sir."

Mana measurement.

The device in front of Riley was a mass-produced version, the kind for a distributed widely and used by anyone. To that end, the orb had measurement lines drawn to help the user easily discern the mana measurement.

“Excuse me, Mr. Peruda.”

“Yes, Mr. Ian.”

Before Riley placed his hand on the orb, Ian asked Peruda,

“What happens if the dissemination type orb breaks?”

“Uh…that only happens in extremely rare circumstances. If that happened, the Magic Tower or someone else will attempt to scout the user, especially if the person is still young since that would mean the person possesses jaw-dropping talent.”

Peruda was shrugging his shoulder as he was responding, but then he changed his words in the middle.

“No, that’s not it… Instead of saying it is rare, it is correct to say it never happened. The orb could develop a crack, but if it broke, that means the user is showing talent beyond the level of a genius. To this day, orbs have never been broken. Haha! It’s not like the user is a dragon or something. There is no way for it to break.”

Peruda waved his hand as he explained that it had never happened before, and he added explanations on the figures that managed to make the orb to develop cracks.

“So, making the orb develop a crack alone is an incredible feat. To tell you about the most notable figure that made it happen, there was the grand mage Astroa from our Magic Tower, and then

there is the renowned mercenary hero from the world war of the past...who was that? I cannot recall his name very well, but there is also that gentleman."

"..."

Sera and Iris, who were watching from the back, made noises of suppressed laughter as they gazed at Ian.

It appeared that a very long time had passed since after all.

"By chance, Mr. Ian... are you expecting to occur? When sir Riley tries it?"

"Kuhum..."

Ian omitted a response as he just made a fake cough.

It was not certain if Riley was aware of how Ian was feeling or not, but Riley placed his hand on top of the orb and casually murmured,

"After this, let's just go eat lunch. I am not certain about the time now... Is it going to be a dinner instead?"

The measurement orb started to exude a steady blue light.

"..."

Perhaps about ten seconds had passed.

The orb's light turned off as if it was signaling that it had finished the measurement, and Riley took his palm off the orb.

"How was it?"

"What was the result?"

"Um."

Not just Ian, but Iris and Sera also gathered in front of the orb that had just finished measuring.

"Well?"

Upon close inspection, the water filling the inside of the orb was up to about half.

"It's...normal. It's about average."

Peruda, who had joined afterward to stand right beside everyone, observed the water inside the orb and opened his mouth.

"...Average?"

“Yes, average. If you tried hard, you could learn magic, but the progress would be slow…so it would be better for him to find something el…”

“This cannot be.”

“Mr. Ian?”

“This is not possible.”

Ian got right in front of the orb and grabbed a firm hold of it with his both hands.

He was hoping maybe that would make the amount of water inside to increase a little or even make the orb to develop a crack.

“M-Mr. Ian! You mustn’t do that!”

“Let… Let go of me Peruda! There must be something wrong with this thing!”

Riley shrugged as he watched the two men struggle. He quietly went to stand next to Sera and Iris and asked,

“What should we eat? We are going to eat at Right Solia right?”

“Sera said she had things prepared.”

“Yes, there is a restaurant that I made reservations with. Let’s go there.”

*

It was dinnertime.

In the first floor of the Magic Tower where the strange guest had just left,

“Ha…ah…”

Peruda sighed wearily, as he cleaned the floor by himself.

“How could an old man be so strong? Oh man…”

It was a problem for Peruda that a visitor caused a commotion that could have broken the measurement orb.

He looked tired from stopping Ian. His exhaustion was apparent in his face.

“Oh, Peruda! Looks like you are in charge of the floor for the day?”

“Yes, hello.”

The mages and scholars, who were either doing research or training on the upper floors, were coming down one by one to go back home or go eat dinner.

Peruda was greeting them as he was sweeping the floor, but he raised his ears as he heard light disturbance in the back.

‘What’s the commotion about?”

Upon closer observation, Peruda realized the people from the Magic Tower were gathering around a certain corner in the first floor.

Peruda noticed that the Magic Tower’s teacher that he had just greeted was also standing over there. Intrigued, Peruda walked over to the corner.

“Hey, P-Peruda? You were the one in charge of the first floor today. right?”

Noticing him approaching, the people gathered around looked towards Peruda as he approached the area. With pale faces, they asked Peruda,

“Yes? Yes…I am?”

“That…over there… What happened?”

“What is it?”

Peruda pushed aside other people’s shoulders in order to get past them to the front. There, he witnessed the sight himself.

“…?!”

Peruda gasped for air and turned pale.

What he saw there was the ‘blue boulder’ on display on the first floor.

‘This…how could this be?!”

The object was a special mana measurement stone that could only be used by those with high mana concentration such as monsters or the Magic Tower’s grand mage Astroa. The device was not for ordinary humans.

Because it was a boulder, its size was beyond comparison to a measurement orb. On a boulder like this, there were deep cracks as if someone had decided to sculpt lightning patterns on it.

“W-who could have done this?”

“We don’t know who did this…but it is only a matter of time until the entire Magic Tower is turned upside down when grand mage Astroa learns about this.”

Gulp.

The sound of someone gulping could be heard.

“W-we need to find the one responsible for this.”

“In the worst case…we could be framed for this.”

RUMBLE!

The boulder finally lost its balance from the crack and collapsed. Not just Peruda, but everyone from the Magic Tower had their faces turn pale.

Chapter 31 - Nothing Happened In Particular

“Riley.”

“Yes?”

“Is it hard on you?”

After exiting Right Solia, the mother and son pair were on their way back to the hotel in Left Solia. They held a conversation as they crossed the main plaza.

“No? It’s not exactly like that… Why?”

He caressed his mother’s hand that he held as he shook his head.

It wasn’t hard, not exactly.

“It looks like there are many interesting things but you don’t seem to be showing any interest, so I asked.”

Because of the swordsmanship tournament to be opened the next day, the main plaza was bustling with people. It was more crowded than it was during the day.

As if to belittle the darkened night sky, there were lights of

orange or yellow hues everywhere on the street to shine light upon the people passing by.

“It’s just…”

Riley was paused at the end of his sentence as he looked around each street vendor, but he finally answered his mother’s question.

“I feel like there’s a lot that had happened.”

It was as he said.

Today was quite full of various incidents and events.

“I even went to a temple for the first time in my life.”

In Solia Temple, he ran into an existence they called a priestess, a wench that he did not want to meet. When he went there, Riley was actually worried he might recieve yet another divine message like he had in his past life. Fortunately, nothing like that happened.

“I also went to the Magic Tower.”

At the Magic Tower, he even had the mana measurement done per request of everyone, including his mother.

Because of the Blessing of Blades that he received in his past life, Riley was able to gather mana in a way that was a little different from the method others used.

Riley was concerned that the amount of mana he actually accumulated could be discovered by that tiny orb, but perhaps it was thanks to him minding this, he was able to get it over with and not have his true mana capacity exposed to everyone.

“Well, anyway, nothing in particular happened, so that was fortunate.”

“It is not like you have been going to places where something could happen, right? Ian and Sera were also accompanying you.”

Nothing in particular?

Iris asked as she tilted her head.

“Hahaha…”

Riley acted like he was busy with something else and dropped his fake smile.

Now that he thought about it, it is not like he went to Lower Solia that he was warned about, so it would have been weird if anything in particular happened today.

“Ugh! Mr. Ian, please get a grip!”

“Huugh... How could this be? There is no way I was just seeing things...”

The mother and son pair, who were holding hands and enjoying their time together, turned their heads after hearing voices from behind.

A maid approached with an old man as she struggled to support him. He had a blank look on his face as if he had just lost his soul.

“It looks like Ian was the one most disappointed by the result earlier.”

When Iris made suppressed laughing noises and looked at Riley, he smiled and asked,

“Mother, weren’t you disappointed? Because your son is ordinary?”

“Hm? Riley, I am relieved to know that you are ordinary.”

“...”

Riley’s mouth opened wide as if he were dazed.

He was expecting it, and he was hoping for it all along, but having received the response he wanted so promptly, it seemed as though Riley could not hide his joy. With a satisfied face, he asked his mother,

“Really?”

“Really? Of course.”

The mother and son duo chuckled as they continued their walk.

“Mother, would you like to stop by over there? I can smell something delicious in that direction.”

“Okay.”

*

“Hey, Beta, what if we get busted from continuing to do this?”

“I know it’s getting riskier! That’s why I said we are going to stop performing the ‘Prince! Please Save Me!’ scheme. Now it is time to go back to our original trade, the original.”

“What, our original trade isn’t thievery? It’s the same deal. What if it goes wrong?”

“It will be alright. Just fine! It’s not even midnight yet, right? Also, you do realize what day today is? If we miss this day, we have to suck on our thumbs until the next festival!”

In the main plaza of Solia, these two homeless people who were pretty famous in Lower Solia, the Hamil and Beta couple, were lurking around to find prey.

“Oh, that guy looks good. He even the tint of his clothes look different, don’t you think?”

“Can’t you see the massive number of knights sticking to the man? At the minimum, those guys are from a Count’s household. If you tried to take a bite out of them, you will really get your jaw torn apart. Pick another brat.”

Of all the people in the area looking like little fishes swimming around the sea, Beta was constantly moving her eyes in search of a prey that was the right size for her. She opened her eyes wide and said,

“Hey, Hamil! What about that one over there?”

“Um?”

Hamil looked carefully toward the direction that Beta was pointing to and then cringed.

“Aren’t those the pricks from the day before yesterday?”

“Yeah! Those pricks! The ones that completely ignored us like it was none of their business when they saw a fragile little girl who was about to be dragged away by rotten men and get raped!”

“…”

“It looks like a naïve young master, a noble lady, and a maid with a weak old butler dragging his feet added to the bunch. That’s only four in total.”

It appeared Beta found her target.

Beta wetted her lips as she flicked her tongue.

“So, are you going to go for those people?”

“Of course! For those heartless ones, we need to give them punishment! This is not a wrongdoing, but sending down a divine punishment from the heavens! Even Irenettesa would forgive us!”

“Haah……”

Hamil looked at the group that Beta pointed out.

On the surface, it looked like nothing could go wrong.

It was just a noble lady and a young master who came to see the Capital's Swordsmanship Tournament.

Also, there were only two escorts.

It was a piece of cake.

On the surface, it sure looked that way.

'...I have a bad feeling about this somehow.'

Hamil rolled his eyes for a quick glance at Beta.

Beta appeared to be fully charged with the hearts for carrying out the score. Her fingers were squirming.

'Haah, if I told her that I have a bad feeling about this, she will just say a woman's intuition is better than that of a man and so on and she will get all sassy with me.'

Watching the loving mother and her son, Beta was staring at them with eyes full of desire.

It looked like she could not hold it anymore.

Hamil, as if showing that he was giving in, said,

“…Ok. Let’s do it.”

“That’s how you should be!”

They calmed their breathing, squirmed and checked their fingers by practicing movements, and approached the target carefully past through the streams of people.

Their target was the funds that the group must be carrying.

‘If we fail, we’re going to bounce right away, got it?’

‘I got it.’

The two exchanged gazes.

They had a rendezvous point already chosen in case the attempt failed.

They had prepared for all sorts of possibilities.

Even so, Hamil’s throat felt like it burning.

He really had a bad feeling about this.

‘One, two…’

It was three steps to the front.

Now, the target was right in front of their noses.

Beta chose the young master and the noble lady.

Hamil chose the maid and the butler.

It was in case the maid and the butler had the wallet or other valuables, and it was also to buy Beta some time when she grabs things from the young master and the noble lady.

‘…Three?!’

Hamil, who was counting the numbers in his head, suddenly opened his eyes wide.

Before he could even put his hand forward, the butler, who looked so weak that he appeared he might die soon, was instead looking at Hamil with eyes filled with murderous intent.

‘Oh no…we have been found o-…’

Hamil was gasping for air. Before he could even finish thinking about the fact that they have been found out, his body was rapidly bent forward by some force.

Unlike his upper body, which was bent over because of a blunt pain on his stomach, his mouth was wide open.

“Kuk?!”

One of his eyes was crushed and closed by itself.

With his left eye, which he had barely managed to open, Hamil looked for the cause of the pain.

It was an elbow.

It belonged to the old man wearing a black butler suit.

His elbow was planted on pit of Hamil’s stomach.

“Ugh?!”

Before Hamil could get a hold of himself, he was forced to straighten his back, and his right arm was suddenly pulled up.

It was the old butler, with a violent look on his face, who grabbed Hamil’s arm and pulled it up.

‘Damn!’

Out of desperation, Hamil locked his teeth, and while trying to ignore the pain, he tried to kick.

'...?'

However, a question mark floated up to Hamil's face.

It was because his legs would not move for him.

'What? My legs?'

While his right arm was constrained, it appeared that backsides of his knees were kicked on. Hamil's legs were just hanging there lifelessly. He could not put any strength into them.

"You runts. Who are you?"

"Ugh..."

The old man gave an aggressive stare at Hamil's eyes as he asked.

Overwhelmed by the old man, Hamil's eyes darted about.

It was to find a way out.

'Damn it...'

Looking at the side, before he realized, the maid beside the butler was long gone.

The maid that disappeared was already in the distance and had finished neutralizing Beta.

Beta's state was even more gruesome than Hamil's situation.

Perhaps it was a retribution for attempting to lay hands on the young master and the noble lady. Beta's right hand was bent in a strange way, and she couldn't even scream because the maid had used her hand to plug Beta's mouth.

'And I thought I had a feeling about this.'

Hamil firmly closed his eyes.

As he thought, in the end, they got busted.

"You runts. Where are you from?"

"..."

"You dared to lay your hands on our Young Master from Iphelleta."

‘Did he just say Iphelleta?’

Hamil’s face turned completely pale.

If it was the Iphelleta family, the name belonged to the nobility that had earned the rank of Count from their swordsmanship alone.

*

“I thought I saw your face from somewhere. You were amongst that rotten bunch from a few days ago. Young Master’s words were indeed correct.”

At the back alley of Solia’s main plaza, two women stepped in to this place where hardly anyone was passing by.

One was Sera.

The other was Beta.

“Your association.”

Sera asked as she tossed Beta to the ground. She still had her wrist bent the wrong way.

In Sera’s chilled gaze, it appeared that there was a sliver of

murderous intent. To an ordinary person, her gaze alone was enough to instill fear in one's mind.

"..."

As if her lips were frozen solid from fear, or perhaps it was to keep the code among the thieves for her partner's sake, Beta couldn't voice anything.

"Well, that's fine."

Sera moved in a step toward Beta, who was on the ground on her stomach, and Sera sniffed the air to catch a scent.

As if she figured it out, Sera reopened the eyes she had closed a moment ago. Sera asked,

"...You are from Lower Solia?"

"...?!"

"Looks like you are wondering how I figured it out. It's because you smell rotten."

"Th-that can't be? I masked it with perfumes?"

Beta, with a look that strongly showed her state of panic, buried

her nose into her arm.

No matter how many times she sniffed at herself, she could only smell the scent of the perfume. There wasn't anything like a rotten sewer smell coming from her.

"Since I'm indebted to that place for my childhood, for the old time's sake, I will let you live this once. However...you must pay the price for attempting to lay your hands on my master and my lady."

The heel of Sera's boot was raised.

"N... No! Please!"

Sera's boot was aimed toward Beta's left hand.

Beta's right hand was already twisted in shambles.

If she hurt her left hand as well, Beta was going to lose her ability to make a living.

"Ugh!?"

The heel of Sera's boot, which was layered with mana, crushed Beta's left fingers.

Crack!

With that sound, which would make anyone cringe, Beta bit her lips and tightly closed her eyes.

“We are not going to give you lectures for pick-pocketing other nobles, but next time, it will serve you better if you picked your target more carefully.

“Ugh…”

Beta rolled around the ground in pain.

To Beta, who was letting her face scrape against the ground due to not being able to use her hands, Sera continued her words and then turned herself away.

“My master despises being bothered.”

*

“…Huh?”

Riley, who had his hands full of various foods from the street vendor, turned his head.

As he licked off the sauce that was on his lips, Riley asked Ian

who was following behind.

"Ian, where's Sera?"

It was because he couldn't see Sera.

Ian shrugged and casually answered.

"She said she would be relieving herself for a restroom break. She will probably come back soon."

"Is that so?"

"Young Master, do you need to go as well?"

"No, not exactly. I was just curious because she suddenly disappeared."

Knowing that he managed to keep the master from finding out, Ian sighed in relief and looked around the surroundings.

It was because he judged that the other members of the runts, which they had just given a serious beating to, could target Riley and Iris.

"Um, while we are at it, perhaps it would be best to make certain..."

Ian, who was in middle of looking around the surroundings and not able to properly hear what Riley just said, tilted his head in confusion.

“Come again Young Master?”

“No, it’s nothing. Ah, mother! That one looks delicious!”

“Okay. Okay. But first, please properly wipe off the crumbs on your mouth.”

Fondly exasperated, Iris smiled toward her son. She was just about to wipe Riley’s face around his mouth. At that moment,

Pew!

They could hear something being shot.

“Huh?”

Boom!

A red ray of light that was shot from the ground exploded splendidly, and it started to form the shape of a beautiful flower.

“...Finally, it feels like this is the beginning.”

Sera murmured as she watched the fireworks decorating the night sky. As if she just returned from her business, before anyone noticed, Sera was standing next to Riley and Iris.

“Ah, Sera. Welcome back. But…what is it?”

Iris welcomed Sera who just came back and asked Sera as if she was confused.

Sera smiled big and responded,

“It’s about the Capital’s Swordsmanship Tournament!”

Chapter 32 - Swordmanship Tournament (Part 1)

Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

There was a loud cheer within the Arena of Solia Castle.

The swordsmanship tournament began that day.

"Sera. Did you bring any food or drinks?"

Riley asked Sera.

"It's taken care of, Young Master."

Sera showed him all the treats and drinks in response.

Now, all that was left was to eat delicious food and drinks to his heart’s content while watching entertainment.

It was the perfect vacation.

"Anyway, I can never get tired of this. It’s simply astonishing no matter how many times I see it."

Most of the arena was white.

At the centre was a square stage surrounded by grass for the contestants who may fall off it. Beyond that was the area of the seats for the spectators, in which Riley's group was currently seated.

"Is that where they fight?"

"Yes, do you remember the list of match-ups they showed before you entered?"

"No, I hadn’t really looked at it."

"Haah...."

Ian immediately released a sigh.

He still believed that Riley should have joined the tournament, rather than only spectate.

"If it goes as planned, then there should be three matches held today."

"Three, huh..."

"I believe they will end before dinner as long as both contestants are neither appalling in skill, or too skilled."

"Hmm."

Riley nodded to show he understood, then turned around to look at the rest of the audience.

Something was strange.

Right Solia and the central plaza were very crowded.

Yet this place was more spacious than he had thought.

"You were expecting more people right?"

"Why is it so spacious?"

Iris questioned in Riley's place. She must have had the same thoughts as he did.

"It is difficult for the commoners to enter Solia Castle. Even if they can enter the castle, only those who are high-ranking members of famous guilds or those who have invitations may enter the arena. It’s because this is a place where sons of nobility gather to compete."

"I see."

Iris asked a different question after nodding to Sera's explanation.

"Then can the commoners not watch the tournament at all?"

"No, that is not so."

Sera shook her head, then pointed at a floating rock with her finger.

Iris clapped her hands in realization after seeing the rock which clearly seemed to be made by the Wizard's Tower in Right Solia.

"Ah, is that...?"

"Yes, as long as that is there, even the commoners who are not in the arena can watch the tournament."

Riley snickered at Sera's explanation.

"Then there must be cases where a noble would be publically embarrassed because of stupid blunder right?"

"No, there isn't. There is a delay before the broadcast."

Sera responded to Riley's words.

"Delay?"

"Hm, you could say we get to watch it a day earlier."

‘Is it like the difference between a live broadcast and a replay?’

Riley nodded with some comprehension.

"Ah, I think I get it."

"Yes, so events which could embarrass the contestants or the viewers cannot be seen beyond Solia Castle. The recordings are managed by the Wizard's Tower. When requested, such scenes can be removed before being broadcasted in the plaza."

"Hm, it's so interesting, that Wizard's Tower."

He scratched his head as he thought to himself.

He wanted to see what was on the second floor of the Wizard's Tower.

How can fire come out of someone's hand after an incantation?

Curiosity arose as it was different from what he was used to in his previous life.

"Ah, it seems like it's starting."

Iris tapped on Riley's shoulder as she pointed to the square.

It seemed the crowd also noticed, as the cheers grew louder.

It was quite amazing considering that only nobles were gathered here.

"Hey! Don’t shout with mana here! Do you not have any manners?"

"Ah, why don't you shut up! Where are you from anyway?!"

"Both of you shut up! My son’s coming out!"

"..."

Riley gave an hollow laugh when he heard the voices around him.

If Riley were to compete as well...

'All of you shut up! Young Master's coming!'

...Ian would have shouted like that.

Riley was relieved that he wasn't a contestant and looked at the centre of the square.

"The person walking down to the stage is from the Voiran family, and the one walking up is from the Drije family. Both families are renowned for their swordsmanship. Although not as much as the Iphelleta family..."

Ian explained with his arms crossed.

The judge who was standing on the square before anyone else made the contestants greet each other, then began to countdown.

"..."

"Finally, finally!"

Ian narrowed his eyes.

Sera tightly clenched her hands.

Iris beamed with anticipation.

And Riley...

***

"...Well, it was quite entertaining."

‘Entertaining’ was his choice of word.

That was his opinion after watching two matches.

‘Entertaining.’

"It was alright."

But...

Even after saying so, Riley's face did not match the words he spoke.

"Haah... Is that really the case?"

"It was interesting for me. What about you, Lady Iris?"

"Me too. It was pretty fun to watch even without any knowledge of swordsmanship. And it was quite exciting too, maybe because the contestants were around Riley's age."

Ian sighed.

Sera muttered.

And Iris respond with a positive review.

Riley stretched his arms then spoke.

"Hm, it was nice to see different styles that I've never seen before."

Excluding the story from his previous life, it was nice to see swordsmanship styles he'd never seen before.

That is what Riley answered.

"Otherwise... I thought I was going to get cancer."

Then, he added those words.

"It may sound weird, but that's the kind of fun I had. Fun while feeling frustrated? It was that kind of feeling."

Ian moped.

"..."

It was not strange for Riley to say those words.

Even in the dark forest he had managed to cut through the goblins without batting an eye, with even more skill than Sera.

"Ah, ahahahah..."

Sera awkwardly laughed.

Truly, there were very few swordsmen at Riley's age who could do what he had done without any hesitation.

"Then why didn't you compete yourself?"

Ian grinned at Riley as he asked.

It seemed that he hadn't given up even when the mana calibration had shown him to be average in mana capacity.

It was because of his movements during the goblin battle.

"That's just annoying."

Riley responded blankly.

"I mean, how can you-..."

Ian shut his mouth before he could answer.

He saw the face Riley was making.

"I just want to live peacefully. Really."

He seemed tired.

A boy who had just turned nineteen.

The eyes of a boy who was living a life of leisure.

It was showing the same look as someone who had lived by the sword for decades.

'Please keep it a secret. That's...what Riley wants.'

Ian could hear Iris's words resound in his head.

While Ian stared at the Young Master, Iris laughed as she spoke.

"Well if Riley wants to live so peacefully..."

The warm voice melted away the heavy atmosphere that was around them.

Not just Ian, but Riley and Sera looked at Iris.

"...it might be a good idea to find your wife here too."

"Oomph, pfft!"

Riley ducked down as he spat out the black beer he was about to swallow.

"..."

"M-my lady. Are those your intentions?"

Ian stood blankly with his jaws open, as if he was caught off guard.

And Riley asked with a blushing face.

"M-mother?"

There were only nobles in the arena.

There were definitely female spectators as well.

So, finding a potential wife...was not impossible.

Using the Iphelleta name would surely gather some initial prospects without any issue.

Riley began to break out in a cold sweat since it didn't seem like a joke.

"... I'm just teasing."

Iris declared after a pause.

Riley just stood with his mouth shut as those words came out with a smile.

"Uh, I'll head off to the toilet for a second."

Riley decided that staying there was no good, and escaped from his seat.

***

"She must have been joking. I mean, a wife? Surely it's a joke..."

After finishing his business, Riley was just about to return with Ian who was waiting for him at the toilet's entrance.

"...Oi!"

"...?"

Riley turned at the voice which called out to him.

"Yeah, you."

The owner of the voice was another boy around his age wearing a tailcoat.

The boy was glaring at Riley with his arms crossed.

"You spoke some arrogant words before, you know?"

The boy seemed like he heard those words before at the stands, as he had waited for this opportunity to ask Riley about his conceited words.

"Arrogant? What was?"

Riley asked Ian who was next to him as he made a clueless face.

"I believe, it was that conversation from before."

Ian shook his head as he wrapped his face in his hand.

As the third match was about to begin, Riley, Ian, tailcoat boy and his follower stood in the corridor.

The four stood and stared at each other.

"Frustrating, getting cancer, do you have any idea how much time and effort they've put in for this day? It seems like you have no idea about swordsmanship at all... If you take back your words from before then I will specially forgive-..."

"Ah, sorry. I was too careless. I apologise."

Riley waved his hand as he apologised.

"...?"

"Let's go Ian. It probably started now."

"W-wait!"

What now?

Riley turned around as he made such an expression.

"That had no sincerity at all."

"What?"

"Your apology wasn't sincere at all. Is that truly an apology?"

"Hah."

Riley's face twisted at the nonsense.

'Ian, what do I do?'

Riley and Ian looked at each other at that peculiar moment.

'Even if you ask me...'

Only nobles may solve problems between nobles.

So there was no place for him to help.

"I, Aploc, am the first son of the Erenjium family! I shall punish your disrespectful behaviour in place of those who are competing in the tournament."

How cheesy.

Those were some cheesy words from an insane man.

So cheesy that it could make you throw up.

"..."

Riley's eyes twitched as his face held an expression that seemed to say that he ate something disgusting.

It seemed like he was holding in his temper.

"You must be from a noble family if you are here as well. Tell me your family name."

'Ah, my mistake...'

‘I should have just stayed quiet.’

Riley truly thought as such.

This loud mouth had always been a problem since his previous life.

It was always the case when he sees others who train with their swords.

'What will you do, Young Master?'

Ian asked with his eyes.

Riley grinded his teeth.

Chapter 33 - Swordmanship Tournament (Part 2)

'What do you mean, ‘what am I going to do?’.'

Riley looked back at Ian with his intentions imbedded in his eyes.

He had no wish to deal with the cheese factory any longer, not to mention it was annoying.

'We run.'

Ian nodded with confirmation.

Riley quickly turned around.

At the same time...

The first son of Erenjium family, Aploc and his follower quickly pursued, shouting “How dare you!'”

It didn't seem like they would allow them to escape.

"Excuse me. But we cannot let you past this..."

Ian spread his arms in order to stop the two from catching Riley,

then frowned.

'His movements aren't so bad?'

The follower was nothing if not ordinary.

But the boy who named himself Aploc...

As the first son of Erenjium, his movements were quite special.

"Ho, not bad for an old man but...sadly it's 2-on-1."

Ian's hand which tried to grab his clothes, only grasped the air behind Aploc.

Ian's face was scrunched by the fact that he allowed Aploc to slip by.

'Young Master!'

Ian turned his head around.

Aploc was already approaching Riley with a grin.

He was just an arm's reach away.

"How dare you show your back!"

It was a dishonourable act for a noble.

From his aggressive tone, it seemed he was not fond of Riley's actions, and was looking to punish him dearly for it.

"For someone who doesn't have a shred of nobility in you..."

Aploc grabbed onto Riley clothes.

And...

"...?!"

He looked into Riley's face.

He annoyed of the fact that his clothes were caught.

The threatening face Riley was making had nothing backing it, not even mana. But it was enough for Aploc to hold his breath.

'What's this? This atmosphere?'

The leisurely atmosphere that was around Riley when he was apologising was gone.

In it's place was a chilling aura which made Aploc gasp.

"...I was trying to get by easily. Why this again."

Riley opened his mouth.

The moment Aploc's senses came back, his wrist was already in Riley's hand.

"You!"

Aploc struggled to release himself from the grip.

More accurately, tt was his instinct to escape from the chilling fear.

Run from here immediately.

That's what his body was telling him.

'What the, his strength is...'

Aploc began to use his mana.

The blue mana moved from his heart to his shoulder, form his

shoulder to his forearm, into his wrist.

Now, all that was left was to swing his wrist.

"Kuk?!"

The wrist should have been free...after the swing.

But strangely, Riley's hand continued to grip on Aploc's wrist like a vice.

In fact, it was getting stronger to the point where the wrist felt like it was about to get crushed.

'What? What is this?'

It doesn't seem like he's using mana?

He has no problem in a contest of strength, even when I'm using mana.

Actually, he seemed like he was ahead.

Very far ahead.

"Y-Young Master?"

Ian and Aploc's follower stopped their skirmish and looked at what was happening here.

Glancing at Riley who had never looked like this before.

"..."

Ian just stood there, unable to speak a word.

"Why do you have to irritate me like this? Huh?"

"Uuh! My wrist...my wrist..."

"Master Aploc!"

Moving past Ian, Aploc's follower extended his arm in order to save him.

Realising that Riley was no push over, the follower's hand was already imbued with mana.

"Let me just..."

Riley spoke as he swung the arm which was holding Aploc's wrist.

Aploc's body moved like a ragdoll.

"...live in peace!"

As he continued his words, Riley swung his arm once more in the opposite direction, deflecting the follower’s hand and released Aploc's wrist from his grip.

"Uak!"

"Kuk!"

The follower was hit by Aploc's back and flew in an arc, landing at the entrance of the rest room.

Aploc continued to fly in the direction he was swung with such force, such that he became stuck in the wall from his back.

"..."

Gulp.

Ian who had been watching Riley all this time moved his eyes to look at Aploc who was imbedded in the wall.

It seemed he had managed to absorb most of the impact with his mana, as Aploc still maintained his consciousness despite the

cracks present on the wall.

Although he seemed a little out of it.

"Haaah..."

The storm has gone past, and Riley sighed greatly.

Riley glimpsed at Ian, then stepped toward Aploc.

"Oi."

"..."

Riley spoke as he moved his face close to Aploc's.

Aploc could not answer, and simply looked back at him with his jaw ajar.

It seems he was quite shocked at what had just happened.

"I'll only say this once, so listen carefully."

Riley let his killing intent seep out.

Aploc's face began to turn blue.

Ian simply held his breath.

"...Got it?"

With a whisper, Riley spoke to Aploc with his mouth on Aploc's ear, and Ian was unable to hear what was said.

Nonetheless, he could tell that Aploc's face was getting paler than before.

"G-got it."

Aploc nodded furiously.

It seemed Riley had made a request.

"Remember. You speak about this, then I don't care if you're of the Erenjium or the Orangium... I'll make a mess out of it."

"...Tha-, Ah, Y-...Yes! Of Course!"

Even as a 3rd party, the killing intent felt overpowering.

How would it feel to be the person it is directed at?

"Ian."

"..."

"Ian!"

"Ah...Yes!"

Riley's call snapped our Ian from his thoughts.

The clear killing intent that could be felt from Riley was now gone as if it were just an illusion.

"I'll leave cleaning the mess to you. If anyone asks, it was done by you okay?"

"Sorry? Why..."

"I'll take responsibility. It's a request okay? Mercenary hero?"

"..."

Riley returned to his seat.

And in the corridor leading to the toilet were just Aploc, his follower and Ian.

***

"...I'm back."

"You took a while."

"Ah, yes."

"Hm? Young Master, where is Ian?"

"I think it's a big one. It seemed like it was going to take a while so I stopped waiting and came first."

"But um...didn't you hear some kind of an explosion before?"

"Explosion? I didn't hear anything. Maybe it's Ian? Pff, quite the intense one he's having. You've got some good ears Sera."

Riley who had ditched Ian began to gulp down the black sugar beer.

Gulp, gulp.

He drank it as if trying to forget the cheesy lines from before, and after a few gulps, he exhaled with satisfaction.

"Ah, it's starting. So, what's the main point to look for in this match?"

Riley asked Sera as he watched both contestants enter.

Despite the unintended incident at the toilet, he had still managed to come back before it had started.

"It seems one of them is a winning candidate. A lot of people are cheering for him. I'm one of them as well."

Sera answered with a smile.

Riley tilted his head.

"Winning candidate?"

"Yes, do you see the person with two swords?"

He wore an indigo cape which extended down to his waist, along with two swords of unequal lengths hanging at his sides.

Riley crossed his arms as he inspected the man Sera was pointing to.

"Hm."

The atmosphere around him didn't seem too bad.

From Riley's judgement, he assumed that Lloyd, the second son of Iphelleta house, would be similar to him if he was of a similar age.

Just the fact that he used two swords as his weapons was the difference.

"He's the only contestant who dual wields like me. That's why I'm cheering for him as well."

Sera continued to explain with a blush, as if embarrassed.

"He is from the Jenier family... This is the first tournament he'll be fighting in."

"It's his first tournament and he's the winning candidate? He must be quite famous? I didn't think that just because he dual wields, that it would be like this."

"Yes. Well...before the tournament started, it seems like he showed amazing skills in the mock battle which was done in privately amongst the contestants. Ah, and one more thing!"

Sera spoke with her index finger extended, as if this was the most important point.

"He's saying he wants to surpass the Iphelleta House as well. That was his main reason for entering this tournament."

"The Iphelleta House?"

"Yes, Iphelleta is considered the best when it comes to swordsmanship in nobility."

Riley's face became confused.

"Then, shouldn't we not cheer for him?"

"What's wrong with that? It's nice to see that he has some ambition in him."

Sera laughed while waving her hands in the air.

Riley turned away from her to watch the match, unable to understand.

The referee in the square raised his hands.

"The match will continue until one of the contestants is driven off the stage, or until he can no longer move. Use of mana is allowed, but using it with the intention to kill will be grounds for disqualification. This judgement will be done by the referee. Do you understand?"

The referee explained the rules of the match to the two nobles.

"Yes."

"Uuuh...yes."

The two nobles nodded.

The noble Jenier nodded with a calm demeanor.

While his opponent was breaking a cold sweat, and nodded a little later.

It seemed he was quite nervous.

"I think the match is already decided."

The countdown began as Sera made her comment.

The two contestants drew their swords.

One side looked confident while the other looked quite grim.

It seemed he was ready to head to the toilet at any moment.

"I'm not so sure about that."

Even so.

Riley keenly observed the match.

He seemed quite interested.

"Uh, Sera."

"Yes?"

"What's the family of Jenier's opponent?"

"His opponent? Well... What was it?"

2 seconds left.

1 second.

The match began.

"Ah, I remember. It was 'Erenjium'..."

Before Sera could finish her words.

Jenier's twin blades flew in the air.

"Huh?"

The opposite of Sera's expectation occurred.

The Jenier contestant could not believe what had happened.

Both of his hands were in the air with his swords discarded.

He was completely open.

His opponent, Erejium charged toward his stomach after the first strike.

"Erenjium?"

It was if he had expected this would happen.

Riley didn't even check what was happening afterwards and recalled about the Erenjium family.

'I, Aploc, first son of the Erenjium family!'

Ah.

Riley's face turned sour.

The person he had just man handled was from Erenjium as well.

"I, I did it?!"

Soon after, there was a mutter from the contestants.

Towards the man who could not believe what he had achieved just now.

The referee shouted.

"Victor! Erenjium's second son, Aplion!"

"I, I won? I won!"

Second son?

So he's the younger brother?

Riley scratched his head as he saw the timid boy who was unlike his brother, then turned his head.

It showed on his face that he remembered something.

'Now that I think about it...'

Ian had not returned yet.

'Is something happening?'

It's been some time since he left Ian to deal with the clean up.

It wouldn't be strange if he had returned by now.

Something was odd.

'Nah, what could possibly happen?'

It was weird.

But detecting no big changes to Ian's mana, Riley decided that it was nothing to worry about and began to eat the snacks Sera had prepared.

Chapter 34 - Movement

"... Please try getting up."

Instead of the eldest son of Erengium, Ian went to help his servant who appeared to have suffered a serious injury to the upper body. While at it, Ian was chewing over in his head about what just occurred before his eyes.

'Just... let me live in peace!'

Even in Ian's opinion, Aploc's skills were extraordinary.

Although a formidable man like that was fully focusing his mana, Riley did not even bat an eye.

Ian pondered at what it could mean.

'It is not a matter of how much talent you have. My Young Master is already capable of skillfully using mana.'

Ian concluded as such.

Ian thought about how Riley coughed out words of anguish as he swung his arms around. Ian's hands were shaking. He could not hide his excitement.

'Young Master is not ordinary. By now, he is probably capable of

effortlessly controlling mana at will to the point that he can even fool the mana measurement.'

'Since when did he?'

The thought gave Ian the chill down his spines and made him shiver.

'Could it be that the Young Master is... a dragon out in human's world for an amusement?'

Dragons were superior beings said to live well over ten thousand years.

Ian remembered stories about them sometimes enjoying themselves posing and living amongst humans, and he considered the possibility of Riley being one of those dragons shape-shifted into a human form.

'This deadly aura, this mana... if that is not the case, none of these can be explained.'

However, soon Ian shook his head.

'No way...'

It was because his theory was not possible.

Ian watched the moment of Riley's birth.

The Young Master that Ian served was born from Iris's womb, not from breaking through eggshells.

'In that case… the lady Iris?'

'If she was a dragon living amongst humans, would she also give birth like humans?'

'Wait. If she really is a dragon, what was that about her coughing blood from mere poison?'

'A powerful dragon coughing blood from mere poison meant for human? Is that possible? Because she is in a human form?'

Ian was chasing tail to tail on his theories and questions.

'No way… Get a grip, Ian!'

Ian's face was full of excitement.

His heart was pumping so hard that it felt like it was about to burst.

However…

It was different from the last time when he collapsed in the mansion.

‘The important thing is that, as expected, what I thought about the Young Master’s abilities is not wrong.’

Gathering up his strength, Ian used his remaining arm to also shoulder Aploc and started to walk.

‘As I thought, Young Master is incredible!’

The tips of Ian’s mouth went up on their own.

It was because he was proud of his Young Master.

Tears were forming around his eyes, which were wrinkled from age.

‘Of course! Definitely! I had faith in him! He is the master that I serve after all! Definitely!’

Ian was wiping off the tears from his eyes, but then he suddenly stopped walking.

‘Wait, hm…’

Ian remembered the favor that Iris asked of him.

“Please keep it a secret.”

On the carriage, on their way to Solia after slaying the goblin, Iris said that to Ian.

‘What? What I witnessed with my eyes today… I need to keep this secret?’

Ian’s face was overflowing with joy, but now it suddenly turned dark.

“Hello… Excuse me.”

Ian was walking while helping Aploc and his servant, but he heard a delicate voice coming from the back and that made his shoulders shiver.

It was not only delicate, but also somehow soft and fine.

The beautiful voice was coming from his rear.

Ian could also feel the presence of many people along with the voice, so he sharpened his eyes and turned his head.

There were about twenty people within Ian’s sight.

"... Um?"

The people were either wearing white clothing or armors.

Even at a glance, they were definitely people from the Solia Temple.

"What could have happened... Huk?!"

'They are the people from the Solia Temple. What business do they have at the castle where the Swordsmanship Tournament is being held at the moment?'

'And why, of all time, now they want to talk to me?'

With his eyes sharpened, Ian looked toward the people, and then,

"Huk!"

He gasped for air.

'That... that person is?'

There was a person with a veil covering the face.

No. It was a girl.

Ian found a girl who appeared to have come straight from the Temple and had holy knights and priests standing behind her.

“At this place…”

The girl with her face hidden behind the veil spoke.

A soft voice, that felt like it contained a special power, echoed on the corridor.

As Ian thought about how she must be delivering divine messages or curing people with that voice, and that was making him overcome with a sense of piety.

“I heard that the guest who came to the temple yesterday is here.”

Priesia, the priestess from the Solia Temple, continued.

It looked like she was looking for someone.

“…”

Gulp.

Ian gulped.

‘That cannot be.’

‘That cannot be, right?’

Ian was picturing in his mind about the trouble that transpired at the temple yesterday.

“By chance.”

Priesia carefully walked toward Ian.

As if there was nothing to it, Priesia walked all the way to the front of Ian, and then she asked,

“Have you always known?”

“That is…”

Ian’s face turned completely pale.

This fragile-hearted butler was now thinking about what Riley said at the temple yesterday.

“Ugh, no matter how I look at you, you are ugly as hell!”

Just thinking about it made Ian's heart pound like a little girl. Because of the predicament he was in, Ian looked like he could cry.

'Ah, why is my memory so good?'

He blamed his sharp memory.

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The three matches for the day ended.

Sera stretched to loosen up her body that became stiff from sitting for so long, and she immediately relaxed back down.

She looked a little disappointed.

"How do I say this... Maybe it is because the contestant that I was rooting for lost. I don't feel good."

"Are there revival rounds or anything like that?"

"I heard there isn't anything like that in the rules."

"That is too bad."

Iris laughed as if she thought it was funny, and then she asked Sera,

“Well then, did we watch all of the matches for the day? Somehow, if feels like they ended rather quickly?”

“Yes. There weren’t many matches today because there was the opening ceremony, but also because there were fewer contestants than the last year. Still, since there won’t be an opening ceremony tomorrow, they will have more matches then. They didn’t give a notice, but I’m projecting that it will continue until there are only four contestants left.”

“hm.”

“So, in the day after tomorrow, they will probably hold the semi-final and the final.”

“That makes sense.”

All of today’s matches now concluded.

The nobilities in the spectator seats were starting to stand up here and there.

Sera and Iris followed and stood up from their seats.

“Anyway, they were surprising. The house of Erengium.”

Sera murmured as she got up and tidied up the place.

“That much?”

“Yes. Considering his skill for the age, he is almost at the same level as Master Ryan.”

“Hm. What if you compared him to Riley?”

“In comparison to the Young Master? Hm…”

Sera held her finger at her chin as she tilted her head.

Even for Sera, it was a question that she could not come to a conclusion easily.

‘When it comes to skills, our Young Master Riley is definitely steps ahead.’

Sera predicted that, unlike the Erengium House’s second born son, Riley was different from him starting with the attitude in holding a sword.

Sera have never seen Riley holding any sword while in the mansion, yet Riley was not shocked at all after cutting down the goblin with ease. Based on that, Sera figured that there is definitely something about Riley.

Not only his attitude, but based on the swordsmanship alone, she

thought that Riley definitely had an upper hand.

From Sera's perspective, who have seen the blade works of both Erengium's second born son and Riley, her assessment was like that.

If there was one problem,

'Difference in mana must be…'

She was thinking that there must be a difference in mana.

A matter of the difference in natural born talent. A difference that could not be helped by skills.

It was the talents related to mana.

The mana measurement from the Magic Tower showed that Riley's mana capacity is average.

In comparison, Erengium's second born son appeared to have substantially superior talent in mana.

This was the one thing that kept Sera from making a conclusive assessment.

"Well, I am not sure."

Because of this, Sera turned her head toward Riley to ask directly.

“Young Master, what do you think… Huh? Young Master?”

Sera blinked her eyes.

It was because Riley, who was with her only a moment ago, disappeared and appeared to have gone somewhere.

“He said that since Ian is still not here, he should go escort him here. He took his leave before us.”

“Ah?”

Based on the look on Sera, it appeared that Iris guessed what Sera wanted to know. Iris told Sera where Riley went.

“Now that I think about it, Mr. Ian is still…”

Did he eat something bad?

Did he open a street vendor shop next to a restroom?

While thinking about Ian, who was still not with them, Sera scratched her cheek.

‘Um. Is it going to be all right for the Young Master to roam around by himself?’

Sera was thinking she should scold Ian when he returns.

Iris smiled nonchalantly toward Sera and tossed a question.

“You never know? While he had the time to spare, maybe he went to find himself a bride?”

“…”

Sera’s face turned red.

“What you said from a while ago, that was not a joke?”

“…”

Iris only smiled without saying anything else.

This time, she didn’t reply to say that it was a joke.

“Ah, ah haha.”

In light of Iris’s smile, Sera started to laugh, but she quickly shut

her mouth when she felt the presence of many in front of her. She looked toward them.

“Um?”

The nobilities, who were on their way to exit the seating area, were gathered at the exit.

It looked like someone was blocking the way.

‘What’s going on?’

Curious, Iris was tilting her head. She decided to go with Sera toward the exit to find out what was going on.

“Huh? Sera, over there… Isn’t that Ian?”

“Please come again?”

Looking past the shoulders of nobilities murmuring in front of her, Sera found a butler who looked like he lost his soul. Flabbergasted, Sera’s eyes opened wide.

“That… that’s right? It is Mr. Ian. Why is Mr. Ian over there?”

‘Mr. Ian is blocking the way? Why? For what reason?’

‘If that’s the case, what happened to the Young Master who went to look for him?’

Questions on Sera’s mind were only leading to yet another question. Sera rolled her eyes in search of Riley, and soon, she found people dressed in white standing along side of Ian.

“Uh?”

They were holy knights and priests from the Solia Temple.

Several additional questions marks floated up on Sera’s face.

“We apologize for blocking the way. Right now… we are looking for the people from the house of Iphelleta.”

Eventually, among the people from the Solia Temple, a girl with a veil covering her face spoke.

Because Sera was from Solia, her face changed fast once she heard the familiar voice that she seemed to have heard from somewhere.

‘Oh my… Pr… Priestess Priesia?!’

***

On the corner of the Solia Castle's Swordmanship Tournament Arena, Riley leaned toward the wall and avoided the gazes of people. He then took out a hard object from his pocket.

"I am glad that I bought this yesterday in advance."

Yesterday, when Riley was with his mother at Solia's main plaza, he purchased this from a street vendor. It was a mask.

Upon wearing it, it was a mask that concealed upper half of his face.

It could also be worn to cover up his hair if the mask was put on from the top, so the design was such that it would not be wrong to call it a full mask.

"I hope he is keeping up the good work and watching his mouth."

Riley twiddled with the mask.

Remembering the Erengium House that he warned a moment ago, Riley was looking for Aploc's energy.

"If things get out of hand, it is going to be inconvenient."

As he murmured, he quickly turned his head.

It was toward beyond the Solia Castle walls.

The direction he was looking at was toward lower Solia.

“… Man… Of all places.”

‘Why is Erengium House heading toward lower Solia?’

‘Since one of their servant is injured, for the treatment alone, they should be heading toward the right Solia?’

However, other than that question, what bothered Riley was the fact that they were moving along the outermost eastline, the furthest location from here. Feeling lazy, Riley cringed.

“What a bother.”

After scaling up the Solia Castle’s walls, Riley put strength to his heels and then made a leap toward the direction of the main plaza.

The destination was the lower Solia, the place Erengium House must be headed.

Chapter 35 - Movement (Part 2)

“… Ugh!”

In the sewers of Lower Solia, Hamil cringed. His body was in shambles.

‘To think that the four we tried to mug yesterday were from the Iphelleta house. We had rotten luck… No, perhaps it was a good luck?’

Although he couldn’t breathe very well, he was still alive.

It was because the Iphelleta house’s butler showed him mercy.

Hamil thought he was a goner for sure.

All things considered, it was correct to say that Hamil was fortunate.

“Is it morning… no, evening?”

Hamil tilted his head up to look through an opening in the sewer’s ceiling to estimate the time.

The color of the sky was a mix of orange and dark blue.

“I arrived in the evening, but I woke up when the sun was about to set... Looks like I was asleep throughout the whole day. Well, I had a rough day yesterday.”

His body was in a horrible shape, and he also had to carry Beta on his back all the way here because she was knocked unconscious.

Even Hamil thought that his mental strength was worthy of praise.

“Uu... Hey, Beta. Are you still among the living?”

Hamil raised his body up, which was aching all over, and looked for Beta, who he struggled to bring back here yesterday.

Beta was nearby.

“Damn it. Damn it. That lassie...”

Sig... Sig...

She was trying to compose her breathing.

She had serious injuries on an arm and a hand, but she appeared to be all right in other places.

“Are you... all right?”

“Do I look all right to you?!”

Beta shouted loudly.

Her voice was loud enough to echo through the sewer.

Someone in the Lower Solia said ‘Shut up!’ in response to her roar.

“Damn it, my arm, and... my hand are busted. It’s the end for me.”

To hide her desperate look on her face, Beta was lying down on her stomach, even if it meant rubbing her face on the sewer’s floor.

Because she couldn’t use her hand, it looked like it would be difficult for her to get up by herself.

“It is not the end. You just need to get them healed by going to the Temple.”

“Those high and mighty people lending a helping hand to me, someone from the Lower Solia? Ha! That’s not even funny.”

Hamil, who at least still had working arms, struggled to get near Beta and helped her get up.

Her face was messed up with her tears and runny nose. It looked funny.

“Calm down.”

Although Beta’s face was making Hamil have a hard time keeping himself from laughing, he managed. Hamil only showed a serious and sincere expression on his face, and he started talking to Beta in order to calm her down.

“…”

Beta was looking at Hamil face to face for a while. She roughly wiped off her tears with her shoulder and then got up.

“Beta?”

“Now that it has come to this… I will have my revenge.”

Her legs were fine at least. Beta got up, and immediately, she started to go somewhere.

“Ug…”

Upon hearing the word 'revenge,' Hamil tried to get up so he could stop Beta.

However, he was not able to.

The parts of his body, his legs, that were on the receiving end of that old butler's beating were not quite recovered yet.

"Stop this. Beta."

Since Hamil could barely walk at the moment, he couldn't get to her. Instead, he tried to convince her to stop with his words.

However, Beta's steps didn't stop.

"It would be faster if you just ran the casino!"

Hamil's voice was becoming more and more distant for Beta, but she still did not stop.

She continued on, turned a corner on the sewer's corridors, and said,

"... I will use garbage!"

She screamed those words out loud and clear. It was so Hamil on the other side, who was still trying to convince her to reconsider, could hear. Beta then continued walking.

“Hey! Hey!”

In Lower Solia, there was a saying,

‘If you are bitten, then bite back harder.’

Beta was insisting on practicing those words. Her eyes were exuding murderous intent.

“…”

Beta walked far to the point that she could no longer hear Hamil’s voice. Eventually, she stopped at a corner of the sewer.

In front of her, there was someone sleeping with a rag as the cover.

“… Get up.”

Beta kicked the person sleeping in the corner.

“… Nainiae.”

“Uh…”

“Hey. Nainiae, I said wake up.”

‘How could someone sleep so soundly on a stone floor?’

Even though Beta kicked her several times, this girl named ‘Nainiae’ was not waking up. Beta used the tip of her foot to quickly get rid of the rag to the side.

“Can’t you hear me? I’m telling you to get up!”

The rag made rustling noise in the air and eventually flew into the sewer’s dirty water.

“…?”

With her blanket gone and the sound echoing at her ear, Nainiae, who was sleeping until now, batted her eyes and looked up toward Beta.

“Ugh.”

Beta scrunched up her face for a moment.

Beta was disgusted by seeing her disturbing face.

It would have been nicer if that was all that Beta had to endure. Instead, she could also smell a terrible stench.

It was worse than something coming from trash.

‘This thing is a woman…’

Beta was thinking that if she was Nainiae, she would have hanged herself. Nainiae asked Beta,

“Beta… What brings you here?”

Two of her fingers were missing. One would never know if she just lost them or sold them.

Nainiae’s right hand only had three fingers. Using her right hand, she carefully got rid of eye boogers from her horrid looking face.

What happened to her face could have been the result of a chemical bottle shattering on her face. The burn from the chemical left her face with one side having a different shade from the other, and one of her eyes were white like a dead person.

‘It feels like asking a favor of a dead person.’

Beta tried to hold in the urge to throw up and said,

“I… I have a favor to ask.”

“A favor?”

Nainiae’s dead eye’s gaze was directed to Beta. Bearing the stench, Beta smiled brightly and answered,

“Yes. This is something that cannot be done without you.”

“Something that cannot be done without me?”

“That’s right. You are the only one that can do it. I have faith in you. That’s why I’m asking you for this favor.”

“…”

Nainiae fell to a silence, deep in thought.

Beta gulped.

“… S… So?”

Breaking the silence, Nainiae lowered her head slightly and murmured.

“Well, okay.”

Nainiae stood up sluggishly.

She looked frail like a person who was in a critical condition.

“Ha, haha…”

Beta flickered the tip of her lips.

***

In middle of the Solia’s main plaza, people from the Erengium house were able to leave the arena before the people in the spectator seats because they participated in the tournament. Now, they were on their way to the Lower Solia.

“That’s when I deflected that bastard’s twin blades with a single blow. After that, I charged right in!”

“…”

Erengium’s second born son was boasting himself as he told the tall tales about the details of the tournament from today, but he tilted his head to a side and said,

“… Big bro?”

It was because his big bro looked as if he was possessed by something.

His eyes were shivering.

His arms were crossed, but his arms weren't just snugly holding his body. They were almost tightly constricting it.

Aplyon grabbed on to his big bro's shoulder, shook him lightly, and said,

"Big bro, is there... something going on?"

His big bro used to be always energetic and full of laughter.

It was very odd to see him acting like this.

"Ah? Aplyon..."

"Big bro?"

"No. It's nothing... There was nothing."

Aploc finally replied to his little brother's question and shook his head hard.

Still, his face was that of a man chock-full of fear.

“Something happened, didn’t it? What happened? Please tell me! Didn’t you say that it is better to think about difficult problems together?”

“Have I not already told you that there was nothing wrong!?”

“… Ug?!”

Aploc opened up his arms, which were crossed til now, and struck down his little brother with the swing of his arm.

Not able to withstand his big bro’s strength, Aplyon’s back collided with the carriage’s wall.

“Big… big bro…”

The servant driving the carriage quietly took a quick peek behind him into the carriage.

He could see Aploc’s servant who was severely injured.

It was certain that something must have happened.

However, Aploc was not about to open his mouth to explain it.

It was as if he was brainwashed by someone.

“It is nothing. Do not… mind it.”

Again, Aploc crossed his arms again, hugged his armpits, and started to shiver again.

***

‘Fortunately, everyone is keeping their mouths shut.’

On top of the carriage.

Riley was relieved after hearing the voices from the carriage below.

It appeared that making things clear to them while he was inside the Solia Castle was quite effective.

‘If they talked, it would have been an inconvenience to me.’

Riley fiddled with the mask he was wearing. He was just about to take off the mask and return to the Solia Castle.

‘Um?’

He could feel eyes on him.

Riley focused his ears.

There were gazes staring directly at him.

As he focused his ears, he could hear voices nearby.

“… That’s the guy.”

“That runt?”

“Yes. The Young Master that Beta spoke of is that one.”

“Young Master? That runt wearing a mask?”

‘… What did you say?’

TADAK. TADAK.

The carriage was running forward without resting.

There were two people blocking its path.

The two were glaring at Riley on top of the carriage as if they were trying to burn holes through him with their gazes.

“But, I don’t see any escorts? What happened to the maid and the butler? And besides all that… what’s a Young master from the

Iphelleta house doing on top of a carriage like that? Even wearing a mask?”

Of the two people blocking the carriage’s path, one of them shook head.

This one had a dirty rag-like fabric covering the entire body from the top of the head. This one looked worse than a beggar.

“I don’t know about that. As for the reasons why the escorts are not with him, I don’t know that either. However, of all people that Beta mentioned, that guy is the one that’s closest to us.”

Erengium’s carriage charged forward as it kicked off dirt.

The servant who was driving the carriage turned pale after realizing there are two people standing right on its path. He waved at them and screamed,

“You two over there! Please get out of the way! Out of the way!”

It looked like the two had no intention of moving out of the way.

They simply stood there on the carriage’s path and stared at Riley who was wearing a mask.

“What are you going to do, Beta?”

The one concealed under the rag asked Beta who was standing on the side.

“Isn’t it obvious… Actually this is better. That it turned out like this…”

Beta twisted the tips of her lips and said,

“Just kill him.”

‘What…’

After hearing the conversation, Riley was about to laugh out of their ridiculousness, but then he suddenly opened his eyes wide.

“…?!”

The one covered in rag put forward one hand.

It was a right hand with its middle and pinky fingers missing.

In front of that hand, it looked like mana was accumulating.

It eventually turned to a black colored light.

[TL: I understand that a black colored light is impossible by default, but that’s what the author said. Think of a magic effect from movies or animes with a mysterious black colored energy.]

The one under the rag spoke,

“Lightning Spear.”

Along with the casting of the spell, the black colored light became sharp.

Soon, a pitch black colored lightning bolt was launched.

The Erengium house’s carriage was pierced through by the lightning bolt spear.

With a single strike, the servant on the carriage’s driver seat turned to burned charcoal.

Of course, having lost the driver, the horses ran amok and roared wildly.

The black lightning pierced through the servant and obliterated the top of the carriage.

Aploc and Aplyon were tossed out of the carriage, and the Erengium house’s carriage was overturned on the side.

As for the Riley who was on the top of the carriage,

‘That just now… It cannot be?’

With his eyes wide open, he landed on top of a building nearby.

“Did it miss…”

The gaze of the one covered under the rug moved toward the rooftop where Riley landed.

“… AAAAAAAAK!”

“AAAAAAAK!”

Due to the chaos that came about without any warning, the citizens in the Solia’s main plaza were screaming and running all over the places in panic.

“It’s magic! Magic!”

“Someone is shooting magic attacks at random!”

“UAAAG! Mama! Mama!”

It was a complete mess.

The main plaza was turned chaotic at an instant. Watching this, Riley cringed and glared at the ‘mage’ wearing a rag.

‘By chance, is that…’

Underneath the rag, although it was hard to see due to the shadow, the face of the figure was beyond hideous.

One of the eyes was white and dead. The skin was red and peeled off as if burned by a chemical.

The ‘mage’ that Riley was looking at said,

“Just you wait. Beta said she has faith in me. That’s why…”

And then…

“…?!”

Mana accumulated behind her, and then it started to exude black colored light.

The mage murmured,

“…I need to show her my gratitude.”

Having witnessed the large boulder-sized magic spells floating about in the air, Riley gulped.

He had never seen these kinds of fire or ice formations. Not even in his past life.

‘…Oh?’

Chapter 36 - Sounds Of Explosions In The Main Plaza

At the Solia Castle, at the arena's grandstand, Sera explained it to Priesia as she tried not to get in Priesia's nerve. Sera pointed to the seat where Riley was sitting and said,

"Hey. So what I'm saying is... Until just a moment ago, he was sitting with us here."

"He was sitting here?"

"Yes."

Priesia gave a blank stare at the seat that Sera pointed at.

There was only a brown-sugar beer holding the seat.

"Do you know where he went now?"

"That is... He said he needed to use the restroom."

Sera didn't quite finish the sentence as if she was embarrassed. She looked at Ian.

It was because before Riley disappeared, he said he was leaving to find Ian.

“…”

Ian that Riley went to find was now here.

Ian’s face was shaded in darkness.

Sera noticed that Ian’s face was more serious than her own face, and she couldn’t continue explaining anymore. Instead, her shoulders slouched down.

‘As I thought, we should have brought more servants as escorts…’

Sera tried to make excuses in her mind, but still she started to blame herself and critiqued her qualification as a maid.

Of the three from the house of Iphelleta, Iris was the one that at least kept her composure. She asked Priesia,

“Ms. Priesia, what would you do? Would you like to wait here?”

“Hm…”

Priesia touched her lips.

At the same time, both Sera and Ian’s eyes were rolling all over

the place.

As for Ian, he was turning the light on his eyes in order to find Riley's energy immediately even at the expense of spending mana.

"..."

"Ms. Priesia?"

While Ian and Sera were at tip of their nerves, Priesia didn't answer Iris's question, and instead, she walked toward where Riley was sitting.

"...Hm?"

Hide-and-Seek. Score: 9 Loss out of 9 Rounds.

So far, Ian lost every time, but he was thinking he would definitely find him this time.

Determined, Ian was burning his eyes.

He looked at Priesia and thought,

'What is she trying to do?'

Priesia walked to where Riley was sitting and carefully picked up

the cup containing the brown-sugar beer, which was about half full.

‘Is she going to use her holy power?’

‘A priestess, a being blessed by the goddess Irenetsa... Is she trying to use her holy power to find Riley?’

Ian watched Priesia with high expectations.

“Hm.”

With her thumb, she brushed the bear cup that she picked up, and she sharpened her eyes.

It looked like she was not liking something.

‘No, did I get the wrong idea?’

‘By the way, why did she pick up the brown-sugar beer cup of all things?’

‘Was she thirsty?’

‘Is she going to quench her thirst with that?’

Ian was about to shake his head.

“...Ugh!”

CRASH!

By the sudden forceful grip of her hand, the beer cup on her hand was completely crushed.

“...?!”

Because of the violent sound, Iris, Ian, Sera, and even the priests from the Solia Temple flinched their shoulders.

“Pr... Priestess?”

“Ah...”

As if she finally regained her consciousness, Priesia gave a blank stare and said,

“I am sorry. What did you just say?”

And then, she turned her head toward Iris and gave her a refreshing smile.

“...”

However, on her right hand, which crushed the cup, the brown-sugar beer's black liquid was dripping and wetting the floor.

For those that could see how she looked, the atmosphere felt like it was demanding silence.

'As... As I thought. It was because of what happened the day before yesterday!'

Ian gulped.

The violently sharp atmosphere that the priestess displayed for a moment made Ian remember the time when Riley badmouthed toward the priestess at the Solia Temple the day before yesterday.

'She is definitely still angry! It looks like... it would probably be best if the Young Master stayed hidden from her until the priestess goes back to the temple...'

In the restroom's corridor, Riley was able to toy with the first-born son of Erengium house as if he was just a rag-doll.

Ian wasn't hoping to feel relieved about Riley this way, but regardless, no matter where Riley may be, Ian figured that Riley wouldn't be in a pinch that was more serious than this one.

Ian relaxed his face a little and started to mind people's nerves.

“… Priestess!”

Breaking the tamed atmosphere, the people who were gathered around where Riley was sitting suddenly turned their head toward the origin of the voice.

As if he ran here at full speed, the priest’s face was full of sweat. He presented the priestess with something.

It looked like a message from someone.

“N… Now, at the main plaza area, something terrib…”

Before the priest could finish his sentence, they could hear an explosion from the distance.

The explosion could be heard from over the wall, coming from the main plaza’s direction.

*

It was incredibly loud.

A large lump of flame created by the power called magic was launched and collided with a building. The explosive sound had an incredible intensity. It made those hearing it go temporarily deaf.

"... Save me!"

Screams were being buried under the explosions.

Hell.

The main plaza was in a state of festivities because of the King's Swordsmanship Tournament. Now, the scenery could be summarized in one word, Hell.

'I only read about it in books. This is the first time seeing it for real.'

Another magic attack was launched at Riley.

He jumped over a roof and barely dodged the magic and looked at the woman under the rag... no, a frail little girl under the rag who was indiscriminately shooting magic attacks.

'She looks young.'

She looked substantially younger than Peruda, the one that guided him in the Magic Tower.

Her appearance looked horrifying.

Riley went over the varieties of the magic and number of shots

that the girl was launching. Riley then sharpened his eyes.

‘She is so young, yet she is able to shoot so many shots of magic. Is that possible?’

Riley was rolling his brain over his doubts.

Solia’s guards who were in charge of the main plaza realized the situation and were running toward this way.

The guards were wearing armors.

It looked like they were skilled, but Riley thought they couldn’t stop this girl.

That was because,

“What are you?! If you don’t surrender immediately… KUUAAAK!”

One by one, the guards who were charging in like that were struck by her magic attacks and either became burned charcoal or shattered crystals after becoming frozen solid.

‘Sera wouldn’t be able to handle this. Looks like someone at least at Ian’s level should come.’

Riley looked around to assess the situation.

The damage was piling up, but he couldn't sense anyone capable of stopping her coming this way.

'Ugh... The dumasses from Erengium... Now would be the time to step up, yet they don't have a grip on their nerves.'

When the carriage turned over as it got destroyed, perhaps they hit their head or sustained injuries from the magic attack. The two Young Masters from the Erengium house were bleeding from their heads and lying unconscious.

'I have to stop this?'

Under the mask, Riley cringed his face.

It was cool to see the magic, but it looked like he was not liking the idea of having to do something himself.

"Fireball."

With her chanting, the girl created a Fireball and immediately launched it toward Riley.

Riley, who was watching the situation from a roof, flicked his tongue and leaped to another roof.

BOOM!

With an explosive sound, the roof that Riley was standing a moment ago was destroyed and engulfed in flames.

‘But, really… she is fighting really comfortably.’

Upon setting foot on another roof, Riley looked at the girl who only changed the direction of her hand.

It looked like she was about to use magic yet again.

In light of this, Riley’s look on his eyes changed.

‘Magic… Should I really try learning it once?’

At least, unlike hard labor of swinging sword, it looked way more comfortable to go bam bam and shoot high-powered magic attacks from a distance like she was doing.

Other miscellaneous magic could be convenient as well, and Riley was thinking how nice it would be to have the teleportation ability.

“Hm.”

“… Ice Lance.”

While Riley was deep in thoughts, appearing to have readied her magic, the three-fingered girl under the rag created a bounder-sized icicle with her magic spell chant and shot it toward Riley.

“How about you realize what’s happening a little by now?”

Riley unsheathed the sword on his waist and swung his right arm at a speed far greater than the icicle that was flying toward him.

In the end, the icicle was able to get close to Riley, but it was still impossible for it to deal any damage to Riley.

“…?!”

Under the rag, the girl’s expression twitched.

It was because the icicle that she sent was cut clean in half without any sound and crashed to the ground.

“What… What are you doing? Nainie! Kill that bastard! I said kill him!”

Her voice was hysteric.

After easily slicing the ice magic that was launched at him, he turned his head toward where the voice was coming from.

The main character of the voice was shivering on her shoulders and quickly walked to the back of the girl under the rag when she saw Riley looking at her.

“Ugh…”

The woman, who cringed her face for a moment due to the girl’s stench, firmed her face again and ordered the girl,

“Nainie, hurry up and just kill him… We are running out of time. I have faith in you?”

“All right. Beta. Just trust me. I will get it done. I will kill him. I will kill him fast.”

Riley dusted off the sword he used to slice through the ice magic. With a gaze that looked like how one stares at something he finds to be an annoying pest, Riley looked at the woman standing behind the girl.

‘That woman?’

It was when Riley first arrived at Solia.

It was the woman from the ‘pickpocket incident’ that he watched as he was drinking a brown-sugar beer.

That was not all.

It was the same woman that targeted their wallets when he was enjoying his time together with Iris taking a walk through street vendors.

‘Really, Ian and Sera sure have big hearts. They are too kind.’

If there was no way to make it certain that they never bother Riley’s party again, Sera and Ian should have taken more extreme measures. That would have been the best.

Riley thought Sera and Ian eliminated that woman back then. Upon realizing that it was not the case, Riley sighed.

‘It cannot be helped.’

There was someone in front of him that was saying she would bring him more bothersome troubles if she was left to her devices. Therefore, there was only once option that Riley could take.

‘Now that it turned out like this. I should clean up bothersome stuff and take care of other businesses as well.’

Riley looked at the magic appearing in mid air, and then he looked at the eyes of the girl casting the magic.

It was intriguing.

Other than a ghastly appearance, her eye behind her hair could be seen.

Her eye looked familiar to Riley. He felt like he had seen it somewhere before.

'... Should I go for a test run?'

Riley lowered his chin as he fiddled with the sword's handle.

*

Immediately capture and bring in the culprit that shattered the mana measurement boulder.

It was the assignment given to Peruda the day before yesterday, the one who was in charge of the Magic Tower's first floor.

The assignment even had a time limit of, 'before the great mage Astroa notices it.'

"Ha..."

He was in mid-twenties.

He had a whole life ahead of him.

However, his face was shaded in shadows.

“At this rate, am I going to get kicked out of the Magic Tower?”

‘Am I going to be able to handle the assignment within the time limit?’

The answer was, ‘impossible.’

Peruda was thinking that way.

It wasn’t that he didn’t have a guess on who might have done it.

However.

“Riley? Did you say Riley? If ‘Riley’ is his name, isn’t that the lazy swordsman from Iphelleta house?”

The very last visitor that came before the boulder incident happened was the most likely suspect. Since that guest even touched the mana measurement boulder with his bare hand, there was no need to doubt.

That should be the case.

However, Peruda shook his head.

“No. That does not make sense at all.”

However, that was insufficient.

There was not enough evidence.

“It is impossible to do…”

Peruda murmured.

It was a problem that the suspect is ‘Riley,’ the one that scored average on the mana estimate sphere.

From his mansion, Riley was infamous for being a lazy-ass. In fact, he was even called a vegetable. The rumors about the third born Young Master were pretty widespread.

The boulder was for monsters, and even Astroa could not cause crack on it by touching it with bare hands. Yet Riley was able to make it fall apart by fiddling with it a little?

It was nonsense.

Every little kids passing by would have answered the same.

“…Um?”

BOOM!

Coming down from the Right Solia, Peruda was heading toward the main plaza, and he tilted his head in an angle as he heard the explosion coming from nearby.

“Fireball?”

BOOM!

After hearing the noise again, Peruda narrowed his eyes.

‘This burning sound... This explosion noise... It is definitely Fireball?’

He got on his knees to put his hand on the ground. Peruda gently closed his eyes.

‘Indeed. It is Fireball.’

Using a detection magic of his own, Peruda realized that the noise just now was from Fireball, a mid-level magic used by mages. Peruda opened his eyes and got up.

“Run everyone!”

“It’s a mage! A mage is running amok!”

From the main plaza's direction, there were people running away from it. Having realized what's happening, Peruda gritted his teeth.

"What kind of crazy bastard is using attack magic in the main plaza without permission?"

Even now, yet another explosion sound continued.

The sounds of people's screams were getting more intense, and Peruda's face became sharper in response.

"I must stop this..."

Peruda didn't know how to use magic that would enable him to fly, so he hastened his steps.

Fortunately, it appeared the situation was happening nearby.

"... Uh?"

Eventually, Peruda arrived at the scene of Hell. He gave a blank stare as he opened his mouth.

"That... that is?"

The one he saw first was the girl under the rags who had three fingers and shooting magic indiscriminately.

“That… That is… Why here?!”

Pitch-black colored magic.

Black colored flame, ice, and lightning magic. Peruda watched them with a blank stare. His lips was shivering as he murmured.

“Was it not dis…disposed of?”

“Fireball.”

The girl under the rag who Peruda was staring at used magic once again.

Peruda was moving his firm gaze to where the magic was headed. A question mark floated up on his face.

“…?”

In that direction, there was a man wearing a mask. He was deflecting the magic attacks with ease with a sword.

Chapter 37 - Sounds Of Explosions In The Main Plaza (Part 2)

The man who wore a mask swung his sword once again.

He swung it with such speed that a blur could be seen in the air along the path of his sword.

‘Ugh. Again?’

Nainiae’s face was already hideous, but now it was getting worse with her cringing.

By the looks of it, his sword appeared to be an ordinary iron sword without any special magical device attached to it.

However, just by swinging his sword, her opponent somehow destroyed all of the magic attacks that were targeted towards him.

‘I only heard theories about that being possible. To think I am witnessing it for real.’

Right around when the magic she launched dissipated, Nainiae coughed.

The black lights floating in the air shook for a moment.

‘No. Beta believes in me. I must return the favor. I must endure this…’

A narrow stream of black blood was flowing down from her lips.

Not wanting anyone to notice, Nainiae wiped off the blood using topside of her hand and started to cast magic once again.

Looking at the situation, she realized that, instead of shooting a powerful magic, it might be more effective to shoot smaller magic attacks in large numbers at once.

“Magic Missile.”

Numerous Magic Missiles appeared everywhere, not just in front of her hand, but also behind her. They looked like black, semi-transparent arrows.

With difficulty, Nainiae took a deep breath as her hand faltered.

If felt like her burnt face, which was from a chemical when she was at the Magic Tower, was hurting more than usual. The parts of her hand where her fingers were cut off were hurting as well.

‘Eat this!’

The situation changed.

Up to this point, there was one shot of magic coming at Riley at a time, but this time, there were several dozens of them.

Despite this,

“Is it a different magic this time?”

Nainiae’s masked opponent was not startled at all by the change in numbers. He was still calmly swinging his sword.

As if he was saying he had no reason to strike every single one of the missiles, he dodged a few and deflected a few.

For the ones he deflected, he deflected them toward other magic missiles to change their trajectory so that they would not hit him.

By this man’s swordplay, all of those magic missiles, which were launched for the sole purpose of piercing through this one man, ended up being scattered to the air or striking nearby buildings and structures.

“… They are getting lighter.”

After a quick sword dance, having completed his finish stance, the masked man said toward Nainiae in front of him,

“Unlike before, that was pretty light. I am not talking about just the decrease in numbers. The amount of mana in each is lighter as

well.”

“…”

‘Is she trying to figure me out? Or…’

The masked man stopped talking. Instead, he looked at Nainiae’s chin.

Perhaps she was not able to completely wipe off all of the blood last time.

On her chin, there was still a bit of stain from her black blood.

“Nainiae. You can win, right?”

“…”

”Nainiae! Answer me! You can win, right?!”

From hearing Beta shouting from behind, Nainiae said,

“… Yes.”

She answered in exhaustion.

Her vision was already blurring.

It felt like she was about to collapse to the side, but Nainiae answered,

“Trust me. Beta, the favor you asked me… I will make sure to get it done.”

Along Nainiae’s cheek, which was red from the burn injury, a stream of pitch-black tear flew down.

It appeared that she had made up her mind.

She was bent on taking that man’s life.

***

‘Something… is not right.’

Riley sharpened his eyes. He thought about all of the magic attacks he deflected or dodged so far, and he suddenly turned his head.

Something was definitely odd.

Riley learned about the basics of magic from books.

Although he heard supplementary explanations during the visit to the Magic Tower, this was still not making sense.

‘The color of magic described in books were not like this.’

In the books that explained magic, to make the descriptions easier to understand, there were pictures, and they were not in black and white.

They were colored pictures.

‘But these…’

Riley looked around to see the aftermath of the places struck by the girl’s magic attacks.

Buildings were burning in black flames.

Long magic icicles nailed to the Main Plaza’s brick-patterned walkways were exuding cold air from their black surfaces.

Even sparks occasionally happening at one of street vendors were black.

Everything was black.

‘Is it a special type?’

This was like what Riley observed in his past life.

Riley was thinking about those that were extraordinarily talented or displayed exceptional abilities.

Those people, just like the girl under the rag he was facing right now, had unique colors or ways of movements.

‘Somehow, the situation is not looking good.’

Riley was looking at the aftermath of the magic attacks, but then he turned his head back toward the girl.

The color was not looking all that great.

It wasn’t a rich or classy black. Instead, the color felt disgusting.

It felt like… sewage water.

‘It looks like she is not able to control her mana properly either.’

Riley could not confirm it to fine details, but he could certainly tell that mana inside the girl’s body was running amok.

He guessed that she is coughing blood because of this, although there must be a different reason for her blood being black.

“Um?”

Riley looked at the girl under the rag.

Looking at her chin again, Riley's eyelids twitched.

It was because there was yet another black line being drawn toward her chin.

It was tears.

'Looks like she is not in the right mind.'

Her eyes were unsettled and constantly shaking, and there were black tears flowing below.

Even at a glance, Riley could tell that it was not normal.

'I think I better not leave things like this.'

He could not afford to let things get out of hands from his plan.

Riley fixed his grip on his sword and concentrated.

Based on the atmosphere, Riley was certain that the next one was going to be an extremely powerful one, far beyond the magic attacks launched at him so far.

“Look over there.”

“Someone is fighting?”

“Does that mean… we don’t have to run away now?”

Riley corrected his stance to be ready for the next magic attack.

Riley was waiting for the attack to come, but he realized that voices of people could be heard, one after the other.

Now Riley had foolish spectators who do not value their lives.

‘God damn it…’

Under the mask, Riley’s face cringed as he remembered something from the past,

‘… Over there! Look! It’s a brave warrior! A brave warrior appeared!’

‘… Ah… Now we are saved! Saved!’

As Riley heard them shouting, at an instant, his mood plunged down to the worst. For the moment at least, nobody in the Main Plaza was calling him the ‘brave warrior,’ but the situation at the moment was very similar to another situation Riley remembered

from his past life.

‘I should just… All of them…’

Under the mask, Riley’s two eyes were starting to fill with deadly aura.

Riley was certainly aware of people starting to gather to watch, one by one after the other.

Their faces were full of anticipations and expectations.

They were hoping that Riley would stop the girl under the rag.

There were people starting to gather.

‘All of them…’

Eventually, Riley’s and the girl’s eyes met.

“…?!”

It could have been that the girl detected Riley’s deadly aura.

She was in the middle of preparing a shot of a giant magic, but suddenly, her shoulders were shaking.

“… Beta.”

“Uh, yes?”

With an almost extinguished voice, the girl said to the woman behind her,

“You must run…”

“What? Nainiae? What do you mean…”

“Trust me. Believe what I have to say. That man, he is going to kill everyone here. That’s why.”

The girl under the rag gritted her teeth.

It looked like she finished preparing the magic.

“When I signal… You must run. You can survive. You, at least.”

“No, No way…”

“It is all right, Beta. As for me, even if I died here…”

“I said it won’t do! You useless bitch!”

"...?"

Because of an unexpected yelling from the woman, the girl's shoulders were shaking even more.

"No way! You still have a job left to do! You can't die already! Before you finish your job, you can't die. If you died already, you... you will become just a trash that couldn't return my good will of having faith in you! You got that?"

The little girl's delicate lips started to tremble.

"Bu... but Beta, this is because you said you believe in me... That is why I..."

"I rescued you. Since I saved your life... and since I fed you and provided you with shelter, you need to at least do your part, isn't that right?! Why do you think we kept you around when you make us puke just from looking at you?! You! You are hopeless!"

"No, it is not true... I'm..."

The girl's voice was shaking. She murmured to deny the woman's words.

Under the rag, on the girl's face, a sense of panic could be felt.

Instead of feeling betrayed, it looked like she was seriously hurt from hearing words like ‘you make us puke’ or ‘disgusting bitch.’

No matter how she appeared to be on the outside, the girl was still not even in her twenties.

“Ugh… Ugh… You disgusting bitch… It is no wonder why you were thrown out from the Magic Tower as w…”

The woman that had been pouring out horrible words suddenly stopped.

It was because an intense aura of murderous intent, the kind that even an ordinary person could feel, ambushed her from her back.

“Ik! Uu, Ah… Uu…”

The woman clumsily stepped back and fell on her butt.

Because she could not use her hands, she fell down hard. Tears were forming in her eyes.

They were tears induced by fear.

“… Spectating ends here.”

Riley was walking toward them while relentlessly exuding his

murderous aura.

“A trash that couldn’t return my good will of having faith in you? What a great line.”

Riley chose the easiest way to neutralize a pesky runt.

In order to take the woman’s life, Riley raised his sword.

The lassie kept on doing things that Riley hated. He had no reason to let her live.

He figured that killing her now would also help him fall asleep at night better.

Riley’s sword glowed with mana.

“Uu.”

Choked by fear, the woman tightly closed her eyes.

The girl under the rug was in a state of panic, but she bit her lips and blocked Riley’s front.

“… Pillar of Fire!”

Before Riley could even say ‘Out of my way,’ the magic that the

girl under the rag prepared was activated.

A red magic circle was drawn Under Riley's feet, and a large pillar of fire revealed itself above it.

'You are really dense…'

Inside the pillar of fire, Riley narrowed his eyes and turned his body wide.

After lowering his upper body by a little, he swung his sword like a windmill. With a small shouting, he straightened up his body.

"…?!"

WHOOSH!

By the whirlwind generated from Riley standing in the middle, the flame rising from below expanded and then dissipated to the air.

"H… How?"

The girl was standing there looking disappointed after watching her magic, which she cast with all of her remaining strength, being torn apart by a piece of sword. Riley stood beside the girl and looked at her.

"..."

Even after hearing horrible insults from the person she trusted, she still stepped into save that person. Watching her, Riley felt like he was looking at his former self from the past life, a naïve fool who was taken advantage of.

"B... Beta! Run... KUK?!"

The girl quickly turned her head toward Beta who was sitting on her butt on the ground, but the girl suddenly strained and opened her eyes wide.

It was because, along with a gust of wind blowing toward her face, there was a sudden and blunt impact at her stomach.

"Please..."

The girl under the rag abruptly collapsed to her knees. While grabbing on to a tip of Riley's pants fabric, she fell forward.

Her three fingers desperately held on, but soon they lost their strength.

Riley knocked her out carefully so she would not be able to regain her consciousness for a while.

"Ah..."

Watching the girl helplessly faint in front of her, the woman gave a blank stare with her mouth open.

With eyes sickened with fear, the woman sitting on the ground looked up toward Riley.

“I don’t have that big of a heart, so, for your attempts at me, ending it with just two of your hands won’t do.”

By carrying murderous intents in his eyes, Riley immobilized his target. Riley raised his sword and swung it without a moment of hesitation.

“… Stop!”

However…

As if it was obstructed by something, the sword that Riley swung made a ‘TING!’ sound as if it struck a layer that was invisible. His sword was not able to cut off the target’s head.

“…?”

As he realized that his sword was blocked by something, Riley narrowed his eyes and started to look for the man who shouted ‘Stop!’ a moment ago.

The man was up above the air.

Wearing a robe with purple and dark green colors properly mixed in, the old man was holding a yellow staff with a blue orb embedded in it. He was staring down at Riley from above.

“Tsk…”

Riley kicked his tongue.

It was because he noticed that the old man floating on the air possessed extraordinary mana.

That was not all.

‘Did I drag this out for too long.’

It wasn’t just the old mage.

From the Left Solia and the Solia Castle, there were people with pretty powerful energies approaching.

Their energies were at a caliber that was on a whole another level from ordinary guards.

They were certainly loyal knights from the Solia Castle, the real deals.

That wasn’t all.

Among the people coming this way, it felt like there were people from the Holy Temple mixed in.

‘Ha…’

Riley sighed and cringed under the mask as the situation headed toward an unwanted direction.

In his dignified appearance and attitude, the old man floating in the air asked,

“Who are you?”

“…”

Riley did not answer.

As if he decided that the silence was the answer, the old man pointed his staff toward Riley and continued,

“If you won’t open your mouth, then I have no choice but to demonstrate my power.”

In front of the staff that the old man put forth, a red-hot flame

appeared.

Unlike the magic that the girl under the rag was using, this one had a different color.

It was a Fireball.

“I, Astroa the grand mage, shall handle this personally.”

The old mage flying in the air, Astroa, was smiling with arrogance.

Chapter 38 - Sounds Of Explosions In The Main Plaza (Part 3)

There was a call from Peruda.

‘It looks like you should come to the main plaza.’

The old man shook his head.

He leisurely finished his dinner, and now, the old man was at the Magic Tower’s basement, watching his twentieth specimen’s drug injection result.

‘Hey Peruda… I am the kind that does not move unless it is for something extraordinary.’

He was the grand mage representing Solia’s King.

Manufacturing drugs and selling them to accumulate wealth, and using that accumulated wealth to perform all sorts of cruel experiments, he had chosen an unbelievably unethical path to get to where he was today.

However, he was Astroa, practitioner of the Seven Circles magic. For humans, it was a level that one in ten thousand mages may or may not reach.

He had more than enough right to refuse Peruda’s request with

the reason he provided.

‘The thing that was thrown away from the Magic Tower is running amok here.’

‘What?’

However, the call from Peruda this time made Astroa, someone who is only self-satisfying, attentively raise his ears.

‘It was on its way to the grave, but it is moving? Huhu. Isn’t that something.’

The tentacle of the plant that Peruda used to communicate was twitching.

Sitting on a grand chair at the Magic Tower’s basement, Astroa was enjoying the screams of his specimen, but he got off his ass.

‘In that case, maybe I should go and watch? It might be fun blowing out a candle.’

‘But…’

“Um?’

‘There is a man fighting a disposable asset.’

***

“Huh?! It is the grand mage Astroa!”

“Alright. Everything will be all right now!”

And now…

The citizen’s voices were explaining the current situations.

Astroa entered the scene in the main plaza.

“… I, the grand mage Astroa will handle this personally.”

Astroa arrived at the main plaza using flight magic and discovered a man swinging a sword at a frightened woman. Astroa used barrier, which is one of defensive spells, and blocked his movement.

‘Hm. He won’t speak? Is he mute?’

Astroa formed a Fireball in front of his treasured staff, and he tilted his head sideways.

The man in the mask, despite being in front of a grand mage’s Fireball, was not faltering.

‘He is quite skilled. The way he struck down magic with his sword was not ordinary.’

According to Peruda, the man in the mask was a skilled practitioner.

He was a man who only used a sword to neutralize the magic attacks launched at him by ‘that thing’ discarded from the Magic Tower.

“Hm, I don’t know what kind of mutt you are or which hole you crawled out from.”

As if it could not wait any longer, the Fireball that appeared in front of Astroa’s staff started to vibrate. It looked like it was urging to be launched soon.

“The fact that you swung your sword to a frightened woman, and the fact that you are impudently messing around inside Solia, the grand mage Astroa’s stage… No matter which one I look at, it cannot go unnoted.”

Soon thereafter, hiding his true intent, Astroa made a smile as he launched the Fireball.

His target was the man who wore a mask looking up towards him.

“I have no choice. I will take care of this personally.”

Of course, because the Fireball’s explosion range was quite wide, there was a possibility that the ‘frightened woman’ and other citizens could get mixed in the explosion, but Astroa didn’t care about the aftermath.

To him, the important thing was not the safety of the citizens. It was the citizens’ perception.

‘He is supposed to be highly skilled, right? In that case…’

The grand mage admired by the people of Solia was now, with eyes full of curiosity, staring at the man who wore a mask.

The people’s gaze looked like they were looking at something interesting.

‘His energy itself was strange. He isn’t just some nobody that could handle mana.’

Remembering what Peruda said, Astroa focused mana to his eyes.

He did that to ensure he wouldn’t lose sight of the man’s movements.

Also, it was because it could be dangerous if a skilled swordsman closed in with a sword.

Even though he was floating in the air, he could not let his guard down.

“Now, wait, look at that over there…”

“No way… It’s not, right? The grand mage Astroa wouldn’t…”

In light of the magic launched by Astroa from the sky, the citizens on the Solia’s main plaza were gradually starting to take steps back.

“If it is this much…”

Finally, a voice could be heard from inside the mask.

Because it was a low voice, Astroa didn’t understand it and tilted his head.

“Um?”

The masked man fixed his grip on his sword and took a stance that Astroa had never seen in his life.

*

Riley was fixated on Astroa’s magic attack coming at him from

above. As he cringed from its brightness, he tightened his grip on the sword with his fingers.

‘There are three directions I need to keep in check.’

In his head, Riley went over the things he had to do once more, and soon, he started to carry out the moves he practiced in his head.

At this point, the thing he had to take care of first was Astroa’s Fireball flying at him.

‘First.’

Riley loaded his sword with mana. With a big motion on his right arm, he pulled his body.

While he was deflecting multiple magic attacks from the girl under the rag, Riley noticed one thing. It was the fact that he could interfere with the power called magic using a sword.

‘I’ll divide it into three, and then…’

After loading the sword with mana, by slashing precisely through the center of magic, it was possible to cut or deflect the magic.

That meant that, to take it to another level, the experiences so far was suggesting that doing something like what Riley was planning

would also be possible.

'All at once…'

Riley's sword was drawing a blue line from being loaded with mana.

An aura blade.

It was an ultimate sword technique that only a swordsman who knew how to handle mana could use.

"…?!"

Astroa, who was floating on the air, had his facial expression changed rapidly.

It was because, in the blink of an eye, Riley divided the Fireball into three.

That was not all.

'… I should be generous with what I made!'

The three Fireball parts were changing their trajectories with different angles following Riley's sword movements.

And soon thereafter, Riley forcefully spread them out.

“That, lunatic!”

Astroa cursed.

It wasn’t just because his magic attack was no longer a Fireball as a whole. Not only had it been turned into pieces of flames, one of it changed its direction and was flying toward him.

“… Waterball!”

Astroa rushed to cast a magic spell of the opposite element.

After neutralizing the piece of flame, Astroa looked below, not able to believe what he just saw.

“W… where?!”

Still looking surprised, Astroa prepared a detection type of magic and turned his head toward all over the places.

The mystery swordsman, the one who cut the grand mage’s Fireball into three pieces and turned its trajectory to the caster, had disappeared without a trace.

‘Wait, it was definitely cut to three pieces?’

Astroa who was in the air, turned his head rapidly.

It was because there was only one piece of flame that was launched back at him.

‘Then what about the other two?’

The other two pieces were each headed to a different direction.

Astroa checked the mana in the destinations of the flames and wrecked his eyebrows as if he wanted to say it was unbelievable.

One of the flames headed to of a blockade on the Left Solia’s entrance, formed by the royal guards of the castle.

The other was going to the entrance of the Solia Castle, where the people from the temple were rushing toward the main plaza.

‘It can’t be…’

Astroa was rolling his brain to figure it out.

As he was giving a blank stare to check the directions of the flames, to his back…

“…?!”

A sword that left its master flew at him.

Astroa noticed a sword spinning, carrying rotational force as it was approaching him. He opened his eyes wide, turned his hand toward his back and started to recite a magic spell.

“Barrier!”

By a very close timing, a barrier appeared in front of Astroa. However, it was not powerful enough to stop a sword carrying mana.

The barrier was torn apart, and the sword that came out of nowhere pierced into his arm.

“...KUUK!”

There was no need to wonder who could have been holding this sword that flew at him just now.

It had to be that masked swordsman.

It was Riley, no doubt.

‘Such impudence! How dare he do this to me!’

Astroa turned his eyes red with veins. He looked around the area to find the bastard.

"..."

While he was scanning the area, when he tilted his head down to look at the main plaza, all he could find was a corpse of a woman just lying there in middle of an ocean of blood.

*

"... What's that?"

On the pathway leading to the main plaza from the Solia Castle, the people from the Solia Temple, who were rushing on their way, suddenly stopped and tilted their heads sideway as they observed the lump of flame flying in their direction.

"It looks like it is headed this way?"

"Please step aside for a moment."

Priesia concluded that the flame closing in was unusual in size, so she decided to have the priests and holy knights to stand behind her.

"Holy Barrier."

A golden light appeared around Priesia's body.

As if she used her holy power, soon, a round-shaped layer large enough to protect everyone from the temple including Priesia, appeared.

It was a protective layer at a whole another level from something that could be cast by ordinary priests.

"Hm..."

With her hand extended forward, after neutralizing the flame that flew at them, Priesia wrinkled her eyebrows. It was because the flame was quite powerful.

"This flame?"

"It seems like it was the grand mage Astroa's flame..."

"A grand mage from the Magic Tower attacking the priestess? How could that be!?"

"..."

Priesia narrowed her eyes and gazed upon the sky.

As one of the priests on the back said, in the sky, there was an old

man that appeared to be Astroa flying in the air using flight magic.

She couldn't tell the expression on his face, but at the moment, he was not looking at Priesia's direction. Instead he was looking toward the main plaza.

"It seems like he wasn't targeting us when he launched the magic attack."

"Pardon?"

"Anyway, it would be best if we went over there quickly as well."

According to the divine message from the Irenetsa, Priesia had to find Riley at once.

However... She assessed that there was another matter in the main plaza that was even more important.

*

In the Solia Castle, the people from the temple left the scene as if they suddenly had an urgent matter to take care of. After that, all of sudden, Sera and Ian was left by themselves. Sera asked,

"What could it be?"

“Um?”

“Why is the priestess Priesia looking for our Young Master Riley?”

“…Hm.”

Ian started to pretend to be doing other things as if he had no idea.

It was not like he actually had no idea, but he was uncomfortable about uttering it out.

Riley dropped a bomb by saying Priesia is ugly. He said it to a priestess that represents a temple.

Even royalty couldn’t say such things.

“… Come on. What is it? Ian?”

While Sera and Ian were deep in thoughts and giving blank stares to the empty space, they could hear a voice from the back.

“…?!”

“Ah! Young Master!”

While thinking about what transpired in the temple a few days ago, Ian's shoulder shivered when he heard the nonchalant voice.

On the other hand, Sera sighed in relief and welcomed Riley.

"You were all here already?"

By Riley's looks, it appeared that he didn't run in to the priestess.

Ian broke cold sweat and forced himself to ask,

"W… where have you been?"

"As I said to my mother, I went to the restroom? To look for you."

Looking at Riley, who was cringing his face as if he was unsatisfied with something, Iris broke into laughter.

"Looks like you all just missed each other on different paths. It is not like there is only one restroom here."

The castle was huge.

As Iris said, this place didn't have just one restroom.

Even so, could he possibly get confused about the location of the

restroom that he went to only a moment ago?

Ian pouted his lips as he thought about it.

‘Looks like the cat’s out of the bag.’

It was Riley, the one that sang songs about how much he hated bothersome matters.

If he ran into the priestess that was looking for him, it was obvious that something bothersome would unfold.

Like an animal with the instinct for survival, Riley probably sensed a bothersome matter coming his way and chose to take his leave. Or so, Ian concluded.

Sera immediately tidied up Riley’s clothes like a maid and asked toward Iris,

“Now that Young Master is here as well, shall we go back?”

“Let’s do that.”

Iris nodded and started walking first.

In the arena, where the matches ended for the day, there was a commotion for a moment because people from the temple came...

but now, most of the people, the people from the temple or the nobilities that came to watch the matches, have already left.

“Ah... I wonder what kind of spectacular tournament will unfold tomorrow. I look forward to it.”

“It seems that of all of us, Sera is enjoying the tournament the most.”

In light of Sera’s words that was uttered due to not being able to contain her excitement, Iris suppressed her laugh and responded.

“Ah, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be all getting excited about this...”

“No. No. I only meant it as a good thing.”

Riley gave a blank stare toward Sera and Iris, who were walking in front of him, and quickly turned his head to look at Ian.

It wasn’t certain what exactly he was thinking so hard about, but Ian held his chin and stared blankly towards the ground.

“Ian.”

“Yes, Yes?”

“The thing I told you about earlier, was it taken care of

properly?”

Riley peeked a smile and asked Ian.

“Ah, if you are talking about the young masters from Erengium… Yes. Although I was worried because I ran into the priestess in the middle of it all.”

Ian didn’t quite finish his explanation as he scratched the side of his head.

Practically, Ian felt like he didn’t do much of anything.

All he did was watch as Riley made the two men freeze in fear from his murderous aura. He ended up only moving the two men who were frozen.

“… Well done.”

Looking at Ian, Riley smiled once more.

His right hand slowly moved to toward his back pocket where he had shoved the mask in.

‘No matter how I think about it…’

Because the timing was bad, Riley had to return without

finishing his business at the main plaza.

Although it was a bother, he thought that he should go out once more in the late evening. He fiddled with the mask and pulled his chin.

Chapter 39 - Sounds Of Explosions In The Main Plaza (Part 4)

It was at Solia's main plaza.

An unexpected disaster turned this place into a complete mess. The priestess who made an appearance was like a blessing of rainfall after a drought or an oasis in middle of a desert.

"Oh. It's lady Priesia."

"Lady Priesia..."

"Goddess Irenetsa, please look after us."

Priesia responded to the people's desperate voices with caring hand gestures and smiles, then she checked the situation in the surrounding area once again.

There were several obliterated buildings and many people who were either injured or dead.

"How many are there?"

"Twenty injured and four dead. Considering what happened, casualties like this could be considered as pretty low."

The storm had past already.

Priesia, who only managed to arrive at the scene after the situation came to an end, cringed.

“Even though the amount of casualties was low, it doesn’t change the fact that we were too late.”

“My apologies. I’m at a loss for words.”

Having heard what Priesia said, a royal knight from the Solia Castle, who was walking besides Priesia, tilted his head down.

The knight was in disbelief. He did not believe something like this could happen inside Solia, a place that enjoyed a prolonged period of peace.

He also looked rather angry at himself, for the fact that he wasn’t there to step forward in the moment when people were in danger.

“I think I will have to send a prayer. Sir Knight, please, will you step aside for a moment?”

“Ah, yes.”

By Priesia’s hand gesture, the royal knight nodded as if he understood and stepped back.

Soon thereafter, Priesia, with her hands together, started to pray.

The prayer was for those who lost their lives today in the incident.

“That’s the priestess’s prayer?”

“She glows just from praying… As expected…”

The people, who were staring with blank faces at the priestess’s prayers, turned their gazes toward where the bodies of the four dead people were placed.

Each with a white fabric covering the face, they were motionless.

Around them, their families or acquaintances gathered. With grieving faces, they were praying like Priesia.

It was not much, but because the priestess was there and given the situation, it was still a grand and proper funeral.

“Beta, I…”

Among the people gathered next to the dead, there was a man in shambles who appeared to be from the Lower Solia.

It appeared that he was either a family or an acquaintance of the

only female among the dead.

“One of those things from Lower Solia came as well.”

“Ugh. Just looking at it feels like I can smell the stench.”

“Does that mean that woman is also from Lower Solia?”

“It seems so? She looks quite pretty though.”

[TL: He said this even though her face was covered in a fabric. Perhaps he was referring to the rest of her body and her clothing. As explained in past chapters, Beta was unusually clean in her appearance.]

Looking at the only man standing next to the dead woman, people who were watching the funeral murmured.

It looked like the people were not happy with the fact that there is someone from Lower Solia in this holy ceremony.

“By the way, if she sends prayers like this, by chance... is it supposed to bring back the dead or something like that?”

She was a priestess from the holy temple.

Someone asked with an expectation just in case she possessed such a holy power. Another person, who was watching the funeral ceremony, answered,

“No, reviving the dead people is still not possible.”

It was a disciplined voice.

Gazes of most people who were watching the funeral now turned toward the man.

It appeared that he came from the Magic Tower.

The man with the voice was wearing a robe that could be placed around his shoulders.

“Bringing back the dead is… That’s a different kind, the kind that human beings should not touch.”

The man continued his explanation with his eyes fixated to the ground.

The people watching the funeral gulped as they heard his explanation, and then they turned their gazes toward his back.

“… Peruda.”

“…?”

It was the grand mage that everyone in Solia knew of.

People turned their gazes because Astroa was approaching the man from the back.

“…”

Astroa stood behind Peruda and quietly murmured something to his ears.

The people wondered what they could be talking about.

The man named Peruda cringed his face.

“Yes… I… understand.”

Although people didn’t know what was going on, they could see Peruda nodding politely.

Also, he did not speak anymore.

***

In the main plaza, the funeral wasn’t the only occasion happening.

In order to find those responsible for the disaster, the royal knights apprehended a few people who were thought to be

suspects.

“I’ll ask you. Why were you headed to Lower Solia?”

“There was someone I needed to meet there.”

At the moment, two of the people included in the list of suspects were the sons of the Erengium house, who were headed to Lower Solia from across the main plaza.

“Someone you needed to meet?”

“We have no reason to tell you that much.”

“What, just…”

“Hey! You look like you know how things work. It is no good to get involved with private matters of nobilities. We have absolutely nothing to do with this incident.”

A servant from Erengium house who just arrived insisted on claiming ignorance to the royal knight.

The royal knight was not making any progress in his investigation.

In fact, he could not keep nobilities under arrest for a long time.

He sighed deeply, enough to even cause the ground to sink and then looked at the two sons of the Erengium house waiting behind their servant.

“…”

“Big bro. Are you all right? Big bro?”

The young master that appeared to be the older brother was looking around the area nervously as if he was possessed by a ghost.

As for the young master that appeared to be the younger brother, he could not sit still as if he was too worried about his older brother. It looked like the younger brother was desperately waiting to go back with everyone and rest.

“From the start, didn’t I explain to you earlier that all this was caused by magic??”

”That… that is true, but…”

“In that case, the Erengium house had nothing to do with this incident. Magic from a house of swordsmen? It is a ridiculous idea. Sir Knight. Don’t you think so too?”

“Hm…”

BAAM!

The servant from Erengium slammed the desk with his fist and stood up.

“Moreover, we are victims. The dead people in the funeral ceremony right now include one of the servants from Erengium!”

“Ah, Yes… Yes… For now, please calm down. I am not saying that the house of Erengium did something wrong.”

“Just what exactly about your accusations could possibly mean that? Huh?!”

The servant didn’t care anymore for honorary speech and started to speak casually.

In his thoughts, the royal knight cursed at the nitpicky nobles and hastily wrote something on the paper on the desk.

“Yes, I understand. Still, this matter is not resolved yet… In case we contact you later, you have to come.”

PATTT!

The servant snatched the paper away from the hand of the royal knight who presented it forward to him. The servant cringed as he complained,

“Darn! What a nitpicky man!”

“…”

Meanwhile, with the paper literally snatched from his hand after he presented it, a blood vein bulged on the royal knight’s forehead.

“Young Masters. You have waited for a long time. For today, it would be best if we just went back. Let’s go eat first.”

Watching the servant tumbling his way to his young masters and saying they should go back for the day, the royal knight glared at them as if he was trying to say that they stink.

***

“Uu…”

Nainiae struggled as she raised herself up.

As soon as she raised herself up, she grabbed her aching stomach. Shortly, she shook her head several times and started to look around with a blank face.

She couldn’t see very well because it was dark.

“First, ligh… Uk?”

It was one of the basic magic.

Nainiae was about to cast ‘Light,’ which brings out a floating sphere of light, but she winced.

It was not just her body that was not moving properly at her will. Even the mana inside her body was not moving as she wished.

‘Now that I think about it… Back then…’

It was just before she lost consciousness.

Nainiae remembered that she was knocked out by a blow from the man in the mask. As she realized it, she bit her lips.

Her eye finally started to get used to the darkness. She could slowly make sense out of her surroundings.

“… This place is?”

It was a room filled with spider webs, as if it had been abandoned for a long time.

The hard floor was made of wood, and there was a window that she failed to notice earlier because she was so dazed.

She noticed a faint silver light coming through the window. It was gradually getting brighter. It appeared that the moon was covered by clouds.

It meant it was nighttime.

"..."

Inside a quiet room, considering how she couldn't hear any noise from outside, she figured it must be very late in the night, an early morning when everyone was still asleep.

In order to withstand the pain in her stomach, Nainiae hugged her knees.

'Useless bitch!'

'You are hopeless!'

'It is no wonder why you were thrown out from the Magic Tower!'

She felt like she could hear Beta's words.

"No. I'm..."

Nainiae murmured.

She tried to protect Beta with her life, but could only hear those harsh words in return.

Instead of feeling anguished from being betrayed, a sense of self-hatred was slowly coming forward. Nainiae buried her face between her knees.

“In order to return your good will for having faith in me… That was why…”

Nainiae’s hands, which were hugging her knees, were suddenly grabbed firmly by someone.

Her hands, which were shaking as if she was going through the emotion of anguish, froze.

“… Are you awake?”

In front of her, she could hear a familiar voice.

Having identified the source of the voice, Nainiae lifted her face from between her knees and looked at the person in front of her.

She couldn’t see his face very well because of how dim it was, but she definitely recognized the vibe.

It was the boy who knocked her unconscious in the main plaza.

“You are…”

“You are awake.”

The boy took a few steps closer to Nainiae.

She could see his face without the mask.

The boy also seemed to have realized that now Nainiae could see his face.

“Beta… What happened to her?”

Nainiae asked carefully.

“I am not sure?”

The boy, Riley, asked back.

The way he talked was rather mischievous, but his voice sounded serious.

From his serious tone of voice, Nainiae realized it.

That Beta was dead.

"..."

"I will ask you straight."

As if he was saying there was no time to grieve, Riley asked,

"Why were you after m... Well, that doesn't matter. How did you attack me?"

As for the reason why a woman named Beta from Lower Solia attacked him, Riley didn't need to think deep to figure out most of it.

Therefore, Riley changed the question in the middle.

Instead of asking why she attacked him, he was asking 'how' Nainiae figured out that it was Riley under the mask back in the main plaza.

Back then, he was wearing a mask, and he was keeping quiet while laying face down on top of the carriage. Riley asked again,

"That's something even my friends could not have managed to figure out. I need to know how you knew that it was me."

Nainiae looked at Riley with her mind in disarray. She wondered if she should charge at him, saying she should take vengeance against Riley for killing Beta, or if she should express her gratitude for sparing her life.

She was conflicted.

"…"

After agonizing over it in her mind for a while, Nainiae thought that she would rather be left alone.

"… I have no reason to explain it to you."

Nainiae answered as she buried her face between her knees.

Riley was watching Nainiae like that from above. He changed his question and said,

"In that case. You. What are you?"

"…"

"You didn't look like an ordinary mage? The color was different."

This time, the question was purely out of curiosity.

Riley was curious about things like her black-colored magic or the pitch-black mana rotten inside her body.

“Is it because you are a special kind? Is that it?”

Riley asked again.

Nainiae answered again.

“… I have no reason to explain things like that to you.”

“… Is that so?”

Seeing Nainiae hug her knees and staying still, Riley nodded as if he understood and moved his right hand.

The place his hand was headed was the sword on his waist.

“In that case, I have no choice.”

The sound of the sword being drawn from its sheath could be heard.

Because it was early morning, the room was filled with tranquility.

Meanwhile, Riley, with his sword drawn, pointed the tip of the sword right at Nainiae’s neck.

Chapter 40 - Nainiae

To the people in the Magic Tower, she was called a 'disposed product,' but even someone like her had a name.

'Nainiae, you are all I have.'

'Yes, mommy! Just believe in me!'

By a rare chance, a girl heard a rumor about the Magic Tower paying money for a secret experiment. Needing money to feed her only mother, the last of her family, the girl went forth to particpate.

'If I participate... you will really give me money, right?'

'Of course. Really. That's not all. Even an ordinary citizen will get a chance to learn magic.'

'In that case... I will do it.'

'HuHu. Most of the people in Magic Tower are looking forward to your performance. We have faith in you. Please try to endure the experiments best you can.'

'Looking forward...? Faith in...? Yes! Please look forward to it!'

Looking forward...

Faith in…

Just from hearing these few words, she shook off her hesitations and participated in the experiment.

The first day was acceptable.

The second day was more or less like the first.

The troubles began from the third day.

‘… AHHHHAC!!’

‘Endure it. You must endure this, right? If you can’t even withstand this, what are you going to do?’

‘UU… UUK! Stop! Please stop!’

‘We said we have faith in you, didn’t we? You need to endure this much at least. We believe in you.’

‘Stop!!’

The drugs she was asked to swallow on the first and second days were the cause.

Her skin turned dead to pitch-black and then back to pale white. The process repeated.

The pain was far beyond anyone's imagination.

'Kill... Kill me! Please, please kill me!'

'Everyone is looking forward to your performance. You must not die yet.'

Since that day, a day that she no longer recalls, her daily life was changed dramatically.

She spent her days being tied up in chains and screaming in pain, pleading to be killed.

'Please...'

'We believe in you.'

'...'

She wasn't even able to keep food down in her stomach, vomiting immediately after consuming food. Instead of taking meals, she received shots.

In order to forget the pain from the drugs, she bit her fingers,

pasted a monster's bodily fluids or blood on her face or over the top of her arms.

However, the excruciating pain was necessary.

It was the only way to receive money.

Her misery only continued. On another day, an unknown monster's acidic fluid mistaken for something else was poured on her face.

That day, one side of her face including the eye, was completely disfigured.

Before anyone realized, two of her fingers were bitten off and swallowed. The condition of the girl's body and mind was turned to a seriously devastating state.

'Even so... my mother would still recognize me.'

After being turned in to her horrendous appearance, she gradually became used to the pain. Her long grown hair in disarray made her look like a ghost.

In chains, the hobby she found was magic.

'One Circle light magic, 'Light,' with this, I may not need candles anymore.'

Light magic.

Fire magic.

Water magic.

She started with magic spells that were useful for daily living.

Maybe it was due to the drug's power, but she mastered up to Six Circles magic in a record time for a child. After that,

'It has been 2 years. The experiment is over. You may go.'

'R... Really? Now, that medicine... I don't need to take it anymore?'

'That's right. You have done well.'

'Ah...'

After being told by Astroa that the experiment was over, she was full of joy like she could jump up and do a binky like a rabbit. In that high spirit, she started heading back home...

... without hearing the murmur that Astroa said right after,

‘You were the sole survivor. How did you manage to… Nah. It doesn’t matter. Since she will be dead soon, can it still be considered as surviving?’

While coughing black blood, Nainiae returned home.

It appeared that her mother definitely received money from the Magic Tower. In her home, Nainiae’s mother was holding down the fort.

Although she was finally able to come home,

‘Who… are you?’

‘It’s… It’s me. It’s Nainiae.’

She couldn’t recognize her own daughter.

On the contrary, she told Nainiae to never come again with that hideous face and kicked her out.

‘Now… what should I do?’

In the end, having lost her place to go, she returned to the Magic Tower. After going through a few more experiments, with her remaining lifespan numbered to be less than half a year, she was disposed of.

***

“…”

She looked like she had no will or strength left to resist.

Riley was directing his sword to cut off her neck, but he stopped his sword in the middle.

“Did I…”

Nainiae was crunching and hugging her knees as tightly as she could. She whispered,

“… What was it that I did wrong?”

Her voice was completely torn.

It was not certain if it was from self-hatred or resentment toward another.

After her cryptic murmur, Riley’s eyes instantly calmed.

It was because in Riley’s past life, there was a time when he murmured just like her.

“Because they were looking forward to it, because they had

expectations and hopes for me, because they said they are relying on me... I tried very hard. I tried my best, but how come, instead..."

Unlike Riley, who was praised as a brave warrior in his past life, the specific details of Nainiae's situation or how she had been treated was different to some degrees... However, she did the best she could.

To not let anyone down, to live up to their expectations, she tried her hardest with everything she had, yet...

... she heard devastating words from the very person whom she tried to protect. In the end, she couldn't even protect her, and now, she was in this state.

"What should I have done differently?"

Nainiae murmured.

Through the girl's voice, which sounded like she was about to give up on everything, Riley felt like he was watching his former self. He steadied the sword he held forward and said,

"... That was the wrong way."

From hearing Riley's voice, Nainiae's shoulders shivered a little.

“It was wrong from the very first stitch of the needle.”

In his mind, Riley continued,

'You have, and...

... I have.'

Riley lowered his eyes and looked at top of Nainiae's head.

“... Huh?”

Breaking her silence, Nainiae, who had her head buried between her knees until now, slowly tilted up her head and looked at Riley. He said,

“Should I show you a way?”

After asking Nainiae, Riley asked himself in his mind,

What if...

If he could start his entire life over with all of the memories intact, how it would be like?

In that case, he would certainly not do useless things... such as holding a sword as the prophecy foretold or volunteering to fulfill

someone's expectations, and...

Like the girl in front of him, he wouldn't break down either.

"... A way?"

With her forehead finally away from her knees, Nainiae asked back.

Although she only had one good eye, he could feel sincerity and desperation in her gaze.

Riley withdrew his sword that was aimed at her neck.

"It would kind of not feel right to just tell you, so how about we do a trade?"

"A trade?"

"I know what is troubling your mind. I also know the right answer to handling it."

"...?"

"That answer, I will tell you."

Nainiae's mouth opened.

“Why would you tell me that…”

Nainiae wondered how a boy in her age, a nobility from a Count’s house, would know what was troubling her. With a blank face, Nainiae looked at Riley.

In Nainiae’s only good eye, Riley was not cringing anywhere despite looking at her horrifying face.

“In return, I will need an advance.”

***

It was early morning.

A few of important members woke up and gathered at the Magic Tower.

There was a call from Astroa.

“So in the end, you are saying you couldn’t find it.”

While chewing on herbs, Astroa criticized the members, including Peruda, and then sighed deelpy enough to make the ground sink.

“Yes. We are terribly sorry. We don’t know what to say.”

The people from Magic Tower apologized to Astroa by bowing, and then they started to look over their shoulders.

It was because Astroa’s arm was wrapped thick with bandages.

It looked as if he was stabbed by a blade. The bandages had a red stain.

To think that a grand mage of Seven Circles Magic was stabbed by a blade, it was just unbelievable to them.

“Damn…”

Astroa cursed as he pasted a thick amount of ointment to top of the bandage on his arm.

He was already angered from being stabbed by the blade of some unknown runt that crawled out of nowhere and on top of that, he just heard that the mana measurement boulder on the first floor that he treasured very much was destroyed.

“Did you find any evidence?”

“Pardon?”

“I’m talking about the runt that destroyed the boulder! Do you know who did it!”

“About that… although there are few suspects, as for having evidence…”

“Instead of making excuses, if you don’t have any evidence, just say you don’t have any before I burn you to crisp.”

Annoyed, Astroa threw a tantrum as he formed flame above his palm and made a tight fist.

“Ah, yes… My apologies.”

“Damn.”

Watching the man apologize while breaking cold sweat, Astroa cringed his face.

The look on his face was that of someone who stood on poop. Stepped hard and really firmly.

“Looks like the Solia’s Magic Tower is not what it used to be, huh? We lost the runt who wore a mask, lost the bastard that broke the boulder, and now lost the disposed product that we threw away. Ha… Everything! That’s really impressive!”

PHEET!

To the ground, Astroa spitted out the herb he was chewing. He turned to the other member and asked him a question,

“Let’s just say that the masked runt is a ghost and there is no proof to find the bastard that broke the boulder. Fine... But why are you saying you couldn’t find the disposed product? There should be a tracking seal branded on it?”

“...”

No one was able to answer the question.

It was a tracking seal that Astroa branded.

It was odd that they could not find it.

“...”

“Speak!”

Angered from the silence and lack of response, Astroa swung his arm in a big motion.

Soon, a knife-like sharp wind accumulated, and it cut off a cowering member’s arm clean.

“KUUAK!”

The arm that was cut off rolled on the Magic Tower’s first floor and poured out blood.

Other associates rushed toward the man that just lost an arm, and they answered with pale faces,

“It… it was erased.”

“What?”

“The tracking seal… was erased.”

“What the hell are you saying? How could the tracking seal be erased?”

‘Tracking seal was erased?’

Even if the branded subject died, in order to make the recovery of the corpse easier, the tracking seal was placed carefully by himself, Astroa the grand mage of Seven Circles Magic.

It was impossible for it to be erased.

“It is the truth. The tracking seal on the disposed product is no longer there. If you cannot believe us, please see it for yourself…”

A man, who was helping to stop the blood loss from the cut off arm, answered in shaky voice, and that made Astroa's face to frown even more.

"What about Erengium?"

"That... That is... Today... No, because of the incident in the last evening, they said today would be difficult."

"Tsk!"

Astroa clicked his tongue.

"That's a shame. A real shame. If they were going to take it, they should have done so yesterday."

As Astroa thought about what he was going to trade today in secret, he made hand gestures to wipe off the blood splatter and herbs he spitted out. Astroa murmured,

"It looks like it will be difficult to expect great results from the tournament."

After cleaning up, Astroa tossed a word of advice to the people who were rushing to take the man with cut off arm to the Holy Temple.

“Even if the schedule changes, the money is the same… so make sure to take it from them, you got that?”

The people from Magic Tower nodded and quickly made their way out of the tower while supporting the man who just lost his arm.

A few people’s faces look disconcerted and upset over the undue violence, but they didn’t dare to take it up against Astroa.

“So, what about the bastards in Lower Solia? Are you managing them properly?”

With some of the members gathered now gone to help the injured, Peruda , who was among the people that still remained, answered his question,

“Yes.”

It was a prompt answer.

It was to prevent yet another man from having have to be carried to the Holy Temple with a cut off arm.

“Good. Good. Be careful to make sure nobody from the Holy Temple or the Castle notices. I figured it would be all right because there is a swordsmanship tournament going on, but with an incident like this happening, it might be dangerous.”

Astroa was sitting on a chair on the first floor that was meant for guests, and now he got off from his ass.

As if he was going to leave, Astroa turned away and started to walk. Watching this, Peruda followed suit and asked,

“Where are you going?”

“Ah! There is something I need to take care of quickly.”

Having heard Astroa saying he had ‘something to take care of quickly,’ A shadow was cast on his face. With a displeased expression, Peruda asked again,

“… Are you going to the basement again?”

“…”

“Now… How would you feel about discontinuing it?”

From Peruda’s question, Astroa’s steps came to a halt.

“Seven Circles… Aren’t they enough?”

“…”

“I believe it is more than enough. To go further, it could no longer be considered a passionate research or anything else mage worthy. This is just…”

When Peruda lifted his head back up after briefly staring at the ground, Astroa was no longer there. He could not be seen or found on the first floor, it was almost as if he had teleported away.

***

It was at a dark basement.

“… Now, tell me.”

“…”

“How do you claim to know me so well?”

Riley ignored Nainiae’s voice coming from his back. Instead, he went through a mountain worth of wooden boxes and checked its contents.

“How could you know my suffering, and how are you going to propose a solution?”

“Hm.”

Nainiae asked again, but Riley didn't answer the girl's question this time either. Instead, he only lifted up what he found just now.

The content found in the box was some sort of plant grass, a bunch that looked like medical herbs.

'Wait. Could this be…'

After bringing the herbs closer to his nose and going snip-snip to smell it, Riley wrinkled his eyebrows.

"… Narcotics?"

The contents of wooden boxes in the basement were all same.

In his past life, Riley had smelled something similar to this. With a blank face, he murmured,

"In the Magic Tower, why would there be narcotics…"

Around the time Riley was cringing at the sight of the greens, from behind, a creaking noise from the motion of a door being opened could be heard.

"… Oh ho?"

"…?!"

Nainiae’s head turned rapidly.

Having confirmed the identity of the man that entered the place, her eye became saturated with terror.

“What’s this? It looks like a few rats crawled in.”

Chapter 41 - Narcotics

He used Light, a spell from One Circle Magic.

With a ball of light floating next to him, the man approaching this way asked,

“What are you?”

Riley, who had no intention of telling him, brought out the mask from his pocket and put it on.

He focused the mana to his eyes and strengthened his eyesight, increasing the view distance and the width of the view field. Having looked at the man approaching this way, Riley realized that it was the old mage he ran into last evening at the Main Plaza.

‘Astroa.’

Riley came to the Magic Tower’s basement after hearing stories about it from Nainiae.

Although it was best to not run into anyone, he expected that it would be difficult not to.

‘It stinks.’

From Nainiae, Riley heard about what was going on in the Magic

Tower's basement, and he came to this place to confirm if there were really human experiments taking place here.

Although he couldn't confirm the human experiments yet, there was something else that he found.

'To think that they are making narcotics...'

Narcotics.

It was a terrifying substance that could make people become dependent to it from using it only once or twice. The substance could destroy the lives of these people from addiction.

All of these grass piled up here were narcotics.

"What's this? I was wondering what kind of rat you were..."

Astroa noticed the mask that Riley wore and in reaction, started to have a blood vein bulge on his forehead.

The air in the basement started to shake, and the pile of wooden crates also vibrated even though there wasn't anyone touching them.

Astroa was about to explode out of anger.

“Why are you so angry?”

After slightly altering his voice with mana, Riley asked Astroa.

By Riley’s easygoing tone of voice, Astroa tightened his fist and took another step forward.

From his glare, Astroa was daring Riley to say one more word.

“Since you sent me a present, all I have done was return your good will, so what’s the problem here?”

“…”

Riley was talking about the incident in the Main Plaza where he divided the Fireball launched at him from the sky into three pieces and sent one back to Astroa.

“I’m the kind with the personality where I always return the favor in folds, so I paid you back in twofold. I wonder if… you received my ‘gift’ well.”

Riley directed his gaze toward Astroa’s arm.

Judging from how there was a blood stain on thickly wrapped bandages on his arm, it appeared that Astroa certainly had received the gift that Riley threw at him, although it looked pretty painful.

“Um. It looks like you took it pretty well.”

“… You runt.”

Astroa glared at Riley as if he was trying to punch a hole through Riley with his gaze, but then he flinched his shoulders.

It was because Astroa noticed the narcotics that Riley was holding in his hand.

“Ah, this?”

Riley continued as he shook the pieces of grass he was holding in his hand,

“This is yours, right? Astroa the grand mage, Sir?”

“…”

“This, isn’t this banned in Solia? I’m right, aren’t I?”

Astroa, unable to answer, only gritted his teeth.

Noticing Astroa’s lips twitching, Riley continued on,

“Actually, I came to dig around about something else… but this… I think people will flip out when they hear about this. Don’t you think?”

In to a wooden crate, Riley tossed in the pieces of grass he was holding. As he lightly tapped the crate with the side of his foot, he looked behind toward Nainiae and said,

“You know this friend of ours too, don’t you?”

Eventually, having discovered Nainiae’s presence later, Astroa’s face turned red as if he was about to tear her apart immediately.

“You bitch… How dare…”

“I’m just…”

As if she was remembering the times she had to take unknown drugs from him, she was shivering and gradually becoming stiff like a stone. To the front of her, Riley stepped in,

“You are the one that abandoned her, and you didn’t even do anything to take care of what came afterwards, so for you to act like this now, aren’t you being a little petty? Aren’t you supposed to be the Grand Mage of the Magic Tower?”

Riley may be a highly skilled swordsman, but nobody could be gutsier than the gallantry being displayed by this masked man.

In light of Riley casually carrying on a conversation with a Grand Mage that represents a city, Astroa twitched his fingers as he asked Riley,

“You runt… Who are you?”

At the same time, as if he just completed a spell by fidgeting his lips earlier, what appears to be tiny white particles started to form behind him.

It was Snow Flurry, a mid level ice element attack magic. It was a magic that could cut with its particles in the wind or freeze things solid.

It was also a magic that was difficult to keep in check with a sword.

“Um…”

After intentionally turning his head to look at Nainiae, who was standing behind him, Riley gave the same answer that he heard from her a while ago,

“… I have no reason to explain something like that to you.”

As if he concluded that further inquiries were meaningless, Astroa cringed his face violently and swung his arm to attack.

To be precise, he tried to.

“...?!”

THUMP...

It was the other arm, the one that didn’t have any bandages wrapped around.

Astroa’s good arm fell to the floor.

A scene very similar to when he chopped off one of the Magic Tower’s associate’s arms at the first floor was recreated.

The problem was that this time it was his very own.

“Huh?”

It could have been that it was hard to see because the basement was very dark.

Because it happened literally at the blink of an eye, not just Astroa, but for Nainiae as well. They were standing like statues with blank faces that have forgotten how to breathe.

“You probably should get that reattached soon.”

“…?”

While holding the shoulder where his arm was severed, with a pale face, Astroa quickly turned his head to glare at Riley.

‘I let my guard down!’

The Magic Tower’s basement was narrow and had many obstacles.

The thing was, Astroa chose not to use his flame magic, the magic he was proudest of, because he didn’t want to burn the narcotics piled up here.

He thought about how he lost his arm because he let his guard down. He used a simple telekinesis to bring his arm that was lying on the floor and wrapped it in the arm that had bandages on.

And then, he started to glare as if he was about to tear apart and kill Riley.

“If you have time to glare at me, it would be better spent to do that… Teleport? To the Holy Temple. That is, unless you want to have a hard time attaching your arm back.”

No one had any idea when Riley took out his sword, but he had its flat side tapping on his shoulder. Riley looked around the

surrounding for a moment and tapped the ground he was standing on.

“Um? The floor here is relatively weak. Could this spot be the…”

“…”

Riley looked toward Nainiae.

Nainiae’s lips were shivering, and she nodded.

In that place…

Underneath that place…

She had to take unknown drugs, and she had that chemical poured on her.

She also lost her two fingers and an eye in that place.

“You, You…! You are just a bitch who will be dead soon. You dare to betray the Magic Tower?!”

Have been found out about his secret laboratory hidden in the basement, Astroa screamed in deafeningly loud voice.

Mana surrounding Astroa vibrated by his fury, and Nainiae’s

shoulders shriveled.

“We gave you an opportunity, and we taught you magic… You dare to stab us in the back?!”

“Dude. We should be the one to say…”

“… No.”

Riley was stepping into speak for Nainiae, but he stopped himself from saying more.

It was because, as if she found strength from hearing that she ‘will be dead soon,’ Nainiae worked up the courage to speak.

“That is not true. The man that taught magic to me, who was dying, was the teacher, Mr. Peruda. It was not you.”

“Peruda?”

Riley’s eyebrows bent slightly.

On the contrary, Astroa’s eyebrows bent rapidly.

“You little…!”

“The only thing that you gave me was that horrible drugs. If

there was one more thing, that would be high expectations.”

As she bit her lips, with difficulty, she continued.

“I am thankful about the fact that you had high expectations for me. I think I was able to withstand the pain because of that... However, now, it is not the case anymore.”

“...?”

Riley tilted his head to the side.

It was because she was staring at his face intensely as if she was trying to make a hole through it.

Even though he wore a mask.

“That person said that he knows the answer to the question I have been agonizing over.”

“...What?”

Astroa crumpled his eyebrows as if he was trying to say what a nonsense this was.

The tone of his voice was saying he did not understand any of this.

“Being entrusted with expectations and demands from other people, trying hardest to live up to their expectations and wishes… I want to know… why that is wrong.”

“…”

“I want to prove it. Even if it is just once, I want to prove that someone recognized my wholehearted efforts. For this question that I have… the person over there said he knows the answer, and that is why…”

Nainiae slowly lifted her right hand.

A pitch-black colored lump of light was generated above it, and soon, a dark flame was created.

It was a black Fireball that only she could make.

“… do not interfere.”

If she was to fight against Astroa, she was well aware that she could not win.

In her face, which was severely contorted from fear, her awareness was fully shown.

However, in her expression… there was also resolve.

“Do not interfere.”

Nainiae said once again.

Since she was going to die soon, she had no intention to have any regrets or afterthoughts. The resolve on her face spoke those words.

“KUK.”

Perhaps it was due to loss of blood from having his arm cut off, Astroa’s face looked a little paler than before. He turned his head around quickly.

Riley was standing behind him, and to his front, there was Nainiae holding a black flame on her palm.

The basement was narrow as it was.

He may be a Class Seven mage, but two on one was not particularly an advantageous condition.

“What you have done here… You will regret it.”

It appeared that Astroa used Teleport. Surrounded by flashing blue lights, just like that, he disappeared from the basement.

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"... Why did you do that?"

It looked like she strained herself to use mana when she was in no condition to do so. Nainiae wiped off the black blood leaking out past her lips and asked.

This time, Riley responded to her question,

"What about it?"

After finding the entrance to the secret laboratory, Riley asked back as he went down the spiral stairs with Nainiae.

"Back then just now... If you wanted to kill him, you could have."

She was asking about Astroa.

She was saying that if Riley was skilled enough to do what he did, he should have just cut off Astroa's head instead, so she was asking why Riley chose to cut off Astroa's arm instead.

"The place we are at right now is the Magic Tower's basement. To put it roughly, instead of tending to his arm, Astroa could have prioritized on exterminating us both and pour down bombardment magic from above."

No matter how good the boy was at handling a sword, if that happened, he would be buried alive right there on the spot.

“Killing him would be… better for not having any more trouble later on as well.”

“Ah.”

Certainly…

It was as Nainiae said.

One could conclude that it would be a difficult choice for Astroa to use bombardment magic considering that the basement was his laboratory or the amount of narcotics stored down there. However still, it was certainly inefficient to allow him leave the scene with his life.

Despite that fact, Riley still let him live.

The reason for that was,

“… It was because of the big picture.”

There was something that he thought of all along.

In his head, Riley double checked the plan forward and tilted the

trailing end of his lips upward.

There were some uncertainties, but there was a chance to watch some entertaining spectacles, spectacles that would be more entertaining than the swordsmanship tournament.

“The big picture?”

As if she couldn’t understand the meaning behind it, she tilted her head sideways.

“It is something like… How do I put this…? Should I say… preparing for a little more comfortable life? Well, it is also to show you in what kind of way you should act to make things work.”

“I don’t have the power like yours. It is impossible.”

Riley was leading the way down the stairs. He turned his head to look at Nainiae, who was following behind him, and said,

“In that case, you really need to learn this.”

“…?”

“Tell me what it is then?”

“Tell me.”

Nainiae turned her head toward Riley in a big way that she have never done before.

“The trick is standing one step behind everything.”

“Stand one step behind?”

“To say it roughly, unless you are a god that can take care of everything by oneself… just take one step back… and watch what happens.”

Riley turned his head again and made his facial expression hidden.

“Whether the world comes to an end, a devil king appears, or no matter what happens…”

Nainiae could not hear the rest of the sentence because Riley’s voice suddenly became quieter. Nainiae came closer to Riley and asked,

“What were you saying just now?”

“Well, I’m saying you should become selfish a little bit. Live toward the direction where you won’t need to step forward. Live toward the direction that will lead to a more comfortable life.”

“You are saying I should stand back a step from everything and live toward the direction that will lead to more comfort without me having to step forward to handle anything… But if I did, I won’t have the opportunity to have someone recognize the hard work and effort I have put in for a cause… won’t it?”

To Nainiae’s question this time, Riley did not answer.

“We are here.”

It was because they reached the end of the spiral stairs, and they arrived at the laboratory right in front of them.

‘I want to prove that someone recognized my wholehearted efforts.’

As he thought about what Nainiae said a while ago, Riley put his hands on the laboratory’s door handle while answering Nainiae’s question in his mind as following,

‘Being recognized for your efforts… It is an impossible task. People are not particularly interested in efforts of others. Even if they recognized your efforts, they will forget it quickly, and instead… for a much longer time, they will remember you for your mistakes.’

Chapter 42 - Narcotics (Part 2)

Solia Holy Temple.

During the late hours of the night, what appeared to be blue fireflies shimmered between the temple's pillars, and with a flash of light, an old man revealed himself.

"Kuuuu..."

He was holding a chopped off arm with his other armpit.

Judging from his pale face, it appeared that he had lost quite a bit of blood.

"...Priest!"

The old man started to turn his head all over the place in search of a priest from the Holy Temple.

"Where is a priest? Priest!!"

Because his voice was loaded with mana, it was incredibly loud and echoed throughout the inside of the Holy Temple. The apprentice priests, who were awake for the early hours and walking nearby, rushed to where the old man stood.

"What brings you here to the-... Huk?! Your arm?"

“Senior…bring me a bastard that is a senior! I need to reattach my arm!”

“W-Wait a moment!”

The apprentice priests made haste to call for a senior priest.

Only a small while ago, there had been a patient who had come by with his arm cut off like Astroa, so fortunately for him, the senior priest that could fix his arm quickly arrived at the scene.

“Oh my. What in the world are the people in the Magic Tower doing at this early morning?”

“…”

“Not just one, but two came with their arm cut off. How did this happen?”

The reattachment procedure involved treatment of the cut-off area using holy power and then sutures afterwards.

This step was quite painful, hence Astroa’s face was scrunched up to the max.

Of course, it was not as bad as when he was cringing because of the two random runts that he had run into a moment ago.

“By chance, did something happen in the Magic Tower?”

The senior priest asked as he focused holy power on his hands to heal Astroa.

Since two people from the Magic Tower came with their arms chopped off, it was an obvious question that had to be asked.

The Holy Temple was located in Right Solia.

The senior priest had to ask because, if anything happened in the Magic Tower, it could also spread to the Holy Temple which was not far from the Magic Tower.

“…”

Astroa was about to tell them about what happened a moment ago, but he shut his mouth.

There was some weird bastard wearing a mask and a disposed product that he had abandoned. The two discovered the narcotics that he gathered in secret in the Magic Tower’s basement, and now, they even broke into the laboratory he was running in secrecy.

It was unfathomable for Astroa to tell such things to anyone, especially to people of the Holy Temple. That was an insane idea.

“... No. Nothing in particular.”

“Astroa, sir, your arm was cut off. Are you sure there is nothi-”

“I said there is nothing in particular! Instead, hurry, just hurry up with attaching my arm back up and do it right. I didn’t get to finish what I was working on!”

The situation was such that Astroa had no idea what the two random runts could possibly do now that they had broken into the laboratory.

All Astroa could think of right now was to return after getting his arm reattached as fast as possible.

He swore on the inside to properly tear them apart and dispose of them once he returned.

***

It seemed that she was having a panic attack due to traumatic memories of her past rushing back to her. Nainiae was shaking helplessly at the back. Riley left her be.

He turned the door handle and entered inside the laboratory.

“...Tsk.”

Riley's face crumpled on its own.

"Ugh..."

It was because the putrid air inside the laboratory, which had been trapped inside all this time, came right at him and buffeted his face.

That wasn't the only reason. Inside the laboratory wafted a horrible stench.

The abhorrent stench was strong enough to completely bypass the mask Riley was wearing and penetrate straight through. It smelled of rotting corpses, unknown chemicals and as well as excrements.

'I sense a presence.'

From the inside, Riley could feel someone's presence.

Just in case, after focusing mana to his senses and roughly figuring out how wide the inside was, Riley walked further into the laboratory.

'The place doesn't appear to be very spacious. As for the number of people still breathing...is it about three? It doesn't look like they will be able to last long.'

As Riley looked at the state of the people caged behind iron bars, he thought Nainiae was quite fortunate in comparison. While glancing around the area, Riley asked the girl who was still standing just outside the door.

“Aren’t you going to come in?”

Nainiae was hesitant for a moment, but soon, she carefully traced the steps that Riley took and came right behind him.

“From what I heard a while ago, you said you learned magic from Peruda?”

To calm her down, Riley decided to strike up a conversation.

“You know my teacher?”

By Riley’s question, Nainiae asked with curious eyes.

Riley answered,

“I don’t think I could say I know him, but I have met him recently.”

“Really?”

From hearing Riley's answer, Nainiae's eyes lit up. It looked like she turned her gaze to a faraway place for a moment, and she started to carefully tell a story about Peruda.

"My teacher, Mr. Peruda, was, of all people from the Magic Tower that came to this basement, the only one...that showed kindness towards people trapped in here. He gave ointment to people who could not stand the itchy skin. He brought sweet treats that would not make people throw up after eating them. In my case, I told him I wanted to read books, and he brought me books."

"Hm."

To discover that such a young man was a teacher to someone...

It was unexpected.

While tuning in to her story, Riley started to search around the area again.

"To the families of the people who were dying here, he also delivered their letters of their last will... In my case, he delivered my letter to my mother who could not recognize me."

Even though she was in shambles, she was still alive.

Although she was still alive, to her mother, she became a dead daughter.

“What a tearjerking story.”

“…”

“So, did you learn that black-colored magic from Peruda?”

“To be exact… No.”

Nainiae immediately shook her head.

“Earlier, remember that I said the teacher gave me books?”

“Ah, is that…?”

“Yes. Those books were textbooks about magic. From the basic level to intermediate level… He brought them in that order for me. He praised me for learning magic so fast.”

Six Circles.

That was the height in magic that Nainiae had reached.

Currently, Astroa, who appeared to be over 60 years old, was at Seven Circles.

The fact that Nainiae, who was not even in her twenties, mastered Six Circles was not just a little fast. It was astonishing.

“Probably…it was because of the drug.”

The speed at which she focused mana, her rapid magic mastery, and the extraordinary pitch-black color of her magic were all because of the drug.

“I do not know exactly what the drugs used in the experiments are supposed to do.”

Based on what was done and what had happened, it could be guessed that Astroa was doing drug research and experiments in order to get to the next Circle.

“How you identified me right away at the Main Plaza, that was not magic, right?”

“That’s right. That wasn’t magic. That was this.”

Nainiae lightly lifted her bang and showed him her white-colored dead eye.

“Because my mind was in disarray at the time, I do not know if I poured it or one of associates from the Magic Tower did, but the thing that was poured onto my eye was not the drug from the experiment. It was something else. I was able to find you because of an unexpected effect from the chemical.”

Nainiae pulled her bangs back down and hid her eye although it could not be concealed completely.

“The explanation is kind of unclear. Can you demonstrate it?”

“Is there someone you want me to find?”

“Um…”

“There is no need for names. Even if you told me, I won’t be able to tell their names with my ability. Just visualize. Things like the person’s appearance.”

Riley was thinking hard about whom to visualize. He first thought about his mother, Ian and Sera, who would be soundly asleep in the hotel, but quickly changed his mind and thought about the two brothers from the Erengium family.

“…”

As he visualized their appearances in his mind, Nainiae slowly turned her head and started to stare toward a wall that had nothing.

Soon, as she gradually lifted her head, with her finger pointing to the upward direction, she said,

“The people you are looking for are pretty far in this direction. Are they nobilities? It looks like they are in a hotel. Other than that… I do not know.”

Her finger was pointing upwards. That much was obvious since Riley and Nainiae were deep underground.

However, the direction she was pointing at was to Left Solia.

“The three people you were thinking about in the beginning are also in Left Solia. They are also the people that Beta asked me to find.”

She was probably talking about Iris, Ian and Sera.

Absolutely impressed, Riley murmured,

“It is like a radar.”

“Radar?”

“It’s nothing.”

Her ability was like the radar he knew from his past life.

As Riley seriously thought about her ability, he asked her,

“Do people from the Magic Tower know? This ability of yours?”

Nainiae shook her head.

“No. They don’t. I didn’t tell them. If I did, I thought I would be trapped in here again.”

“But, you told that woman?”

“…”

Thinking about Beta from the Lower Solia, Nainiae remained silent.

That woman, Beta, the one that said she had faith in Nainiae, as well as the one that had poured out devastating insults at her in the end, was no longer living in this world.

“So in conclusion… You are saying that you obtained both the dark-colored magic and tracking ability from here, right?”

To Riley’s question, she couldn’t respond, and instead, she nodded as she bit her lips.

“…ll me.”

“…?”

With a blank face, Nainiae was following right behind Riley, but she stopped after hearing a voice coming from nearby.

From the side…

An almost extinguished voice could be heard from the cage that had people trapped inside.

“…Kill me.”

With great difficulty, the voice was pleading to be killed.

“I…”

Without her realizing, Nainiae’s mouth opened.

It seemed that she was seeing a glimpse of her former self when she was trapped inside the cage.

Back then, there were times when she screamed and pleaded to be killed too.

“Please…kill…me…”

Inside the cage, there was a child who appeared to be a lot younger than Nainiae.

It was not certain if they were aware of the presence of others outside.

With hollow eyes, as they drooled from their mouths, the people inside the cage were pleading to be killed. Seeing them made Nainiae stumble back. Soon, she bumped the back of her head to someone's chest.

"..."

It was Riley.

It seemed he already observed the insides of the cage. Riley stood still, and his gaze was following Nainiae in to the people inside the cage begging to be killed.

"Please..."

Nainiae carefully opened her mouth.

It was because she had a favor to ask of Riley.

It was for ending the lives of these people who were suffering.

However...before she could even finish what she had to say, Riley moved one step toward the cage and brandished his sword.

“Ah…”

Riley’s sword was swung.

Nainiae was not confident concerning watching them being cut down, so she tightly shut her eyes.

“…”

However, instead…

The sound that followed was not the sound of people being cut down. Instead, it was a metallic ‘clank’ sound of the sword striking against the cage bars.

“…?”

After cutting down just the iron cage, Riley dusted off the sword to the side and asked toward Nainiae who had her eyes closed into thin lines,

“You…by chance, do you have a bit of leadership?”

“Leader…ship?”

Looking at Nainiae, who murmured as if she did not know the

meaning, Riley put his hand in his pocket and brought out a small-sized badge.

“I’m talking about the ability to take charge and lead people.”

After making the question easier to understand, Riley tossed the badge he brought out from his pocket on the floor.

“You mean…when I asked you to kill these people?”

As she could not understand the reason behind Riley’s behavior, Nainiae tilted her head to the side and asked.

“It is time you try doing what I told you a moment ago.”

“What you told me a moment ago?”

“It is time for you to stand one step behind.”

Looking at the Erengium’s insignia on the badge that was dropped to the floor, Riley continued,

“By the looks of the eyeballs of that old geezer, it seems he had already gone insane a long time ago. He can’t see straight and thinks he can do whatever he wants… I think leaving this much here is enough.”

"…?"

"With this, the preparation is roughly complete. Now, all we have to do is to stand back and watch the spectacle."

The foundation of the big plan that Riley imagined in his mind was complete. He directed his gaze to the badge and then looked at Nainiae.

As she still did not quite understand what Riley was hinting at, all Nainiae could do was raise up a question mark on her face and stare back at Riley.

Riley was smiling comfortably.

Chapter 43 - Narcotics (Part 3)

“Riley. Hey Riley... The match is starting. How about you wake up?”

It was at Solia Castle where the swordsmanship tournament was taking place.

Riley was sleeping using his palm as the pillow and the shouting of the crowds as the lullaby, but with Iris’s hand shaking his shoulder, Riley struggled and opened his eyes.

“Uuuu...”

“You don’t get to see something like this very often. Let’s watch.”

“...Okay.”

As if he hadn’t gotten enough sleep, her son was complaining and murmuring, but she lulled him and pointed toward the arena.

Still, she was being very considerate for Riley’s lack of sleep. The tournament had progressed a lot, and now the final match was about to commence.

“Is it Erengium?”

“Yes. The Erengium House is going last.”

Hearing a discussion about Erengium, Ian, who was watching the game with everyone, directed his eyes towards Riley.

Ian still had vivid memories about what transpired in the corridor in front of the restroom.

‘Our Young Master was incredible…but now that I think about it, Erengium’s young master was also highly skilled.’

The one who was highly skilled…

Ian was thinking about the eldest son of Erengium, the one who had avoided Ian’s grasp and charged towards Riley.

It was certainly an incredible move.

However, looking back now, there was something odd about it.

‘The movement was somehow…unfitting of his body type?’

For a swordsman, there are movements and mana utilization techniques that best fit one’s body.

The movements demonstrated by the Erengium’s eldest son were definitely fearsome, but they could not hide the fact that there was some awkwardness about them.

Ian thought that, if he was Erengium's eldest son, he would have done things a little differently when he turned his upper body or moved his feet.

"I heard the second son of the Erengium house had a match yesterday."

"Ah, right. Ian, you weren't here yesterday…"

Iris responded to Ian's murmur, and Sera added,

"Yes. That's right. The dual-sword-wielding contestant that I was rooting for lost to that second son. I'm still really disappointed. I never thought that the match would end so fast."

"Dual-sword-wielding? You mean Jenier?"

"Yes."

"Hm…"

All contestants participating in the tournament were under 20.

Ian fiddled with his beard for a moment and then glanced towards the arena where the match was about to begin.

“Sera.”

“Yes?”

“By chance, during yesterday’s match, was there anything odd about the second son of the Erengium house?”

“Anything…odd? I’m not sure?”

Sera tilted her head to the side.

“Other than that he sent both of Young Master Jenier’s swords flying with just one blow, which I thought was pretty incredible, other than that… I don’t know much.”

Although the contestant that she was cheering for lost, Sera was not doubting Erengium out of anguish over it.

It was because there could be a difference in physical strength.

Also this was the most common scenario whenever a dual-wielding swordsman was defeated.

“What about the smells?”

When Ian and Sera were talking to each other, Riley, who was rubbing his sleepy eyes, asked casually.

“Yes?”

“His smell. That guy over there.”

Riley made a gesture with his chin toward Erengium’s second son.

Erengium’s second son Apolion was drawing his sword following the instruction from the judge who was standing in the middle of the arena.

He was shaking uncontrollably unlike yesterday.

“Smell…is there anything about him…”

Sniff Sniff

Sera, who had superb sense of smell, checked the smell and tilted her head.

As Riley said, a smell slightly different from yesterday was coming from Apolion.

It was a small difference that would have gone unnoticed if she was not directed to examine it so carefully.

“What is it?”

“…”

Iris and Ian looked at Sera, wondering about what was going on.

It was because they didn’t have special sense of smell like she did.

“Certainly, the smell is different.”

“Different?”

“Unlike yesterday, something is missing…”

Around the time Sera narrowed her eyes and puzzled over this

finding in her head, the countdown announcing the beginning of the match started to roll.

"Mother, did you say this is the last match for the day?"

"Yes."

"In that case, why don't we get going? It is a bit awkward to say this, but the result is already out."

Riley stretched widely and stood up from his seat.

In his head, he was agonizing over what he should eat for dinner.

"But Young Master, still, shouldn't you at least watch and then go?"

"Yes. This is the last match for the day."

"Look at that guy's hands. They are shaking uncontrollably. Do you think he can fight properly like that to begin with?"

Ian and Sera raised question marks on their faces and looked at the arena.

With three seconds remaining, Apolion, who was standing on the arena, did indeed have trembling hands. It was different from

yesterday in the arena. During yesterday's match, although he looked nervous, at least his hands were not shaking.

It was odd.

"...Huuaap!!"

The countdown ended, and the match began...

But the result was, as Riley had predicted, Apolion's defeat.

It was a humiliating defeat that didn't take even 3 seconds.

***

"...Damn it. How come?!"

Bam!

Erengium's eldest son, Aploc, smashed the desk in the contestant preparation room.

His fist became red, but that was not the problem here.

"It...it was supposed to be given to us yesterday! So why all of a sudden?"

“Young Master… Please, calm down.”

“You think anyone could calm down now?! My little brother lost!”

Bam!

The desk shook once again.

“What the hell were they doing yesterday??!”

“That…that is…”

The plan was to get the stuff by going to Lower Solia, but they didn’t get to have the stuff.

This was the reason why Aploc was so angry.

To calm him down, the butler responded as he broke into a cold sweat,

“We rushed to Lower Solia this morning, but they said they couldn’t hand over the stuff to Erengium anymore, so…”

“What?”

The look on Aploc's face, with his shaky eyes, was definitely not alright.

The man was no longer in his right mind.

"The bastards from Lower Solia betrayed us?"

"That is... It appears to be the case. I tried to threaten them, but they called my bluff and were acting like they were telling me to go ahead and gut them if I would dare."

"Lowly trash bastards dare to...dare to-!"

Paf!

Aploc stood up abruptly. The chair he was sitting on fell over to the back. He started to roughly scratch his head.

Not just because of the deadly aura he felt from Iphelleta's Young Master, but also because of the withdrawal symptoms, his entire body was shaking uncontrollably.

It felt like there was a bug crawling around inside his body.

"How dare... Do they not realize who we are??!"

Aploc stopped scratching his head. Now his eyes were being filled

with a deadly light.

‘Even though I didn’t get to take the drug I need, would I be so weak that I would not be able to handle even a few homeless bastards?’

As Aploc thought about this, he quickly turned his body and started to walk.

“Y-Young Master! Where are you going?”

Aploc didn’t answer his servant. He only marched towards Lower Solia.

His eyes had lost their original colors and turned red.

“You should console Young Master Apolion! Young Master? Young Master!”

The swordsmanship tournament’s events for the day came to a conclusion.

With the applause towards the victor as the backdrop, Aploc left Solia Castle.

***

It was an uncertain hour. It could have been early morning or late evening.

Five people, whose horrible stench made anyone cringe just from briefly passing by them, walked into the Solia Holy Temple.

The five people included Nainiae who was doing a few things with Riley during early morning today.

Because she was barefoot, Nainiae was leaving black footprints on the Holy Temple's white floor. She was thinking about what Riley said this morning.

'When the swordsmanship tournament ends, wait about 10... no... 20 minutes? And then stop by at the Holy Temple.'

'But...they won't accept us.'

'No. They will accept you all.'

'How? I'm...although I have been living there for only a while now, I am from Lower Solia. Also, I look like this too...'

'You need to throw a bait.'

'A bait?'

‘That’s right. A bait that they could not possibly just pass without biting.’

Nainiae put her hand into her pocket.

There was a small stash of grass inside, which was the grass taken from the Magic Tower’s basement.

“Over there, stop! All of you… What is this?”

Before they could enter all the way in, they were stopped by a priest who was walking around the area.

Perhaps it was due to the stench, but before long, even the holy knights who were guarding the temple approached where she stood, and the holy knights stared at her with eyes full of suspicion.

‘Going to Solia Castle would make it more certain, but if you guys went there, there is a good chance that you will be all cut down on the spot, so going to the Holy Temple would be better. They will at least listen to what you have to say before doing anything.’

Nainiae went over Riley’s advice and looked at the people behind her who were shaking out of fear.

Due to withdrawal symptoms from the drugs used used during the Magic Tower’s experiments, there was one bubbling up and drooling from the mouth.

"..."

They were all people who were suffering in the hands of Astroa at the Magic Tower's laboratory. According to Riley's advice, based on what she say here, these people's future could be decided.

"All of you... Based on your appearances, all of you seem to be from Lower Solia. Is that right? People from Lower Solia can't just enter the Holy Temple without permission. Please leave."

When the priest shook his head and gestured them to leave, Nainiae took one step forward. At the same time, the holy knights drew their swords.

"...Please wait."

Nainiae shriveled for a moment in the light of golden swords drawn by the holy knights, but she knew she was going to die soon anyway. These people, although they were in the experiments, still had hope for survival unlike her. To save those she could...Nainiae decided to be brave once more.

"Please wait a moment..."

Nainiae asked politely with the word 'please.'

It was awkward because she was very used to the crass language

used in Lower Solia. However, this was no time for such a crude mannerism.

“Of us all, I am the only one that came from the Lower Solia. These people… these people are not like that. They all used to live in either Left or Right Solia.”

“…?”

Priest felt her story was suspicious and cringed.

Although her voice sounded desperate and sincere, even so, the holy knights around them did not put away their swords.

It was because their appearances were that suspicious.

“There is something I want to say… I mean, there is something I would like to tell to Solia Temple. It is very important.”

Nainiae slowly brought out the grass that she prepared.

Because her pocket was dirty, there were black stains on the grass now, but its shape was still intact.

Its distinct addictive scent, although it was mixed in with her stench, was also still intact.

"...This?"

The priest's eyebrows bent.

"About this forbidden plant, about the Magic Tower's basement... I have something I would like to tell you."

"What..."

The priest looked around at others. As the priest panicked without knowing what to do, Nainiae tightly closed her hand holding the grass and continued,

"I know that priests in the Holy Temple despise the people from Lower Solia. However, these people behind me are not from Lower Solia. Instead of thinking of it as my story, please think of it as their story and listen."

"Aburbur..."

Perhaps due to the experiments done to them in the basement, people standing behind Nainiae were not able to talk properly.

They only scratched themselves on the arms or their faces occasionally displayed that that they were in pain.

Nainiae knew well of that horrifying pain, and that was the reason why she wanted to help them.

“Because of the experiments, they are not well. This is why they are not able to speak properly at the moment. So I…I will speak in their…”

Nainiae didn’t finish her words. On the other side, there was someone wearing a dress that was significantly whiter than what the priests were wearing. She was walking towards the core of the temple, but now she had stopped and was looking this way.

“…”

Unlike Nainiae, who had covered half of her face with her hair because of disfigurement, there was someone who had her face covered with a clean veil. Nainiae figured out that she must be someone important in the temple.

“…Please!!”

Nainiae shouted.

“Please, to make sure that there will not be any more like me or these people here!”

“…”

The veiled figure, who was keeping its silence, walked toward where Nainiae was.

“P-Priestess…”

The priests around the scene raised their hands to stop her, telling her it is dangerous, but the one under the veil ordered them to put away their hands.

Despite the horrible stench, she approached Nainiae as if it didn’t bother her at all and asked,

“…Would you please tell me your name?”

She asked Nainiae’s name.

“It’s N-Nainiae.”

Nainiae answered.

The veiled one raised her hand and slowly revealed her face behind the veil. She stared at Nainiae as if she was about to pierce through Nainiae.

Nainiae’s shoulder’s shriveled on their own in light of her beautiful face that was completely unlike her own. Nainiae couldn’t even dare to look at the priestess.

“Um…”

“…?”

The priestess steadily looked at the girl’s eye, and soon, with a refreshing smile, Priesia said,

“…Asteel.”

“Yes.”

It must have been the priest standing next to her. An answer could be heard right away.

As soon as she heard the response, Priesia asked the priest,

“How many of the Holy Temple’s people can be mobilized right now?”

Chapter 44 - Narcotics (Part 4)

It was at Lower Solia.

Around the time when there was a moon hanging in the sky, sounds of screams spread and echoed through the corridors of the sewers.

“Uaaak!”

“Kuuuaaak!”

Wheeec!

Whenever that sound of a blade cutting through the air was heard, the screams followed immediately after the sounds of flesh being cut.

The ones screaming were the weak without any power or strength. They were the people in shambles living in Lower Solia. In other words, they were the homeless.

“That… That runt! Who is that?!”

“What’s a nobility bastard doing here?”

“That crazy lunatic runt!”

The stronger side was the young master from a noble family wearing a tail-coat, Aploc, the eldest son of Erengium.

While drooling, he was swinging the sword and going around between the homeless.

“You sons of bitches! Did you think you could do that to me?!”

Having reached the peak of the withdrawal symptoms, Aploc screamed in a strange voice and cut down yet another man.

Due to an unexpected raid by a murderous maniac, Lower Solia became a complete mess much like the Main Plaza two days ago.

On top of that, because this was Lower Solia where no patrol would come by, there was no sign of the threat being neutralized.

“Don’t panic! Just make him fall into the sewer!”

“Throw everything you can grab! Kill him!”

“Since when did the people in Lower Solia cower in front of nobles? Kill him! That crazy asshole!”

The homeless that were running away in panic started to change their attitudes. The atmosphere among them gradually took a violent turn.

‘If you are bitten, then bite back harder.’

It was because of these famous words of advice that had stayed with the people of Lower Solia for a long time.

“Look at that bastard’s eyes. There is no other answer to this! Hurry up and bring him down!”

“This bastard is clearly addicted. Slice and dice him!”

The homeless started to throw everything they could grab.

Most of the things that were picked up had some excrements on them, so they were slimy.

Squashing sounds continued on and overlapped. As the sounds continued, Aploc’s movements started to slow down noticeably.

“Hand it over... I said, hand it over! My drug...hand over my drug!”

Aploc swung his sword aimlessly and chased away the homeless. However, with his entire body covered in excrements, his body was not moving as he wanted.

On top of the withdrawal symptoms, he was also facing mana depletion. The situation was gradually taking a nosedive towards

the worst.

Even the aura blade, a technique that he was proud of, was no longer active.

“Uuuu. Hand it over! Hand it over!”

“Hey! That’s enough!”

“Stop throwing stuff at him! It would be a waste to kill him!”

In the middle of this excrement-filled mud fight, the excrement attacks toward Aploc started to dwindle.

It was to make money out of him.

“He is a noble! We could ask for a ransom or sell him as a slave. Anyway, we can get a lot of money!”

“That’s right! Keep him alive!”

“Hey! Stop throwing shit!”

Of course, there were others that suggested they should just end him.

“Hey! You retards! A runt like him drenched in drugs won’t sell!

Just kill him!”

“That’s right you rascals! He bit us first, so why let him live!? If you can’t handle what would come next, they will tear you apart!”

“Still, he is a noble! It would be a waste to kill him!”

“We could at least get a few loaves of bread!”

“Don’t you remember what happened to Beta? Don’t get excited over a few loaves of bread!”

By the time the excrement attacks from the homeless started to decrease in number, Aploc, who was now covered in waste, started to move and cut down a homeless man’s head.

“Kuuuaaaku!”

Aploc now had blood on top of excrements covering him. He started to laugh, going, ‘hehe,’ like a crazy person as he chased after another homeless man.

“If you won’t hand over the drugs, then blood...hand over your blood!”

“As I said! We really need to kill this fucker!”

Only a moment ago, the man was completely black from being covered in feces, but now he had turned into a monster covered in blood. The homeless of Lower Solia all nodded as if they came to an agreement.

Although they quarreled among themselves all the time, in times like these, they were sure to demonstrate great cooperation.

Although they had only thrown excrements up to this point, from that moment and on, it was time for something more vicious.

“Kill him.”

“Let’s just kill him.”

Right about when they all made up their minds and were moving toward Aploc to kill him, something unexpected happened.

“...Air Hammer.”

Wooowhooosh!

A translucent wall-like object appeared to the side of Aploc. It soon accelerated and smashed his entire body.

“Uuk, kheeerck?!”

Along with the sound of bones in his entire body being crushed, Aploc's body flew away like a kite that had just gotten its string cut and had been stuck up at a sewer wall.

Having witnessed his body being thrown by something invisible, Lower Solia's homeless stopped their movements and looked around at one another.

"...What is it?"

One of the homeless murmured.

Soon, a response could be heard.

"...From now on, if there is anyone that steps forward, I shall personally burn you to crisp."

Whaarurururuck!

With the sound of something burning, the homeless turned their gazes toward the direction of the sound.

It looked like light-blue mana was accumulating and pulsating, and there was an old man that revealed himself as he set things around him on fire.

"What the...?"

“It’s Astroa?”

“What? The Magic Tower’s boss?”

“That old geezer? What’s he doing here all of a sudden?”

The homeless that did not know about the connection between Lower Solia and the Magic Tower tilted their heads sideways.

Only the few who knew the truth started to flee the scene quietly.

“You little rat…”

Astroa’s face looked agitated as if he was about to explode immediately.

Using wind magic, he got rid of the dead bodies of the homeless and excrements that were getting in his way, and he walked towards where Aploc fell. Astroa said in a furious voice,

“Did you think I wouldn’t know?”

“…Uuuk.”

In between the obstacles that were now thrown aside, Astroa walked forward as he took out a lump of grass.

Because of the shock to his entire body, Aploc was not able to control his muscles. He barely turned his head towards Astroa who was approaching his way.

“…?”

And soon…

After noticing the stuff that was in Astroa’s hand, Aploc’s eyes started to twitch rapidly.

“I was considerate and even gave you a discount for the stuff you wanted, but if you do something like this and betray me…”

“Ah…”

Astroa was showing Aploc the grass that he wanted badly. Astroa then started to gently shake the lump of grass as though it was a fan.

Through Lower Solia’s abhorrent stench, the faint scent from the grass came to tickle the tip of Aploc’s nose. Through the bloody carnage, Aploc was barely suppressing his withdrawal symptoms, but now, he reached the limit.

“Ah, uuuu, ahhhh!”

“Is this what you want? Is this the reason why you have been

running around like a rat wearing a mask?”

Aploc nodded like crazy.

Perhaps it was because he was out of his mind, but it looked like he didn’t hear anything that Astroa said toward the end.

“But then, what should I do? It’s such a shame.”

Astroa cracked a smile. He reached down in his pocket with his other hand and produced a badge that looked similar to Aploc’s.

“It turns out you dropped this and left.”

“…?!”

The grass that Aploc wanted went up in flames right in front of his eyes.

“Ah, ah!”

After the grass turned to ashes and scattered to the floor, Aploc did not know what to do as he touched the ground. Although his entire hand became smeared with ash, he continued to scratch the ground as if he believed that doing so would bring back what he wanted.

‘Um?’

Astroa was looking at Aploc’s foolish and pathetic state, but then he squinted.

Because his arm was cut off, and because he was infuriated from it being cut off, his brain was not functioning very well, but now, it started to roll again.

‘What’s this? Something is…not right?’

Astroa was a man who had never experienced any serious peril in his life, but now, for the first time in his life, Astroa realized something strange was going on.

‘That bastard…was he weak like this?’

***

It was after the dinner.

Ian was on his way back to the hotel, but he suddenly stopped walking and said,

“… I…I think I will have to go stop by at Solia Castle for a moment.”

“At the Solia Castle?”

The three people who were walking in front of him turned their heads and looked at Ian.

‘It couldn’t be…’

Having witnessed his serious face, Sera tilted her head sideways with a quizzical expression on her face.

“No matter how much I think about it, something is suspicious about the people from the Erengium house.”

“What do you mean suspicious?”

Hearing Ian’s words, Iris floated a question mark on her face and asked.

“Sera probably figured out the majority of it… It seems that the people from that house had been handling something they should not have.”

“Handling something they should not have?”

“I’m talking about narcotics.”

“Pardon?”

Iris covered her mouth with her hand and stepped back.

It looked like she was not expecting narcotics to come up in the conversation.

“The truth is, two days ago in Solia, during the day of the tournament, I had a confrontation with the eldest Young Master of the Erengium house. He showed off his abilities...but ever since then, I felt that something was suspicious.”

The thing that was suspicious about them was now apparent from how the match of the Erengium’s second Young Master went today.

The dual-wielding swordsman, the one who was the strongest contender for winning the tournament, lost without being able to put up a fight. However, Apolion, the one that defeated that dual-wielding swordsman, lost in the next match in a way that was far worse than how the dual-wielding swordsman had.

‘Does this make any sense?’

As Ian thought about it, it made no sense.

There was a problem.

“This is why I think I should go to the castle and do a background

investigation on the Erengium house. This is an important matter," Ian said with a serious face.

It was understandable.

20 years ago, during the days of the Great War when Ian worked as a mercenary, the cause of the war was actually none other than narcotics.

Ian was worried about the Great War happening again.

"I will just make a report and come back. Please wait at the hotel..."

Ian was about to raise his hand and convince Riley and Iris, but his words were interrupted in the middle.

"...I want to go too."

It was because Riley started talking in the middle.

Hearing those words, Ian's face became filled with panic.

"Pardon?"

"Let us all come along too. Mother, is that alright?"

“It is fine with me, but…”

Iris responded to Riley and then looked at Sera to figure out how she felt about the matter.

By the looks on Sera, it appeared she was not against it in particular.

“However…”

Ian hesitated.

It was because Ian was expecting his Young Master to say that it was bothersome, or that he was tired and then would go straight to the hotel. Now that Riley said he wanted to come along, Ian could not believe what he just heard.

Riley looked at Sera and said,

“By yourself, don’t you think it will be too much?”

He was talking about guarding Riley and Iris by herself without Ian.

“If I went back, I probably won’t be able to sleep anyway…”

Riley, who had plenty of sleep when the tournament was in full

swing, shrugged his shoulders.

Ian gave a blank stare at Riley. It was because the corner of Riley's lips was slightly bent upwards, indicating Riley was up to something.

"..."

Ian could not believe this, but after exchanging a few looks with Riley, Ian soon tilted his head down and after a while answered,

"...I understand. Let's all go together."

Something was not right, but still, the Young Master that Ian knew was someone that, deep down, always knew to take good care of his own people.

Ian was certain that Riley was not up to something bad. In front of everyone, Ian led the way to Solia Castle.

"Ah, wait... Wait a minute."

Before they could even take a few steps, Ian's steps stopped because Riley grabbed his sleeve.

"What is it, Young Master?"

Ian turned to Riley and asked.

“Before we go…”

“…?”

Only a moment ago, the four were on their way to the hotel. The place that the four were standing in now was the Main Plaza.

Because of the magic attacks that Nainiae had poured out to the scene, some of the stores or street vendors were closed, but most of the street vendors were still open and selling foods or beverages.

Riley looked at one of those street vendors and continued,

“Would it be okay if I bought a few brown-sugar beers and brought them with me?”

“…Pardon?”

Because Riley made the suggestion as he smiled widely, Ian, Sera and even Iris could not help but to bring up question marks on their faces.

“It’s just that I’m a little thirsty.”

Because of the three people’s blank stares at him, Riley explained

the reason as he scratched the back of his head.

Chapter 45 - Fish Nibbling At The Bait

Something was odd.

Astroa thought the way the situation was rolling along felt strange.

‘The masked man that I ran into…was he this weak?’

The question in his head led to yet another question,

‘It cannot be…’

Astroa turned his head rapidly and looked at Lower Solia’s homeless people who were hiding in corners and watching him.

A few of them had met Astroa before because of the narcotics trade, so they seemed to know why Astroa was here, but some of the others were staring at him with their eyes wide open and wondering what in the world was happening here.

It was strange.

The atmosphere felt very uncomfortable even for Lower Solia.

‘Erengium was…a bait?’

Astroa assumed that the masked man that cut off his arm and ran off with the disposed product during the early morning must be someone from Erengium Househouse because Astroa found the badge in the laboratory.

However, now that Astroa's anger had receded a bit and his head was cool, after thinking hard about it...Astroa felt that it was probably not right. His eyebrows started to wrinkle slowly.

'Ugh what a bonehead... What am I doing right now... it's... How am I any different from a lab rat trapped in an experiment box?'

Astroa realized that he got too used to the peaceful life, so he had overlooked something he should have been suspicious of.

Astroa realized that he totally fell for it like a fool. He gritted his teeth.

"Huh?"

It was when he was shaking his fist in fury.

One of the homeless who was hiding and watching the scene made the noise.

Soon, along with the sounds of footsteps, the presence of numerous people approaching could be felt.

Judging from the sound, it sounded like people wearing plate armor were approaching.

“S-Solia Holy Temple bastards?”

“The bastards from the Holy Temple? Why here…”

The priests and holy knights from the Solia Holy Temple usually didn’t want to have anything to do with the people of Lower Solia, claiming that these homeless people had abandoned god.

However, this time, there was a mob of them that showed up.

“Holy shit. It’s the priestess…”

In middle of priests and holy knights, there was a girl with a veil, who was relatively shorter than the rest, standing in front of everyone.

Watching her obviously walking toward Astroa, the homeless people of Lower Solia opened their eyes wider than when Astroa made his entrance. The homeless murmured,

“What?”

“P-Priestess?”

“Priesia? Is it the real deal?”

“That’s crazy. Why would Priesia come here…”

Hearing the homeless people’s voices, Astroa also opened his eyes wide and stared.

‘She is the priestess from the Holy Temple. Just what business does she have here that she had to march all the way down here?’

Astroa could not think of many possibilities.

“Astroa, sir.”

“…”

And soon, in front of Astroa’s sight, there was Priesia’s veil.

With priests and holy knights standing behind her, Priesia took a step forward and continued,

“Recently, I received a report about obscene occurrences.”

When she finished, at the same time,

Baaam!

The holy knights wearing plate-armored boots stomped their feet on the ground and put forth their shields and swords.

It was an unspoken threat toward Astroa. They were demanding Astroa to answer honestly to the priestess.

“Can you please answer?”

At the priestess’ question, Astroa flinched his face and asked back,

“About what?”

“About narcotics…and unethical human experiments.”

“…”

“Are you involved with them?”

Priesia asked as she sharpened her eyes under the veil.

Her gaze was fierce. It was unbelievable that it belonged to a girl.

“Ha…”

Astroa shrugged a little.

It looked like he coughed out a word to express his amusement for no reason, but he slowly turned his body away and started to murmur something.

Upon listening to it carefully, it sounded like he was murmuring a spell.

Most likely, it was going to be the Teleport spell to escape the scene.

"... Spell Cancel."

However...

Before Astroa could finish casting Teleport, the spell was canceled. It was because someone interfered with his spell.

"...?!"

Astroa was currently at Seven Circles.

'Someone interfered and canceled my magic? A magic cast by me, a Seven Circles level mage?'

The feat was not possible unless it was by a Six Circles level

mage.

Astroa stared with wide eyes at the girl in horrible state that was standing behind Priesia.

“… You… Y…you bitch?”

There was a girl with her hand directed toward Astroa. She was certainly the one that interfered with Astroa’s spell.

It was the girl that showed abnormal rate of mana growth due to drug experiments in the Magic Tower.

It was the girl that reached the height of Six Circles in just two short years. Literally, she was a manufactured prodigy, and she was standing right there.

“To make sure that there will not be any more…”

‘To make sure that there will not be any more like me.’

Because of black blood leaking out of her mouth, Nainiae couldn’t finish her words. Instead, she continued in her head. Due to exhaustion, her eyes were about to close on her own, but she desperately maintained them and glared at Astroa.

***

After arriving at Solia Castle, Ian explained to the royal guards about the Erengium Househouse, and the royal guards replied and said that they were actually investigating about the Erengium Househouse already.

“Right now, I heard that there are suspicious movements in Lower Solia. We were about to head out right away so we won’t be late like at the incident in the Main Plaza last time.”

The royal guard explained that the eldest son of the Erengium was there right now and that something big was happening.

“Did something happen in the Main Plaza?”

Ian was listening to the royal guard’s explanation, but he tilted his head sideways and asked. It was because Ian was not aware of what had happened in the Main Plaza.

“That is...we don’t have the time to explain that to you at the moment. Please understand.”

The royal guard, who was explaining things to Ian, gathered his armor and weapon to join the other royal guards. He took a quick look to the back and said,

“Would the Iphelleta House like to come as well? To Lower Solia?”

“No thank y-...”

“…Sure. Why not.”

In light of the royal guard’s question, Sera was about to say ‘No thank you!’ However, she flinched as she heard Riley telling the royal guard that he would join them.

“Young Master, why would you…”

“We checked out all of Left and Right Solia, so…I think I would be a little upset to not get the chance to check out Lower Solia. I think that’s why?”

“But, that place…!”

Sera was about to say something back, but she bit her lips. It was because she couldn’t think of anything else to say other than that it is dangerous there.

“It is not like we are going by ourselves. Royal guards are coming too, right? It won’t be all that dangerous.”

“…”

With a pleading look on her face as if she was wronged, Sera looked at Iris.

However, the gaze from Iris was also saying, ‘I don’t understand

why you are against this.'

"It seems like the decision has been made to come along. Royal guard, I'm sorry, but please let us borrow some horses."

"Should I just provide you with a carriage? Because it is for the royal guards, it will be uncomfortable, but it would be better than riding on horses."

"In that case, please do so."

Now that Ian had even prepared a carriage for everyone in the blink of an eye, Sera's face darkened even more. It was because now, going to Lower Solia became a certainty.

"Ugh."

While the carriage was being prepared, with Riley and Iris standing in front of her, Sera sighed heavily enough to make the ground sink.

"Now that it has come to this... It cannot be helped. There are a few things I want to warn you all about. Please keep these in mind at all times."

"I got it."

"I understand."

To explain things to watch out for, Sera opened her fingers one at a time as she explained them to the mother and son duo,

“First, don’t go anywhere by yourself! Second, don’t get separated from the group! Third, don’t do anything by yourself!”

Although they were worded differently, the overall message in the cautions was the same. Riley raised an eyebrow and asked back,

“What the hell was that about?”

No matter what face Riley was making, Sera continued with a serious face and emphasized the three points once again.

“This is really important. The people in Lower Solia are filthier and more vicious than wild animals or monsters.”

“That bad?”

Riley shrugged as if he was saying he couldn’t get a feel for it.

“… If you are bitten, then bite back harder.”

“…?”

After Riley's question, Sera raised her index finger and recited the puzzling statement with a serious face.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"To people of Lower Solia, it is a proverb, a piece of advice. Literally, these guys don't have any sense of limits. They will throw anything that they can grab, and they are the kind of bastards who will always try to take someone with them to the grave. Lower Solia is a place where such bastards gather."

"Hm."

"Although we ended up going there, it would be best to avoid eye contact with any of them. Not everyone will be like that, but it doesn't hurt to be careful."

Riley glanced at his mother real quick to get a glimpse of how she was feeling. Riley asked Sera,

"Hey, Sera."

"Yes?"

"By chance, have you lived in Lower Solia before? You seem to know a lot about the place."

"Pardon? Ah, that is..."

Because of Riley's question, which was poking right at the heart of the matter, Sera avoided his eyes and mumbled.

It looked like Riley's thoughts were correct.

"Yes. That's right. When I was little, for a while, there was a time when I lived there."

Instead of agonizing over how to get around the subject, Sera decided to just be honest about it and continued,

"That's why I'm worried even more. It is not like the people living in thatthis place have any special physical abilities, but their obsessions or resentments are scary beyond anyone's imagination. It is really...really dangerous there."

It wasn't the kind of trouble that would end with bumping into someone's shoulder in the street.

These people might pick a fight just for having the eyes meet for more than three seconds.

It was that bad in Lower Solia.

Saying that they didn't like how you were dressed in nice clothes, saying that they didn't like how your face looked all clean and pretty, saying that they were just having a bad day... Using all sorts

of excuses, they would come to pick a fight and turn things ugly.

Noticing Sera's voice and face hardening, Iris said,

"... Looks like you experienced them."

"..."

Sera opened her mouth like a fish inside a fishbowl. She spared the words, and, instead, she just nodded.

Actually, there was a time when she lived in Lower Solia and she experienced pain from it. Riley replied,

"I got it. We will heed your warnings. Don't go anywhere alone, don't get separated from the group, and don't do anything alone... Okay?"

As if she could not help it, Iris smiled as she nodded as well.

Sera too tilted up the corners of her lips and smiled.

"It is ready."

"Wow..."

Riley could hear Ian from his back. It appeared that the

preparations were complete.

Riley turned to see how it looked, and he said ‘wow’ after noticing the number of royal guards standing behind Ian.

“It seems that what’s happening in Lower Solia is something very serious.”

Ian said with a serious face.

***

Having arrived at Lower Solia with Solia Castle’s royal guards, Riley gave a vacant stare at the scene as he murmured,

“Oh my…”

The way his jaw was just hanging explained how unbelievable the scene was.

“What’s this?”

Lower Solia was matching up perfectly to the description as a place that was piled up with filth from the sewer, trash and all sorts of other garbage. In this place, the Solia Holy Temple’s holy knights and priests were exuding steady lights as they were having a confrontation with someone.

“Young Master, it seems that…”

Noticing the old man facing the people from the Holy Temple, Ian said,

“It looks like… it really is something very serious.”

There were homeless people hiding and watching, and there were also priests and holy knights from the temple with stern faces.

Those were enough to call it an epic scene, but that wasn’t all there was.

“… Grand Mage Astroa and Priestess Priesia.”

The Grand Mage and the Priestess were glaring at each other, and she had a horrendous looking girl standing behind her.

The atmosphere felt like it would explode at any moment.

“Can you please explain to us what’s happening here?”

The captain of Solia’s royal guards asked.

“…”

Gulp

Meanwhile, Riley watched as he drank the brown-sugar beer that he brought.

Chapter 46 - Fish Nibbling At The Bait (Part 2)

"...I heard from Nainiae."

While Riley was sipping the brown-sugar beer, a soft but stern voice could be heard from afar. It was coming from a girl having a standoff against Astroa. It was from the priestess under the veil, Priesia.

"Narcotics and experimentation... By chance, Grand Mage Astroa, were you involved?"

"N-Narcotics?"

By the word 'narcotics' that was included in Priesia's question, the captain of Solia Castle royal guards that had barged into the situation was now glaring at Astroa with a menacing look in his eyes.

"Haha. How could that be?"

Astroa was cringing and staring at Nainiae as if he was trying to express to her that she frustrated him by interfering with his teleportation spell. However, as he turned toward the priestess, he fixed his facial expression and smiled widely.

"That's absolutely not true. The master of the Magic Tower being

involved with narcotics? Ridiculous.”

Pretending to be innocent, Astroa answered and said he did no such things.

His good-natured looking smile and long, gray beard occasionally blowing in the wind were totally making him look like a man that would never do such things no matter who looked at him.

However…

“…”

Those were not enough to trick Priesia.

Appearance wise, she was just a pretty girl. However, she was a priestess, the person closest to the heavens and blessed by the goddess Irenetsa.

“In that case, I would like to ask.”

Behind the veil, Priesia’s eyes gradually changed their color from dark brown to golden.

“To the goddess Irenetsa, can you swear that you are telling the truth?”

It was the power of the priestess.

Her golden eyes, the eyes that could pierce through others and determine the truth and deception, were glaring at Astroa.

“That is…”

Astroa was smiling like a good-natured man, but his face was slowly hardening.

It was because he was well aware that deception was not allowed in front of those eyes and that question.

‘Hm?’

On the other side of the street, standing among Solia Castle’s royal guards, Riley was looking back and forth between Astroa and Priesia. Intrigued, his eyes were beaming.

‘That’s interesting as well. Is it like a polygraph?’

This was the girl who acted like a little lass going through puberty and poured out foul words towards him at the temple.

However, in this moment, she was displaying valor.

The existence called priestess was something that Riley had ill

feelings towards since his past life. However, by herself alone, Priesia was pressuring the grand mage who represented Solia. Watching her standing up like that made Riley think that she had a pretty strong backbone.

"Aren't you going to answer?"

"..."

"I will ask you again.The narcotics and experimentation that Nainiae spoke of... Is it true that you were the one that orchestrated them?"

With a fierce expression on her face, Priesia inquired again.

This time, the question was no longer asking if he was 'involved.'

Instead, now, the question was tossed at him with an assumption that he was.

"Ugh."

Astroa dropped his head down and breathed out heavily after having been holding it for a while.

Because of the power that Priesia had as a priestess, he could not lie. That was not all.

He was also surrounded by Solia Castle's royal guards and Solia Temple's holy knights.

As if that was not enough, although she was just a disposed product of the Magic Tower, Nainiae, who was at Six Circles, was interfering with his escape.

It was the worst situation.

Thinking about the fact that all this was because of that 'bastard under the mask' made him furious.

"Ugh. Ugh. Ugh..."

Astroa all of sudden dropped his shoulders and started to make suppressed laughing sounds.

He was cornered.

No matter how much he racked his brain, it was a situation where he couldn't think of a way out.

Hence, obviously,

"...Yes."

Astroa answered.

“Yes. I am the one that did all of them.”

“…”

“Narcotics… Yes. In the Magic Tower’s basement, I manufactured narcotics and sold them to nobles. With that, I procured funds for experiments, and I performed trivial experiments…that didn’t hurt anyone.”

‘Didn’t hurt anyone?’

Nainiae was standing with the people from the Holy Temple. Having heard Astroa’s words, she made a tight fist. It was starting to shake.

“Astroa…”

Priesia narrowed her eyes and called his name.

Her voice, and how she omitted his title, conveyed her rage.

“Yes. Is there a problem?”

“…”

Nainiae’s nails dug into her skin.

She would not have been as angry if she were the only one to be exploited.

'What about the little kid who I had just brought to the temple, the one who was trapped inside the laboratory and begged to be killed? What did that child ever do to deserve being subjected to painful drugs and chemicals?'

It was just about when Nainiae was about to scream out of fury.

"...What a total son of a bitch!!"

A powerful roar could be heard from across the street. Nainiae's shoulders shivered.

The loud voice echoed through the entire area.

In light of the incredibly powerful voice, not just Nainiae, but people from Solia Temple and even the homeless of Lower Solia all directed their gazes toward the man.

"Narcotics? You manufactured narcotics? You lunatic runt! Do you have any idea how many people shed bloody tears during the Great War? How dare you!"

The voice was from an old man wearing a butler's suit with multiple Iphalleta House insignias. It was Ian.

‘Ugh. My ear drums…’

It was such an incredibly loud shout that Riley, who was standing right next to Ian, was groaning with his ears covered.

He felt like his ears were about to go deaf from the unexpected roar.

“That son of a b-…!”

“…”

“…”

Unable to hide his agitation, Ian was breathing hard. However, he took a glance at Iris and Sera and bit his lips.

“…Since before, I never liked mage bastards.”

“Ah, I got it…”

As Ian said it in a quiet voice, Riley responded a little later.

Since back in the days when he was addressed with the title of hero mercenary, Ian had deep hatred toward narcotics.

Riley expected that he would be enraged by all this, but Riley never expected that his reaction would be this intense.

“Especially this runt. Of all sons of bitches out there, this bastard… He is the real lunatic of them all. They are all lunatics.”

“…Yep.”

Riley had forgotten about Ian’s habit for a long time. Having remembered it, Riley responded as he nodded.

“Young master.”

“Yes, yes? What is it?”

Ian put his hand on the handle of the sword he was carrying on his waist.

The old man’s entire body was overflowing with deadly aura. It felt like he would draw the sword at any moment.

“I know it is not my place to do this, but please, may I step in?”

“Step in?”

“For lunatic bastards, a good beating is like medicine. Borrowing the name of the Iphelleta House, I would like to beat the crap out

of that runt. He deserves punishment from the above. It would not be enough to kill him by frying him on a skillet full of shit. He is a piece of shi-…”

“…”

“…Ahem. You will allow me, right?”

Looking at Ian with his burning eyes, Riley did not know what to do. He looked at his mother and Sera.

Riley’s mother and Sera too only shrugged. Their eyes were saying they didn’t know what to do either.

“Uh, that is…”

While Riley was speechless and was not able to make a decision, sounds of multiple swords being drawn all together could be heard.

It was from Solia Castle’s royal knights.

By his looks, starting from his cape, his armor, even the sword he was holding, the captain of the royal knights stood out among all royal knights. The captain aimed his sword toward Astroa and said,

“Manufacturing or distributing narcotics inside Solia is the most serious crime of all. Hence, I will have to ask you to come with us

to the Solia Castle. Do not resist! Please put on these mana suppressing cuffs."

The mana felt from Astroa appeared to be at an alarming level.

"...Ha, haha."

The one who broke the silence that came after the captain's words was Astroa, the one who was warned.

While laughing, he shrugged his shoulder. Astroa covered his face with his right hand and took a look around at all the people that were surrounding him. The look on his face expressed how he viewed them. He thought their standoff was ludicrous.

"Did you just say you will arrest me?"

Astroa retorted.

No response could be heard.

Until only a moment ago, his gray beard looked elderly and graceful, but now, even his beard looked terrifying.

He started to exude deadly aura.

"By chance, have you forgotten? I am a grand mage of Seven

Circles magic.”

Astroa turned his head.

No matter where he looked, everyone was looking at him with the same eyes.

Everyone was glaring at him with the kind of eyes that one stared with at an evildoer.

Although it was not showing, a few people’s eyes were filled with fear.

“I’m the only one in Solia with the Seven Circles magic. If you were to arrest a grand mage like me and then Rainfield or Ansirium were to declare war on Solia...then what would you intend to do?”

To his question, again, no response could be heard.

“There is nothing good that would come out of making an enemy out of me. Am I wrong? Miss priestess?”

This time, Astroa’s head turned toward Priesia.

As if he was disappointed that he could not see the look on her face under her veil, the corner of the grand mage’s mouth was stretching.

It appeared that he was thinking the situation was turning in his favor.

"...Certainly, that would be a problem."

Priesia answered.

In light of her response, the royal knights and temple priests all dropped their jaws with vacant stares.

"Indeed, right?"

Astroa pulled up the corner of his mouth and grinned as if he figured as much. He immediately pointed at Nainiae and said,

"As for that disposed product, well, since it was a mistake from the Magic Tower, I will clean it up for you. So..."

"That is, if it wasn't for the 'divine message' that was sent down to me recently."

"...Pardon?"

The divine message.

It was an oracle that the goddess Irenetsa bestowed upon the

priestess.

Hearing Priesia's words mentioning a divine message, Astroa soon wrinkled his grinning face and stared at her.

"Now, what do you mean by..."

"It is not the kind of message that would be permitted to be told to someone with a bleak heart. To summarize...Astroa, it means your threat will not work."

After finishing what she had to say, Priesia raised her right arm.

With her gesture, as if everyone was waiting for it, Solia Temple's holy knights directed their holy powers toward their shields and swords and started to exude golden lights.

"...Arrest him."

"You...!"

At that instant, Solia Castle's royal knights started to move in. Those who could use the Aura Sword technique were wielding swords with a blue aura and rapidly approaching Astroa.

As expected, perhaps because they were hardened warriors, instead of describing them as running, describing their movement as flying was more appropriate.

“…Barrier!”

Soon, all holy and royal knights who closed in toward Astroa started to swing their swords.

Baam!

Holy knights and royal knights were deflected off by a semi-transparent layer that appeared in front of them.

Aura swords and others engulfed in holy powers penetrated deep without being deflected. However, the problem was that they could not tear apart the barrier.

“Kuk?!”

“Is it a barrier?”

Knights scrunched their faces.

Also, Astroa too cringed.

“This is justified self defense.”

Because he cast a barrier and was standing inside, there was supposed to be no wind blowing at him, but his gray beard was

flapping like a kite in a festival.

“Grease.”

Astroa cast a spell.

Grease, a One Circle magic.

It instantly eliminated the friction on the ground to make people in the effective range slip or fall down.

“Uh?”

“Kuk!”

Because it suddenly became slippery, some knights were not able to stand it and fell or tap danced around to keep the balance.

“Swamp!”

“What?”

“Damn it. My foot…”

“It’s a swamp! Get out of it!”

After casting Grease, Astroa immediately cast Swamp, a Two Circle magic, which turned the ground into a mud field. Astroa also cast Fly and rose up in the air.

“Even if it is now, how about you call this off and take back what you said, Priestess Priesia? If you try to fight me…many people will die.”

“…”

Priesia turned her head up and looked at Astroa’s face.

“…Cure.”

As Priesia focused her holy power and distributed it to the surrounding quietly, the area, which was turning into a complete mess along with the sewer water starting to be thrown into the mix, was returning to its original state…and then it became completely clean.

Having cleansed the ground using her holy power, Priesia said,

“About what you just said… I believe you will have to make a correction on your statement since not stopping you now will result in more casualties.”

“Huh…”

As if he concluded that persuasion is no longer an option, Astroa completed the spell that he had started to cast when he ascended a while ago. With several boulder-sized fireballs summoned behind him, Astroa stared down below and said,

“Well then, please feel free to go ahead and try.”

Astroa swung his hand.

The fireballs that he summoned started to pour down on Lower Solia.

Chapter 47 - Defeating The Grand Mage

After the end of a suffocating conversation, a battle to defeat Astroa had begun.

It was one versus many, a little less than 50.

“Stop him from uttering spells! Stop him from using magic!”

“Archer squad! Ordinary arrows won’t work! Bring something else!”

There were about twenty of the elite royal guards from Solia Castle, and there were about twenty of holy knights and priests from Solia Holy Temple.

“Don’t get hit by magic! Always look at his mouth and check for any lights appearing around him!”

“It’s... It’s coming again!”

“Step forward if you can use the Aura Blade technique! Cut down magic attacks coming at us!”

Considering the fact that there was Ian with his sword drawn, Priesia using her holy powers, and even Nainiae launching arrays of small magic attacks, an ordinary man would have died several times over by now in face of their combined firepower.

“Injured! Priest sir, we have an injured here!”

“Hey! Fire, fire! Your back’s on fire you rascal!”

“Ugh! My arm! My arm won’t move!”

If one was to point out a problem in this situation, it was the fact that they were fighting against a grand mage that represented a city.

He wasn’t an ordinary level mage. He was at Seven Circles. The man was a magic specialist.

“Huh! Staring at my mouth? Fools.”

Astroa saw his opponents on the ground giving a blank stare towards his mouth. Astroa snorted and swung his hand.

“Something like Three Circles magic and below…”

Following Astroa’s arm movement, several dozens of flame and ice arrows were created behind him.

“…I can launch them without having to recite the spells.”

The sky was dark because it was night-time, but now it suddenly

became bright.

It was because of magic attacks Astroa generated.

“Ugh…”

Solia Castle’s royal guards and the people from the temple looked up and saw vast number of magic attacks that were about to be poured down on them like rain. They opened and closed their mouths wordlessly, like fishes.

They were starting to realize whom they were up against.

“When you are in Hell, blame the priestess who sent you to your grave.”

As if he was done with the preparation for his bombardment, Astroa murmured as he lowered his arm.

“Here they come!”

“I will stop this wave of attacks.”

As Astroa’s magic arrows were launched towards the ground, Priesia took a step forward and raised her arm.

A gentle golden light surrounded her, and soon, a protective

layer wide enough to surround everyone within Astroa's bombardment range appeared.

Unlike the blue-colored barriers that mages could generate, her barrier was golden and contained holy power.

"Oh!"

Fire and ice arrows rained down on them, and the golden barrier stopped all magic arrows.

The expression on the priestess' face was as strong and enduring as always.

"..."

"Tsk."

Having confirmed that the magic attacks were blocked, Astroa clicked his tongue.

She was annoying the hell out of him.

Although she would not be able to inflict serious harm to him, to Astroa, the priestess was like a thorn poking at his eyes.

"Archer squad! What are you doing? Stop sitting on your asses!

Take aim!”

“Ah, yes!”

Solia Castle’s archers were giving vacant stares and watching the priestess’ might and grace. Roused by the captain’s shouting, they fumbled, placed arrows in their bows and took aim toward the sky.

Astroa, the one floating in the air, was their target.

“Impudence...”

“Prepare to shoot!”

Noticing the tightly drawn bowstrings, Astroa directed his gaze toward the archers. He prepared his mana, pointed his hand at the direction where the arrows would be launched from, and recited a spell.

“...Shoot!”

All arrows were launched with ferocity. Although they were launched...

“Wind Wave!”

None of the arrows were able to hit the target. The arrows were

either swept away by the wind and fell to the ground or were cut in half by invisible blades.

It was because Astroa used the wind magic to block the arrows.

“God damn it!”

Seeing the attempt going down the drain, the captain of the royal guards clicked his tongue. It was because they had no means of attacking the mage floating in the air other than with arrows.

‘From this distance, I could launch an energy blade attack, but there is a limit on how many shots I can handle. If he dodges it using a short-distance teleportation spell, the situation will turn for worse for us. I can’t afford to be reckless.’

It was not like the captain had no other means of attacking Astroa who was floating in the air.

He could launch an energy blade to a mid-range target. It was a technique that could be considered his most powerful attack. There was a drawback, which was a severe drain of mana. Because of this, there was a limit on how many times he could launch the energy blade attacks.

‘God damn it! If only we had just one of the bow masters…’

Because of a situation, Solia Castle’s bow master was on a mission in some other country. The captain thought about the bow master

as he gritted his teeth.

‘If this keeps up, there will be no end to this.’

With an anxious look on his face, the captain looked toward the direction where the people from the temple were gathered.

To be precise, he was looking at where Nainiae was.

‘It looks like it will be also difficult to count on our little friend there.’

Unlike the tough looking scars on her face, still, the best way to describe her would have been ‘frail.’

Although she was standing still, expression on her face looked like she could collapse out of exhaustion at any moment. Having noticed this, the captain’s face darkened.

At the moment, she was limited to stopping Astroa from casting Teleport, which he tried occasionally.

‘God damn it, there is no end to this.’

Just like the Solia Castle’s royal guard captain, Astora was also scrunching his face as he thought about the same thing.

Because of the priestess' Barrier and constant healing by the temple priests, there have not been any lethal casualties.

Astroa could not be certain if he would run out of mana first or if the priestess would run out of her holy power first.

Astroa cracked his neck left and right and said,

"In that case, I think I had enough of getting warmed up."

"..."

Priesia's face crumpled. Astroa said,

"It's about time. Slowly, I will throw you a big one."

Astroa pulled his upper body back and raised both of his hands above his head.

It appeared like he was preparing for a massive attack.

Although the homeless of Lower Solia were not capable of seeing mana, even they could see distortions in the air around Astroa.

"Inferno Ball."

The object was beyond red-hot. A lump of flame, which appeared

to be like lava out of a volcano, appeared above Astora's palms.

It looked as if a sun appeared in the night sky all of sudden.

Because of its blinding brightness, Priesia squinted, and at the same time, Astroa swung his hands wide.

"Kuk..."

As she opened her hand and raised it to generate a barrier once again, Priesia cringed. It was because the heat was extraordinary.

The flame had not even touched the barrier yet, but she was already furrowing her eyebrows due to its intense heat. Looking at her reaction, others could guess just how powerful the magic attack must be.

"It's a Six Circles magic. Why don't you try taking one?"

Priesia had not had a ceremony for her adulthood yet. It also meant she had not completed her priestess training and she was not a full-fledged priestess yet.

Of course, her barrier had a limit.

"Ugh."

Priesia was maintaining the barrier, but she grunted as she took a step back.

Fortunately, the barrier was being maintained, but it looked critical.

“…How about I send you another one?”

Astroa pulled his hands toward his chest and started to recite a spell again.

Pazizizik!

Blue lightning sparks formed between his hands, and their size and length started to grow.

It looked like Astroa was intending to launch Six Circles magic attacks continuously.

“…Shoot!”

As if they were trying to say that they weren’t just going to sit and watch, Solia Castle’s archers went around to a side, tightly pulled the bowstrings with all of their strength, and launched the arrows upon the signal.

“Kuk?!”

Could it be that they properly seized the right opportunity when Astroa was in the middle of casting a large spell?

Of the arrows that were launched, one of them hit right on Astroa's thigh.

At the same time, the large spell that Astroa was preparing was canceled.

"You bastards!"

Astroa's forehead was bulging with veins. Astroa rapidly turned his head toward the direction of the arrow's origin and put forth his hand.

"Reverse!"

Around Astroa's shoulder, arm and hand, three purplish circular magic circles were formed.

It was signaling that he was about to use gravitation magic, and it was a Six Circles level magic.

"Huh? Uhuh?"

"My body!"

“What’s happening!”

Solia Castle’s archers started to float up in the air. Defying gravity, their bodies rose up continuously with no end in sight, but then, along with Astroa’s shouting…

“…Gravity!”

…their bodies were thrown downwards, to be smashed to the ground to be exact.

“Uuaak!”

“Ahhk!”

Splash! Splash!

Horrifying sounds of people being squashed after falling to the ground could be heard.

Their bodies were thrown to the ground at a speed far greater than it would have from simply jumping off from a high ground. Obviously, the archers’ bodies were not in good shape.

“This… God damn it…”

As the battle continued, as feared, death toll started to pile up.

***

“Ugh… Ugh…”

Once again, Nainiae canceled the teleportation magic that Astroa was trying to cast just now. Struggling to stand her ground, she took a deep breath.

‘How many more times…will I be able to withstand this?’

It was extremely fortunate that casting the Teleport spell required a long time before it could be attempted again.

If it was like Blink, a short-range teleportation magic, which had very short preparation and recovery time before reuse, Nainiae would have coughed blood and fainted several times over by now.

“For you…isn’t this too dangerous? Since a while ago, healing measures have not been very effective.”

The priest Asteel had been standing by Nainiae like a partner since the beginning to heal her. With an anxious look on his face, Asteel stared at Nainiae’s face from the side.

Although they roughly cleaned her horrid appearance back in the temple, that was about it.

Under her pitch-black eyes, her mouth was unable to close because of all the murmurs of pain, clearly indicating the critical state that Nainiae was in.

“B-Big sis… Are you okay?”

A voice could be heard from nearby.

It wasn’t just Asteel that was right by Nainiae. The little girl who Nainiae and Riley rescued from the laboratory was also sticking right next to Nainiae.

Thanks to the Priestess Priesia’s help, the child was able to wash away all her injuries from the basement. Seeing the little girl being concerned for Nainiae, although she was not sure how, she was able to gain strength.

“I’m…all right.”

Having realized that there were eyes watching her, Nainiae stopped shaking and answered.

‘My job. I must do it.’

Nainiae’s eye looked toward Astroa who was floating in the air.

Having finished casting gravitation magic, it appeared he was preparing a large scale spell once again. Nainiae gritted her teeth.

Because the people on the ground didn't have many options for a long-range attack, Nainiae was well aware that her role was more important than ever.

'What I have to do... I must do it...'

Nainiae's gaze, which was aimed at Astroa, slowly moved downward.

Her body hasn't reached the limit yet. She lowered her gaze to the ground because she could feel someone's gaze.

"..."

Even though there was Astroa in the air randomly launching magic attacks of terrifying power, there was someone fixated at Nainiae.

'Who is it?'

Nainiae bowed her head down and checked who it was. It was a face that Nainiae was familiar with.

"Ah."

Nainiae made a vacant stare and opened her mouth.

There were only a few people in Lower Solia that knew her face, and one of those people was looking this way.

“Ha…mil.”

He was one of the homeless that had spent all of their savings to purchase her, a disposed product.

Although they never spoke of it, he was also Beta’s lover.

“…Hamil.”

It was Hamil.

‘Why is Hamil here?’

With her eye trembling, she looked at Hamil. As if Hamil also realized that Nainiae was looking at him, he asked Nainiae by mouthing words,

‘What happened to Beta?’

Hamil was asking what happened to Beta. As he was making the inquiry, the look on Hamil’s face was desperate. It was certain that he couldn’t sleep through the night worrying about her.

“T-That is…”

In his eyes, there was a sliver of hope. They looked like he was saying,

‘You probably protected her? You were able to protect her, right?’

“Beta is…”

Nainiae murmured.

With his gaze locked onto her, Nainiae’s breathing started to speed up.

“Beta is… That is…”

Nainiae was blaming herself for not being able to protect Beta in the end. Nainiae was hesitating and was not sure of what to do, but then, a familiar voice could be heard in her head,

<…Hey.>

“…?!”

Nainiae flinched and looked around.

The voice belonged to the boy whom she spent the entire early morning with.

<I know what you are thinking about right now, but do you have the time for that now?>

In light of the question being heard through her head, Nainiae turned her head towards the back.

Right now, there were other people watching her, not just Hamil alone.

“Big sis…are you really okay?”

“…”

She heard the question from the concerned child. As Nainiae was giving a vacant stare and just standing still, the boy’s voice could be heard again,

<If you end this with a vacant stare like that, will that be all right?>

To Nainiae, who was still hesitating, the boy asked the question.

Hearing the question, Nainiae slowly shook her head.

‘I…’

“…When it comes to thoughts that you can finish after everything is over, you should finish them when it is done.”

“…?!”

This time, instead of the voice being heard in her head, from the back, the voice could be heard directly from the boy.

Chapter 48 - Defeating The Grand Mage (Part 2)

"...?"

Having heard the voice coming from the back, Nainiae quickly turned her head. Along with Riley, she also discovered that the priest, Asteel, was unconscious and leaning against a wall. Looking confused, Nainiae asked Riley,

"Why are you here?"

Through the power of her eye, she was roughly aware that Riley had come to this place. However, Nainiae knew Riley was not going to step in the situation.

"I clearly remember you telling me that you will not step forward..."

When Nainiae was with Riley during the early morning, Riley had said so, and that instead he would just watch. Because Nainiae remembered his words, she stared at Riley with a question mark floating on her face.

"I know. I did say that."

The look on Riley's face said all this was such a bother to him. He scratched the back of his head and continued.

“I was not planning on stepping forward. It is as I said before, but…”

Riley furrowed the spot between his eyebrows and looked at Astroa floating in the air.

Astroa did have an arrow stuck in his thigh, but it appeared that the injury was not hindering him from using magic. Also, the intensity of the magic attacks that he was pouring out was not showing any signs of winding down.

Riley could see why Astroa was called the grand mage representing the Magic Tower. He deserved the title.

“…this is taking too long.”

Riley complained that it was going to take too long to defeat a grand mage like Astroa. Nainiae could see in Riley’s face that he was not joking. Nainiae asked,

“Too…long?”

The opponent that they were fighting against was the top dog of Solia’s Magic Tower, a grand mage that reached the height of Seven Circles. He was a monster that was launching a Six Circles level magic every five minutes.

Hunting him down quickly like a sewer rat was practically impossible.

“That’s right. This is taking too long.”

Despite all that, Riley was saying that the battle was being sustained for too long.

“This is being dragged on for too long, and because of that, magic attacks are about to reach all the way to where my mother is.”

Because this was taking too long, now there was a possibility of endangering his mother. This was the reason why Riley came to Nainiae.

If things went as Riley originally thought, the situation should have concluded before an incident where Astroa’s indiscriminate magic attacks came flying towards where Riley was.

“I don’t know about their circumstances, but…”

Again, the look on Riley’s face expressed that all this was such a bother to him. He turned his head toward Solia’s royal guards who were engaged in a head-on battle against Astroa.

“…Among the people from Solia Castle, there isn’t any skilled archer. This is the problem.”

The opponent was a grand mage floating in the air using Fly magic.

For Solia Castle's swordsmen and the Holy Temple's priests and holy knights, striking him down was certainly a very difficult task.

There were archers among the castle's royal guards, but, because they didn't know how to load the arrows with mana, these archers were not the ones Riley could have big expectations of.

"How could these so called knights not even know the concept of blade throw technique."

Tsk.

Riley mentioned his specialty, and he clicked his tongue as he closed and opened his hand several times.

"There aren't many that can attack from mid-range. Looking at the situation, there isn't any among the priests from the Holy Temple that are capable of doing it either."

"In that case, we should ask the Magic Tower..."

"No."

As Nainiae said, in that case, the only way left was magic. It was best to use magic and shoot down Astroa or bring him down to the

ground.

Although they had Nainiae here, because the mana inside her was running amok, she was limited to stopping Astroa when he occasionally attempted to cast Teleport, therefore she could not be counted on for such a task.

They needed another mage.

However, to point out a problem, the question was if the mages from the Magic Tower would willingly cooperate if they asked the Magic Tower's mages the following question: 'would you please lend your strengths and help us hunt down Astroa, your leader?'

"Notifying the Magic Tower about this should be done after giving a serious thought first. If we just tell them about it, it might only make the problem bigger. You never know. In the worst case scenario, it may lead to a rebellion."

Riley was saying that mages had that much influence in a country. Therefore, Riley thought that, instead, finishing the deed while Astroa was alone and far away from everyone else might be easier.

"...God damn it. Mithril net! Is there a Mithril net?!"

As a powerful voice like the sound of thunder could be heard, Nainiae's gaze moved toward the origin.

It was from Ian, the one that immediately went up to the frontline and started leading knights and archers along with the royal guard's captain when Riley gave Ian the permission to act.

"It... It's at the castle!"

"What? God damn it! Even if it is now, go get it!"

"But, it will at least take 30 minutes."

"I said just go get it for now!"

It appeared Ian was titled as the hero mercenary from the Great War for a good reason. Ian had succeeded in burying an arrow in Astroa's thigh. However, since then, he had not managed to successfully deal another hit, which was a problem.

When Riley first heard Ian looking for a net, Riley whistled. However, when Riley then heard it will take 30 minutes, he sighed.

"If this keeps up. The problem isn't going to be just about whether Ian would get hurt or not."

Currently, the battle to defeat Astroa was in full swing.

Noticing the people's gazes toward where Nainiae was standing, Riley slowly moved back and stepped on Nainiae's shadow.

He stepped back because he had already told Nainiae that he was intending to do so and show her how.

If possible, Riley wanted to avoid having the situation head in a direction where he was getting the attention.

“Big Sis. Who is this Big Bro?”

Riley, who stepped back to hide himself, came face to face with the young child who he had his eyes met with earlier for a brief moment.

It was the child that he and Nainiae saved together from the Magic Tower’s basement laboratory. Now, because of the medical treatment from the Holy Temple, the child was able to speak a little.

“That is…”

Nainiae blurred the end of her sentence and looked around. It was because she couldn’t decide what to say, and she was also worried about the priest who was sticking by her until a moment ago, who was now unconscious before anyone, even rats or birds, noticed.

“Big Sis, by chance, did you see? A moment ago, this big bro moved super fast.”

Although Nainiae didn’t see it herself, it appeared that the child

saw up to the moment when Riley sat the priest to the nearby wall.

"...Young lady."

"...?"

Riley called the child and bent his upper body slightly to level his eyes with her.

Riley had a leisurely tone of voice, and there was no animosity in it.

However, Nainiae was still worried. All she did was staring vacantly to her front with her mouth open like a fish and shifting her eyes.

'Will it be...okay?'

She was not able to turn around and see what was happening behind her, between Riley and the child. It was because she was currently being the wall that hid Riley from the gazes of others.

"I'm sorry, but, about what just happened, and the fact that you saw me here today...can you please keep it a secret?"

Shh.

As if he was belittling Nainiae's worries, Riley only put his index finger to the front of his lips and pleaded to the child.

Just a moment ago, without any warning, Riley had knocked out the priest that was standing by Nainiae. How he was acting towards the child was different. Compared to what he did to the priest, some would have thought it was different to the point of being unfair.

"But..."

As Riley saw the child fiddling and being hesitant, he moved his hand to his back pocket.

"...Could you please?"

"Ah!"

What Riley brought out was his mask.

It was the mask that Riley was wearing when he was at the basement of the Magic Tower and saving the child.

"By chance, back then...you are that big bro?"

"That's right. Keeping this a secret... You can do it, right? I'll be able to save others only if you keep it a secret."

As the child watched Riley bring the mask toward his face, the child's eyes were sparkling. She soon nodded deeply and said,

"Okay!"

"All right. You are such a good girl."

"Hehe."

Riley smiled behind his mask, extended his right arm, and patted the child's head.

There was familiarity in Riley's way of gently patting her head. The child stayed put and accepted his gesture.

'He looks like a different person…'

Seeing a side of Riley that she had never seen until today, Nainiae thought so as she heard a faint laughter coming from behind her.

Nainiae was deep in her thoughts for a moment, but she opened both of her eyes wide. It was because she recalled something she had forgotten for a while.

'Hamil.'

Nainiae shifted her eyes and rushed to find Hamil.

She couldn’t see him in the spot that he was standing a while ago. She couldn’t locate him within the range of Astroa’s magic. Among the Solia’s royal guards, Holy Temple’s priests, or even among the homeless of Lower Solia, she could not find Hamil.

‘Hamil… Where could you be?’

There was uneasiness in the corner of her mind because she was worried about him, but she decided to not worry too much.

‘When it comes to thoughts that I could think about after everything is over, I should be thinking about them when everything is over.’

It was because the warmth from Riley reaching her back felt like it was telling her to do so.

To Nainiae, who pursed her lips and was calming her mind, Riley said,

“Now, take a deep breath.”

“…?”

“This has dragged on long enough. We should end this quickly, don’t you think?”

Ian would obviously have no way of knowing because he was in middle of fighting, but to his mother and Sera, who were watching the battle to defeat Astora, Riley came after giving them enough excuses.

Because Riley had no intention of letting this drag on any further, Riley put his hand on a sword that he snatched from a royal guard.

“Have a big shot prepared.”

Until now, Riley was only holding the mask in front of him, but now, he actually put it on.

Astroa cast different spells in each of his hands and attacked Solia Castle’s royal guards.

“Firewall, Poison Spray.”

Firewall was a fire-element mid-level magic. In middle of the battlefield, a wall of fire was summoned, and immediately, a poisonous mist that could spread through the air was released.

The Firewall and Poison Spray were not high circle number spells, but because they were combined together, they were demonstrating fearsome power.

“Kuuaaak!”

“Ahhhhhk!”

The royal guards within Astroa’s magic attacks’ range got swept into its effects. Screaming in pain, they ran toward the people from the Holy Temple.

Although they were tempered knights after long years of hard training, it appeared they had no way of withstanding attacks from flames or extreme poisons that were burning or melting their body.

“Save me!”

“Heal! Heal!”

Instead of magic that the royal guards could easily cut down or block, Astroa was using magic that was tricky to handle or they could not even go nearby.

“Looks like I should start doing something about those priests as well.”

Astroa slowly turned his gaze.

Unlike during the beginning of the battle, the priestess’ barrier was now noticeably dimmer.

With a little bit more of bombardment, it appeared Astroa could even eliminate the extra thick barrier cast on the side of the people from the Holy Temple and end the situation.

“Bringing down the rear is the best strategy of all best strategies in a battle.”

Astroa waved his hand again and prepared a Six Circles level flame magic.

He recited a pretty long spell and collected mana.

Astroa’s plan was to either throw or launch the magic when it was complete. Once he destroyed the priestess’ barrier, the idea he had for the plan thereafter was to tear apart the priests using lightning magic, which would have resulted in rapid casualties.

“Tsk!”

Astroa had his magic ready, and all he had to do was to launch the attack, but, at that moment, he slightly tilted his head to the side and barely dodged an arrow that flew toward him.

‘I could have ended this sooner, but to think that a mercenary hero would show up out of nowhere…’

Astroa turned his head and locked his eyes with the man

responsible for the arrow.

The man looked old, but his face still looked familiar.

It was a face that Astroa had ran into in his past, and that made his face crumple.

Both arrows, the one that got stuck in his thigh and the other that left a scratch on his cheek, were launched by the man.

‘Still, he is not as good as he was in his prime.’

The look on Astroa’s face was stating that he thought of Ian’s effort as impudent and laughable. Now fixated on Ian, Astroa moved his arm and cast Air Hammer.

Among the wind element spells, Air Hammer possessed considerable destructive power.

It was the same magic that he used against Aploc, who was now unconscious and stuck in Lower Solia’s sewers.

“Kuk…”

Perhaps Ian just had good senses. The old man succeeded in blocking Astroa’s invisible Air Hammer with just a sword. He was successful, but perhaps because he couldn’t beat his age, Ian was not able to stop his body from being bounced back. His body was

pushed back as his feet dragged.

'You are probably starting to feel it about now. Have you realized it? That a mage and a swordsman are different?'

Unlike those who handled swords, mages only got stronger with experience regardless of age. Having pushed Ian out of the battlefield, Astroa turned his head again toward the place where the priests were.

'Once I clean them up and tear apart that disposed product bitch, I should pack up the stuff and leave Soli-...'

Astroa was moving his gaze as he thought about his future plans, but he suddenly twitched his eyebrows.

"...That!"

It was at a place pretty far from where the priests were gathered. Astroa was twitching his eyebrows because his eyes met with someone standing on a corner in that place.

"...Ah, looks like I drew his attention."

The 'masked man,' the one Astroa had his eyes meet, murmured.

Chapter 49 - Defeating The Grand Mage (Part 3)

Seven Circles was a height in magic mastery where a mage was capable of creating a natural disaster level calamity with just a sweep of a hand, and it was the height that Astroa, a human, had reached.

‘That insolent bastard, he dares to come here!’

Certainly, Astroa may have had his guard down during the past encounters, but still, the foe that beat him twice was here.

‘You bastard. You may have ran away after making a fool out of me twice, but… This time, it won’t happen.’

His white beard and facial muscles started to shake out of fury.

It was to the point that air surrounding him was starting to show distortions and haze.

The grand mage was in a state of rage.

‘If you think I’ll fall for your tricks like before, you are seriously mistaken.’

It looked like his head was about to pop open from all the anger, but unlike his appearance, Astroa was thinking calmly. He was

only focused on how to slice, dice and fry that masked man.

"Shoot!"

Wheeeec!

Wheeeec!

Before Astroa could think about his plan for more than ten seconds, Solia Castle's royal guards took stances again and launched arrows.

"Ugh, these small fries..."

All of the arrows collided with the barrier that Astroa had prepared earlier and fell down.

Although the attack ended up a failure, it appeared to have succeeded in making Astroa more annoyed because he gritted his teeth as he glared toward the direction where the arrows came from.

'I don't have time to deal with you bastards!'

Astroa assessed that the unidentified masked man was far more dangerous than the castle's royal guards. It was because, to Astroa, the masked man was a bastard that managed to threaten his life twice, the life of a mage who had reached the height of Seven

Circles magic. He may have had his guard down during his past encounters, but the masked man could not be taken lightly.

“Blizzard!”

Astroa decided to make sure that the small fries were neutralized and cast Blizzard, which was a Seven Circles level magic and the highest level ice element magic he could cast.

“This is, god damn it…”

The captain of the royal guards definitely heard what spell Astroa was reciting. The captain immediately started to have his subordinates fall back.

“Fall back! Everyone! Retreat! It’s a large-scale magic! You must fall back!”

Ha…

[TL: I’m sure you can tell, but this is not laughter. This is a sound effect as in how one would breath out during a cold winter and notice the breathe is turning into white mist because it is so cold.]

It was supposed to be spring right now, but somehow, the breath coming out of the captain was turning into white mist.

The wind was initially blowing gently, but soon, it started to generate fierce noise that was sharp enough to tear apart people’s

eardrums. With the cold wind, the atmosphere was changed to the point that it was slowing the royal guards' movements.

"Uu... Col-..."

A royal guard froze completely before being able to finish his word. The true power of the Blizzard, a Seven Circles magic, was starting to take effect.

"Kuuuk!"

The captain barely managed to get out of the blizzard's range. He covered himself by raising one of his arms. He scrunched up his face. It was because some of his subordinates didn't manage to escape the blizzard.

A royal guard that was standing near the center of the effective area didn't just freeze. He was turned completely white and beyond recognition.

"C-Captain..."

A royal guard crawling from the effective area put out his arm toward the captain. The expression on his face was desperate and trying to tell the captain as he was pleading to be saved. However, with a tear hanging on his face, the royal guard froze solid.

It was a helpless situation.

Because he couldn’t save his subordinates, out of despair, the captain was just standing there with a vacant look on his face. Meanwhile, to the captain, a shadow was being cast from above.

“C-Captain! Look out!”

Although he wasn’t frozen from the magic, the captain was standing still like a statue because he was looking at the royal guard that didn’t make it out of the range. A royal guard came to tackle the captain and have him fall back.

“Kuuk?!”

Baam!

To the spot where the captain was standing a moment ago, an icicle, no, a large boulder of ice fell.

Its lower end had a blunt shape. If he was under the ice, it looked like it would not have ended with simply getting crushed.

The problem now was that these things were falling continuously.

‘This is a Seven Circles magic…’

The captain crumpled his face as he raised his upper body.

"Hm!"

Having noticed the captain staring at him, Astroa snorted as he thought of the captain's glare as just an impudent gesture. Astroa turned his head away.

There were people remaining in the Holy Temple's side, but regardless, they were not the people that could hurt him directly.

Now that he roughly neutralized the small-fries from Solia Castle, Astroa fixated his gaze toward the distance where Nainiae and the mask man were standing.

'The amount of mana remaining in me is...about half? Still, this is enough.'

Astroa narrowed his eyes. He had enough mana to cast two more Seven Circles level spells that were about as powerful as the Blizzard.

Also, there was his trump card, the drug that he completed after having spent a long time in experiments.

There was no problem.

'...I shall send you to your grave.'

Astroa’s eyes bulged with deadly intent.

“Huh, look at how violent his eyes are.”

Riley shivered his shoulders as he watched the blizzard from afar.

It appeared that the blizzard was quite powerful. Even though Riley was far away from the effective range, even he could feel the cold from here. It was making his body shiver from the cold.

Despite the cold from the magic and the grand mage glaring at him with murderous eyes, Riley was looking as relaxed as ever.

Nainiae shifted her eye to the back where the child was standing. Nainiae asked Riley,

“Hey… What are you going to do?”

She asked because Astroa was floating in the air and pretty far from where they were. Riley’s skill as a swordsman was something anyone would be proud of, but from this distance, it looked like it would be difficult for him to use his swordsmanship skill against Astroa.

“What do you mean? I have no intention of letting this drag on any longer.”

Riley replied as he fiddled with the sword on his waist. He asked,

“Have you taken a deep breath?”

“I did, but…”

In light of his question, Nainiae forced herself to respond. Because Riley said Astroa will no longer run, she even withdrew the Spell Cancel magic that she had prepared.

“And the big shot?”

Riley asked Nainaie to prepare a big shot that was as flashy and extravagant as possible. Again, Nainiae forced herself to answer,

“It’s ready.”

She prepared Giga Impact.

It was a Six Circles magic that didn’t have any particular element base.

It was a magic where she focused and compressed the mana to a point and forced it to be held in that state before releasing the mana in a linear beam. It didn’t have an elemental basis, but it had a flashy visual effect and incredibly violent explosion sound.

To point out a drawback, it made the caster's arm into pulp.

"Have you prepared your mind as well?"

"..."

He didn't need to ask that question in this situation, but he did. To his question, Nainiae responded with silence.

"Well, okay."

Riley leisurely pulled out his sword.

At the same moment, Astroa's surrounding was starting to haze up from his energy.

It looked like he was about to launch a large Seven Circles magic.

There was no sign of Astroa letting his guard down.

"It's been a while since I threw it seriously."

"...?"

Nainiae floated a question mark on her face as she heard Riley's

murmur from the side.

‘Throw? What are you going to throw?’

“When I give you the signal, you just need to spray it in his general direction.”

“Spray it?”

“What I’m saying is that you just need to shoot.”

Riley narrowed his eyes as he answered and confirmed Astroa’s location. Riley roughly calculated the distance, spread out his legs properly for a stance, and tightly grabbed on to the sword.

His target was Astroa, the one floating in the air.

“…It’s coming.”

Having heard Riley, Nainiae put strength in her shoulder and raised her arm.

Immediately, they could see a flash from Astroa’s side and a large bird made of flames flying toward them.

‘As I thought, it is a Seven Circles magic…’

Nainiae crumpled her face because she confirmed the magic attack flying toward them was a Seven Cricles level flame magic that she had seen in the past.

'...Will I be able to beat it?'

Her magic was Six Circles magic, and her mana was gradually being extinguished due to her numbered lifespan.

When Nainiae bit her lips, Riley told her,

"Do it."

By Riley's signal, as if she was murmuring, Nainiae initiated the magic that she prepared.

"Giga Impact."

At the moment her low voice echoed, front of Nainiae's sight became completely white.

It wasn't that she lost consciousness. The magic produced blindingly bright light, and a violent sound of explosion followed.

'Ugh...'

It was like standing in front of a large waterfall and listening to

its sound.

Reacting to the conditions, one of Nainiae's eyes closed on its own.

Because of the violent sound of explosion overwhelming her ears, because of bright light filling her sight, and because her arm felt like it was about to fall apart, Nainiae was barely managing to remain conscious.

'...What is he doing now?'

Using the eye that she barely had open, Nainiae looked to the side and watched Riley.

Riley murmured as he stared at his target,

"Please don't be a bother to me. Just go in one shot."

Riley dragged his feet on the ground. With strength, he pulled his arm back, and quickly threw the sword he held in his hand.

'...What?'

Nainiae strained her closed eye and opened it again. Her face was being filled with shock.

In the middle of violent explosion sounds, she could hear another noise that was like something cutting through the wind, and that was it.

Nainiae did see Riley taking a stance and throwing the sword, but she wasn’t able to see where the sword went. However, she realized that the intensity of the flame approaching them from the distance suddenly weakened.

“Now, that's the end… I’ll be going now.”

Nainiae was staring at Riley with her arm raised, but she opened her mouth like a fish and gave a vacant stare after she realized that Riley had disappeared in a blink of an eye.

It was like a mirage. Nainiae stood there as if she was mesmerized.

“…”

Feeling someone’s touch patting her on the back before leaving, Nainiae, who was standing with a blank face, got a grip on her focus and concentrated on her magic.

She desperately held on to the mana floating around her, and she directed all of the mana being focused inside her toward her right arm.

“Kuuuk!”

Starting from her right arm, the mana was starting to overflow, and she felt excruciating pain that felt like her entire body was going to explode.

Because of the severe pain, she even forgot to scream. Nainiae tightly closed her eyes.

"..."

When she strained and opened her eyes again, a black-colored light, a special light that only Nainiae could produce, was piercing through Astroa.

There was a hole.

On an old man that plummeted to Lower Solia's sewer, on his dead body, lying down on the ground with his mouth wide open without any breath, there was a large hole in his chest, big enough for someone's fist to go through.

"Just now, what happened...?"

On top of the blizzard, the Solia Castle's royal guards also witnessed the giant bird made of flames, and now, with confused faces as if they were not able to comprehend what just happened, they stared at the corpse of Astroa.

Literally, all of it happened in an instant.

“Is he…dead?”

A royal guard asked after looking at the corpse. They had the grand mage’s corpse right in front of them, but they were still not able to believe it.

“Just…who did it?”

They saw a pitch-black beam of light that pierced through the firebird and punctured Astroa’s chest. Toward the origin of the light, people directed their gazes, and soon,

“Nai-…”

Having discovered the person that shot the beam of light, Priesia murmured her name with a vacant stare.

“… -niae?”

There was a girl standing motionless with her arm raised toward where Astroa fell.

Nainiae was the one that shot that beam of light and brought down Astroa.

"..."

She looked scary because of the scars on her face, but she looked worn out and frail as if she could be swept away by a gentle wind.

It appeared there was a breeze.

Her body slowly started to tilt to the side.

"Nainiae!"

It was not certain if she only lost consciousness or if she lost her life.

Priesia rushed toward her as Nainiae started to fall to the side with her eyes closed.

"Uu, Big Sis!"

Fortunately, the child that was by Nainiae's side supported her before she fell. Of course, she was not strong enough to keep her from falling down, but it was enough to delay the motion.

"Nainiae!"

Priesia, who rushed to the scene, supported Nainiae.

Nainiae's arm was turned to pulp from using magic, and her body was just hanging without any strength. To describe it, it would not have been enough to say she was in a sorry state.

"S-Sis from the temple... Big Sis Nainiae... Is she okay?"

"..."

Unable to stand still, the child asked Priesia.

It seemed Priesia was unable to tell from Nainiae's appearance. Unable to hide nervousness on her face, Priesia brought her ear close to Nainiae's face to check her breathing.

After having checked Nainiae's breathing, Priesia realized that Nainiae was...

Chapter 50 - A Request

In front of a gravestone, a girl in a white dress just stood there with a vacant gaze.

“…I’m sorry. I don’t know very well…”

In end of the silence, the girl opened her mouth.

By someone’s good will, the gravestone was placed in a pretty nice location, and on the grave, the spring, whose turn was about to come to its end, was sending gentle breeze mixed with flower petals as a farewell gift.

“…why it ended up like this.”

Facing the wind mixed with flower petals, the girl continued.

On the gravestone that the girl was looking at, there were words written in a dirty language criticizing and blaming her.

It looked like someone definitely came by before she arrived.

“I…”

It was asking why she couldn’t protect her and why she was the only one that survived. The girl blurred the end of her sentence as she stared at the gravestone with questions criticizing her written

on it.

“I…”

In front of a dead person, she didn’t know what to say as an excuse.

“…Why don’t we get going soon?”

As the girl stood there without being able to continue her words, the priest, who was standing in waiting behind her, said to the girl. It was because there were people waiting for her.

“Okay.”

The girl nodded as she looked behind her, and she took a step forward and bent her body down. It was to put down the bouquet of flowers she was holding with both of her hands.

“Beta…”

Among the two hands that carefully laid down the bouquet of flowers, one hand had only three fingers.

“…I’ll get going now.”

The girl who laid down the bouquet of flowers, Nainiae, raised

her arm toward the gravestone. It was to wipe off the words on the gravestone, no, the dirt used to write them on the gravestone.

“Soon, I’ll be seeing you again, so…”

The new white dress that she received became dirty from Lower Solia’s dirt, but Nainiae didn’t mind it.

“When that time comes, to me, you…”

Nainiae, who just cleaned the gravestone with great care and turned her body around with her hands to her back, was carrying sadness and bitterness on her face.

“Ugh, to think that something like that would happen in Lower Solia of all places.”

“That’s what I’m saying. Because those homeless people have heavy lips, it seems it won’t be easy to ask them about anything.”

Last night, in Lower Solia, Astroa the grand mage died. This was not an ordinary problem.

“And today is the final of the King’s Swordsmanship Tournament, ugh…”

In this serious atmosphere, in the middle of the discussion meeting, as someone sighed and murmured, another slammed the round table,

Baam!

and that made the polished round table to jump up slightly from the impact.

“Is King’s Swordsmanship Tournament important in a moment like this?!”

“The pillar of the Magic Tower is dead! Not only that, narcotics were discovered! What are we supposed to tell the other side? A lunatic mage was hiding narcotics and was found out? Ha! Sure they will believe that, right?”

Today morning, a few of Solia Castle’s royal guards and some people from the Holy Temple came to the Magic Tower.

As reported by a certain ‘girl,’ in the basement of the Magic Tower, not only the hidden laboratory, but also massive amount of narcotics were discovered.

It had quite literally gone from bad to worse.

“Fortunately, some of the members of the Magic Tower willingly admitted about them. If there was another lunatic like Astroa in the Magic Tower… Ugh…”

The few mages who knew about Astroa's atrocity acknowledged his crimes willingly. Also, for the crime of keeping silence about it for all this time, they said they would accept punishment as a well-deserved penalty.

Some of the mages were currently being held in Solia Castle.

"Even though it happened now, it was fortunate that it was finally exposed."

"Let's go over and get all these organized slowly. First, why don't we talk about the leader of the Magic Tower? Astroa is dead. That means the chair for the leader of the Magic Tower is now empty."

"Hmm."

"I'm sure you all know the reason, but that chair must not be empty. Who killed Astroa again? From what I heard, it was a mage?"

"Yes, that mage killed him. It was a dark witch."

"A dark witch..."

It was by a single blow.

When Solia's royal guards and the people from the temple were

in desperate situation in the battle, Nainiae, the dark witch and a disposed product from the Magic Tower, shot the magic that she prepared and succeeded in defeating Astroa.

Everyone that was at the scene of the battle said the same thing. They talked about a violent explosion sound, loud enough to tear the eardrums, and also the dark colored beam of light's trajectory. They were all explaining that Nainiae defeated Astroa.

No matter who looked at it, it appeared to be the case, so it could not be told in a different way.

"In that case, that...dark witch... Should we assume she would be taking on the leadership role in the Magic Tower?"

By law, the leader of the Magic Tower was decided by the people in the tower.

It was possible for the others to propose their opinions, but they couldn't just demand the people of the Magic Tower to elect a specific person. It didn't matter who proposed it, even if they were royalties or the king's associates gathered in the meeting at the moment.

Therefore, they could only speculate.

"Probably, that would be the case, right?"

"From what I heard, it was also her that went to the Holy Temple

and reported the narcotics and human experiments.”

“Regardless, her exploits are commendable. She had the courage to report the dirty secrets of the Magic Tower. Solia Castle was already thinking about giving her rewards.”

“In that case, looks like it is a sure thing now.”

“…That’s not the case.”

When everyone was thinking the dark witch will become the leader of the Magic Tower, someone in the meeting room shook the head and continued,

“She probably will not be able to become the leader of the Magic Tower.”

”Why? Her exploits are deserving of such a title, so why?”

In light of the negative opinion, everyone turned their heads. That someone started to explain,

“There are many reasons, but the first one is her appearance.”

“Her face?”

“Like her nickname ‘witch,’ because of experiments in the Magic

Tower, one side of her face is in a horrible condition. Her appearance is not becoming for someone who would be representing the Magic Tower."

"Hm..."

"The second factor is her age. She is currently 17. Even if we provided her with an aide, it is questionable if she would be able to properly carry out her role as the leader."

Everyone in the discussion meeting either brushed their chins or scratched their heads.

Certainly, if she is a 17 year old girl, asking her to be the leader of the Magic Tower would be asking too much.

Priesia, the priestess of Solia's Holy Temple, was also estimated to be around 17 years old, similar to the dark witch, but the Holy Temple was completely different from the Magic Tower.

If they were to compare Priesia and the dark witch, the environments in which they grew up, were also different, so that was also another factor that could not be denied in the consideration.

"The third factor is her magic. Perhaps it is due to the experiments, but I heard that all of the magic that she launched had dark tint to them."

“Dark-colored magic. That’s intriguing…but why is that a problem?”

“Yes. By chance, have you heard about the ‘dark mage’ that had recently became the biggest issue in Rainfield, our neighboring country?”

“By chance…”

“Yes. Some people were mistaking. They were thinking that she might be the dark mage from Rainfield who has a bounty.”

“Hm. What is the likelihood of her being the dark mage from Rainfield?”

“Fortunately, there is none. However…the problem is that people could mistake her for the dark mage.”

“Um. I think I understand what your concern is.”

Being mistaken as the dark mage. This was not the kind of problem that would have ended with a simple statement such as ‘if she is not the dark mage, then that’s fine.’

“The fourth factor is…”

“There is another one?”

“Yes.”

The people around the table asked as if they were sick of hearing more.

The mage that was giving out the reasons nodded.

This reason was the most important, and the last, reason why she could not become the leader of the Magic Tower.

“…I’m sorry, Nainiae.”

It was at Solia’s Holy Temple.

In the best guest room they had, Priesia was sitting in front of Nainiae. Priesia tightened her grip on the tea cup.

“I did the best I could, but…”

Watching Priesia crumpling her face, Nainiae pursed her lips as she thought she was undeserving of such a statement from Priesia.

Her appearance and clothing that were dirtied from her life in Lower Solia were cleaned up. However, the injuries from the experiments from the Magic Tower or right hand, which only had three fingers, were still the same.

“It could be said that it had been too long. That’s, what I’m saying is…”

“You can’t heal me, that’s what you are trying to say, right?”

“…”

Instead of beating around the bush, Nainiae asked straight and got it off her chest.

However, it weighed heavily on Priesia’s mind.

“…Yes.”

After a long hesitation, Priesia finally replied.

Because of her guilt over the fact that she couldn’t heal Nainiae’s injuries, because she felt powerless for not being able to give anything in return to a benefactor who raised courage and came to the Holy Temple, Priesia was questioning herself as a priestess. Her shoulders were completely down.

“It’s all right. I was ready for this.”

“I don’t know how to express how sorry I am, and also, how grateful we are… Thanks to you, we were able to stop Astroa. Thanking you several times would not be enough.”

“No. It’s all right. I didn’t actually do much.”

All Priesia could do at the moment was talk.

She feared how her foolish self would look to Nainiae. Priesia lowered her head and bit her lip.

Nainiae was fiddling with her new white dress because she felt awkward wearing it. Nainiae said,

“Excuse me, Priestess Priesia.”

“Yes?”

Priesia responded. It appeared she knew what Nainiae was going to ask. Priesia was trying hard not to let her own face shrivel out of powerlessness.

“In that case, my illness… No…”

“…”

Nainiae was about to ask a question, but she shook her head and changed it.

“How long do you think I’ll be able to live?”

“That is…”

Although Priesia knew the question was coming, her face still crumbled.

“I can’t completely cure your illness. That’s why… That is… I can extend your life, but…”

The skirt that Priesia grabbed on to started to shake. To her benefactor, more over, to a friend of her age that Priesia made for the first time in her life, Priesia felt that it was not enough to say she felt like a fool for continuing to talk only to give out excuses.

“…I’m sorry.”

“It’s all right. I had my heart prepared for this.”

As she did before, Nainiae responded again with grit.

Having heard her courageous voice, Priesia made up her mind to not show Naniae the foolish side of herself. Priesia, with her tears hanging on the corners of her eyes like dew, lifted her head and faced Nainiae.

“I’ll tell you.”

“Yes, please tell me.”

“It could be as short as until the summer, or it could last up to the winter. However… I believe it will most likely last until the fall.”

“Fall…”

Nainiae murmured the season with a vacant stare.

‘Until fall… It’s pretty long.’

“Priestess, thank you.”

Because of the priestess’ kindness, Nainiae now had a new white dress, and her life was extended to the fall which she believed could be any day now. To her, to tell the truth, she felt it was enough. Actually, she was thinking all these were more than generous. That’s how she was thinking.

That’s why Nainiae took a bow and expressed her gratitude toward Priesia.

“Nainiae… Please do not feel grateful toward me.”

Having heard Nainiae’s words expressing gratitude, Priesia shook her head with a look on her face that stated she doesn’t deserve it.

“If you thank me when I have done nothing for you, I wouldn’t know how to respond to that.”

“Miss Priesia…”

“If there is any favor or request you would like to ask of the Holy Temple, please tell me.”

Priesia suddenly got up from her seat and leaned her face toward Nainiae’s face.

She had Nainiae’s horrifying face right in front of her nose, but Priesia was not even batting an eye.

“A…request?”

On the contrary, Nainiae was feeling down and overwhelmed by Priesia’s angel-like beauty. Her beauty was becoming of a priestess and was incomparable to Nainiae. Nainiae leaned herself on the back support of the chair and hunched up her shoulders.

“If it is something that the Holy Temple is capable of handling, we will do anything for you. I may not look like one, but I’m really a priestess.”

Having heard Priesia saying she will accept any request, Nainiae, who was still sitting there with a blank look on her face, asked carefully,

“Anything?”

“Yes, anything.”

After seeing Priesia nodding her head, Nainiae thought about something very carefully, and after a long silence, she opened her mouth.

“In that case, can you make all of these ‘exploits’ as if they never happened?”

“…Pardon?”

“About exposing the narcotics and the human experiments in the laboratory, and also defeating Astroa, I’m talking about those exploits.”

“…?”

A question mark floated up on Priesia’s face on its own.

Wondering if she didn’t hear Nainiae correctly, Priesia tilted her head to the side and asked,

“You want your exploits to be nullified as if you had never done anything?”

“Yes.”

Nainiae nodded without any hesitation and continued,

“As I said many times, I have not done much.”

“But…”

“The one that should be praised and paid attention to is not myself…but someone else. If there is someone who should be recognized for these exploits, it is that person.”

“…”

“If you would like to grant my wish, then please grant that person’s wish. That is my request, my wish.”

“Who is this person?”

“That is…”

Chapter 51 - A Request (Part 2)

It was at Solia Castle.

Currently, in the arena, the final for the King's Swordsmanship Tournament was taking place.

"...Ah."

Riley was sitting in the stadium and chewing on snacks smacked his lips, but he furrowed his eyebrows. It appeared he noticed something that was an eyesore for him.

"There, that over there, look... Sera, did you just see that?"

Riley bumped his elbow to the maid's arm as he asked.

To the sudden question, Sera, who was watching the final, gave a vacant response,

"Yes, I was watching at least."

"What do you think is the problem?"

As Sera carefully observed the two young swordsmen in the arena swinging swords at each other, she tilted her head sideways while wondering if their techniques were correct.

“Their feet…”

“That’s right. You know well!”

Although she didn’t finish her sentence, because she said the most important word, Riley said as he nodded,

“They are not using their feet. They are only using their hands.”

Riley explained as he looked toward the arena.

As he advised to Sera, the two contestants fighting hard in the arena were only swinging their arms diligently without moving their feet.

“Even just now, if he had swung the sword as he stepped to the side, he could have aimed for a little better part.”

Not directing his words toward anyone in particular, Riley murmured on his own. Sera heard what Riley just said, and she narrowed her eyes to watch the flinging of the swords in the arena. Soon, she too murmured with her eyes wide open.

“Ah, it really is.”

It appeared that she also succeeded in noticing the shortcomings in the contestants’ techniques. If it was before she heard the advice

from Riley, she would have said something like, ‘they are incredible despite their age,’ and only applauded.

“It really is. At that moment just now, if he used footwork, certainly…”

Sera felt like her eye for swordsmanship broadened compared to before. With her eyes opened, the sensation felt strange and new. It was something she would have never even imagined before. Excited by this, Sera’s eyes started to exude glowing light.

“Ah, young master… Again! There, he stepped wrong there again. Right?”

“Right!”

Riley slammed the top of his thighs in agreement.

By the look on his face, it seemed he managed to take out and resolve his frustration a little.

“…”

On the other hand, Iris, who was watching the two from the side, had a satisfied smile on her face. It was because, even as she thought about it again, she felt she made the right call on bringing Riley to the city.

She put aside her smile for a moment, turned and looked at Ian, who was sitting beside her. She asked,

“Ian, how’s your body?”

It was because his fight against Astroa yesterday looked pretty dangerous.

“Yes. I’m all right. I was in debt to the Holy Temple’s priests because my back felt a little stiff, but that was all. There is no need for you to worry.”

Ian shrugged his shoulders and answered as if it was nothing.

When it came to standing against a mage, Ian knew the methods.

In fact, during the fight against Astroa, he either redirected or blocked the magic attacks with his sword. He was never once hit directly by the magic attacks.

“If I was just a few years younger, I could have dealt more damage to him. That’s my only regret.”

Ian narrowed his eyes as he thought about yesterday. Until now, Ian didn’t have much of a feel for the fact that his body was gradually aging.

However, because of so many incidents happening in a row, he

started to seriously worry.

“Ian, there is no need for you to feel guilty about it. If you were going to criticize yourself by thinking that way, then I have done nothing at all when I was there, so…”

Iris fiddled with her fingers placed in her lap.

Yesterday, in Lower Solia, when Astroa was running amok, all she had done was nodding her head when her son handed her the brown-sugar beer that he was drinking as he said he will be back.

“Ah, it’s over.”

Pak!

With an exhilarating sound, one of the contestants’ swords was bounced off to the side. Soon, with the sound of the crowd going wild filling up the colosseum, the King’s Swordsmanship Tournament came to its conclusion. The master of ceremonies (M.C.) said to the crowd,

“Soon after this, there will be the award ceremony. Everyone, please keep the seats and congratulate the victor and send out encouragements to the defeated.”

Clapclap!

With the final concluded,

“Hm… It’s over already?”

Ian was sending applause toward the arena as he murmured quietly that the overall skill level of the contestants was lower than the past.

“Ah, is that so? So their skill levels were lower than the contestants of the past tournaments?”

Having heard what Ian said, Riley put his hands to the back of his head and locked the fingers.

“I thought something was up. It felt like they came to Solia Castle for sightseeing instead of having a business about swords.”

“Ah haha… Um?”

Sera was showing a hollow smile as she watched Riley looking uncomfortable about something, but she noticed something in the distance. She pointed her finger toward the lower side of the arena.

“Young master, over there… Please look over there.”

When she pointed in that direction, at the same time, the M.C. of the tournament, who was standing in the middle of the colosseum,

looked over his shoulder and then started to talk in front of the voice amplifier device that the Magic Tower invented.

"Ah, as for the award ceremony, prince Daniel of Solia Castle will be doing the honors."

The swordsmanship tournament's M.C. bowed toward the people in the stadium and took his leave.

Right after that, Daniel, the prince of Solia, came up to the arena.

He had a few red hair strands mixed in his blonde hair. Overall, his face was that of a handsome man's.

"Ah, ah. It's a pleasure seeing you all. I'm Daniel."

Unlike how it was when the victor of the tournament was decided. Let alone sounds of applause, not even sounds of people breathing could be heard. It appeared that this was because all spectators were trying to show respect to the royalty.

"Those that are well informed probably already know this, but..."

Daniel continued as he looked around the stadium. Appearing to be intending to go straight to the main point, his voice was very serious.

“…during this year’s tournament…there was a contestant that used drug that is forbidden in Solia.”

The contestant that used drugs. He was probably talking about Erengium House.

What the prince was trying to explain was simple.

It appeared that the message he wanted to deliver was, during this tournament, Solia had nothing to do with the drugs that Erengium House used, and Solia will do its best to stop the use of drugs.

Sera hid her mouth with her hand and whispered to Riley’s side,

“Um, young master. What do you think happened to the Erengium House?”

“I don’t know?”

Sera’s whisper to his ear was making it tickle, so Riley used his hand to scratch it, and then he said he doesn’t know as he shrugged his shoulder.

‘Although I don’t know, it probably didn’t end well for them.’

At minimum, they would be suffering the loss of their titles, and in the worst case scenario, their three generations of lineage would

be going extinct.

Riley thought those were within the realm of possibilities as the punishment.

“Ah, there is one more thing I would like to inform you about.”

Prince Daniel, the one standing on the arena who had the attention of everyone in the stadium, continued. It appeared there was something else in addition to the incident about drugs.

“I heard there is an exemplary nobility that uncovered despicable secrets hidden in the Magic Tower in addition to the drugs that I just told you about.”

“…?”

Question marks started to float up on the faces of the people in the stadium. Even Riley, who was supporting his head with his hands and leaning against the chair in a comfortable and relaxed angle, had a question mark on his face.

“Iphelleta House.”

“…?!”

Ian, Sera and Iris flinched.

“I believe there are people from Iphelleta, the House of a count, attending the swordsmanship tournament today. Where are you seated?”

Prince Daniel looked around the stadium. It was certain that he was looking for the group from Iphelleta that was sitting somewhere in the stadium.

“Uh, uh, that is…”

Having heard what the prince said, Ian became like a clockwork doll with his mouth repeatedly opening and closing.

As if she didn’t know how it came to this, with her eyes rolling all over the place, Iris wasn’t able to sit still.

As for Sera…

“Y-Young master… Did you hear that just now? Prince Daniel said…”

…she was about to look at Riley who was sitting next to her, but she opened her mouth with a vacant stare.

“…Young master?”

Riley, who was sitting there until a moment ago, was now gone without a trace.

Before he even realized himself, he kicked the seat and got out of there. He thought,

'...What the hell?'

He was in Solia Castle's restroom.

He hid in the very last stall at the end. He sat there with his eyes blinking in disbelief.

'Why me?'

The one to be praised for incredible exploits of uncovering the narcotics and horrid secrets of the Magic Tower was not supposed to be him.

'Nobody would have seen me? The overall composition of the work was perfect?'

Riley was thinking that the one to be accredited for the exploits was supposed to be Nainiae, not him.

It was supposed to be that girl, the one who was taken advantage of over and over just like how Riley had been in his past life.

‘Why am I being brought up?’

During the battle against Astroa that ended his life, it certainly was Riley who threw the sword that pierced Astroa’s chest.

However…

In order to leave no evidence, he asked Nainiae to use her most flashy magic so that it would completely vaporize even the sword that was stuck in Astroa’s chest.

In fact, because Nainiae’s magic perfectly vaporized the sword, if anyone that were not aware of the actual circumstances saw it, they would all have thought that it was Nainiae that defeated Astroa.

‘So why?’

Unable to figure out how it came to this, Riley was looking vacantly with glazed eyes. It was at that moment.

Tap Tap Tap

He could hear the sounds of footsteps.

“…He is here.”

‘This voice?’

The voice belonged to a girl.

Riley’s eyes twitched. It was because he knew to whom the voice belonged to.

“R-Really? He’s here?”

“Yes.”

Then he could hear another voice.

Riley also knew to whom this voice belonged to.

In the past he took a leave just to avoid running into the owner of that voice.

“Excuse me. That is… Young Master Riley?”

The muscles on Riley's face had flinched several times by the time he heard the priestess. Riley used mana to change his voice and responded,

"Aham. This place is...men's room?"

"Ugh?!"

The question was piercing the heart of the matter. He could hear someone flinching on the other side. It was a hard question for the priestess to ignore.

"I'll be opening the stall door."

"N-Nainiae! Wait!"

"...Unlock."

Inside the stall, Riley was trying to figure out the situation, and now his gaze quickly turned toward the door's lock.

Clank!

By a shot of a magic spell, the lock slowly slid and the door opened on its own.

'Lunatic...'

Riley felt like he could understand a little why his own butler had such a strong hatred toward mages. Riley narrowed his eyes.

Soon, the door opened, and Riley witnessed the two girls standing in front of the last stall.

The funny thing was the fact that it was the priestess who had her face turned red and covered with her hands.

“I’m going to file a lawsuit for sexual harassment.”

“…?”

Unable to hide how uncomfortable he was feeling about the situation, with his face completely crumpled, Riley murmured.

Of course, there was no way that the girl would have known what Riley meant by the lawsuit, which was a concept belonging only to his past life’s world.

In response, Nainiae only tilted her head to the side.

“God damn it! You used that eye?”

Riley asked Nainiae as he stood up.

He was asking about Nainiae's dead-white eye, the one that has the ability to track people.

"Yes."

Nainiae nodded proudly and looked at Riley.

Bling! Bling!

Although she only had one good eye, her clear and polished eye looked like it was begging Riley to hurry up and praise her for her deed.

'It's not like I can do something about her.'

The way she looked right now felt like it was overlapping with how he was in his past life where he thirsted for praise.

Riley ground his teeth loudly and gently rapped her forehead.

"Uk?!"

She touched her head as if it hurt. Looking at her, Riley sighed heavily. Still grinding his teeth, Riley directed his glare toward the priestess.

"I don't have my pants down, so how about you get rid of those

hands?”

“...Uuuu.”

“You walked right into a men’s restroom without hesitation. Ha! Looks like the priestess in you died all the way.”

“E-Excuse me? Also, didn’t you say you were not interested in me anyway?”

Tsk

Riley clicked his tongue. Revealing how annoyed he was in all sorts of ways, Riley stared at the two girls.

“What is it?”

“Um…”

With a fist gently touching her lips, Priesia did a few coughs to calm her voice and fixed her gaze on Riley.

“That is, I think it is not right to bring up something like this so abruptly in a men’s restroom, but you…have been chosen by the goddess Irenetsa.”

“…”

Riley’s eyebrows twitched.

The progression of it all…

It was so familiar.

It was similar, and also, he was sick and disgusted by it.

“So, I’m telling you this. Young Master Riley…”

“Hold on.”

Riley stopped himself from shaking out of agitation.

‘No way. It wouldn’t be, right?’

Riley murmured inwardly and interjected Priesia,

“By chance, are you going to ask me to hunt down something? Is that it?”

“Pardon? Ah, yes…that is it.”

“…”

Chapter 52 - A Request (Part 3)

Again?

Same thing again?

If someone called god really did exist, and this being was standing in front of Riley, he would have asked if there was something wrong with the god's eyes.

"...Ha..."

Having heard the answer, Riley let out hollow laughter and crossed his arms as if he was daring her to continue explaining.

"According to the divine message, the reason you were chosen is..."

Priesia carefully continued, and Riley, with his eyes narrowed, glared at her as if he was going to pierce a hole through her lips.

'Go ahead. Why don't you tell me again to go kill a demon lord. Go right ahead.'

If, just like how it went in his past life, a pretty-faced priestess looked at him and said, 'This world will be in a great danger soon, so please defeat the demon lord,' in that case, even if she was a priestess or whatever...

"..."

...Riley was thinking he was going to turn everything upside down. As he was thinking such things, he repeated the motion of closing and opening his hand.

"What's the reason?"

Answering Riley's question, Priesia, who paused for a moment, said with a serious face,

"...It's because of a dragon."

"...?"

'A dragon? It's not a demon lord, but a dragon?'

Riley asked back,

"...A dragon?"

"Yes. A dragon."

Based on how things were going, Riley was sure that she was going to ask him to kill a demon lord, but instead, it was a dragon.

"..."

As Riley was not giving any response, Priesia continued first,

"According to the divine message from the goddess Irenetsa, soon...a dragon will appear and it will bring terrifying disaster not just to Solia, but other cities as well."

"So?"

Because the story was different from his predictions, Riley chose to postpone taking action. Instead, he asked Priesia.

"According to the goddess Irenetsa's words, the one who will defeat that dragon is you, young master."

"I will?"

"Yes."

This was definitely similar to a situation he heard in his past life. However, it was somehow funny.

Also...

'This damn piece of work called god must have absolutely nothing else to do...'

Riley thought that.

‘Just how many cities are in this world, and how many people live in this world? To put it bluntly, for going this far, isn’t this almost at the level of a stalker? By chance, is this a scripted scheme being filmed with hidden cameras?’

Riley thought of all sorts of stuff.

“…Ha…”

Although the being that priestess asked him to kill was changed from a demon lord to a dragon, Riley still couldn’t believe this. Moreover, he was sorely disappointed.

“Excuse me. Lady priestess. Do you think that makes any sense?”

Riley stared at the priestess with a gaze of disbelief. Priesia flinched.

“Do you at least know what kind of person I am?”

“That is…”

Avoiding Riley’s gaze, Priesia fiddled with her fingers.

It appeared that she had no idea.

“The title I was given from my own House is Lazy-Sword. Lazy-Sword… In the past, present, and even in the future, I have always been and will be dawdling around without doing anything. Just how is someone like me supposed to kill a dragon?”

If he had a bit of luck, he might be able to kill a dragon just by tricking it with words like how a main character in some fiction would.

However, that was…just a story in fiction.

From how other people saw, Riley was just the youngest son and a spoiled master in the House, who has achieved or trained in absolutely nothing.

It was absurd that anyone would expect someone of such a reputation to kill a dragon. After all, how would he?

It was nonsense.

“Also, have you forgotten what you said to me last time?”

“…What are you…?”

“You asked if I was impotent! Me!”

"…!"

Priesia flinched as her face turned red.

Meanwhile, Nainiae, who was watching the two from the side, tilted her head to the sides. It was because she didn't understand where the conversation was flowing toward.

"Instead of looking for hope from a dawdling impotent young master, go look for someone else!"

No matter what kind of reaction the priestess showed, the expression on Riley's face did not change.

Pat Pat

Riley patted her shoulder a few times and started to walk away to get out of the restroom.

"P-Please wait… I haven't finished telling you the whole story."

Priesia rapidly turned her body as she called Riley to stop him.

Noticing that it didn't stop him from walking, Priesia brought up what she didn't get to earlier.

"…Astroa."

"..."

Now that the name of the grand mage who died yesterday was mentioned, Riley's steps came to a stop.

"I heard it was you that managed to stop Astroa."

"What?"

"I heard. Exposing the laboratory and narcotics hidden in the basement of the Magic Tower were actually your exploits."

"Just who said such..."

'Who spread such ridiculous rumors?'

Riley was about to ask that, but he looked at Nainiae. She only had one good eye, but her wide open eye was definitely directed toward Riley.

"...It was you?"

"..."

"I believe I have told you not to say anything anywhere?"

Riley was outside of the restroom, but he turned around and walked toward Nainiae.

Thump Thump

Riley was approaching Nainiae one step at a time, and there was terrifying aura being exuded from him. Priesia was unable to continue her words. Instead, all she could do was to gasp for air.

“…Then what you did can be considered as an act of betrayal, right?”

Because Riley could see his old self from the past life in her, and because that conjured up sympathy in his mind, Riley didn’t warn Nainiae with deadly aura like how he had done to Aploc.

“You sure have some amazing guts, or did you not know that it was going to turn out this way?”

If he had known she was going to cause such a huge accident like this, Riley would not have left her alive.

“…Kuk!”

Riley grabbed Nainiae by the neck and immediately pushed and hung her up against the restroom wall.

“Who else knows about this?”

With her neck held up by Riley, Nainiae grabbed on to his arm with her eye barely open.

Her legs, which were struggling in the air, had stopped moving before anyone noticed.

Soon, Nainiae started to strain herself to sound her voice as she looked at Riley.

“They were…not my deeds…”

Riley’s eyebrows wrinkled.

“…?”

“Because they were not my accomplishments… What happened in Lower Solia…or uncovering the things in the basement of the Magic Tower… Because I only watched you. Because I don’t deserve the credit. That’s why…”

All Nainiae thought was that the one who should be rewarded was someone other than herself.

She could not stand the fact that the person who should be credited for the deeds were not getting any rewards, and she also could not stand that she was the one, despite not having done much, who would be getting all of the rewards.

"..."

Having heard Nainiae slowly voicing her reasons little by little, Riley's grip on her neck became weaker.

"Kuk! Kuhuk! Kuhuk!"

With her neck grabbed by Riley, Nainiae was held up in the air against the wall. Now, with his hold weakened, she slid down, fell on her knees and started to cough.

'...'

The expression on Riley's face turned bitter.

It was because what Nainiae said earlier was so similar to what he had once said in his past life.

"...Please do not worry."

As Riley's suffocating aura subsided a little, Priesia, who was barely able to breathe again, carefully opened her mouth.

"I am the only one who heard from Nainiae."

Riley slowly turned his head and looked at Priesia.

It appeared she was telling the truth. Riley couldn't see or feel the presence of any holy knights or priests nearby who were supposed to be guarding her.

Although he couldn't know, he figured everyone in the Holy Temple must be panicking right about now since the priestess suddenly disappeared.

"In that case, what was that about?"

Riley pointed his index finger toward the outside of the restroom, toward the arena.

He was talking about the prince Daniel.

"I didn't mention anything about your 'powers.' I just informed them about your good deeds. Initially, I was going to inform the castle about everything I heard from Nainiae, including your strength, but..."

Priesia looked at Nainiae who was still unable to stop coughing.

"Nainiae objected. She insisted that I keep that a secret."

With his eyes narrowed, Riley glared at Priesia.

It appeared she was still wary of how Riley's atmosphere changed

suddenly in a blink of an eye earlier. Her tone of voice was a bit more cautious than before.

“Young master. Regardless, as Nainiae said, it seems the fact about your incredible power has been proven already.”

‘Should I just bury them all? What if doing something in the castle leads to something else even more bothersome?’

As he racked his brain, Riley asked the priestess as he glared at her,

“So?”

“It’s about that dragon that I told you about earlier.”

Kill the dragon for them.

In the end, the main point that the priestess was trying to make was just that.

Actually, to Priesia, it was probably not important if Nainiae told her about Riley or not.

Recalling his experience in his past life, the priestess that Riley knew did not care about terms or conditions. No matter what, once she received a divine message, the priestess that Riley knew from his past life had an extreme tendency to bite on and never let go.

It meant that, regardless of Riley's skills, she would have come and made a request to him about killing the dragon.

"We would greatly appreciate it if you could please slay the dragon as the divine message said..."

Although Priesia continued, Riley was not heeding her words at all, not even with the backside of his ears.

Instead, all he was doing was just remembering how he acted in his past life.

'Could you please hold the holy sword? Please save us.'

In his past life, to a request from a priestess to slay a demon lord, he said,

'Yes, I will do it.'

The Riley in the past life answered like that so willingly.

'In that case, how about now? Even now, am I supposed to answer like that?'

"Ha... Hahaha..."

Having asked himself the question, Riley started to give off hollow laughter.

It was not certain for how long he laughed. The laugher did not last for very long, but Riley barely managed to hold in his laughter and said,

“…Why should I?”

Riley answered with a question.

Why? It was a simple question.

“…?”

Priesia tilted her head to the side and explained once more,

“As I explained before, you have received a sign from the goddess Irenetsa. So, the dragon…”

“So, why?”

Riley asked again like that.

‘Why do I have to do it?’

“I am not religious. What I’m saying is, I don’t believe in the

goddess Ire-whatever.”

“…”

“To put it bluntly, even if the world is going to be destroyed tomorrow, I’m a bastard that would not care much about it.”

It looked like Priesia was not expecting that such an answer would jump out of Riley.

In panic, Priesia gathered her hands together and held them firmly as she started to try convincing Riley,

“Because…you have a great power.”

“Great power?”

“You possess a great power, enough to stop Astroa with a single blow.”

“Power huh…”

“I heard from Nainiae. That’s not all. What you just showed earlier… I remember it clearly as well.”

It looked like she was talking about how Riley, out of frustration, acted toward Nainiae, the one who didn’t keep his secret.

Priesia continued,

“If you have a great power, if you have received a divine sign... then surely, you should be using your power to protect people, isn’t that right?”

Clap

Clap

Clap

Riley slowly applauded as he nodded and said,

“Um, those are magnificent words.”

Riley kept on nodding as if he was impressed. Priesia looked relieved. It was just about when her face started to become brighter.

“Ah...but what should we do?”

Suddenly, Riley stopped nodding. Instead, in a deadly and violent voice, Riley asked back,

“I don’t think that way at all?”

“Pardon? What do you…”

“What are you going to do if I still say no after all that?”

Riley took a step toward Priesia and started to exude his aura. It was the aura similar to what he showed toward Nainiae earlier.

“T-That is…”

“Are you going to yap to everyone all over the town? Tell them that the youngest master of the Iphelleta House has astonishing powers, yet all he does is just dawdling and leisurely enjoying himself playing around?”

Under normal circumstances, nobody would have believed a claim about the Lazy-Sword Riley, the youngest of the Iphelleta House, actually being an incredible top-notch warrior.

However, if the one making the claim was the priestess, it was possible that things could go differently.

“Or are you going to follow me around everywhere and pester me?”

“…”

“By pouring in your holy power into a dying body, by giving

blessing to a cursed body, are you going to force me to fight? As you say something like, you are the chosen one who received a sign by the goddess. You mustn't fall here?"

Priesia was gazing at Riley's eyes, but her shoulders shriveled.

His eyes were filled with unbelievably huge rage.

It was pure rage that included the anguish that was oppressed and held up inside Riley since the past life.

"Goddess? Fuck! What a bullshit. This goddess must have her eyes rolled the wrong way. She thinks I'm some kind of tool. She is doing this just to work me and take advantage of me again, isn't that right? Doesn't she know this is a stark violation of the Labors Standard Law? What a lunatic... In my past life, even the horrible bosses who were called sons of bitches would not have been this bad."

'Labors Standard Law?'

Priesia had no way of understanding all of the harsh, bare-knuckled words pouring out of Riley's mouth, but she could not dare to ask what he meant by that.

It was because deadly aura, the kind that made her fear that one wrong word could result in losing her head, could be felt from Riley.

All she could do at the moment was to look at Riley approaching her as she shook in fear.

“Fine… Go ahead. Expose my secret or follow me around. When you do…”

Riley brought his face right up to Priesia’s and warned. His warning message was loaded with his deadly aura as well.

Because of his deadly aura, without realizing it, Priesia hunched her shoulders and took steps back.

“…then you will be hearing an urgent message from your goddess telling you that you will need to find a brave warrior who could stop me.”

“…”

As Priesia’s face turned cold and hardened, Riley continued,

“I don’t know if there really is so called god or not, but…deliver this message to your goddess. No, maybe she is watching from somewhere.”

To the goddess that must have a serious problem with her eyesight, the video mail that Riley was sending had a simple message.

“Just let me be. Let me rest a little now.”

N O

His message of response could also be summarized in those two letters.

“…”

Priesia was still frozen solid. Leaving her be, Riley turned his head.

“And you.”

Before anyone realized, Nainiae was not coughing anymore, and she was looking at Riley.

Riley locked his eyes with Nainiae, cracked a smile, and said,

“You. Let’s have a word, shall we?”

It was a terrifying smile that felt like a warning.

Chapter 53 - After The Curtain Fell

It was during the evening at the Iphelleta House.

Things no different from the usual continued.

The scenery of maids taking their shifts to carry out their tasks inside the mansion, servants using their break time to occasionally swing swords in the dueling arena, the eldest and second sons exchanging words with each other about swords, or Stein, the master of the House, taking care of simple paperwork inside the office...

Everything was as usual.

“Um?”

At least that was the case until Stein, who was sitting inside the office, found a document with an unexpected content.

“This is?”

Instead of calling it a paperwork, it was more appropriate to call it a summarized newspaper.

On the top of the newspaper, in gigantic letters, there was the following question written:

‘Last Night, What Happened In Solia?’

With his youngest son currently visiting Solia, it obviously drew Stein’s attention.

[Last night, horrible crates were discovered in Right Solia’s Magic Tower. The crates contained mass amount of grass with psychedelic properties. The one that had been hiding these was revealed to be Astroa, the grand mage of Seven Circles magic who was famous for being the leader of the Magic Tower, and the citizens and the nobilities are not able to recover from the shock from finding out about the incident.]

Grass with psychedelic properties.

Stein furrowed his brows as he read that particular part of the news. He thought about the old butler that he sent with Riley.

Because Stein knew very well how much that butler hated, despised and was disgusted by that grass, he started to worry that his youngest son may have gotten swept into this incident.

[Also… A young master from a count’s House, who reported the outlawed grass hidden in the Magic Tower and also provided big assistance in neutralizing Astroa and search of the Magic Tower’s basement, received a medal of honor from the prince Daniel today.]

Wondering what this was about, Stein started to wiggle his

eyebrows. He continued reading what the newspaper said below, which read,

[From a House that holds an extraordinary position in the world of swordsmanship in Solia, from the famous Finn Iphelleta House, the third-born Young Master…]

Baam!

Stein was diligently reading the newspaper, but he smashed the desk while holding the paper in his hand.

He still could not believe what he just saw. With a vacant stare, he just kept on blinking his eyes for a moment, and then he raised the newspaper again.

[…Riley, he is the hero in these incidents. Afterwards, a girl, who had been abandoned by the Magic Tower and also accomplished quite a commendable deed in efforts of apprehending Astroa by using her magic…]

Immediately, having confirmed Riley's name in the newspaper, Stein abruptly stood up from the chair. He shouted,

"Willa… Willa!"

Stein's loud voice calling for a servant was echoing in the mansion.

It was at Solia Castle.

After roughly taking care of the business at the restroom, Riley returned to the stadium, but he asked Ian as he stared at the medal of honor that was placed in his palm,

“...What’s this?”

“Kuhup, Kuhuhuk...”

Sob Sob

It’s not like he was a little girl, yet Ian had burst into tears. It was apparent that Ian was not able to answer Riley in the current state.

“…Sera, what’s this?”

So, Riley turned his head and asked Sera.

“It’s a medal of honor bestowed to you by Solia Castle. Because you suddenly left in middle of the prince Daniel’s speech, our lady received it for you.”

“Anyway, where were you?”

Sera explained, and Iris asked.

Riley, who had the answer already prepared, replied with a smile,

“Ah, I just went to the restroom for a bit…”

Having threatened the priestess at the restroom, Riley returned to the group for now.

“I-I… I never knew that you were working so hard in places we could not see…”

Sob Sob

Hearing the sound of someone sniffing up the runny nose mixed in with tears, the gazes of the three, including Riley, turned toward the man.

The one crying was not even a little kid. It was the old butler.

“What the, this medal of honor... This is for reporting to Solia Castle, isn’t it? Then shouldn’t Ian be the one getting it? Why are they giving it to me?”

Not convinced, Riley asked while fiddling with the medal.

Sera responded.

“That’s why the lady asked if they are really giving it to you, not Ian. When she asked, the prince said that this is correct. He said the medal is being given to the young master for his great exploits.”

The way Sera was scratching her cheek as she looked with gleaming eyes was not too different from how Ian was doing.

It appeared that even Sera was proud inside that the young master who she is serving had received such a reward of recognition.

“That young master is the one?”

“Yes, I heard he is the young master who received the medal of honor.”

“Have you heard? It seems he is from the Iphelleta House.”

“As expected, I thought there was something about him.”

“You said he is the youngest, right? He is different from the rumors.”

Even now, among the nobilities leaving the castle, there were people whispering to each other as they looked at Riley.

They were somehow tickling Riley’s ears.

‘Ha, in a way…she did practice my advice down to the letter.’

Riley did advise her to avoid situations where it would bring the attentions to her and also to take a step back and watch.

Riley, the one who had given Nainiae such advice, gave out a hollow sigh.

In a way, all she did was properly carrying out Riley’s advice.

‘…I’m sorry.’

‘…’

‘But I don’t regret what I have done.’

‘Even if you died right there by being choked to death?’

‘In the end, I haven’t done anything and that’s the truth, so…’

When Riley asked Nainiae, she responded like that.

“…Riley.”

“Yes?”

Riley, who was thinking about the conversation with Nainiae, turned his head as he heard his mother’s voice.

Iris was gently smiling at Riley.

“Why don’t you just take it?”

“Yes?”

“I’m talking about the medal of honor.”

“Ah.”

“Wouldn’t your father be happy about it as well?”

“Hmm…”

Riley hesitated for a moment, and as if he understood his mother’s words, he nodded and grabbed the medal placed on his hand.

“Yes. I understand. I’ll take it for now.”

He did so because he figured it was not a bad idea to be nice to his mother this way.

According to Priesia, they didn’t tell anyone about his skills. Also, to Nainiae, who was the biggest problem for him, he explained clearly and politely (?), so others would just think that Riley had a pretty good luck that led to his accomplishments.

“Well then, shall we start heading back as well?”

There was supposed to be a festival the day after the winner of the swordsmanship tournament was decided. If it was going to be as Sera explained before, then the festival would also be the time when the city would be at its busiest with the crowds going about their businesses enjoying their time in the festivities.

“Right about now, it is probably quite loud over at the Main Plaza with the festival already started.”

As Sera stepped forward to lead the way, Ian and Iris followed her.

“If the schedule doesn’t change a lot, as the closing ceremony, we may be able to see fireworks tomorrow night… Young master?”

Sera was going off about how beautiful the fireworks were when she saw them every year during the tournaments, and she slowly turned her head.

At the same time, also with question marks on their faces, Ian and Iris turned their heads and looked at Riley. It was because Riley was standing still there.

“Hey, I didn’t tell you this sooner, so I’m sorry about that, but there is something I must tell you.”

After making an apology out of the blue, Riley made a hand gesture toward a corner of the stadium. It was a gesture calling for someone to come over.

“…?”

Soon, a girl, who was hiding at the corner on her knees, stood up

and walked toward where Riley was.

“Riley, who is that child?”

“Yes mother, that is…um…”

As Iris noticed the girl, she looked at Riley and asked. He answered,

“I picked her up at the restroom.”

Nainiae’s appearance could not be expressed in a single sentence.

She was a girl whose white, high-class dress and her pale white skin, which looked as if she was someone with an illness, were making quite an impression.

“…Um.”

To point out a problem, it was the fact that those were all of her appearance’s nice qualities. Excluding them, all that could be seen in her appearance were drawbacks.

“That child…could it be that she can’t see with one of her eyes?”

“It appears to be the case.”

Because it was awkward, with her eyes narrowed, Sera asked Ian and Iris who were walking in front of her in a row as she looked at Nainiae.

“Is that a burn mark? What do you think happened to her face?”

“Sera…”

“Why are her fingers like that? The length of her middle and pinky fingers are a little odd, don’t you think?”

“Sera.”

Mumbling and mumbling, Sera was mumbling as she stared at Nainiae, but her shoulders flinched from Ian’s voice.

“Yes?”

“Regardless, she is the child that the young master said he would like to take care of as a servant… So it is not going to look good to mumble about her from the back. You are a smart girl, so you understand what I’m trying to tell you, right?”

Hearing Ian’s advice, Sera lowered her head and fidgeted. She felt he hit the heart of the matter.

“Uu…”

“Sera, you need to fix that habit of yours.”

Sera was about to say that she is reflecting on her wrongdoing, but she flinched as she looked at Ian’s profile.

“Well, about the fact that the young master’s reason for taking her in is about her being a mage, it is a little…and the fact that she will be teaching magic to our young master is really just a little unsettling to me, but…”

Sera flinched because the old man’s facial muscles were twitching violently, exuding deadly aura.

“…”

It was to the point that people, who just passed by him and took a glance at his face, were whispering to guards that the old man looked like he might do something troubling right now.

“E-Excuse me, Sir Ian…”

Hearing Sera’s voice calling for him, Ian turned his head and looked at Sera.

“What is it?”

Looking at his face directly was even more terrifying, and that made Sera's shoulders to shrivel, but she continued with a smile,

"Your face…it is scary."

Having heard Sera's words, Ian did a loud fake cough and finally straightened his expression.

It appeared he was not aware of the expression on his face.

"Haah, anyhow…no matter what we say, it looks like the young master won't change his mind about this decision, so all we can do now is just watch and see how it goes."

"Still, she is a girl too just like you, so Sera, you should be more mindful and be sure that the child… Um?"

Right behind the three in the front, which included Riley, Ian was following the group from the back, but he stopped talking and tilted his head to the side.

It was because, in front of them, he could feel the presence of many people.

"Uh? What is that?"

"They are people from Solia's Holy Temple, aren't they?"

“Wow, even the archbishop came.” “What could this be about? Why are they in a large group like that?”

Mumble, mumble…

From the voices coming from the Main Plaza’s direction, Ian realized that the presence of many people that he felt was coming from the Holy Temple’s people.

At the same time, a thought crossed his mind.

‘The Holy Temple probably don’t have anything to do with the swordsmanship tournament. If they came all the way here to the Main Plaza in a group like this… The reason for it, it wouldn’t be…”

Ian was making conjectures without knowing that the priestess came by to the restroom that Riley was hiding in during today’s event.

He was thinking about the reason why there are people from Solia’s Holy Temple gathered along the path that Riley was walking at the Main Plaza now.

“…Sir Riley.”

Before Ian could finish his thoughts, a dignified voice could be heard.

“Excuse me, Sir Ian, this voice…”

Although Ian didn’t recognize it, Sera knew to whom the voice belonged to.

It was a beautiful voice like a smoothly polished pearl rolling on a golden plate. She also knew that her appearance was even more blindingly beautiful than her voice.

“Lady Priesia? What brings you here?”

Of the three, Riley, Sera and Iris, who had to stop walking because of the people from the temple blocking their path, Iris, the eldest of the three, stepped forward and inquired.

“…”

Priesia omitted the response to Iris’s question. Instead, she took a step forward and looked at Riley. Riley was also steadily staring at Priesia, and at that moment, Nainiae took a step forward and narrowed her eyes.

“…”

A sense of wariness could be seen in her gaze. It was the look of a servant who stepped forward with intention to take care of a trouble before her master had to.

“…Wait.”

“…?”

Riley extended his arm to grab Nainiae’s shoulder and stopped her.

As if she was trying to ask why he was stopping her, Nainiae turned her head toward Riley and looked at him with a question mark on her face.

“…”

Once she met Riley’s eyes, as if she understood the reason, Nainiae politely lowered her head and slowly stepped back to stand behind Riley.

Chapter 54 - After The Curtain Fell (Part 2)

“You are people from the Holy Temple, but does that give you the right to block a path where people walk through?”

Looking at the priests in formation in front of him, Riley asked, but no response could be heard.

“…”

It looked like Priesia still remembered the threat she received from Riley when she was in Solia Castle. Without saying any words, all she was doing was slowly shifting eyes around to avoid Riley’s gaze.

‘What’s this?’

Riley furrowed his eyebrows.

Judging from her reaction, it looked like his warning was definitely received. It appeared Priesia was not here out of her own accord.

“Ah… This… All this… Really, my apologies.”

After a long while, finally, an awkward voice could be heard. It was the old man standing next to Priesia.

“Our lady priestess is still not skilled in having conversations with people, so she makes mistakes like this occasionally. Please be generous and understand, Young Master Riley.”

Toward the old man standing next to Priesia, Riley narrowed his eyes and glared at his face.

He remembered the old man.

Riley definitely had seen his face during the first day he visited Right Solia.

“Ah, Archbishop Rebethra!”

Like how the old man was standing next to Priesia, Iris was standing next to Riley. Iris identified the old man’s title.

“Lady Iris, it’s good to see you again.”

Rebethra, the archbishop representing the priests of Solia’s Holy Temple, bowed his head and paid his respects to the two standing in front of him.

Because of his respectful gesture, Iris lost some of her wariness toward them and started to look around the people from the temple who were blocking her path.

“Why are all these people here?”

“Ah, it’s none other than…”

Rebethra turned his body to the side and gestured to the priests who were prepared and waiting at the back to come this way.

“Um? What is this?”

Following Rebethra’s hand gesture, three priests, each in both hands carrying a box that was richly decorated, came to the front.

“These are about the recent exploits. The two people, they left these things at the Holy Temple. They are supposed to take these with them.”

Two of the priests walked toward Riley, and one walked toward Nainiae.

As if they were trying to ask what these were, Riley and Nainiae floated question marks on their faces. They held the boxes given to them by the priests and checked the contents inside.

‘They don’t look like anything special.’

After checking the contents, Riley raised his eyebrows and looked at Rebethra.

“This is?”

"..."

On the other hand, Nainiae vacantly opened her mouth as if she didn't expect the content to be what it was.

It did not mean that she was impressed and thankful.

It meant that she was shocked.

"It is a loot or a spoil, if you will."

Rebethra opened his mouth.

"...A loot?"

Riley wondered if an archbishop that represented a temple should be talking like that. Riley pulled his chin and stared at Rebethra.

What Riley and Nainiae received were a cape that was neatly folded into a square shape, an ordinary looking silver ring that didn't have any decorations, and a leather bracelet with unknown engraved patterns, these three things.

"Because we are out in the public, I can't explain the specifics directly, but these belong to the..."

Rebethra paused for a moment and looked over the shoulders to gauge Solia citizens watching them. Rebethra continued,

“Yes. These are belongings of ‘that man.’ As for his staff, it broke completely, so it could not be helped.”

Rebethra was careful about the discussion because the death of that man was a fact not revealed to the public.

“If I refuse these?”

With a concerned and reluctant face, Riley asked back.

Nainiae was feeling the same as Riley.

She was going to die soon, so she felt that receiving these were probably not going to make a big difference. Also, they were belongings of a mage that experimented on her. She was not feeling right about having such things.

“Please accept them. The Holy Temple determined that it would be better to present these to you two instead of delivering them to the castle. I swear under the goddess Irenetsa that we have not done anything odd.”

Rebethra bowed his head once again, Riley shifted his eyes toward Priesia who was standing next to the old man.

“…”

The expression on her face looked pretty uncomfortable.

It felt like she wanted to get away from this place right this instant.

It was probably because of Riley.

‘Is this just the archbishop acting alone?’

Earlier, Riley warned Priesia that he will turn everything upside down if they pestered him, and it looked like his threat worked. It was evidenced by how the priestess was keeping her mouth shut.

‘If he is acting alone, then why is he doing this? Assuming the archbishop knew about the divine message that Priesia received, in that case, if she told him that they shouldn’t ask me, then why?’

After making conjectures on the reason behind the archbishop’s action, Riley turned his head.

“Young master, are you going to take these?”

Nainiae slowly came next to Riley and whispered to him quietly so the archbishop couldn’t hear her.

“By the looks of them, how are they?”

“I checked them already. I don’t sense any magical interferences in them.”

To Riley’s question, Nainiae responded that she already checked, but she realized that she made mistake in choosing the tone of her words. She was still too used to the crass language used in Lower Solia.

“…I mean… I have checked them for you, young master.”

“Is that so?”

[TL: There is some description at this point about how Nainiae was using non-honorific form of language and then realized her mistake. She corrected them immediately afterwards. However, it is simply impossible to describe these in English because honorific/non-honorific word forms do not exist in English language. So instead, I added words of formality in how she could address Riley in her revision to give it a similar effect.]

Riley looked like he was a bit impressed that Nainiae took a notice.

‘Is she intending to work hard as a servant?’

Riley figured that her crass language could not be helped because it became a habit for her from her time in Lower Solia. Still, Riley

was impressed that Nainiae knew what he wanted and went ahead and did things even before he asked.

'So, this means these are just simple gifts. In that case…'

Thinking about the situation and making a conjecture, Riley figured that Rebethra chose an approach of taking a long time with Riley instead of abruptly showing up and making a request. He was sure that Rebethra was trying to work him from that angle. The fact that Rebethra was not bringing up the dragon at all was the evidence.

'So, what you are trying to do here is, let's make an impression in person first at least, is that it?'

To Nainiae, Riley handed over the two boxes that he was carrying and then took a step toward Rebethra.

"Thank you. Since you are giving us these gifts, we will take them with appreciation."

Toward Rebethra, Riley smiled like a good person and continued,

"But, are you going to keep the road blocked? It's a little… No. It's a big hindrance for the citizens."

Shoo Shoo

As if he was trying to tell them to hurry up and get out of the way, Riley was making fanning gestures with his hand. In light of Riley's gesture, Rebethra broke in cold sweat and stepped back.

"Pardon?"

"The thing is, we haven't had our dinner yet."

"Ah, Yes... My apologies."

Even though Rebethra was the elder here, he was overwhelmed by Riley's gaze staring down at him from above. Rebethra got out of the way by taking steps back.

At the same time, other people from the temple broke into two groups and got out of Riley's way just like how Rebethra had.

"Mother, let's get going... Ian, Sera!"

Without a moment of hesitation, Riley started walking confidently through the pathway that the people from the temple formed by stepping away for him, but he suddenly turned his head toward his back and called for the maid and the butler who were just standing there with vacant looks.

"Ah, yes!"

“Pardon?”

“Just for how much longer are you going to stand there with blank faces? I’m so hungry that my stomach is about to stick to my back!”

Ian and Sera exchanged looks without saying anything and rushed to follow Riley who was walking far in front of them.

As for Ian, because he saw how it went with the priestess last time, and also because he was thinking she came here to block the way on her own accord, Ian was surprised that she didn’t say anything.

“That young master, he is different from what I have heard. What I’m saying is…not the rumors about him being Lazy Sword. I’m talking about what you told me today evening.”

After returning to the temple, the Archbishop Rebethra, who was standing in front of the stone statue with Priesia, asked as he tilted his head to the sides.

There was a shadow cast deeply on the priestess’ face that he had not seen before.

“Haa, Archbishop Rebethra, I think…it would be best if we just

left him alone.”

“However, didn’t you say you received a divine message? If that young master is really the hero that could stop the dragon we are concerned about, then it is too early to give up.”

“It is futile. His eyes… His eyes are a problem separate from the divine message.”

Priesia murmured as she shook her head,

“Archbishop Rebethra, you probably don’t know this, but that man’s eyes have something…”

It was a small voice that would be hard to hear unless someone really leaned toward her to listen.

Because he was pretty hard of hearing, Rebethra didn’t hear what Priesia said. Instead, he sent a prayer in front of the statue and walked away.

It was because, just like Riley, he had not eaten his dinner yet either.

“Haha. Priestess, you worry too much. Anyway, we just need to take our time and talk to him slowly. As we do, I’m certain that he will heed to our words, the goddess Irenetsa’s words.”

Rebethra smiled like a good man and turned away, and Priesia was glaring at him with her eyes narrowed.

‘Rebethra.’

Priesia’s eyes turned golden for a moment before returning to normal.

‘I don’t know what you are scheming, but…’

Priesia was thinking about the very first divine message that she received after becoming a priestess, the one well before the message about Riley and the dragon.

<My child, he is the first trial that will impend upon you soon.>

The very first message she received was about the trial that she must go through as a priestess.

The divine message was telling her that Archbishop Rebethra, the one that appointed her as the priestess, is going to be her first trial.

<My child, soon, you must watch out for a dragon that will fly in the sky.>

She had kept the first divine message about the trial as a secret all this time. While looking over her shoulders to be cautious of the

archbishop's gaze, Priesia had been diligently gaining experience as a priestess. The second divine message that she received was already well known to the archbishop.

Also…

<My child, that boy will stop the dragon that you are worried about.>

The third divine message told her that Riley, the one who visited the temple while the swordsmanship tournament was still in full swing, was going to resolve the problem with the dragon.

Rebethra knew about the third divine message as well because he heard about it from Priesia.

'Rebethra, regardless of what you are thinking…'

Rebethra only knew two of the divine messages, the second one about the dragon, and the third one about Riley, a nobility, being the one who would stop the dragon.

'This man…'

As Priesia looked at the back of the archbishop, who was certainly scheming something, she suddenly shook her body as if she was creeped out by something.

It was not because she was afraid of the archbishop.

It was because she remembered the terrifying aura from Riley when she ran into him in Solia Castle's restroom.

'...is beyond you...'

Although Priesia didn't know what the archbishop was plotting, she was still more afraid of Riley who she met only a while ago.

'...because...'

Priesia was certain that it was not going to work no matter what the archbishop tried to do to Riley.

'..."

It was because, at the Main Plaza, when Rebethra made a bow to Riley by lowering his head, Priesia was able to see it while she was standing a step behind him and looking at Riley.

She saw that Riley was looking at Rebethra's back as if he just found a useful tool he could use, and he was smiling.

"...Here."

Having arrived at the restaurant, before Sera could make a move, Nainiae picked up the container that had forks and knives, and set them on the table for everyone.

“Oh my, how kind of you.”

Iris gave a refreshing smile toward Nainiae as she received the fork and knife from Nainiae.

“Thank you.”

It seemed it didn’t matter to her that Nainiae had burn marks on her face, cannot see with one of her eyes, and was missing a couple of her fingers. It appeared that Iris thought of Nainiae as just a friend of Riley around his age.

“Uu…”

Somehow, Sera lost it to Nainiae with the silverware. Sera had no choice but to just sit there and twiddle her thumbs. She sat down and blew up her cheeks.

Sera felt that, unlike Nainiae’s emotionless face, Nainiae was quite sneaky.

“Hmm…”

Unlike Sera who had her cheeks blown up, Ian was observing

Nainiae with his arms crossed.

"Young master, young master, I did super job, right?"

Having finished with laying down the silverware on the table, Nainiae turned her head and was about to ask Riley, but she flinched.

It was because her eyes met Ian's.

'I did super job, right?'

Because of the lack of formality in her words, Ian's eyebrows kept twitching.

The sarcastic, deadly gaze from Ian felt like he was threatening to turn the table upside down if she said 'I did super job, right?' again.

"I mean... Young master, have I done well?"

Nainiae carefully corrected herself.

Nainiae's eye was beaming like a little puppy's asking for praise. Looking at her, Riley cringed as he moved his finger toward her forehead.

"...Ugh!"

Ttak!

An upbeat sound could be heard.

Because of Riley's gentle tap on her forehead, Nainiae's head tilted toward the back.

"Just make sure to keep the gifts safe."

He was talking about the Astroa's belongings that the people from the temple gave them.

"By the way, weren't you going to refuse those gifts?"

Nainiae slightly opened the cape she was wearing on her shoulders as she asked. On her waist, there were three bags tied to her, each of which contained the things they received from the temple.

"Well, they smell rotten, so I was going to refuse them...but after thinking about it carefully, I had no reason to refuse them. It also looked like this was not going to be the last time they are going to give us gifts, so..."

"...?"

As if she didn’t understand very well, Nainiae tilted her head to the sides.

Meanwhile, Riley murmured as he twisted the corner of his mouth.

“Well, they insist on showering us with gifts, so, why not? Who hates getting stuff for free?”

Riley enjoyed the taste of the beverage placed inside the cup on the table. Appearing to be satisfied, he took a few more sips.

Judging from its color, aroma, or taste, it was a honey drink.

Chapter 55 - Returning Home

With the King's Swordsmanship Tournament events all concluded, Riley's group was on its way back to the mansion while riding in Iphelleta House's carriage.

The atmosphere inside the carriage was a bit odd because the group now had one more person unlike how it was when they first came to visit Solia. However, it was not the case for Iphelleta House's Young Master Riley and Lady Iris.

"The fireworks on the last day... They were gorgeous, weren't they?"

"Yes. Mother, this is the first time you saw the fireworks, right?"

"They were so pretty. I think I'll never get bored of it no matter how many times I watch them."

The mother and the son were busy chattering about the events during the last day of the festival.

"Um."

On the other hand, unlike the young master and the lady that he served, the old butler was not feeling all that comfortable. With his arms crossed, he glared at the driver's seat as he tapped his fingers.

“...Regardless, if you are going to serve our young master from now on!”

In the direction that Ian was looking in, there were two little girls sitting in the drivers’ seats of the carriage. They were Sera in maid dress and Nainiae in white dress.

It looked like Sera was in middle of providing Nainiae with private education.

“Instead of casual language, it would be better to use a respectful language!”

Listening to Sera’s advice, Nainiae, who was sitting right next to her in the drivers’ seats, nodded her head as she said,

“...Got it.”

“...”

Sera, who was driving the carriage, turned her head toward Nainiae and narrowed her eyes.

Spark

Nainiae felt the heat somehow coming from the gaze. She tilted her head to the side as she wondered if she did something wrong. Soon, she realized her mistake and corrected her response.

“Ah, I understand… My apologies.”

It seemed she still didn’t quite become fully aware of the mistakes in her language. Nainiae, with an awkward expression on her face, was fiddling with her fingers.

“That is, my old habits are still there, so…”

In Lower Solia, a place full of people with foul mouths, she had been indebted to that place for quite a while ever since she was abandoned by the Magic Tower.

It appeared that she was so accustomed to Lower Solia’s foul language that she was currently having difficulty adjusting to respectful language.

“Ha…”

Sera, who was driving the carriage, sighed heavily enough to make the ground sink.

In her opinion, actually, with all things considered, Nainiae’s

language was in a pretty good shape.

Despite having spent quite a while in Lower Solia, Nainiae was not carrying disturbing and vulgar swears in her mouth. Instead of complaining about Nainiae having problems with adjusting her language, Sera at least found it to be fortunate that Nainiae didn't swear like that.

'Although I didn't want to be understanding of her over something like this.'

Sera knew well about the old habits that Nainiae spoke of earlier.

It was because there was a time when Sera lived in Lower Solia and it also took her quite a while to correct her language afterwards.

Moreover, the foul language she had back then was far rougher than how Nainiae's language was now.

'I'm not liking this…'

Although Sera was someone who had experience living in Lower Solia, because of her experience, she didn't like Lower Solia and people from that place.

The slightly scrunched expression on her face was revealing that fact.

“You need to use respectful…language…”

It appeared Nainiae was at a loss for words. She didn’t know what to say, so instead, she was focusing on fiddling with her fingers.

Her slightly lowered head was showing signs of reflecting upon her mistake from the bottom of her heart.

“…”

Because Sera was sitting right next to Nainiae with almost no distance between them, and because Sera was looking at Nainiae from Nainiae’s left side, the side where she could not see Nainiae’s scars on her right, the expression on Sera’s face looked mesmerized.

‘One side of her face is normal at least.’

Her skin was whiter than milk.

According to Riley, Sera heard that Nainiae was subjected to all sorts of cruel experiments at the Magic Tower.

Right side of Nainiae’s face had scars, but other than that, Nainiae had a spotless, white and smooth skin. It was the kind that Sera, as a woman, could feel jealous about.

“Sera…”

“…”

Nainiae was still fiddling with her fingers while giving a blank stare straight ahead, but she suddenly called Sera’s name.

The look on Sera’s face expressed that she was thinking this was unfair. While pouting, Sera was staring at Nainiae’s face from the side, and she was not able to hear Nainiae’s voice.

“Sera… No. I mean, Lady Sera, in the front…”

Nainiae raised her right hand, which was missing two fingers, and pointed its index finger toward something.

Because of Nainiae’s movement, Sera finally woke up from her useless thoughts and looked where Nainiae was pointing. Surprised, Sera quickly fixed her grip on the rein.

“Ah?!”

Sera had her guard down all this time because she was distracted by Nainiae’s face. Now, Sera’s eyes were open wide.

She had no idea since when the object was there, but there was a large boulder blocking the way.

‘D-Danger!’

Sera pulled the rein with all of her strength to change the carriage’s direction.

Horses turned their heads as they screamed with beastly neighs, but because of the rapid change in direction, the carriage was starting to tilt to the side.

“Uh? Uhuhuh?”

“Sera!”

Inside the carriage, Riley was holding Iris. Sera could hear his voice calling her name.

Ian stuck his face out toward the drivers’ seats and yelled at Sera,

“Uuaaaa!”

If she corrected the tilted carriage, the carriage would collide with the boulder. On the other hand, if she changed the direction to avoid the boulder, the carriage would tilt over to the side.

Literally, it was the worst situation where all of the available options would lead to disastrous results.

It was when Sera was screaming.

“…Air Cushion.”

Nainiae tightly grabbed hold of the drivers’ seats with her right hand, and she shouted a magic spell as she put forth her left hand toward the ground the carriage was tilting toward.

“…Kuk?”

Right at the moment the carriage was about to flip over, Sera had her eyes tightly closed. However, as she realized there was no sound of crashing noise following after, she narrowly opened one of her eyes and looked at the ground that was almost at her nose.

‘Uh?’

On top of that, after noticing Nainiae’s arm obstructing the view in front of her face, Sera finally understood the situation.

She used magic, and thanks to that, the carriage did not flip over. It regained balance.

“Ugh!”

Clank!

The carriage was about to kiss the ground, but then regained its balance thanks to Nainiae and made loud noises.

Another alarmed voice could be heard from inside of the carriage.

“Sera, the rein…”

“…Ah, got it.”

Whoosh

Thanks to the wind blowing from the direction where Nainiae had her arm directed toward, Sera barely regained her senses and grabbed hard on to the rein.

Clank!

The carriage was tilting to the opposite side in order to regain its balance, and it produced yet another loud noise. Finally, the carriage was balanced successfully.

“Ugh…”

A cold sweat fell down riding on Sera’s cheek.

Whoosh

Nainiae's magic tickled her face once more as if the wind was trying to wipe off the sweat from her face this time. Now, Sera finally sighed in relief.

"Haa..."

'That could have been a disaster.'

Feeling a terrifying glare from Ian on her back, Sera murmured like that inside and pouted. Nainaie asked,

"Are you o-...all right?"

Nainiae corrected her words. She was tilting her head to the sides. She was worried about Sera.

"..."

Before she realized, Sera's cheeks were red. She started to mumble around.

Appearing to be bent on not making the same mistake twice, Sera had her gaze fixed to the front and held tightly on to the rein.

"That is... Sir Ian! I think Lady Sera might be ill..."

“Ahahah!”

It appeared that Nainiae was worried. She had her head turned toward inside of the carriage, and she was about to call for Ian, but she was stopped before she could call him.

“…?”

As Nainiae looked at Sera blushing, Nainiae tilted her head to the side with an expression on her face that questioned if Sera was really all right.

“Are you really alright?”

Of Nainiae’s face, which was full of concern for Sera from the bottom of her heart, Sera’s gaze went toward the right side of Nainiae’s face. Although it was for a brief moment, Sera ended up thinking how appalling it was, and that made her blush even more.

Nainiae was genuinely concerned about Sera, yet Sera was having such a thought in her head. Sera thought her own behavior was unacceptable, and she felt ashamed as well.

“…Yes!! I’m all right! I’m completely fine!”

Sera quickly turned her head and responded in a loud voice.

After visiting Solia to watch the King’s Swordsmanship Tournament for almost a week, having finally returned to the Iphelleta mansion, Riley came down from the carriage as he tapped his back.

“Uu, finally, we are home… Um?”

Having realized there were servants lined up left and right to welcome him, Riley made a dumbfounded face.

“What is it?”

“Welcome home, Young Master Riley.”

When Riley asked as he furrowed his brows, lined up servants bent their upper bodies all the way to bow and welcome Riley.

Some servants’ gazes had the, 'that Young Master Lazy Sword really did?' look.

‘Ah, I was wondering why, but is it because of that?’

Riley was wondering why the servants were acting like this, but soon he realized why. It was probably because of the medal of honor that he received from prince Daniel when he was at the Solia castle, which was in his pocket now.

“Riley.”

When Riley was thinking carefully about the medal, he could hear a dignified voice in front of him.

At the same time, servants fixed their postures and lowered their heads slightly.

It was to pay respects to the master of the mansion.

“Father.”

Step Step

Having discovered Stein approaching this way, Riley also slightly lowered his head and showed that he had returned to the mansion.

“I presume you enjoyed the tournament?”

Unlike the last time, when Stein insisted on Riley entering the tournament, Stein asked if Riley enjoyed watching the tournament.

Riley nodded as the replacement for a reply.

“...What about the medal?”

To confirm what he read in the news article, Stein went straight to asking about the main subject.

It was Solia Castle’s medal of honor, something even Ryan, the eldest, or Lloyd, the second eldest, had not managed to receive yet.

On top of that, it was a medal that the prince bestowed in person. It was unbelievable.

“It’s in my pocket.”

Riley answered.

When Stein could only hear the response without the medal being shown, Stein narrowed his eyes and ordered Riley,

“Show it to me!”

“Hm…”

Riley lightly breathed out and put his hand in his pocket.

It appeared there was something inside his pocket.

By the sound of something clanking inside his pocket, the servants of Iphelleta mansion, who were lined up and standing to watch, gulped.

“Here.”

From Riley’s pocket, the medal of honor, which was bestowed to him from Solia Castle, was revealed.

It was to recognize and show his accomplishments for uncovering the dirty secrets of the Magic Tower that were hidden for a long time and also for providing assistance to people of Solia Castle and Temple in ‘apprehending’ Astroa.

After seeing the medal, servants gasped.

One thing surprising about it was that Ryan and Lloyd's servants were gasping more than the others.

"It was...not just a fluke, right?"

Stein asked as he looked at Riley.

Again, Riley leisurely shrugged his shoulder as a replacement for a response.

His looks were truly becoming of a nickname Lazy Sword.

"...You were out here."

When Riley and Stein, the father and the son, were having a strange psychological warfare, from inside of the carriage, Iris's voice could be heard.

"Anyway, you were worried about his well-being more than anything, yet... Your inability to be honest with yourself is a quirk of yours. Huhu."

Following Riley, Iris also came down from the carriage. She was smiling with her lips covered by her hand.

Stein didn't have many weak points, but now that one of them made an entrance to the scene, Stein groaned and cringed.

“Was it inconvenient to have just Sera and Ian?”

“Of course not. The two have fulfilled their roles well. They were more than enough.”

As Iris smiled and turned toward the back, Sera and Ian, who were waiting in the back, lowered their heads and paid their respects to Stein.

“Um?”

Also, having discovered a girl sitting next to them, Stein showed a question mark on his face.

“Who is that child?”

Not just Stein, but others of the House had their gazes focused on Nainiae. Their gazes were making her feel hesitant, and she lowered her head.

“It looks like there is much to talk about, so why don’t we have the rest after going inside?”

Iris gave a refreshing smile and looked at her son.

“Riley.”

“Yes.”

“Could you please go inside first with Nainiae?”

Riley nodded and gave a hand gesture toward Nainiae to come this way.

Nainiae looked like she was able to calm down a little from the young master’s gesture. She relaxed her face and carefully came close to his back.

“…”

After Nainiae came next to his back, Riley stopped walking for a moment and looked back at his mother.

It appeared that Riley was concerned about his mother after all.

‘You don’t need to worry. Your mother’s lips are heavy.’

The mother and the son had their eyes meet, and after quickly reading her son’s face, Iris winked.

Finally, Riley cracked a smile, relaxed his face, and was about to walk inside the mansion, but…

“...Oh, Riley? So you returned at last?”

At the entrance of the mansion, they ran into Lloyd, the second-born.

Chapter 56 - Returning Home (Part 2)

“From what I’ve been hearing, you returned with a magnificent medal.”

Clap Clap

Lloyd walked toward Riley as he clapped. He opened his arms wide, gave Riley a tight hug and took a step back.

“How about showing it to your big brother too? I’m talking about that medal.”

With his hands on his waist, in a pose full of confidence, Lloyd looked at Riley.

It appeared he could not care less about Nainiae who was following behind Riley.

“Um? Why are you acting like that?”

As Riley stood there with a blank stare while suppressing his expression that wanted to say what a bother this was, Lloyd started to look at Riley as if he was concerned for him.

“By chance… It’s not like the news about the medal was a lie or anything, right? My little brother would never do that! Isn’t that right?”

Lloyd asked the servants who were standing to the side in a line.

Because the servants were here from the beginning to welcome Riley, they already saw Riley’s medal. However, despite that, the

servants were sparing themselves of speaking any words and only looked over shoulders.

It was because they became aware of the public secret that the two were competing to be the heir of the Iphelleta House.

“Now, hurry up!”

Lloyd immediately put forth one of his hands.

His gesture was saying to hurry up and bring out the medal.

“...Ha~ah.”

Riley sighed quietly.

“...”

Nainiae glanced back and forth between Riley and Lloyd. Soon, as if she realized that the older young man with blond hair was not a good person to Riley, she narrowed her eyes.

<Don’t do it.>

Nainaie was going to give Lloyd a shot of her magic, the kind that won’t require her to recite a spell and all she had to do would have been just concentrating mana. She was going to prepare it in secret

and shoot it, but she could hear Riley's voice in her head.

'Why?'

Nainiae moved her eye and looked at Riley from the side.

She couldn't figure out exactly what he was thinking, but there was a little bit of the expression on his face that showed he was finding all this to be a nuisance. That much was certain.

So, to make sure she doesn't end up getting in Riley's way, she put away the mana that she focused and decided to just quietly watch the situation.

"Yes. Well... I'll show it to you."

Riley put his hand in the pocket again and brought out the medal.

It was a golden medal with Solia's insignia engraved on it.

It was certainly the medal that Daniel, the prince of Solia, bestowed to Riley.

"...Oh, oh oh?"

Now that he was looking at the medal in person, Lloyd's eyes widened.

It looked like he never thought Riley would really bring a medal.

“This is the medal that you received from that old man?”

As Lloyd stared at the medal, which was shaped just like the one hanging in Stein’s office, he narrowed his eyes as if he grew suspicious and asked,

“How should I say this… I find this… quite surprising.”

“…?”

“Ah ah. Don’t misunderstand me. It’s just that I can’t imagine how you would have done it. I find it hard to believe that you received it.”

Lloyd said as he waved his hand around and smiled.

Watching Lloyd, Nainiae’s patience reached its limit. She crumpled her face.

It was difficult for her to stand still when Lloyd was making a mockery of Riley about his accomplishments.

“…”

The servants watching the second-born and the youngest of the House were also drenched in cold sweat.

Of course, this wasn't the first time Lloyd made mockery of Riley for him being lazy, but they were worried because the situation now was a little different.

'Is it okay to do that?'

They were thinking that.

No matter how things led to Riley receiving the medal, it was a medal of honor that was bestowed on him by the royalty.

Lloyd doubting the medal that Riley held could also imply that he was doubting the judgment of Solia Castle's royalty. This was the reason for the servants' concerns.

"By chance, can you please explain it to me? How did you get the medal?"

"..."

"Hm. I wonder why you can't just answer? It's frustrating. Riley, by chance, you..."

Listening to Lloyd's provocation, to how he was blurring the end of his sentence as he narrowed his eyes, Riley opened his mouth,

“…Big Brother.”

“Um?”

Riley was holding the medal in his palm and had stretched his hand toward Lloyd to show it to him. Now, Riley slowly grabbed hold of the medal.

Riley held the tip of the medal’s tail with his thumb and index finger and swung it left and right in front of Lloyd’s face as if he was performing hypnosis.

“If you like this so much, shall I give it to you?”

“What?”

In leisurely tone, with a smile, Riley made the proposition.

At this, not just Lloyd, but the servants, who were watching them also, closed their mouths without even being able to make gasping sounds.

“It’s just that you seem like you really want to have it.”

Riley brought back the medal, which he was lightly swinging around, close to his face. He carefully observed Solia’s insignia on it, and as if he got bored of it, he held it toward Lloyd and said,

“For me, it’s a bother to have it anyway.”

The expression on Riley’s face was tinged with annoyance.

Hearing Riley’s tone of voice, which sounded like he was saying Lloyd should take the medal if he really wanted to,

“You…”

Lloyd seemed like he was doubting Riley’s words. He moved his hand toward the medal that was swinging in Riley’s hand.

It felt like slight convulsion of his hand was expressing how he was feeling inside.

It was when his hand was about one hand’s width away from reaching the medal.

“Well, if you don’t want it, then it cannot be helped.”

“…?!”

Riley took back the medal and promptly put it away.

With a leisurely expression on his face that stated he had moments and nerves to spare, Riley was tilting up the corner of his

mouth.

Watching this, Lloyd finally realized that Riley was swinging the medal around to mock him.

“You…you runt… How dare…”

The fact that he was ridiculed by Riley, not someone else, seemed to be unbearable to Lloyd.

Lloyd was about to extend his arm and grab Riley’s neck. At that moment,

“…Lloyd.”

“…Kuk.”

Stein, who was having a conversation with Iris until now, walked toward the two brothers and stopped him.

“That’s enough.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Hearing his father’s order, Lloyd ground his teeth inwardly, took care of the expression on his face and slowly lowered his head.

“Ah.”

Shoving down the rage inside, Lloyd raised his head he just had lowered and noticed Iris who was sticking right next to his father. Lloyd lightly twitched his eyebrow as he lowered his head again.

“Lady Iris, have you had a pleasant visit to Solia?”

“Thank you for your consideration, Young Master Lloyd. Thanks to you, we had a good trip.”

Iris responded to Lloyd’s greeting by lightly fiddling her chin with her hand. She immediately turned her head toward Riley and delivered ‘why don’t you take your leave now’ with her gaze.

‘I’ll get going now.’

Heeding to his mother’s good will, Riley, who just put the medal away into his pocket, stepped into the mansion.

“Young Master Lloyd, have you been well?”

“Ah, yes.”

To turn his gaze away from Riley, Iris asked how Lloyd had been.

“The thing is, my swordsmanship is improving daily. Lady Iris, it

would be hard for you to believe it because you have Riley, but now, besides Father and Big Brother, there isn't anyone in the House that could beat me…"

With his chin all the way up, as if he was boasting about himself, he was going off about himself as he walked, but suddenly, when he stepped on to the polished surface of the mansion's entrance, he started to slide.

'Did someone oil the floor or something?'

At least, how he was moving looked like it was not by his intent.

"…Uh? Uu uh?"

After realizing the surface was excessively slippery, Lloyd started to wave his hands in the air chaotically.

'What the hell? Why is the floor like this?'

Since childhood, he had exceptionally good sense of balance, so no matter how slippery the floor was, if it was like any other day, he would have been able to balance himself immediately. However, for some reason, his seriously compromised balance was not coming back to its stable state so easily.

"Uu uh!"

In the end, until the moment he tipped over completely, he was still not able to regain his balance, and,

“...Kek?!”

He plummeted with his ass to the floor in an embarrassing way.

“Y-Young master?”

“Are you all right?”

Having watched Lloyd falling in a grand way, the servants who were on standby on the side quickly rushed to him and checked.

“...Puhaha!”

From a pretty far distance, Sera watched it all, how Lloyd was going on and on boasting about himself and fell all of sudden after a brief dance of struggle. She was not able to hold it anymore. She broke into laughter.

It was because she had a pretty good idea who it was that made it happen.

“Pup... Kuhuhu...”

She turned her head away and hid her mouth with her hands so

others won’t see her laughing.

“Kuhum!”

Looking at Sera making suppressed laughter, Ian, who was standing next to her, made a light hem and poked her with his elbow.

“...Sera.”

Poke

Poke

His elbow lightly tapped Sera's arm. Ian was trying to scold Sera to make her stop laughing.

"I-I'm sorry. Kuhuhu..."

Sera was barely containing her laughter. With dew hanging around her eyes from laughter, Sera turned her head to the front again.

Sera forced herself to think about depressing matters. She took a quick glance at Ian.

It turned out, Ian too was trying to hold himself from laughing. Still, his facial muscles were occasionally twitching toward laughter. The look on his face was quite a sight to behold.

"...Puhuhu!"

Sera broke into laughter once again.

"How clumsy and embarrassing."

"Big Brother, that's not how it happened. The floor was a little odd. There was really something..."

“I got it. Got it.”

Lloyd was trying to explain himself as he rubbed the part with which he hit the floor. Looking at Ryan, who smiled at him gently as if he was trying to say he is giving in, Lloyd cringed.

“So, how is Riley?”

As if he was checking on things, Ryan asked as he turned his head.

Lloyd shrugged his shoulder and responded,

“Same as always. There wasn’t much that changed about him.”

“Same as always, huh…”

“Unfocused eyes, lassy-like smooth palm, the way of walking that lacks any strength, and right down to how he runs his mouth since he has no physical skills… Everything was as they were. It looks like there won’t be a need to worry so much. Ah, by the way…”

As Lloyd explained, he brought up the part he forgot that he found amusing,

“He brought some weird lass with him.”

“A lass?”

“Yes. Her presence was weak, and her face was grotesque, so I didn’t look carefully. Anyway, one thing for certain is that she is an odd looking one. It bothers me inside.”

Lloyd remembered as he scratched the back of his head.

As he said, to him, she looked really odd. It was not sitting right in his mind.

Not just her appearance, but her atmosphere as well.

“Hmm…”

“Although I can’t know what would come of this, I think that girl being here is only going to help us in the heir competition. It didn’t look like she was going to be a hindrance. If she is a daughter of a nobility, then perhaps… But it was hard to find any trace of nobility in the way she acts or walks.”

As Ryan listened to his explanation, Ryan fiddled with his chin and nodded as if he understood. Ryan said,

“It seems like it would be best if we continued to find out more.”

“About what exactly?”

“I’m talking about that lass. Something is fishy about it all.”

“But Big Brother, that lass is…”

As if it was not sitting right with him, Lloyd was going to object, but his gaze met with Ryan’s, which looked extremely serious. Lloyd promptly shut his mouth.

“Riley, that rascal is not the horny scoundrel type. You know that well too.”

Money? Not interested.

Power? Not interested.

Women? Not interested.

Other than reading books or resting against the trunk in a tree’s shade, his youngest brother had no other particular interests.

‘He brought a girl that nobody knows into the Iphelleta House? Also, not any girl, but a girl who has quite a horrid appearance?’

It was certain he had something he was scheming inside.

“He has something up his sleeve. This isn’t a matter you should

just ignore because she had an unsightly face.”

“Um… I understand.”

After hearing Ryan’s explanation, as if he was thinking it was plausible too, Lloyd nodded his head and responded.

“I’ll find out about it on my own. Okay then. Why don’t you go back for now?”

“Yes.”

Lloyd bowed and left the room.

Ryan, who was alone in his room now, started to fiddle with his chin again.

“A medal from the castle…”

He didn’t know how Riley received the medal when he went to Solia Castle just to watch the swordsmanship tournament.

However, one thing for certain was that this was a sign. Ryan was concerned. Ryan’s plan was about to be forced to take a wrong turn.

Chapter 57 - Astroa's Belongings

It was a dress with white and black colors mixed in.

It was a dress with loose frills decorating its skirt.

From today on, Nainiae was officially going to work as a maid in Iphelleta House.

She looked around at her maid uniform here and there, and she turned to look at Sera who was standing in front of her.

‘Do I look all right?’

With her mouth tightly closed, Nainiae asked Sera with her gaze.

“Hmm…”

With her arm resting on her waist, Sera thoroughly checked Nainiae’s appearance from top to bottom. Looking satisfied, Sera nodded and said,

“Fortunately, there was one that fits you perfectly.”

“…”

It looked like Nainiae was not used to the dress’s lace decoration.

Not knowing what to do, Nainiae fiddled with its thin and soft fabric.

Looking at Nainiae in panic, Sera mumbled inside,

'If we could do something about her face, that would be nice…'

For now, she had it roughly hidden with her long hair. However, one side of her face was burned and peeled off red due to experiments at the Magic Tower.

Her scars could invoke either sympathy or disgust. Regardless, it looked like it was going to make anyone cringe if they laid their eyes on her scars.

'I really think just her hair is not going to be enough.'

Sera developed a pretty good immunity to Nainiae's disfigurement.

Now, she was able to maintain her facial expression when she looked at Nainiae's face.

Sera breathed out lightly and fixed Nainiae's clothing.

As for Nainiae's face, it seemed like she had to think about it some more.

“Although our young master said he picked it up from… I mean he wants to take you in because he wants to learn magic, still, you should do your job, right?”

Because Sera’s face came right up to her face, Nainiae flinched and turned her head away.

The pleasant smell of Sera’s shampoo was tickling her nose. Somehow, it was making Nainiae feel embarrassed.

“The rules for being a maid in Iphelleta House are pretty strict, so prepare your mind for it. Do you understand?”

At first, the maid thing was Iris’s idea.

The idea was that, if Nainiae was going to support Riley from the back anyway, instead of just sticking to Riley’s side and only teaching him magic, Iris thought Nainiae working in the mansion with Sera might be a good idea.

“I’m saying this because you might misunderstand me. This part was also approved by Young Master Riley, so, from now on, listen carefully to me, your ‘Big Sis Sera,’ and…”

Tighten

Sera tightened Nainiae's clothing around the neck area and looked at her.

Perhaps it was to show her who is boss. Unlike her usual self, the look in Sera's eyes was violent.

"...let's work well...well together, do you understand?"

Inside, Sera resented Iris for putting her in charge of educating Nainiae.

At the same time, Sera showed a refreshing smile toward Nainiae.

"...Yes."

Nainiae felt something bad would happen if she did anything that wasn't to Sera's liking. Nainiae gulped and responded in a quiet voice.

It was in the main garden of Iphelleta mansion.

By the trunk of the apple tree, the one designated as his sanctuary, Riley had leisurely taken the place and was lying down,

but he turned his gaze toward the direction where a loud voice was coming from.

“No. I’m telling you that’s not how it is done!”

“In that case… Like this?”

“No! No! The other way!”

“If I just use magic…”

“Uh uh? Who said you can use tricks? Please don’t! Magic is forbidden!”

There were Sera and Nainiae.

By the Iris’s proposition, Nainiae was receiving maid lessons from Sera. Riley cracked a smile as if he found it amusing to watch.

“Are you going to keep on thinking about ways to use tricks instead?”

“Ah, No… It is not like that.”

Riley didn’t hate passing the time by just lying down idly, but it was not a bad thing for him to watch something entertaining while lying down in his designated sanctuary.

“How should I put it…”

She was still not used to the work. Also, Nainiae’s crass language was popping out once in a while.

Frustrated, Sera was pounding on her chest as she admonished Nainiae.

Watching this, Riley mumbled with a vacant stare,

“…It’s like watching a new recruit and a senior in the army.”

This scene felt familiar as if he saw it somewhere in the past.

With intrigued eyes, Riley watched the two girls struggling as he thought the situation felt similar to how things were in army in his past life where senior soldiers gave new recruits a hard time just for the sake of it.

“Are you going to keep talking back to me?”

“No. No, I’m not. I’m not trying to talk back to you, it is just…”

“Uh uh? Again?”

There was Nainiae breaking in cold sweat and not knowing what

to do.

There was also Sera on the verge of exploding from frustration.

Regardless of which one he watched, the situation was entertaining for Riley.

“And here, we even have an officer too.”

Riley turned his head as he murmured.

Next to Riley was an old butler with a stern face standing with his arms folded behind his back.

It was Ian.

“…”

Becoming of an ‘officer,’ the title that Riley mentioned, Ian was glaring at Sera and Nainiae with a serious and disciplined eyes.

It looked like he was going to take action on the first sign of a mistake that wasn’t to his liking.

“Hu… In that case, am I the most senior officer who is in his last year of the army service?”

Entertained by the current situation. Riley cracked a smile and murmured.

Having heard what Riley just said, Ian, who was looking at Sera and Nainiae, turned his head toward Riley and asked,

“Young master, did you just say something?”

“Um? No, it is nothing.”

It was a culture that didn’t exist in this world. It was something Riley knew from his past life.

Because there was no need for Riley to exert his brain in attempt to explain it all to Ian, Riley chose not to talk about it anymore, so he closed his mouth.

“Anyway, young master…”

“Um?”

Having finished their business at the garden, Sera and Nainiae went back into the mansion. As he watched this, Ian slowly turned his head toward three pouches that were laying next to Riley.

“Those items. What are you going to do with them?”

The three pouches.

They contained items that the people from the Holy Temple delivered to Riley. They said the items were spoils for defeating Astroa.

Ian was asking what Riley was going to do with them.

“I don’t know?”

A purple colored cape.

A silver ring.

A leather bracelet.

The pouches contained those three things.

They were items that used to belong to Astroa, the grand mage, the one Riley defeated.

Riley chose to take them since the Holy Temple said they will give the items to him for free.

However, Riley didn’t know exactly how to use these items.

“I guess it would be a little odd to sell these things, right?”

After all, the items were something a grand mage used.

On the other hand, Riley was from Iphelleta, a House that was renowned for sword. There was a chance that a rumor could spread about Iphelleta selling items at high prices that used to belong to a grand mage when he was alive. Therefore, it was hard to pick that as the option.

“Ah, that would be indeed.”

“Hmm.”

Riley opened a pouch, brought out the cape from inside, and narrowed his eyes.

Because of the blade that Riley threw and Nainiae’s magic during the Lower Solia incident, the cape had a hole in it, but the rest of it looked fine.

“By chance, like that cape from that wizard school movie, is this going to make me invisible if I cover my body with it? Is it something like that?”

“A wizard school, sir?”

‘What, what? A wizard school movie?’

Ian was not able to understand what Riley was mumbling about.

As Ian tilted his head to the side and asked, Riley shook his head and corrected himself,

“No. It’s nothing. I was just talking to myself.”

After he shook his head, Riley judged that the cape couldn’t be like that. He fiddled with the cape and felt the quality of the fabric.

‘There is no way it could.’

If this cape could really do that, Astroa would not have been defeated so easily during the battle in Lower Solia.

“These things, how are they used?”

“Look at that one’s face.”

“Iphelleta House has a standard and class. That scar is a little…”

“What’s wrong with her fingers? With that, could she even do her work properly?”

Inside the mansion, other maids or butlers in the hallway glanced

at Nainiae, who was tying the curtain, and clicked their tongues as they passed by.

"I should do it like this, right?"

"..."

"Miss Sera?"

Just like how Sera was a few days ago when she was introduced to Nainiae for the first time, her colleagues were passing by while saying bad things about Nainiae. Hearing their voices, Sera stared at their backs with an expression on her face that protested against their behavior. Eventually, Sera turned her head toward Nainiae and responded,

"Pardon?"

Nainiae, after tying the curtain in the way Sera taught her, asked Sera,

"This, tying it like this is correct, right?"

"Ah, yes. That's correct. At least you are pretty good at this."

They were currently standing in the hallway that was in front of Riley's room.

To be precise, it was the cleaning area that Nainiae will be in charge of from now on.

“Now, the next thing to do on the list is…”

If it had been like her normal routine, Sera would have been walking around Iris’s room or the corridors nearby to organize things. However, currently, she was sticking by Nainiae for the sake of her adjustment to the work inside the mansion. Sera was teaching her things Nainiae was going to be doing.

“…cleaning up the footprints on carpets.”

With the hallway’s curtain arrangement now complete, Sera moved her eyes to check if there were any footprints or stains on the carpet.

One thing good about the assignment was that, compared to other places, the front of Riley’s room had relatively few people coming by. So it looked like it was not going to be too hard for Nainiae to maintain the place.

“Well, as for the carpets, it looks like it just needs to be dusted off a little. And…”

“Ah, Sera? You were here.”

Sera was organizing the day’s schedule in her head, but she turned her head because of the voice coming from the back.

The owner of the voice, which sounded pretentious somehow, was someone who was holding a pretty high position in the mansion, the second young master of the Iphelleta House.

“Young Master Lloyd.”

Having noticed him, Sera lowered her head.

‘Who was that again?’

Because Lloyd was walking this way, Nainiae, who momentarily tilted her head to the side, also followed Sera and lowered her head.

‘Ah, that young master from before. The one that makes me lose appetite for food.’

As Nainiae lowered her head, she realized that this young master with pretentious voice was someone she ran into in the past. Nainiae hardened her face.

It was definitely from when they just arrived at the mansion.

It was that man who insisted on trying to pick a fight with Riley, the one who she served. It was the young master on whom Nainiae used grease magic, which eliminates friction on the floor, in secret to make him plummet on his butt for pestering Riley.

“What’s this? What’s this? Are you in middle of educating a new family member of the household?”

“Yes. I’m showing her around the mansion, and I’m also explaining to her about her tasks.”

To Lloyd’s question, Sera replied politely, and then she did the reverse and asked him a question,

“By the way, what brings you here?”

The place was in front of Riley’s room.

It was pretty far from Lloyd’s room, so Sera asked wondering why he came all this way.

“Um. It’s nothing.”

‘Is he trying to harass Young Master Riley again? Or is he here to run his mouth in front of me? I rather have it be that he is here just to boast about himself again…’

Sera was agonizing about it in her mind. At that moment, Lloyd continued,

“I came to see you.”

It looked like, of all the scenarios she was thinking about, it was the one Sera hated the most.

Having heard what Lloyd said, Sera's eyebrows twitched a little and she tried to divert the conversation,

"Young Master Lloyd, as I said earlier, because I'm currently in middle of training Nainiae, I cannot see you at the moment. Also, after this, I have to go tend to cleaning my lady's room, so I can't come to see you at your room eith-..."

"Come on. Why are you acting like that when it's between us? I called for you like this, so isn't it about time you came to me at least once? I think I asked you to come and hang out with me at my room a few dozen times by now. Isn't that right?"

"..."

When Sera turned her head away showing that she was not interested, Lloyd didn't miss the chance and took a quick glance below to take a good look at Sera's cleavage. He smiled with his eyes and hid the lewdness that was revealed in his eyes.

"It's not like I'm going to roast and eat someone. I'm only asking for a cup of tea together, so why? Ah, right! While at it, the new recruit, why don't you come too?"

When Lloyd suddenly looked at Nainiae and continued, with a

displeased, protesting look on her face, Nainiae tilted her head to the side.

“Are you talking about me?”

“That’s right. What’s your name?”

“...It’s Nainiae.”

“Um. Good. Nainiae! If you are in middle of training by Sera, I think it won’t be a bad idea to come by with Sera to have some tea with me at my room, have a conversation together and have the opportunity to get to know each other. Right?”

Lloyd suggested with his arms wide open.

“What do you think?”

Nainiae made a quick glance to check Sera’s face.

She did because it had been only a day since she started working here. It was still difficult for Nainiae to know what’s going on in these kinds of situations.

“...”

Although it looked like Sera was trying hard not to let it show,

because Nainaie was also a woman, as Nainiae observed her face from that perspective, she noticed that Sera looked displeased.

As if she decided to do something, Nainiae turned her head toward Lloyd and looked at him. Nainaie responded to his proposition,

“…No. We are not going.”

“…?”

“I said we are not going.”

It appeared she still had the habit of her crude language from Lower Solia.

With her unique dry expression on her face, Nainiae glared at Lloyd as if she was going to burn a hole through his face.

Chapter 58 - Astroa's Belongings (Part 2)

“...What did you just say?”

Wondering if he misheard just now, Lloyd tilted his head to the side and asked Nainiae.

“What did you just say? We are not going?”

Nainiae’s answer was nothing in lines of ‘We apologize, but I’m afraid we are not able to attend,’ or anything similar.

Also, after giving her initial response, Nainiae repeated herself to Lloyd as if she thought maybe he didn’t hear her. All that made Lloyd’s facial muscles to twitch.

“Hey. Perhaps you don’t know because you are new, but if you shoot your yap off like that...”

“Like that?”

Because of the difference in height, Nainiae was looking upward to Lloyd with her chin up. She pulled her chin slightly, glanced at Lloyd’s chest and said,

“You mean like this?”

With demonstration, Nainiae was tossing an advice to Lloyd.

"..."

By Nainiae's act, which was out of the blue, Lloyd fiddled with his fingers as he thought about how he moved his eyes in front of Sera.

'This bitch...'

Lloyd was here under Ryan's order. He came here, at the hallway in front of Riley's room, to observe Nainiae, the new maid that Riley took in from Solia.

In the process, he also ran into a maid he lusted after with his eyes occasionally. So he invited her for a cup of tea to his room, and took a quick glance at her cleavage while at it. It appeared Nainiae noticed him in the act.

'She may look the way she is, but she is quite street smart at least it seems?'

Nainiae tilted her chin up slightly again and looked at Lloyd.

As his eyes met with Nainiae's, Lloyd's face crumpled.

'Tsk, just look at that face.'

He was cringing not because of her way of talking or her advice

that hit the heart of the matter. It was a cringe that felt like it was out of disgust.

“Young master, my apologies, Nainiae is from Lower Solia, so her crude language habits were not corrected yet.”

Lloyd’s face changed as if he just chewed on something awful. Noticing this, Sera, while breaking in cold sweat, came in front of Nainiae and lowered her head.

“I’ll educate her separately to correct this, so please…”

She was saying Lloyd should generously forgive her.

Watching Sera properly bowing and asking for forgiveness for the mistake of her new recruit, Lloyd laughed as he wiggled his brows,

“…Ha!”

Just a maid glaring and talking in such a crude language toward a young master of a count’s House was a problem that could not be forgiven so easily.

“All right. Well… I’m a generous guy.”

His facial muscles were still twitching slightly, but he slowly managed to regain composure. Lloyd took a step closer to Sera and

looked at her face.

“But in return, as her senior, you can take the responsibility, right?”

“…”

Sera was holding it in well until now, but finally, her face crumpled.

Just like Nainiae, she wanted to say ‘I’m not going. Get lost.’ However, she couldn’t do that.

‘Haaa. How did I end up…’

She thought she had a bad feeling about this from the start, and it came to this.

Sera sighed heavily enough to make the ground sink. Instead of resenting Nainiae, she was resenting herself for not warning Nainiae in advance.

‘When I became a maid, it’s not like I didn't know a situation like this could happen, but…’

When she became a maid, she had thought about the possibility.

Until now, while serving Iris, she managed to avoid a situation like this, but it looked like her luck finally ran out.

‘Still, this is… Huh?’

Sera was biting her lips as she thought it could not be helped, but she relaxed her narrowed eyes after hearing a quiet voice from the back.

‘Nainiae?’

Mumble Mumble

The one quietly mumbling was Nainiae, the one Sera quickly hid away behind her back just now.

Following a certain someone's advice, Nainiae was standing a step behind.

From a place where Lloyd's field of view cannot reach, she was mumbling something.

"...Sleep."

After whispering for a few seconds, Nainiae finished reciting the spell. She put forth her hand over Sera's shoulder and activated the magic she prepared.

"Well then, Sera. When you are finished with your work in the evening, come to my...room..."

Blink, blink...

Lloyd was in the middle of a sentence, but he faltered from his eyelids rapidly becoming heavy, and soon, he slowly collapsed down as he leaned against a wall.

"Um..."

“Huk?!”

‘What just happened?’

As if he was suffering from narcolepsy, Lloyd fell asleep while leaning against the wall with his legs spread out. He was drooling.

“He will be asleep for 30 minutes.”

Nainiae, who was hiding behind Sera’s back, walked to the front of Sera and shrugged.

Nainiae dusted off her hands. Now, she was beaming with a look in her eye that said, ‘I did a good thing, right? Please praise me!’

“N-Nainiae. Did you do this?”

Sera, with her eyes wide open, asked Nainiae.

Nainiae simply nodded as the replacement for a response.

“Yes. As expected, he is a young master from a high nobility’s House. He had strength to resist it.”

“…”

“But, because I’m at Six Circles…”

Hearing Nainiae mumbling on as if she had nothing to worry about, Sera looked at Lloyd. He was asleep with his mouth open.

“Just what were you thinking? How are you going to handle things afterwards…”

Out of concerns for what was going to happen later, Sera was breaking in cold sweat.

Nainiae shrugged her shoulders and answered,

“It doesn’t matter. If you just toss him on top of a bed, he will just think he had a strange dream.”

From the time when she used crude language at the young master she didn’t like…

From the time when she mimicked his act of glancing at Sera’s cleavage showing that she didn’t like it…

It appeared Nainiae had thought of everything, including how to handle what would happen afterwards.

“I actually wanted to give him a bucketful of foul language for being randy and daring to oggle, but…”

Nainiae lowered her head.

Although the scars on her face were very noticeable, her saddened face was like any other 18 year old girl's.

"...if I did, I figured I'll get scolded, so..."

As if she was afraid of checking the expression on Sera, who was staring at her, Nainaie was hesitating to lift her head.

"Excuse me, Miss Sera."

After gathering some courage by fiddling with her hands, Nainiae struggled and lifted her head to look at Sera. Having confirmed the look on Sera's face, Nainiae smiled lightly and asked,

"...It's all right to use this much, right?"

Iphelleta House had an extreme hatred toward assassins.

However, when it came to mages, the house was pretty generous in their opinion.

Ian, the old butler who served Riley, was the only one who had a strong disgust toward mages for some reason. With exception to anything underhanded, Sera also had no objection to Nainiae using magic.

“Yes…”

Because Nainiae started work today without any separate introduction to everyone, no one in the mansion, other than Riley’s group that went to Solia Castle, had an idea that Nainiae was the one in the newspaper that was mentioned as ‘a girl, who had been abandoned by the Magic Tower and also accomplished quite a commendable deed in efforts of apprehending Astroa.’

“It is…all right.”

Looking at Lloyd who was asleep, Sera answered with a vacant look on her face.

Although the girl was wearing a maid uniform, her true nature of existence was certainly fierce and overbearing.

She was a mage of Six Circles magic.

‘Maybe…’

Sera turned her head and looked at Nainiae who was standing there with an awkward look.

Sera was thinking that perhaps she could change the prejudice of other people who clicked their tongues after looking at Nainiae’s face.

“…Nainiae.”

Breaking the brief silence, another boy’s voice could be heard behind them. Sera and Nainiae quickly turned their heads around.

“Y-Young Master Riley?”

Sera sighed in relief as she saw her young master leisurely walking down the hallway.

She thought about how it would have went if it was the eldest young master that showed up. Just thinking about it made her feel frightened.

“Why are you so surprised?”

Riley tilted his head to the side as he asked. He asked another question before he even got a reply.

“The time is up now, right? Can I take her now?”

With his finger, Riley pointed at Nainiae.

It was four in the evening.

Riley was talking about the time when Nainiae’s maid training was suppose to end for the day.

“Pardon? Ah…”

“Nainiae.”

As if he couldn’t even see his older brother Lloyd sleeping while leaning against the wall of the hallway, Riley was not even glancing in that direction. Instead, he only gestured toward Nainiae to come to him.

“Miss Sera, about handling the rest about Young Master Lloyd… I’m counting on you.”

Of all replies Nainiae had given today, she gave the most high-spirited one to Riley’s gesture.

Nainiae lightly bowed to Sera and started to walk.

“Ugh…”

All Riley did was to arrogantly call out her name and ask her to come, yet Nainiae went straight to Riley like a puppy with light steps and sparkle in her eye. Sera looked at her with a vacant face for a moment.

Soon, as if she was trying to say she is finally giving in to Nainiae’s attitude, Sera broke into laughter.

It was at Iphelleta mansion's library.

As if he missed his sanctuary that he was away from for so long, he dived into the soft sofa and stretched out as if he was on top of the world.

"Ugh. It's been ages since I lay down here."

Because reading was one of a few hobbies she had, instead of watching Riley stretching out, Nainiae's eye was chasing after books in the library.

Soon, she shook her head hard to calm down and asked,

"That is... Should I bring you something like a tea?"

"No. It's fine. You know you would stink at it, so why bother."

"..."

Riley said it casually as he cracked a smile, but the expression on Nainiae's face quickly turned to disappointment.

"No. It's only been a day. A day... I'm sure you will do better later."

Riley figured it would be also not a good idea to kill her spirit, so he corrected himself.

In order to get to the main point, Riley tossed the three pouches on the table.

“These are…?”

“You were the one that had been keeping them safe while we were on our way back to the mansion, so you know what these are, right? They are what you think.”

They were Astroa’s belongings, a cape, a ring, and a bracelet.

“I laid down and spent the whole day examining them here and there, but no matter how long I stared at them, I couldn’t get a feel on how these are suppose to be used.”

“Yes…”

As if she understood what Riley was trying to say, Nainiae nodded. However, when she was fiddling with the three objects on the table, the look on her face was not looking all right.

“Excuse me, young master. I understand what you are trying to ask. However, I can only tell things such as mana or a trap contained in objects. As for their usage methods… I cannot tell.”

Looking apologetic for not being able to do what Riley hoped for, Nainiae responded with a disappointed face.

She wished she could tell him that she knew, but it was not right to tell such a lie to the young master she served.

“Hm. You haven’t seen that bastard using them either?”

“From how I remember, he did wear the cape when I was in the laboratory, but…he never used it.”

Nainiae was fiddling with the cape. She continued as she moved her hand toward the ring and the bracelet,

“As for the ring and the bracelet, he didn’t have these back then.”

“Is that so?”

Riley had his fingers locked and his hands placed behind his head as a pillow. He looked away with a face that looked like he was thinking it could not be helped.

“In that case. For now, you hold on to these. I know someone that knows a lot about these kinds of things, so I’ll ask him then.”

“Someone that knows a lot about these kinds of things?”

“Don’t try to get to know him. That rascal is not a very pleasant guy to hang out with.”

“Yes.”

After Nainiae replied and gathered the items that were on the table, Riley, who was lying on the sofa, looked in Nainiae’s direction and said,

“In that case, why don’t we get the lesson started? We have been postponing it for a while.”

Riley brought Nainiae to the library because he wanted to learn how to pick apples from the apple trees without using his hand.

This was the technique which that rascal absolutely refused to teach him...

Chapter 59 - Astroa's Belongings (Part 3)

“Excuse me, young master.”

Nainiae was fiddling with Astroa’s belongings on the table, but she looked at Riley, who was lying down on the sofa with his legs dangling around, and asked,

“Before I start, I wanna ask you somethin’.”

“What?”

Nainiae was about to teach Riley the basics of magic, but there was one thing that floated up in her mind that made her curious. To resolve this curiosity, she asked the question.

So far, she was barely managing to adjust her language to the respectful tone. She was feeling complicated, so she started to spit out crude language again.

“Why me?”

‘Why did he choose me of all people?’

Nainiae’s question was rather vague. Riley couldn’t quite figure out the reason behind her question. He tilted his head to the side to show that he needed additional explanation.

With her voice lacking in confidence, Nainiae provided supplementary explanation.

“I may have reached the Six Circles magic at a young age, but it was through the use of experimental drugs... Even if you claimed my magic mastery as my strong suit, I have not learned the magic through proper training, so, unlike other, proper mages, it will be difficult for me to teach someone efficiently. Also...”

‘Also, I don’t have the face that’s suitable for a teacher.’

Still, Nainiae was an 18 years old girl. Instead of saying it, she swallowed those words back down and grabbed on tightly on the folds of her skirt.

“Back in Solia Castle, if you spared my life just to learn magic from me, you don’t have to choose me. You can learn it from someone else...”

It was not certain if Riley knew this, but Nainiae’s life was limited to this autumn.

That was the reason why she thought it would be more efficient for him to find someone else if he was looking for a teacher to give him lessons in magic. It was the logical choice no matter how she looked at it.

In the end, Nainiae was wondering why Riley chose her instead of other accomplished mages when Nainiae had a horrid face and

numbered lifespan.

“Um… Do I need to tell you?”

Riley was scratching the back of his head. He looked at Nainiae and asked back.

Nainiae was facing an expression that said all this was such a bother. Having looked at Riley’s face, she pursed her mouth.

Nainiae finally realized she was using crass language. She shook her head and replied in respectful language,

“Ah… There is no need for you to explain, young master. It’s not absolutely necessary. There is no need for you to tell me…”

Her voice sounded like she could collapse at an instant.

Nainiae was looking for a goal or meaning in her life before her death. She decided to invest the remaining time she had in Riley, the one who sought her out and asked her to teach him magic.

‘That’s right.’

That was the reason why Nainiae was standing here at this moment.

She was intending to do as she was told.

If Riley praised her for her efforts, then that would have made her happier.

‘Things like reasons are irrelevant.’

Nainiae recalled the words Riley said to her on a certain morning back in Solia.

Back then, Nainiae asked Riley what was the reason why Nainiae was never acknowledged or rewarded for her efforts when she did her best to live up to others’ expectations and requests. Recalling Riley’s answer and his solution, Nainiae was agonizing over them.

‘I…need to take a step back and watch…’

Riley told her that.

She was not sure what the true intent of Riley’s answer was.

She just thought that the only thing she could do now was doing exactly that and watching Riley from a step behind him.

This was the reason why she made up her mind to give up her life of her own and give her everything to Riley so willingly. Back then, she made up her mind to help him and teach him magic as he wished, and that was the reason.

“...Actually, there is a rascal that is better suited for teaching magic, but...”

Riley was keeping silence until now, but he finally opened his mouth.

Having heard his words, Nainiae woke up from her useless thoughts.

“I have a friend I had been in communication for quite a while. When it comes to giving magic lessons, that rascal would be better suited for the job than you are. That friend has heavier mouth than you as well.”

“Young master, I...”

She had no idea who this ‘rascal friend’ was. She was about to say her lips are just as heavy, but she blurred the end of her sentence.

It was because she thought about her other shortcomings that could not be made up for with just that.

“But the problem is...”

Watching Nainiae’s disappointed face, Riley cracked a smile and continued as he dangled his legs on the armrest of the sofa.

“That rascal essentially said ‘over my dead body,’ and stubbornly refused.”

Nainiae gave a vacant stare to Riley.

With a leisurely expression on his face, Riley was swinging his legs. He continued his explanation with a look on his face that said he found the friend’s reasoning to be so ridiculous.

“I tried asking. I did, but…that runt said this, ‘Hey! You are already a master swordsman. If you learned magic too on top of that… Are you scheming to take over the world or something?’ and sounded really annoyed.”

“I see.”

“I told that rascal I’m too lazy to do something like that, but that runt told me to stop with the bullcrap.”

It appeared he was pretty close with this friend.

Riley was making suppressed laughing noise as he mumbled about the past conversations. The corners of his lips were tilted up. There was a smile drawn on his face.

“…”

Because the one she was serving was smiling, it was making her

feel excited too.

Riley noticed Nainiae was relaxing her face. He got up and sat on the sofa and continued explaining to Nainiae.

“Well, that probably wasn’t enough to explain why I chose you, but I do have a specific reason.”

“I understand.”

“It is not going to be all that pleasant to learn about it, so, what I’m saying is, let’s just skip over it. You understand, right?”

Nainiae noticed that the look in Riley’s eyes showed emotion for a brief moment. She stopped asking. Instead, she lowered her head.

“…Yes.”

She figured that she would learn the real reason when the time came.

Even if Riley was not going to tell her, she felt that it was only right for her to figure it out on her own.

When it came to test questions, instead of looking at the answer on the supplementary section or the back, working hard to find the answer on your own was far more beneficial.

“All right. Then what shall we start with? From what I heard, the very first magic you learn is ‘Light,’ the First Circle magic’s light element type spell?”

Coming back to the main subject, in order to start the magic lesson, Riley clapped his hands together once and asked Nainiae, the one who became a teacher, although it was for a brief moment.

“Yes. I was going to explain things assuming you are already skilled in controlling mana… Is that all right with you?”

Mana.

A swordsman used it to increase the sword’s power.

An assassin used it to hide one’s presence.

An archer used it to increase the piercing power of the arrow.

A summoner used it to summon spirits.

A mage used it to cast magic.

Nainiae was asking if Riley knew how to handle the resource required for a skilled practitioner of a discipline.

Riley picked up a feather pen that was rolling around on top of the table and picked up a piece of blank paper that was rolling around on the floor.

“Here.”

Riley brushed the paper with the feathered portion of the pen.

After a moment, the part of the paper where the feather just brushed through was cut clean as if a knife went through it.

The cut paper fell to the floor as if it was a falling leaf during autumn. Nainiae nodded as if she understood. She continued,

“To use magic, first, you need something called a Circle. It is an act of weaving mana and making a link to the heart. If you can make one link to the heart, that’s One Circle. If you can make Six, then that’s Six Circles.”

“So, that means you have Six, right?”

“Yes.”

Nainiae nodded and raised her palm to the front.

It was to demonstrate ‘Light,’ the basic magic that Riley was going to learn and use first.

“Light.”

Once she recited the spell, a sphere floated up on top of her white palm.

The way it gradually materialized looked like a firefly except that the color was tainted in dark color because of the side effect from the drug experiments that was done on her.

“This is the Light magic that all mages learn as the basic spell. It’s a magic where you float up a light sphere on top of your palm. It demonstrates the miracle of suspending something in mid air or making something materialize in an empty space. Literally, it is the basics of the magic.”

Nainiae explained that all other magic starts with mastering the Light spell. She gave the simplest example.

“The most famous one you can advance to from this spell would be…a Fireball.”

“Fireball?”

“Yes. You probably have seen it before.”

Nainiae placed the light sphere on her hand a little further away from her and started to spin the mana circle that was clumped near her heart.

“I’ll show it to you step by step. How should I explain this... Ah, first, have the Light magic float on your hand, change the mana according to the formula and inject it into the sphere. That’s how it feels. Like this.”

Once she finished her explanation, the dark colored firefly light started to burn with a noise like a flame. It grew in size and became a complete ‘Fireball.’

“Wow?”

As a small light sphere became a large lump of flame, Riley’s eyes opened wide.

It felt really mysterious.

Perhaps it was because the entire process was explained and then demonstrated, but it felt different from how it was when he experienced them in Solia.

“To be able to use Light magic, first...”

Nainiae opened her mouth as she extinguished the flame on top of her palm. It was because there was something Riley had to know as the basic before being able to use Light magic.

“...Young master, I need to know your elemental type.”

“Elemental type?”

“Yes. Elemental type. Fire, water, wind, earth… and among many others, you need to start with knowledge of your elemental type so you can learn Light magic method that fits your elemental type. You have to know it so you can also obtain more Circles efficiently. How should I say this… It’s like saying you need to have a strong foundation.”

Riley was tilting his head to the sides as he listened to Nainiae’s explanation about elemental type.

“What’s your elemental type?”

“I don’t have one in particular that fits me.”

“You don’t have one?”

“That’s right. My affinity toward all elements were generally measured to be high, so they mostly fit me regardless of the element. That’s why I don’t have an elemental type in particular.”

With a scrunched face, Riley glared at Nainiae as if she was an eyesore.

“Are you showing off?”

“No. This is all because of the experiments in the Magic Tower… I wasn’t trying to boast about it. I’m sorry.”

Her affinities were high toward all elements because of the experiments in the Magic Tower. It was a result that was accomplished because of a substantial luck. However, unlike other mages, her mana was depleted faster, and there was also the negative side effect of cutting down her lifespan. In the end, it was not possible to call it a positive result.

“I got it. Got it. I won’t ask anymore, so please… Enough with that depressed look.”

Tsk.

Riley clicked his tongue and continued,

“So, how do I find out? This elemental type?”

“We need a tool… By chance, do you have a mana measurement sphere in this mansion?”

“…”

When she mentioned the mana measurement sphere, the one he saw at the Magic Tower’s first floor, Riley gave a blank stare for a moment.

“No. There isn’t any.”

There was no reason for such a thing to be in the nobility House of proud swordsmen lineage.

When Riley shook his head and answered, Nainiae asked,

“In that case, have you been measured?”

“Yes, I have…”

Back then, because he didn’t want to reveal his mana capacity at such an official place, he intentionally tricked the sphere into giving an ordinary result. This was the reason why he blurred the end of the sentence.

“That is… I didn’t do a proper measurement.”

“In that case…”

Not sure of what to do, Nainiae looked at Riley with a concerned face.

It was because she could not start teaching him without a clear measurement result.

She was teaching magic to her young master that she served. She

had no intention of going about this haphazardly. She started to think hard about it.

"In that case, we should go back to the Magic Tower and..."

"No. We shouldn't."

'Getting the mana measured again by going to the Magic Tower?'

Riley cut down the idea in an instant.

In Magic Tower, there were Peruda and others watching. Also, above all, it was such a bother to him.

He came back just two days ago. The thought of going all the way back to Solia made him cringe.

"...Now that it has come to this..."

Riley got up from the sofa and scratched the back of his head.

"Tomorrow, I think I'll have to stop by at Iffa village."

"A village?"

"I have to go to find out about those things anyway. Also, there is something else, personal, that I need to check, so... I think it

actually turned out well.”

Nainiae looked at Astroa’s belongings that were packed up.

Meanwhile, Riley stretched widely by bending his upper body backward as he made ‘Uu!’ noise.

“Tell Sera in advance that it looks like you will have to ditch the maid training tomorrow.”

“Ditch…?”

“I’m saying you need to clear your schedule for tomorrow.”

He figured he could go and check if the matter he left behind was cleaned up properly.

He figured he could go check what Astroa’s belongings are for.

He also figured he could go see that rascal as well.

So, Riley decided to set foot in Iffa village again, a place he hadn’t visited in a long while.

Chapter 60 - Amusement

It was a few hours after the sunrise.

The youngest master of the Iphelleta House said he wanted to go out. It had been a while since he had done so.

“Excuse me, young master. How about just letting us accompany you?”

“...Ian.”

Having heard Riley saying he wanted to go to Iffa village, far away in the outskirts of the area, Ian dropped everything he was working on and rushed to see Riley in order to convince him.

“Nainiae only just started working. She also still needs to receive the maid training. If you went there by yourself, it could be dangerous, so even if it is someone other than myself, please take another servant to accompany you.”

He was saying all that because the one he picked to accompany him was Nainiae, the new maid who had been working in the House for less than a week.

“Dangerous? Why would it be?”

“It is! Having just Nainiae would be dangerous! Instead, allowing

me to accompany you would be…”

Ian was saying all this because he heard Riley intended to take only one person, just Nainiae, to accompany him.

Since Ian was making the complaint from that angle, Riley actually had a lot to say.

Whenever Riley was inside the mansion or outside somewhere, it was none other than Ian who accompanied Riley, and he always had done it by himself without any other servants.

“Ugh…”

Unlike how the man looked, Ian was overprotective toward Riley. He cared for Riley like one would care for a fragile little baby. That was the perfect way to describe Ian.

When it came to this, Ian was more overbearing than Riley’s mother. As Riley thought that, he sighed and asked Ian,

“Ian, didn’t you say my father was calling for you?”

“S-Still, it’s dangerous?!”

As he listened to Ian, Riley looked at Nainiae. She was waiting quietly with the carriage ready at the back end of the mansion where an entrance was. Riley sighed again and said,

“Come on. I have a Six Circles mage as the bodyguard here. Isn’t that enough?”

Nainiae might still lack the delicate skills as a maid, but when it came to functioning as a bodyguard, there probably wasn’t anyone in the mansion that could be more efficient at it than Nainiae.

After all, she was a Six Circles mage.

“…A mag-…!”

Ian was about to say ‘A mage is!’ and say something to object, but he crumpled his face and quickly lowered his voice.

It was because there wasn’t anyone, besides the few that went to Solia with Riley, who knew that Nainiae was a mage.

“…”

Ian looked over the shoulders and checked other servants. There were a few cleaning up the garden area. He figured he should keep this a secret.

Ian scratched his head and came back to the main point.

“Anyway, I’m against this idea!”

“But you said before that I should stop sitting around and move a little, didn’t you?”

“But that was!”

It looked like Ian was going to explode from frustration.

With tightened fists, Ian pounded at his own chest like a gorilla. He continued,

“That was about swords. Your skill is…”

“You have a rough idea from what you saw at Solia Castle?”

Riley interrupted Ian.

Riley could no longer deny his own abilities to Ian. Making silly excuses, such as practicing some moves just in case, was not going to work either.

Back in Solia, at the castle’s restroom hallway, Ian clearly saw how Riley handled Erengium’s eldest son by demonstrating his real power. It was overwhelmingly flawless.

“…”

Ian was completely lost for words. He looked like someone who couldn't speak because his mouth was full of sweets.

To be exact, what Ian saw that day was not just flawless. It was to the point Ian was having a hard time believing.

"Let alone any training, you never once grabbed a sword, so how..."

"Well, that's that."

"Now that we are on this subject, I have to ask. What you did that day, how was it possible for you to do it?"

"I'm not sure?"

"Could it be that you already have mastered mana long ago?"

"I'm not sure?"

"I also think the mana measurement you did last time was odd. Did you adjust your mana when you were getting it measured?"

"I'm not sure?"

As Riley kept on spewing out 'I'm not sure?' as the answers, Ian quickly took steps back.

“Young master, by chance… You haven’t been using…”

“Ha! That’s right. Why don’t you go get a narcotic sniffing dog and raise it?”

Riley was thinking Ian’s idea was ridiculous, and that showed in his mumbling reply.

“A narcotic sniffing dog?”

“There isn’t one in this world? Well, think whatever you think it is.”

Riley answered as he shrugged.

He was innocent, so there wasn’t anything that was poking his conscience.

Riley was skilled in swordsmanship because he had been swinging it until he got sick of it when he was in his past life.

As for the mana, it was possible because Riley still remembered the blessing he received from his last life. With it, just by breathing, he could reach new heights faster than others using dedicated training methods.

“Still, I’m against this. Instead of having just Nainiae to

accompany you, it would be better...!”

“...Mr. Ian!!”

Ian was going to try to convince Riley again, but his shoulders flinched.

It was because, while he had his guard down, a sharp voice flew by and stabbed him in the ears from the back.

“I was wondering where you were! You were here? Count Stein is calling for you!”

“S-Sera?”

It looked like she must have been running around the entire mansion in search of Ian.

She was sweating all over. Sera came right next to Ian and grabbed him by the sleeve.

“Instead of holding young master here, just come quickly. Count Stein is calling for you. Didn’t you hear?”

“S-Sera! Wait! You stop young master too! He is going to Iffa village, but having just Nainiae to accompany him is too dangerous...”

It looked like the roles of the junior and higher ranking officers were reversed.

Ian was starting to be dragged away by Sera who held him by the sleeve.

Sera directed her gaze toward Nainiae, who was waiting at the mansion's entrance. She winked at her and said,

"I don't think so! I think Nainiae alone is more than enough!"

"Kuk!"

Ian held his ground with all of his might and gritted his teeth.

With desperate eyes, he started to stare at Riley.

His eyes were pleading with Riley to take him along.

'Young master!'

Riley looked at Ian and then moved his gaze.

When his gaze met with Sera, she said with her eyes,

'Hurry.'

‘Thanks.’

Riley expressed his gratitude with his eyes and turned around without any hesitation.

At that moment, Ian’s face darkened.

“Young master!”

Ignoring Ian’s desperate cry, Riley went straight to get on the carriage that Nainiae had prepared and waved as he smiled.

“We’ll be back later.”

“You said Iffa village, right?”

Perhaps inside of the carriage was too confining for him.

Riley was sitting on the drivers’ seats and watching the sceneries passing by. With an uninterested face, he nodded and said,

“We’ll be there if we go for about another five minutes.”

“Is it the very last village we saw on the way back to the

mansion?”

“That’s right.”

Noticing the carriage rumbling, Nainiae used wind magic to gently sweep away low hanging tree branches that could get to Riley. She slowed down the carriage when she saw the village gradually coming into her field of view.

“What should I do about the carriage?”

“You can park it near our destination, so take it all the way there for now.”

It appeared Nainiae understood Riley. She nodded. Following Riley’s order, she drove the carriage methodically. They successfully arrived at the destination.

“Oh, you got here on the first try?”

It wasn’t obvious if this was due to her extraordinary senses of figuring out what her master wants or her sheer brilliance.

She hadn’t even been doing this for a very long time, but she drove the carriage to the destination without asking Riley any questions. Riley looked impressed.

‘Did she use her eye?’

Riley looked at her white eye and cracked a smile as if he was impressed.

After dismounting from the carriage, Nainiae tied the horses to a pillar at the destination, checked the tightness of the tie, came to Riley in puppy steps and put forth her head toward Riley.

“What?”

Noticing the top of Nainiae’s head suddenly coming right at his face, Riley tilted his head to the side and asked.

“That is… I was wondering if you could please praise me.”

As a reward for getting here on the first try, Nainiae wanted a compliment.

“Hey…”

If Sera was here, she would have said, ‘A maid asking for compliments from the master she is serving? That’s unbelievable! Just focus on your work!’ to scold Nainiae.

“…”

Nainiae slightly lifted her head. It looked like she figured that wasn’t going to be enough. Now, she showed a disappointed look

on her face.

“Ugh.”

After sighing, Riley raised his right hand and put it on top of Nainiae’s head.

“Ah…”

“Here.”

It seemed Sera was personally taking care of Nainiae. Compared to how Nainiae was when Riley met her for the first time, the smell of her hair was significantly improved.

“…T-Thank you.”

It wasn’t like he said anything complimentary.

All he did was patting her head.

Despite that, Nainiae looked like she was happy like an innocent child.

Watching this, Riley too cracked a smile as he started to walk.

“Now, are you satisfied?”

"…"

Perhaps she was too happy that she couldn't move her lips.

Instead, Nainiae nodded in response.

"Let's get inside then."

Riley and Nainiae came out of the mansion toward the end of the morning. This place, the place they arrived around lunch time, was the third biggest pub in Iffa village.

'This place is?'

Nainiae cast simple search and alarm magic spells around the area and followed Riley's back.

"Hey, Andal!"

Squeak!

Perhaps it was a very old door.

The wooden door opened with a hated noise.

Riley stepped inside as he called for someone.

‘Mana measurement and artifact identifications in a pub? Why? Wait, perhaps that’s not it? Did he come here for a different reason?’

Nainiae followed in after Riley. She looked once at the floor, which was making squeaky noises, and then inside of the store, which was in shambles.

“…Andal! Are you sitting on your ass again?”

Baam!

Riley kicked one of the empty chairs and called the name again.

It seemed the owner of this pub was named ‘Andal.’

“There aren’t any customers…”

She wondered if this was a pub where nobody came to during lunch for a reason.

She murmured as she noticed the empty scene inside the pub.

“Still, it is pretty busy during the dinner time, and that’s why I came during the lunch time.”

After answering, Riley walked toward a table that looked like there should be a bartender standing behind it. He extended his neck toward other side of the table.

“Andal? He is not here. Is he further in back?”

From inside of the store, they could see three doors.

One was a restroom for men.

The other was a restroom for women.

The last one was a storage and changing room for people working at the store.

“...Ugh. I thought I made it clear that I don’t do business during the lunchtime. Who is the runt that didn’t get the memo?”

Soon, they could hear an annoyed voice. The unwelcoming voice was coming from the changing room.

The changing room’s door opened with a squeaky noise, and a man with red hair walked out of the room.

“...”

The man walked out of the door as he scratched his head. His eyebrows twitched when he noticed Riley leaning his upper body on the bar table.

“Ha?”

Watching the man with twitching facial muscles looking at him, Riley raised a hand and greeted him.

“Wow... You finally woke up? You have gotten really lazy.”

“Shut up you lunatic. To think I’ll be hearing something like that coming from you of all people...”

Extremely annoyed, the man scratched his head with all of his might. With a displeased face, the man walked behind the other side of the table that Riley was leaning toward.

It appeared this was Andal, the pub owner.

“About cleaning up after Tess's trading company... Did you do it right?”

Andal washed his hands immediately after coming inside the kitchen. When he heard Riley ask the question, he turned his head for a brief moment toward Riley and then went back to rubbing his hands under the running water.

“Ah, don’t even bring that up. Because of your stupidity, I had to do all sorts of bullshit stuff that weren’t even becoming of me. All in order to round up what you did…”

“…”

Because the man kept on spewing out swear words at Riley, unable to stand it any further, Nainiae was about to step in, but she was stopped by Riley.

“There is no need. He is an old friend.”

“He is a friend?”

‘Could it be that these swear words are different from how they are in Lower Solia?’

Because Riley gestured toward Nainiae to stay put and sit down, Nainiae lowered her head a little and sat down.

“…I understand.”

“What’s this? Is it a new servant? She sure listens well.”

‘I’m sure he had a good look of my scar, so why?’

Andal was not batting an eye despite having noticed the scar on

her face. Surprised, Nainiae stared at Andal's back.

"So? What would you like to drink? The usual?"

"Yes."

Having heard Andal's question, Riley smiled widely and nodded.

Andal sighed heavily, turned his body and complained.

"Tsk. If you are called the Lazy Sword, why don't you go chug a bucket full of sleep aid drink and sleep? You really have mastered the art of causing annoyance to others while having everything to be convenient for yourself. You are a master at it I tell ya."

Mumble Mumble

Complain Complain

The way he talked was somehow similar to Riley.

Noticing this, Nainiae shriveled her shoulders and started to be cautious of the atmosphere.

“Riley. About the Tes incident, you owe me. You know that, right?”

“Hey. That one doesn’t count as a debt.”

“Bullshit!”

“I’m serious.”

Nainiae slowly turned her head and looked at the inside of the pub.

She observed it with her eye, and then examined it with her search magic. Either way, it was an ordinary store.

‘Hmm…’

She was wondering if it was not her place to sit next to her master at a pub like this, so, instead, she was torturing the tip of her skirt that was innocent in all this.

She started to stare at the back of Andal and listen to their conversation again.

“Ha! Right... Let’s hear a reason. If you are trying to scam me, you better be prepared to eat my burp. You know that, right?”

“Hey. I absolutely don’t want your burp.”

Riley answered as he giggled.

Andal served two cups of beverages to Riley and Nainiae.

Riley said as he grabbed the cup.

“I was at Solia recently, and I heard an interesting story when I visited the Holy Temple.”

“So what does that have to do with how you are trying to scam...”

“Can you guess what they told me to do?”

As if he was trying to say Andal should just hear the whole thing first, Riley interrupted him.

Riley lifted the hand that was holding the cup and opened just the index finger to point it at Andal who was standing inside the

kitchen.

"…?"

Andal was furrowing his brows. They looked like they were saying, 'What did they say?'

"…They told me to slay you. Can you believe that?"

Having heard what Riley said,

"…?"

Nainiae's lips became shaped like a circle.

It looked like Nainiae was having a hard time understanding what she just heard. Nainiae, with a confused face, went back and forth looking at Riley and Andal.

Chapter 61 - Amusement (Part 2)

“...Just now, what did you say?”

It looked as if Andal was smacked on the back.

Nainiae was not the only one who had the mouth open with a blank stare.

Andal, who was standing on the other side of the counter, also had a look of disbelief.

Breaking the brief moment of silence, Andal asked,

“Which place again?”

Riley replied with a smile,

“Solia Holy Temple.”

“The Holy Temple? To whom?”

“They asked me.”

“The Holy Temple, they asked you to slay me?”

Riley smiled steadily and pointed at Andal once more.

“Yeah, you.”

“…Me?”

Andal, the one who Riley pointed with his finger, tilted his head to the sides.

Andal’s eyes were saying he could not believe this.

“…”

Andal was lost for words. He looked as if he had his mouth full of sweets.

[TL: “Mouth full of sweets” means the person is dumbfounded and lost for words in a ridiculous situation.]

With hollow eyes, he gave a vacant stare to Riley, and then…

“…Fup.”

He started to laugh.

As if the fuse on a dynamite was ignited, Andal started to bang on the table.

“...Fuhahahahahaha!”

It didn’t look like Andal was all that muscular, but every time the smashing sound boomed, the table shook as if it was about to break.

“Fuhup, Fuhahahahaha!!”

Wondering what’s happening, Nainiae gulped quietly.

All she could do at the moment was trying hard to understand the situation.

“Wow...”

Andal’s fist was red because he had been banging on the table for so long.

He had tears in his eyes because he was laughing so hard.

“Hey, that was really funny.”

After a while, Andal looked satisfied. It looked as if it had been a while since he laughed so hard like that until his stomach was on the verge of exploding. Andal put his hand on his waist and looked at Riley.

Riley was cracking smiles. Noticing this, Andal asked again,

“…By chance, is this true?”

“I thought they were bullshitting too.”

“…”

Hearing Riley’s prompt response, Andal, who was keeping silent for a few seconds, mumbled as if he found all this to be silly,

“Are people in the Holy Temple gone completely wacko? How old is the priestess in that place now? Is she about the age when she would be having dementia?”

“…Hukuk!”

Because Nainiae made a strange sound with her voice, Andal’s gaze moved toward her direction.

“…?”

Nainiae quickly covered her mouth.

Realizing what happened, she held her breath to stop the hiccup.

“The priestess there now is around the same age as me.”

Riley answered to Andal's question about the priestess as he laughed.

"In that case, is she a dumbass just like you?"

"...Hukuk!"

Nainiae hiccupped once again.

Although she had her mouth covered, the sound that leaked through was pretty obvious.

"Yeah. She is a dumbass like me."

Riley smiled widely and responded as he patted Nainiae's back.

Andal's face crumpled naturally.

"Bullshit..."

In the end of the conversation, having realized that Riley was not joking, Andal continued the conversation with a look of disbelief on his face,

"Of all people, why did they ask you?"

“I’m not sure? How should I know that?”

“So now what? Are you going to do it? Should I make you into a Dragon Slayer?”

“Have you gone insane? Why would I want such a bothersome title?”

“I knew you would say that.”

As if he also found it funny, not just Riley, but Andal was cracking smiles as well.

“Slay a dragon? What nonsense. Are they not realizing who they are really up against because the dragon is sitting quietly?”

Andal chewed and spat out swears about the goddess.

Meanwhile, Riley finished the cup before anyone realized and handed it to Andal.

“Andal, around here, you are the only dragon, right?”

“That’s right. There’s only one dragon in Solia. Blackie is in Ansirium direction, and Bluie is in Rainfield direction. I don’t know about the others, but, for now, there is just me near Solia. It’s been a while since I have seen their faces… How long has it been? About 3,000 years?”

Andal took the empty cup from Riley and refilled it. He gave the cup back to Riley and took a glance at Nainiae's cup.

Her cup was still full as if she had not taken a single sip out of it.

"Have some. It's not an alcoholic beverage. So, it won't cause any problem with serving your master."

"Pardon? Ah... Yes."

After nodding, she finally rushed to pick up the cup.

She was still having hiccups. In order to stop them, she held the cup with both hands and chugged the beverage.

"Anyway, Andal..."

"Yeah?"

Riley was looking at Nainiae chugging the beverage, and now he turned his head.

He tossed a question as he looked at Andal who had his arms crossed with a displeased look on his face,

"By chance, are you planning on causing ruckus in Solia?"

Still, it was a divine message delivered to the priestess.

If the divine message had a similar role as it did in his past life, there had to be a reason for the message.

Riley asked because of this reason.

“You think I’m insane?”

On the other hand, unlike Riley’s worries, Andal asked back with scrunched up face.

“Hey… I’m on my 17th amusement trip. 17th. I finally managed to start enjoying a little bit of human lifestyle. Why would I go cause a ruckus? Do I have any reason to mess all this up?”

With a completely crumpled face, Andal rambled on.

He was mad at Solia’s Holy Temple for giving such a ridiculous divine message.

He was mad… However…

Andal was a dragon.

Words like “making one’s head to spin” to describe one’s

intelligence was unbecoming and couldn't even begin to describe him. His high intellect was far beyond human. It was at a different dimension. Also, he could use Nine Circles magic. Dragons were truly supernatural beings.

"It's not like there's any particular treasure I want in that place. Why do something that would only bring negative consequences? It's such a bother as well."

Andal did have things he wanted, but he hated bothersome things.

In a way, Andal was the kind of dragon that was similar to Riley.

"That is... Young master... Is Mr. Andal really..."

Nainiae was finally able to stop her hiccups after emptying the cup that Andal prepared for her. She inquired carefully.

Riley responded as he nodded,

"That's right. He's a dragon. He transformed into a human form, and he is on an amusement trip."

With a look of disbelief, Nainiae stared at Andal.

No matter how she viewed him, he didn't look like a dragon.

Not just the physical appearance, but his mana felt that way as well.

‘No. Perhaps… The parts I cannot detect… All of it is…’

Nainiae was petrified with a blank stare.

She only read about dragons in books.

People said dragons were only in legends and did not exist.

However, there was one in front of her.

“You. Riley’s servant, don’t go running your mouth somewhere.”

Andal suddenly warned Nainiae as he glared at her. It looked as if he was going to make a hole through her with his gaze.

Until a moment ago, his eyes looked ordinary, no different from other people, but it looked like the dark irises in his eyes were gradually changing. Soon, they started to exude golden light and deadly aura.

They were literally the eyes of a dragon.

“…”

Facing overwhelming pressure all of a sudden, Nainiae was not able to open her mouth easily. Instead, she barely managed to nod her head.

It felt far scarier than how it was in books.

“Hey. Stop scaring a kid. Just take a look at these.”

Thanks to Riley talking besides her, Nainiae was barely released from Andal’s gaze that felt like it was chaining her down. Feeling the sense of relief, Nainiae dropped her shoulders all the way.

“What are they?”

Andal turned his eyes back into human form and looked at the bag Riley pushed toward him.

“These are some items I picked up recently, but I couldn’t figure out how to use them, so I came to have these identified.”

They were the three items that used to belong to Astroa. Identifying these items was one of two goals Riley had in visiting Andal today.

Andal took his eyes off the bag and stared at Riley while murmuring,

“Riley.”

“Yeah?”

“I think you have forgotten this, but this place is a pub, you know? It’s a place that serves drinks or appetizers… You know that, right?”

“I know that.”

Riley added with a smile,

“But you do side jobs too.”

“…Ugh. What a dumbass… This runt is… Really.”

As if he was trying to say he was giving in, Andal scratched his head hard and opened the bag.

Perhaps Nainiae had them neatly arranged. Inside the bag, there were a neatly folded cape with a leather bracelet and a silver ring carefully laid on top.

“You want me to look at all of them?”

“Yeah.”

“You brought money?”

“Come on… Between us?”

“As I thought, you really are a dumbass. You are trying to get a freebie from a dragon. You are like a thief, you runt.”

Hearing Andal’s line, Nainiae looked at Riley’s face from the side.

Although he introduced Andal as a friend, what was in front of them was a being with power close to that of a god. He was a dragon.

Despite that, Riley was having a conversation with him with a leisurely face.

On top of that, he was working the dragon with a smile.

‘Young master, you…just…’

With eyes full of disbelief, Nainiae stared at Riley.

Riley’s face was still as leisurely as ever.

“I finished identifying them. About which one do you want to know first?”

“…?”

‘Already?’

Nainiae had her eyes wide open and turned to Andal.

It was as expected of a dragon.

“Start with the cape. I was curious about that one the most.”

Riley pointed at the cape.

Andal nodded and opened the cape as he started explaining the powers contained within,

“It’s nothing much. If you wear this and shoot magic, your magic will not be affected by the season or the weather.”

“What is that suppose to mean?”

Riley tilted his head to the side as if he didn’t understand very well.

Nainiae, who figured out what Andal meant, explained it to Riley in an easier way,

“For instance, imagine that it is raining right now. If I used a flame magic against you right now, would its effect be stronger or

weaker?”

“Weaker, of course?”

“That’s it. Even on a day with dark clouds where lightning magic would be extra harder to control, if you have that cape, it would make up for it to some extent. It seems that cape has that kind of function.”

“Um… In other words, it’s only for a mage?”

Having heard Nainiae’s explanation, Riley fiddled with his chin as if he understood.

Andal, who was watching the two, smiled and said,

“How could the servant be smarter than the master?”

“Shut up. What about the next one?”

Riley flicked Nainiae’s forehead. Acting frustrated, he looked at the leather bracelet.

“This bracelet is like a storage room.”

“A storage room?”

“By injecting it with mana in the way that the original owner made it to be, like this…”

Andal stopped explaining and injected his mana into the bracelet.

Wooong

A horn flute like sound could be heard, and along with it, a semi-transparent box appeared.

It was a pretty big box, big enough for a person to fit inside.

“...you can summon a small storage room.”

“It’s really interesting?”

“It’s pretty well made for something a human made. Inside... There is nothing in there.”

Astroa was a Seven Circles mage. He probably had it made so that nobody else could open it.

If it wasn’t someone of Andal’s level, it would not have been possible to even summon the box in the first place. As Nainiae thought about this, she gave a blank stare and her mouth opened on its own.

She had heard all dragons were Nine Circles mages, and it seemed to be true.

“Because it is a leather bracelet, if it is torn, the workings of its magic will scatter as well, so use it carefully.”

“If it is torn, how do I use it?”

“How to use it? You can’t. You will lose it.”

“Is there a way to fix it?”

“No. Even if you repair the bracelet, its original workings of magic will not come back, so be mindful of it.”

“Tsk.”

Hearing from Andal that this one requires a delicate care, Riley clicked his tongue.

“What about the ring?”

“Try wearing it.”

Andal tossed the ring to Riley as he answered.

Riley grabbed the ring that flew toward one of his hands.

With an awkward look on his face, Riley put it on.

“How is it?”

“How is it? Whatever… What’s this ring suppose to be?”

“…Ugh.”

Andal sighed immediately and looked at Nainiae who was sitting next to Riley.

“In that case, you, servant… You try it on.”

“Pardon? But… I’m…”

Nainiae blurred the end of her sentence as she hid her hand behind her.

It was because the two fingers on her right hand were horrible to look at.

She didn’t really want to show them to him.

“Ah, it doesn’t matter if you wear it on your left hand, so try it on.”

As if he didn’t understand such concerns of humans, Andal crumpled his face and waved his hand to say Nainiae should hurry up and try it on.

“Here.”

Riley took off the ring and tossed it to Nainiae.

Although it was tossed to her from a short distance, she didn’t manage to catch it right away. She demonstrated juggling in the air a few times and barely managed to grab it. She was still hesitant.

“Hurry up and try it on!”

“…Yes.”

By the young master’s order, Nainiae, who lowered her head all the way down to hide her facial expression, used her thumb and index finger that were left on her right hand to put the ring on her left hand.

“Huh?”

As soon as she put it on, Nainiae’s eye opened wide.

“…This is?”

Nainiae murmured as she looked down at the ring.

“What is it? Why?”

Riley crumpled his face as if he was trying to ask Nainiae to let him in on the details. He looked back and forth between Andal and Nainiae.

Andal sighed heavily again.

“That’s a mana ring. Just by wearing it, it automatically collects mana from surroundings little by little. It’s an accessory that has that function.”

“It collects mana just by wearing it?”

Hearing his murmured question, Andal glared at Riley as if he was sick of it.

“You understood what I just explained, right?”

“That is… I understood it, but…”

Riley murmured as he looked at the ring on Nainiae’s left hand.

“That thing is really collecting mana?”

“Yes. It really is collecting mana. Even now.”

Nainiae responded with a surprised voice.

It was slow, but the ring was diligently collecting mana from the surrounding by itself and delivering it to the owner.

It was unbelievable to think there was a ring that could help its owner's growth by sending mana just from wearing it.

"Is that so? Um..."

Riley tilted his head to the sides and murmured,

"I didn't notice anything..."

"...Pardon?"

"Ugh. I knew that would be the case with you."

With a curious look on her face, Nainiae turned to look at Riley.

Annoyed, Andal said with a frustrated voice as he sighed heavily enough to sink the ground,

"That's because... It's just that you are a monster."

Chapter 62 - Amusement (Part 3)

‘It made no difference?’

Having heard what Riley said, Nainiae’s mouth opened vacantly.

Even as they sat there, the ring that Nainiae was wearing was collecting mana from the surrounding and diligently piling it in her heart, near her Circles.

“Young master, just what are you…”

It was an accessory that collected mana just by wearing it.

It was certain the item was priceless.

‘He didn’t notice anything from wearing it?’

Looking at Riley’s uninterested face, Nainiae’s gaze was getting filled with shock.

“By the looks of it, the servant lady here still doesn’t know what a monster Riley is. He is powerful like a monster. You don’t know, don’t you, right?”

“There is no need to tell her that. Isn’t that right? Nothing good would come from telling her anyway.”

As if he was trying to say Nainiae should get a hold of herself, Riley raised his right hand and placed it on top of her head and started to mess up her hair.

"...Ah."

As if that was the right medicine for it, Nainiae, who had her mouth open like a bass, closed her mouth.

"Well, I kind of figured as much because they are all belongings of a mage, but... So, in conclusion, all three items are more or less useless to me."

After having gone through Nainiae's hair to turn it into a mess, Riley shrugged and said,

"Well, you take it. Wearing a ring is a bother because it only tickles my finger."

"Young master? N-No! I couldn't accept something like t-..."

When Riley said he would give the ring to Nainiae out of the blue, Nainiae shook her head to say she couldn't accept it.

"In that case, just hold it for me for a while. It's a bother to have it with me."

Riley's face genuinely said he found it to be a bother.

Actually, it was less efficient for Riley to wear the ring.

It was correct to say he didn't need it.

Because of the blessing he received from his past life, he could collect even more mana just by breathing, and the mana he collected was of a higher quality than what the ring could gather.

"...I understand."

Nainiae, unable to refuse, answered.

For now, Riley handed all of the items to Nainiae. Riley looked at Andal.

"Is that all you came for?"

Riley shook his head.

Andal's face was crumpled again.

"Now what?"

"There's one more thing."

Riley asked about the second favor as he looked at the changing room that Andal just came from.

“Can I have mana measured?”

“Mana measurement?”

Andal asked as he tilted his head to the side.

“There is a mana measurement boulder that was presented by some guardian runt... But why?”

It seemed Andal thought it was odd.

With his face scrunched, Andal changed his question in the middle,

“You want to use it? Na... Why bother with getting it measu-...”

“No.”

Riley answered as he shook his head like a fool.

‘That’s not the reason? I was pretty sure that was the reason.’

After hearing what Riley just said, Nainiae had a curious look on her face.

“This kid is going to use it.”

“Um?”

“…?”

Riley nodded toward Nainiae.

Naturally, Andal’s gaze moved toward her.

‘Y-Young master?’

Nainiae’s lips started to quiver.

It was because she was not expecting things to go this way.

“Hmm…”

Andal leaned all the way forward to Nainiae and started to look at Nainiae’s face.

Soon, he started to wiggle his nose and sniff to smell her.

He wasn’t trying to smell her shampoo or skin.

He was going after the smell of mana inside her.

“Oh? That is odd? It’s certainly unique?”

Sniff Sniff

Having confirmed the smell of mana coming from Nainiae, he mumbled as if he found something precious.

At the same time, Nainiae's shoulders shriveled.

"..."

'To think I'll be examined by a dragon?'

Nainiae was frozen solid, but in her head,

<...Hey. Don't shrivel. You are my servant. Are you his servant?>

She could hear Riley's voice directly in her head.

She was embarrassed. She thought Riley must have figured out what she was thinking.

Having concluded that Riley, the master who she served, was a greater existence than a dragon standing in front of her, Nainiae corrected her posture and upheld her shoulders with pride.

"Hm... Let's see... There is something special mixed in?"

Andal extended his hand toward Nainiae's bangs.

It looked like he determined that there was something around her right eye.

"Uumm..."

Nainiae's hair was lifted gently.

Andal scrunched up his face after he discovered the horrible scars and dead-white eye.

"Huh, why are there so many things mixed in? It's really busy and complicated here."

He didn't cringe out of disgust for her appearance.

He cringed because of the complexity.

Andal was trying to analyze the inner workings of her white eye, but he shook his head.

"This... Hm... Even I can't figure it out."

Andal was gently brushing Nainaie's scars with his hand, and he took his hand back after he declared he was giving up on trying to figure out the white eye.

The way he responded seemed like he didn't care at all about her scars.

Nainiae asked as she fiddled with her bangs.

"Sir Andal."

'Should I ask? Should I not ask?'

Nainiae went over this question and hesitated a few dozen times in that brief moment. She carefully inquired,

"That is... My face. Is it not uncomfortable for you to look at?"

It was a question that she asked Riley once as well.

Back then, Riley answered, 'No? Not really?'

"Ha."

Having heard Nainiae's question, Andal cracked a smile and said,

"Hey, servant."

"It's Nainiae."

Riley corrected Andal by telling him her name.

As if he was trying to say he will yield, Andal corrected himself.

“I got it, you rascal. I got it, got it. Okay?”

“…”

Nainiae blushed.

“Servant Nainiae… I’ll ask. When you see several tens, hundreds or thousands of ants passing by your feet… Are you the type that observes each of the ant faces one by one?”

It seemed Nainiae realized what Andal was trying to say.

Nainiae shook her head left and right in response.

Andal continued,

“…It’s like that.”

Having answered Nainiae’s question, Andal leaned back and moved his hands toward two empty cups on top of the table.

“Certainly, there are a lot of convoluted things there. Mana and other things…”

Andal determined that it would be difficult to exactly observe Nainiae just using his eyes. He tossed the cups into the kitchen sink and continued,

“All right. Try using it. I’m curious about the result too.”

Andal waved his hand in the air.

Following his hand movement, although nobody touched the door, the changing room’s door opened on its own.

As Riley watched the changing room’s door open, he inwardly murmured ‘all right’. However, he asked Andal with his face still maintaining an unexcited look.

“Even you can’t see it?”

“The nature of mana is decided by how one’s born, so it’s hard to examine it just by looking at it. On top of that, that eye is a type that’s different from her natural mana type. How should I say it, a chaotic mix was forced in there?”

The inborn nature of mana was something even a dragon could not see.

Having heard Andal's explanation, Riley asked what he was curious about,

"So, is that why all of her magic has ash color?"

"What?"

"I'm talking about the color of her magic."

"Her magic has ash color? In all elements?"

"That's right. Fireball, chunk of ice, lightning... They were all stuffy gray colored."

"Huh... Interesting."

Andal, with a curious look on his face, stared at Nainiae. Andal walked further into the room.

It was to guide Riley and Nainiae to the space below the changing room that was prepared separately.

They were under the pub's changing room.

While they were walking down to the secret space underground,

Riley asked,

“...Even if it is just to change the mood... Say something.”

Having heard what Riley said, Nainiae carefully brought up a question,

“How long have you been friends with each other?”

Perhaps it was a question with a pretty high difficulty.

Both Riley and Andal just dragged on without being able to answer promptly.

“I’m not sure?”

“I don’t know.”

“Me too.”

Andal and Riley both mumbled.

It was certain Riley and Andal met when Riley was young, but they couldn’t remember when exactly it was.

“I can’t quite remember well.”

“Ah hahaha…”

Nainiae was giving out a hollow laughter. Riley gave a quick look to Nainiae behind him and asked,

“Why do you ask?”

Nainiae answered as she faced Riley,

“By chance… Young master… I was wondering if you were also a dragon.”

“What?”

It was not just Riley.

Andal, who also quickly turned his head to look at Nainiae, also had his face scrunched.

Both of them looked very displeased about it somehow.

“You think I’m something as lowly as…?”

“You think this dumbass could be one?”

They both asked at the same time.

Their stern faces felt like they were advising Nainiae to correct herself.

“I’m disappointed, Nainiae.”

“Are you also a dumbass following after your master?”

“…”

Nainiae was walking down into the underground by following them. She bit her lip.

She felt certain the flames would splash to her if she said anything else.

“Andal. That was a little too harsh. You called her a dumbass?”

“You were the one that was harsh, don’t you think? ‘As lowly as?’ What do you mean, ‘as lowly as?’ ”

Nainiae was watching the two from the back. She smiled quietly.

It was because she could confirm two things from their conversations.

First thing was that Riley was not a dragon. The second thing was that they were very close friends.

After a long bickering, they finally arrived at the end of the stairs. Having reached another wall, Andal murmured,

"...Now, we are here."

"...?"

'No matter how I look at it, this place seems like a dead end. 'We are here?' What did he mean by that?'

Nainiae was tilting her head to the sides. Meanwhile, Andal waved his hand toward the wall.

"Welcome, Sir Andal."

It felt like a thick voice was coming from the wall, and soon, the wall opened to left and right to reveal a path.

Nainiae's eye opened widely.

'Golem?'

Living, moving walls.

In other words, having witnessed two well made golems, Nainiae was impressed.

As she saw the scenery inside the cave, she opened her eye even wider.

“…This place is?”

“I used a simple magic to connect the basement of the pub and my cave.”

“Oh my…”

“Hey, Riley. Did you see that? Your servant knows how incredible this is… So, what the hell are you doing?”

Andal’s face crumpled.

It was because, before Andal realized, Riley already left his side. Instead, Riley was already standing in front of the mana measurement boulder.

Soon, Riley put his hand on the boulder.

Andal yelled,

“What the? Hey! Why are you doing it?”

Riley responded as if he was trying to excuse himself,

“Um. I want to try it too.”

Hearing his sleazy voice, Andal realized why Riley was looking for a mana measurement boulder and why he had his hand on the boulder. Finding it all to be unbelievable and nonsensical, Andal murmured,

“This rascal. I was wondering why you came…”

As Andal started to walk toward Riley, Nainiae, who was standing next to Andal, also rushed toward the young master.

‘I was wondering why he hired a mage as a maid. So there was a reason after all.’

“Hey. We had this conversation before too. Just what do you want to do with it after learning magic?”

“…?”

Riley didn’t answer.

Instead, he just had his hand on the boulder and waited.

“Are you really trying to take over the world?”

“Have you gone insane?”

It seemed Riley could not stand that question.

He asked back if Andal was insane.

“In that case, what’s all this ruckus about?”

When Andal asked again, Riley answered quietly,

“Picking apples are such a bother.”

“What?”

“It’s such a bother to go pick apples. Climbing trees is a pain too.”

‘You have all that physical strength and abilities and also all that mana, but you think picking apples is too much of a trouble?’

Of all stories Andal had heard in his life, this was the most ridiculous and nonsensical one.

Andal looked like he was staring at a lunatic. Andal mumbled,

“You dumbass rascal.”

He continued,

“You are a young master of a count’s House. What all the servants are for?”

“…Ah.”

Andal had a point.

Riley opened his mouth like a bass as he thought why he didn’t think of that.

If he only had Ian as the servant, Ian would have said, ‘Young master, please go pick it yourself and eat it. How long are you planning on sitting and rolling around?’

However, now, he had Nainiae.

“You have a point.”

“You crazy dumbass rascal.”

Andal complained once again.

“…?”

Regardless, Nainiae was standing next to Riley and observing the boulder. Having noticed that the mana measurement boulder was not showing any particular response, she tilted her head to the side and asked,

“Young master, you do have your hand on it, right?”

“Can’t you see? I have it touching the boulder right here?”

“That’s odd. There should be a response…”

The boulder was not showing even the slightest movement.

It wasn’t showing any gentle, steady light. It wasn’t shaking either.

Realizing this, not just Nainiae, but Andal also tilted his head to the sides.

“Um?”

Perhaps about five to ten seconds had passed.

A cracking sound could be heard, and the boulder started to crack from the bottom.

“What the? What’s this? Its response was a little late?”

“This is…”

With a look of disbelief in her gaze, she stared at the boulder.

Meanwhile, the boulder was still cracking further.

“Andal, is this one defective?”

“No. This one isn’t defective. This is correct.”

After the boulder finally responded, Riley cringed and turned away.

Andal shook his head and said it was not defective.

“…It is Time.”

Nainiae murmured.

“What?”

“Young master, your innate type is…related to time.”

“Time?”

Riley asked with a question mark above his head.

Andal nodded and confirmed,

“That’s right. Time.”

‘Not Fire, Water, Wind, or Earth, but Time? What do you mean Time?’

Riley didn’t understand, but he took his hand off from the boulder and asked Nainiae and Andal,

“Is it something good?”

And then…

The mana measurement boulder that Riley had touched crumbled and collapsed.

Chapter 63 - Amusement (Part 4)

Time.

It was the innate type that was at a whole another dimension in comparison to the other elemental types.

This was the reason why only the extreme few were born with this innate type.

“...So... Is it something good?”

Looking at Andal and Nainiae who were breaking in cold sweat, Riley asked with his face completely crumpled.

“Um... Since you are asking if it is something good...”

“I’m not sure.”

To Riley, it was not a matter of whether it was rare or not.

Good or bad.

Useful or inconvenient.

To Riley, these were the most important factors.

“Hey, are you guys bullying me because you two know a little bit of magic? Hurry up and tell me before I turn this entire place upside down.”

“You crazy rascal, you better not do it here.”

“Please wait a minute, young master. I’m trying to organize in my head how to explain this to you.”

Riley decided to ignore Andal who was all agitated and angry.

Instead, having noticed Nainiae in deep thought with a serious face, he felt like he could trust her, so he nodded in agreement and chose to wait.

“First, I was thinking about explaining each of the innate types.”

Innate type.

According to Nainiae’s explanation, when it came to the use of magic, the special characteristics of innate type were surprisingly easy to explain.

“If a person’s innate type is Fire, then it will be beneficial when using a fire element based magic. If a person’s innate type is Water, then it will be beneficial when using a water element based magic. It makes sense up to this point, right?”

“Hey. You think I’m stupid? I understood. Continue.”

“Most of magic that mages use are made of things found in nature. Fire, water, wind, earth…lightning and so forth.”

Riley nodded as he heard Nainiae’s explanation.

Riley had already read that much from a book that he read because he was interested in learning magic.

“So, most mages are born with an innate type among those elements. Still, there are cases where a mage is born with an innate type that is outside of those common elements. The best known examples are gravity, light, or darkness.”

Of those people, the people who were born with light as the innate type were known to work in the Holy Temple and worship the goddess Irenetsa.

This too was something Riley already knew about.

“Young master, your innate type is Time. The proof is in the fact that the measurement boulder appeared to be unaffected initially but gradually cracked and crumbled apart. It weathered away.”

“So?”

“With time as the innate type, it will be beneficial when using

magic related to time. However, time magic is a little unique kind…”

It appeared she was not sure how to explain the rest.

Nainiae lowered her head as if she was ashamed.

“What’s wrong? You look like a doctor who just failed a surgery.”

Having noticed that Nainiae was unable to continue explaining, Andal shrugged and explained in her stead,

“To go straight to the point, it is impossible to use any other magic besides time magic.”

“What?”

“Actually, no. You could use other elemental type magic, but… you won’t be able to bring out even half of the magic’s full potential.”

Andal stopped talking and moved mana inside his body.

It looked like his body was giving off a red haze.

“Instead of explaining it in words, I’ll just show it to you. Watch.”

Fshhh!

A large chunk of flame materialized on top of Andal's right hand.

As if it was mimicking Andal's red hair, it looked fearsome. It looked like it would be difficult to survive a direct hit from this lump of flame.

As expected, it was a flame from a red dragon.

"I didn't hammer in all of my innate type's potential to create this. Anyway, this is a 'Fireball' within the normal parameters of what human beings know about."

Andal added that if he created a flame that was fitting of his innate type, then the inside of the cave would be like in middle of summer. Andal lifted his left hand.

"And in comparison this is how a 'Fireball' would look like if you created it."

Spark

Instead of the sound of something flaming up, a sound of something being ignited was heard.

Riley's gaze moved toward Andal's left hand.

"What's this? Is it a lighter?"

Looking at the tiny seed of flame on Andal's left hand, Riley asked as he squinted his eyes.

"What's a lighter? Anyway... This is the fireball that you can create."

Andal asked what a lighter was because he didn't know about it. He couldn't since it was an object that was from Riley's past life that Andal was unaware of. Andal put his left hand closer to Riley so he could observe it better.

"..."

Compared to the flame on Andal's right hand, the tiny seed of fire on his left hand was so tiny.

It was pathetic. Still, Riley wanted to have some hope, so he asked Andal,

“What about its power?”

“Watch.”

Andal slowly turned his body toward a wall inside the cave.

Starting with the fireball on his right hand,

“This is what you know as a “Fireball.”

Andal swung his right hand and threw the fireball.

The fireball left Andal’s hand and flew toward the wall with a fearsome sound. It generated a huge explosion with a loud boom as soon as it hit the wall.

The fireball’s size blew up the moment it exploded. Soon, hot wind blew toward Riley and Nainiae.

“Um.”

Riley narrowed his eyes.

This was the Fireball that Riley saw last time in the Solia’s Main Plaza when he ran into Nainiae and Astroa who launched fireballs at him.

“And this is the fireball that you will be shooting.”

With his left hand, Andal threw the tiny seed of fire. Instead of calling it a lump of flame, it was better suited to be called that. The tiny seed of fire left its owner and flew.

The way it faltered as it flew had no power. Riley felt like he knew how this was going to end. Inside of Riley’s mouth dried up quickly.

“What was that?”

Chiiiiek…

Although Andel threw it to the wall, it didn’t even get to the wall. Instead, it fell along the way. It burned for a few seconds and started to whither.

“What do you mean what? It’s the fireball you will be shooting.”

As Andal grinned, Riley furrowed his brows.

“You call that a fireball? It was just a lighter that was thrown.”

“Just what is this ‘lighter’?”

“…”

Riley turned his head and looked at where the tiny seed of fire fell.

The spot was stained a little. There wasn’t an explosion.

That was it.

That tiny bit was the full extent of its power.

“Did you throw a match?”

Having remembered that this world doesn’t have a device called a lighter, he changed the word and asked Andal.

Riley looked like he was threatening Andal, saying cut this bullcrap. However, Andal cracked a smile and responded,

“In that case, can you please spread a rumor about me? The red dragon Andalobena uses a match instead of his own flame.”

Riley slowly turned his head and looked at Nainiae.

It was to ask if what Andal just demonstrated was the true extent of what Riley would be able to do.

"..."

Nainiae could not respond in words. Instead, she only nodded.

Andal shrugged and started to make fun of Riley,

"Well, it's like being an impotent man in magic."

By the word 'impotent,' Riley's head quickly turned to Andal.

"Impotent! Fuck! Who's impotent!?"

"Just give up."

"I can't... So, what kind of magic spells are there in time magic?"

Grinding his teeth, Riley asked about the time magic to find other potentials.

"I'm not sure. Time magic... What kind of spells are there?"

"There are probably a lot of magic spells related to speed. Things like hastening spells that would enable you to make something faster and slowing spells that would make something work slower."

"That would be speed magic instead of being time magic,

wouldn’t it?”

“Ah haha…”

Nainiae laughed awkwardly.

Andal shrugged and started to explain time magic that he knew,

“Well, back when my grandfather was alive, I heard there was a human that could rewind or fast forward time to travel through the past and present.”

“Hey, you rascal. Don’t bring up stories about your grandfather. It makes me dizzy.”

It was not a matter of it being several hundreds or thousands of years.

If he was talking about Andal’s grandfather’s time period, he was talking about a world that was several tens of thousands of years ago.

It was so old that Riley was having a hard time believing it.

“Anything else?”

“That is… Young master, as I explained earlier, only the extreme

few have time as their innate type. On top of that, even smaller fraction of people learn magic with time as their innate type. So…”

When Nainiae blurred the end of her sentence, Andal added,

“What she is trying to say is that the number of magic spells related to time are very limited.”

“I read in a book that my teacher Peruda gave me. Currently, most of the time magic spells are dead. There are a few that are commonly used still. There are things like hastening and slowing magic… Ah! There are also magic for increasing or decreasing the speed of time! Alchemists sometimes use such spells when doing… their experiments.”

Having realized Riley’s face growing more violent by the minute, Nainiae’s voice became tinier than a rat’s tail.

“Is there a magic that can rewind time?”

Riley turned away from Nainiae and looked at Andal.

Andal was a dragon afterall, and he was a mage that had reached Nine Circles. Riley wanted to ask Andal because of this reason.

“I don’t know either.”

Andal heartlessly crushed Riley’s expectations.

“How about a magic that will stop time?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you know anything? Are you really a dragon?”

“Should I swear to you in the dragon language? I’m telling you. I really don’t know.”

Now it was Andal what was cringing. He started to explain about the time magic that could rewind or stop time,

“Well, I think there is a magic spell for rewinding time to fix a broken object, but when it comes to time magic that could affect living things to rewind or force it to be held in a stopped time, such spells are… They belong to the Ten Circles magic. Even at the absolute minimum requirement, you will need Nine Circles.”

Ten Circles.

It was a height that even dragons could not reach. It was quite literally the realm of gods.

“That’s assuming such magic existed at all.”

Andal murmured as he shrugged. Andal looked at Riley.

“Even if such spells existed, it is not like you are going to work hard to find them. You are not the type.”

“Go to hell…”

As if he was frustrated, Riley aggressively scratched the back of his head.

Not knowing what to do, Nainiae in the back said with a forced smile,

“Y-Young master! Still… At least you won’t have to touch the apple tree.”

“What?”

“If you cast a time hastening magic on an apple, it will mature quickly, and when a matured apple falls on its own, you can eat that one. Now that I think about it, it looks like you won’t have to wait for apple seasons either.”

Clap

Nainiae said as she clapped.

Riley gave a vacant stare at her face.

"..."

"As for other magic, although it will not be powerful, I can teach you a wind magic that will be still strong enough to catch a falling apple. Something like an Air Cushion."

Listening to Nainiae trying to convince him to settle down, Riley sighed heavily enough to make the ground sink and said,

"...You pick them."

"Pardon?"

"I said, you go ahead and pick the apples."

Riley had a serious talk with Andal about time magic that he could use and the cleanup of Tes merchant company.

Having finished the conversation, Riley and Nainiae started

heading back to the mansion in the carriage. Riley was trying out magic while riding on the carriage.

"...Light."

Riley managed to float up a small ball of light on top of his palm in just three tries.

Nainiae, who was driving the carriage, took a quick look at Riley and opened her eye widely.

"You can already do it?"

"Oh? So this is how it feels. It's quite mysterious."

The light that Riley created was rather small, but it was carrying out its task to the full extent.

Before they realized, there was already a link in his heart that was spinning.

It meant Riley had succeeded in achieving the One Circle.

"That was going to be your practice tomorrow, but you already did it. Um... It looks like I'll have to think hard about this."

"Think hard?"

“They say getting started is the hardest part. Actually, generating the One Circle’s Light is very difficult. This was the reason why I thought we should figure out your innate type today and focus on the Light magic tomorrow. But… You already succeeded in it.”

As she drove the carriage, she used wind magic to push away tree branches that could reach Riley’s hair.

“Although it is not very effective, there are time magic spells even for Two Circles, so… Tomorrow, I think it would be good to practice by focusing on that. We can practice other elemental magic here and there as well.”

“Two Circles, huh…”

“You can think of it as taking steps that fit your innate type.”

Riley noticed the mansion could be seen in the distance.

He turned off the light he had floating on his palm.

“…Um?”

The carriage bumped once and arrived at the mansion’s entrance. Riley narrowed his eyes.

It was because there was a carriage that he had never seen before

that was parked in front of the mansion.

‘That carriage is?’

Chapter 64 - The Fiancée And Nianiae

It was a carriage that Riley had never seen.

Riley tilted his head to the sides and went straight to the new carriage as soon as he got off from the one he was riding on.

“Who could it be?”

He wondered if it was someone he thought it might be, so he quietly went next to the carriage to check its side.

“Is it from the Solia’s Holy Temple? No. It does not appear to be the case.”

Having confirmed the crest on the side of the carriage, Riley mumbled.

Instead of the Holy Temple, it appeared that someone from a nobility family came to visit.

Its overall red color was eye catching, but black color mixed in here and there gave the carriage a flashy look. Even at a glance, it looked like an expensive carriage.

“I parked the carriage.”

While Riley was checking out the carriage’s crest, Nainiae went

to tie the carriage to where it should be and returned.

“I have never seen this carriage.”

“Have you heard anything from Sera?”

Riley still couldn’t figure out what this was all about, so he asked Nainiae.

Nainiae took a quick glance at the carriage, shook her head and said she didn’t know about it.

“Well, I’ll get to know what’s going on soon enough.”

Riley gave up on trying to figure it out and started to walk toward inside of the mansion.

There was an old butler already standing there and waiting for Riley.

“Huk!”

Having discovered Riley walking into the mansion, the old butler flinched his shoulder and rushed to Riley like a pet that missed his owner.

“Young maaasteeerrr!”

It was Ian. Riley was not sure if he should act like he is happy or sad for the first face he ran into right after entering the mansion. For now, Riley gave the old butler a hug.

“You came back.”

“Ian, it’s not good to age backward. Shouldn’t you act your age?”

“Kuhup. It’s not a bad thing for a servant to worry about the master he serves.”

Ian was still hugging Riley, but his gaze ran into Nainiae’s.

Ian immediately made a violent face and started pouting.

‘…Nothing in particular happened I hope?’

Ian said to Nainiae using ventriloquism. Seeing this, Nainiae also pursed her lips and carefully nodded.

Although something did happen, Nainiae was sure that nobody would let her off easy, whether it was Ian, Riley or even Andal.

“Did Nainiae make things uncomfortable for you in any way?”

Ian, the one who just threatened Nainiae through ventriloquism,

released Riley from hug and asked if she did well or not.

“What’s this? Were you hoping I was uncomfortable?”

“Ah, not at all! There’s no way I would hope for such…”

When Riley slowly tilted his head to the side and asked, Ian denied and said it was absolutely not what he was thinking.

“Is that so?”

Riley definitely felt that Ian’s words and facial expressions were different from Ian’s actual thoughts. Riley started to smile with the corners of his mouth wiggling.

Looking at Riley’s smile, Ian started to act like he was paying attention to something else.

“Anyway, what’s that carriage about?”

Riley decided to make fun of Ian later. Instead, Riley flipped up his thumb and pointed it over his shoulder to the back toward the red carriage to make inquiries.

“It’s from Mogared family.”

“Mogared?”

“Yes. A daughter from Mogared family is currently visiting here.”

Riley tilted his head to the sides. In a tone of voice that indicated he was not sure what was happening, he asked,

“A daughter? Why?”

“Have you forgotten?”

“…?”

“There was an engagement ceremony two years ago. It’s that family.”

“…Ah?”

“…?”

Having heard the words ‘engagement ceremony,’ Nainiae, who was standing in the back, had her face twisted into a strange look and then turned into a stone.

“…About lady Orelly, that is most unfortunate. I’m sorry to hear that.”

Inside Ryan's personal office, there was a woman wearing a dress full of lace enjoying a tea made for a guest.

"My mother brought it onto herself. It's just that, I don't think my mother is a horrible person. Afterall, she is my mother who gave birth to me."

The person sitting in front of the woman was the eldest son of the Iphalleta House, Ryan. He was the one that people believed will most likely be the successor of the family.

"You intend to bring her back?"

"Yes. Once I win the successorship, I intend to bring my mother back to the mansion, although I'll have to convince my father first."

By the woman's question, Ryan nodded with a saddened face.

"About Tes merchant company, the news don't sound so good, so I'm worried, but it will be all right. That person is tenacious."

"I have been trying to find out in any way I can. I'm sure there will be a good news soon."

"Thank you. Thanks to you... I feel a little bit at ease."

Ryan had a sad look on his face, but he tried hard and smiled gently. He held the woman's hand.

Feeling the warmth of his hand, the woman blushed.

"Young master…"

The ring on her finger was identical to the one on Ryan's finger.

"…Young Master Ryan's fiancée?"

Sera and Nainiae's job for the day was washing bed blankets.

Sera was doing both the daily task and maid lessons for Nainiae. When Nainiae asked the question, Sera started to explain about Mogared's daughter.

"That's right. The daughter from Mogared family that visited us today is… Utcha! The Young Master Ryan's fiancée. They had their engagement ceremony two years ago."

Sera hung a large blanket on the laundry string. She quickly turned her head toward Nainiae and looked at her.

Nainiae was just standing there with a blank stare and a blanket in her arms.

“Nainiae?”

“…”

Although Sera called her, Nainiae was not answering. She was just standing there with a vacant look on her face.

The look on her face wasn’t giving any clues on what she was thinking.

“Nainiae!”

“…Yes? Ah, yes!”

Nainiae finally opened her ears after being called twice. She tumbled and answered.

By how surprised she looked, it seemed that she really didn’t hear Sera.

“Just what were you thinking so hard about?”

“No. It’s nothing. It’s just…”

She said it was nothing, and Nainiae started to hang the blanket she held in her arms on the laundry string.

Based on how Nainiae was giving a blank stare, Sera was certain that something was up. Sera narrowed her eyes mischievously and asked.

“What is it? Did something happen with young master?”

“Pardon?”

Nainiae was still somehow looking rather absent minded, but suddenly, her eye focused.

It was like a fish that bit the bait.

Nainiae turned her head to Sera after hearing Sera’s question. As if she didn’t quite hear the question, Nainiae had a question mark floating above her head and she was blinking her eyes.

“You are acting strange, so it’s odd, you know? You had that blank look on your face ever since you went to Iffa village with young master yesterday.”

“That is…”

Having heard Sera’s question, Nainiae lowered her head and bit her lower lip.

She thought about what transpired in Iffa village.

‘Here.’

‘You are my servant. Are you his servant?’

Nainiae was thinking about how Riley gently patted her on top of her head and how he said she was his servant. She was thinking about his hand gesture and voice.

“…No. Nothing happened.”

Nainiae slowly shook her head and got rid of futile thoughts in her head.

Meanwhile, she was still biting her lower lip.

‘It’s so foolish…’

She was still biting her lower lip because of something else.

It was she was thinking, ‘I’m feeling relieved…’

Her heart sunk for a moment when she heard Ian mention the fiancée. She felt relieved when she learned that it was actually Young Master Ryan’s fiancée.

Nainiae was feeling guilty for feeling that way.

‘I’m going to die soon, so how dare I…’

Even if it lasted, it was going to be only until the autumn.

Also, there was a stark difference in class.

‘That is not all, isn’t it?’

The right side of her face was horrid, and she was missing two fingers.

She thought that having such feelings were a sin.

“Ms. Sera, what’s the schedule after washing the blankets?”

“Have you forgotten what I told you yesterday?”

“Yesterday… Ah, right. That starts today, right?”

“Haha. So, something did happen, didn’t it? Something happened, right?”

“No! Absolutely nothing happened!”

Sera asked with a suppressed laughter, and Nainiae shook her

head in denial.

“Um. All right. I won’t pry anymore.”

Sera hung the very last blanket on the string.

She roughly wiped off the water on her hands in the apron and turned back to look at Nainiae.

“Have you ever held a wooden sword at least?”

“No. Not even once…”

In response to Sera’s question about a wooden sword, Nainiae shook her head again.

Sera laughed as if she thought it could not be helped.

“Well. I can understand that. Actually, I got to hold a sword for the first time after coming to the mansion.”

Sera promised Nainiae that she would teach her sword if they finished the day’s schedule early.

It was something Nainiae asked first, but also, it was because there wasn’t any servant in Iphalleta that didn’t know how to use a sword.

“By the way… Are you right handed, Nainiae?”

Sera remembered that Nainiae’s middle and ring fingers were not all right, so she carefully asked.

As a woman just like herself, she figured Nainiae would not like being asked that question.

“…I was.”

With a bitter expression on her face, Nainiae said she use to be.

Having lost her fingers, she had no choice but to become left-handed after the experiments in the Magic Tower. It was because her fingers were still alright on her left hand.

“I can still use my right hand to some extent, but if it is about holding a sword…”

Nainiae murmured as she looked down at her right hand.

Because her right hand was missing two fingers, it looked like it didn’t belong to a human being.

It was certain that it could not be called a pretty looking hand.

“Left hand would be better, right?”

Nainiae forced a smile as she asked.

Sera also had a bitter expression on her face just like how Nainiae was until a moment ago. Sera nodded and said,

“Yes. Left hand would be better.”

Missing two fingers was a big difference for a person holding a sword in comparison to having them.

It was a woman’s hand, and on top of that, the missing fingers were not the pinky, but the middle and ring fingers. Explaining it any further was only going to hurt her lips.

“We will be stared at by other servants if we went straight to the training arena, so let’s try practicing the form while holding a wooden sword. Wait for me and stretch your wrists. I’ll go get a light one.”

Sera went into the storage room to find a wooden training sword, and Nainiae was left alone in the corridor.

“A sword huh…”

Sword.

Nainiae thought about swords with a blank look on her face, and she started to think about Riley.

He was the youngest young master of the Iphelleta House that she met for the first time in Solia.

How they met was definitely not under good circumstances, but there were many things that happened there after.

‘His skills were incredible.’

Once, when she saw him slicing through her magic attacks, and once again but to a greater extent, when she saw him defeating Astroa by throwing a sword at him, all she could think of was the word, ‘incredible.’

‘Despite all that, he hides his true power from the people in the mansion. Why is he doing that?’

Nainiae thought Riley’s humbleness was as deep and wide as the sea. It was making her head to lower on its own.

‘As I thought, young master is…’

Before Nainiae could finish her thought, Sera came out of the storage room while holding two wooden swords.

“Here.”

“Yes.”

Sera gave a wooden sword to Nainiae.

It was relatively small and light. It was a wooden sword designed for a beginner.

‘It feels strange. I wonder if young master feels like this when he holds a sword?’

Nainiae tried closing and opening the fingers of her left hand that was holding the sword.

It felt awkward.

To explain how she was feeling, it was like that.

“Now, then, shall we start with the basic form?”

“Do I need to just follow what you are doing?”

“Yes. I’ll be starting with the easier one.”

With her maid lessons concluded for the day, Sera’s sword lessons started.

“In this pose, put strength in your shoulder! Your gaze should be toward the front!”

“L-Like this? Is this right?”

It seemed like Sera was determined to teach her properly now that she was the one teaching her. There was Sera who became a fierce teacher like a tiger, and there was Nainiae who was still sloppy at using a sword but trying hard to learn.

“...Hm?”

And there was someone hiding in a corner of the corridor and watching them.

Chapter 65 - The Fiancée And Nianiae (Part 2)

It was during the dinner time.

Lloyd came to the front of Ryan's door and knocked on the door a few times.

"Big Brother, it's me."

He wasn't sure how long he waited after he knocked, but he could hear the reply a little while later.

"...Come in."

After getting the permission, Lloyd carefully opened the door and entered the room. It appeared Ryan was not the only one inside the room.

"Sister in law, it has been a while."

"Oh dear... Sister in law... I'm so embarrassed."

The woman who was called as the sister in law by Lloyd, the woman wearing a graceful dress, responded as she blushed.

"It has been a while since I saw you last, Young Master Lloyd.

You look so different compared to how you were several years ago. I think it would be difficult to joke that you look like a child now."

Annabelle Mogared.

It was the name of the woman who was engaged to Ryan two years ago. To the people, she was a woman more well known as the daughter of the Mogared House.

"So. What is she like?"

After Lloyd and Annabelle greeted each other, Ryan quickly walked next to Lloyd and asked.

He was asking about Nainiae, the one who Riley brought in as a new servant.

"Well, she was as we expected."

Lloyd shrugged with a confident face.

He didn't have much to report.

As expected, that was all.

"It seems she is just a lass with nothing extraordinary about her. I went and took a glance at how she was doing in her sword

training taught by Sera... It didn't look like she was particularly good in her sword skill either."

"Hm."

"Big Brother. You worry too much. If I must point out anything unique about her, there was a disgusting scar on her face that almost made me puke, and she is missing two fingers on her right hand."

That horrible scar.

Those disgusting fingers.

Other than those, it could be said Nainiae had quite a fair face, but those problems were cutting down even that one good thing about her appearance.

"Honestly, even I think it is strange, and it makes me wonder too. I'm talking about why that runt Riley brought in a lass like that and made her work in the mansion."

Lloyd continued as he shook his head.

Even on his second thought, he just could not get used to that face.

"Afterall, Riley's taste in woman was always a mystery. If he has

a thing for something like that, well...that would explain why he brought in a lass like her and made her settle in the mansion."

As if he was trying to say he had no idea of his brother born from a different mother liked that kind of woman, Lloyd murmured as he wiggled the corners of his mouth.

"I'm sorry I'm not able to maintain the expression on my face. I couldn't help myself because it was so funny when I just thought about it."

Lloyd was thinking about paying back Riley for making a fool out of him with the medal when he returned to the mansion from Solia.

Lloyd was thinking he would be able to make fun of Riley with this, so he was not able to hold himself from laughing.

"Still, it is so strange. I can't shake the feeling that there's something wrong with all this."

"Seriously. Big brother, you doubt people too much. He isn't called the Lazy Sword inside and outside the mansion for no reason."

Having heard what his older brother said, Lloyd stopped laughing and shrugged.

It was because it looked like there was no need to mind it no

matter how many times Lloyd went over it. He felt that there was no reason to worry about Riley or the lass named Nainiae that he brought.

“In that case, should I take a look for you as well?”

Lloyd was looking at Ryan, but after hearing the question, Lloyd turned his head toward Annabelle.

“Sister in law, would you like to?”

“Yes. It’s been a while since I visited Iphalleta mansion, so I have to greet young master Riley as well, so… Tomorrow, I can whenever I find the time.”

“Will you be all right?”

Ryan looked at Annabelle with a gaze of someone that genuinely worried about his beloved.

In response, Annabelle gave a refreshing smile and she put forth an expression on her face that said not to worry.

“Of course.”

Nainiae’s schedule for the day was pretty busy during the

morning when Ian was next to Riley.

“Now… Is it the right timing?”

“No. The tea is not quite brewed yet. Try again.”

With Sera supervising, Nainiae's maid training and tasks were completed within that time. Also, in middle of all these, she was also trained in swordsmanship.

“L-Like this?”

“You will be losing your wrist if you did it like that. What do you think you should do?”

“If I lowered the angle a little…”

“Yes. A little further! You should lower it a little further!”

Maid work.

Maid training.

Swordsmanship lessons.

It was around 4 o’clock by the time all three things were roughly over, and that’s when she switched places with Ian.

From there, Nainiae served right next to Riley until it was time for bed.

Of course, she had to prepare magic lessons for Riley in middle of all these. She had the right to say that having two of her was not going to be enough to handle everything at the moment.

“You have done a good work, Mr. Ian.”

“Ugh. It would be fine if I continued to look after him.”

Nainiae switched places with Ian at the garden a little after 4 o’clock when she roughly finished most of her things for the day.

Nainiae sighed heavily and stood next to Riley after surviving a deadly gaze from Ian.

‘Is he sleeping?’

Under the garden tree’s shadow, Riley was lying down on his designated spot where he always slept during the day.

Nainiae quietly lowered her eyes and looked at Riley’s sleeping face.

He had his eyes closed, and she could hear a regular breathing that sounded like he was asleep. Together, they felt like they were

protesting and saying not to bother him because he was taking a nap in middle of a day.

‘So, he is sleeping.’

He looked so relaxed.

It was making the person that watched him feel relaxed too.

Nainiae quietly smiled.

‘Let’s see.’

It looked like Nainiae was trying to do something.

Nainiae lifted her left hand.

She stood like that for a moment. As if she was trying to feel something, Nainiae started to look for something as she turned her head all over the place.

‘There is…no wind…’

With her hand raised, she confirmed that there was no wind around the area and carefully recited a spell to cast a One Circle level wind magic.

‘Would this be enough?’

To make sure she would not wake up Riley who was taking a nap, Nainiae whispered in a quiet voice to recite the spell.

It appeared she successfully cast the spell. Wind started to blow at her and make her hair wave in the air.

‘It worked.’

It was almost at the end of the spring season.

Because the summer was almost here, the sunlight was quite warm.

Therefore, the wind that was blowing right now was something to be welcomed very much.

Riley, who was taking a nap, started to smile. The corners of his mouth were tilting up to indicate he was happy about it. This was the proof.

“…Oh my!”

“…?”

It was around 5 p.m. Nainiae was quietly keeping her place next

to Riley, but she moved her eyes to look at a woman who was walking towards them. It was because Nainiae heard her voice.

The woman was wearing a lavish dress with excess number of lace. Even at a glance, it was obvious that the woman was a nobility, someone of a higher class than Nainiae.

‘This person is…’

Although Nainiae didn’t know her name, she knew who she was because Sera have explained about her before.

She was the daughter of a nobility family and also the fiancée of Ryan, Iphalleta House’s eldest young master.

“Oh my, oh my… Young Master Riley!”

It was a high tone voice.

It looked like she did it on purpose to wake Riley up from his nap.

“Oh my, Young Master Riley. It’s been two years since I saw you last, but you are still such a sleepyhead.”

Instead of lowering her voice, the woman was making it louder and louder. Having noticed this, Nainiae slightly furrowed her eyebrows.

However… She could not let it be noticeable.

It was because she was taught by Sera about it.

“…”

Annabelle, the daughter of a nobility family, took a step closer to Riley who was lying down.

Following the education she received, Nainiae lowered her head when her eyes met with Annabelle’s to express her respect toward Annabelle.

“He was born from Iphalleta family, yet he is so foolish…”

Nainiae still had her head lowered, but she could hear Annabelle’s voice.

She was definitely speaking ill of the Young Master that Nainiae served.

“After disgracing your own brothers in the family, you sure are shameless.”

She was pouring harsh words at Riley who was still asleep.

Nainiae lifted her head slightly to confirm the expression on

Annabelle’s face.

Annabelle’s face was full of intense hate.

‘How dare…’

Nainiae lowered her head down so Annabelle wouldn’t notice. Nainiae’s eyes became violent.

She was not the type that could just stand and watch the master she served being bad mouthed by someone.

Nainiae wanted to threaten the woman with a fireball right next to her face and force her to apologize.

“Excuse me, Young Master Riley? How about you get up soon? Aren’t you pretending to be asleep? Even if you were culled by the family, you should at least greet me, don’t you think? Where are your manners?”

“…”

Although Nainiae wanted to, she did not step in carelessly.

It was to practice the advice, ‘take a step back.’ Also, it was because there was a possibility of putting Riley in a difficult position if Nainiae took action right now.

Those were not all of her reasons.

'If this keeps up, Young Master might wake up…'

She was also concerned she might interfere with Riley's sleep. She didn't want to do that when Riley appeared to be enjoying his nap.

She wanted to protect that leisurely expression on his face.

It looked like Nainiae concluded that things must not continue this way and decided to do something.

'It looks like I won't be able to use Sleep in this situation, so, to make it simple…'

Nainiae started to move her lips with her head still lowered.

"Seriously, if you resembled even half of Ryan…"

"…Silence."

Nainiae successfully cast a spell quietly so Annabelle would not have heard it.

Sometime soon afterwards, Annabelle's voice suddenly stopped.

“…”

Nainiae cast Silence, a magic that silenced the affected person so that the person would not be able to make any sound.

“…”

That was not all. Nainiae modified the spell in a unique way so the affected person will not notice that the person’s voice had become silent.

It was a magic that Nainiae thought of recently as she taught magic to Riley. She had been thinking hard recently about what kind of magic spells would be useful for Riley.

‘With this…young master won’t be woken up by her voice, and she won’t be pestering young master about her voice being silent either.”

After doing all that, Nainiae used search magic and confirmed there wasn’t any eyes or ears spying on them from a hidden angle. Relieved, Nainiae sighed inside.

‘Young master is…. Good. He is still asleep.’

Nainiae gently smiled after checking that Riley was still in middle of sleep.

She was a Six Circles mage.

It was the next day.

With a wooden sword in her hand, Nainiae stood in front of a training dummy. She asked Sera who was standing on the back.

“Uh? Should I try swinging it?”

“Yes. You are starting to have proper form. So, I was thinking it’s time you really tried swinging the sword and hit the target as a practice.”

Sera answered as she nodded.

Nainiae’s face became somewhat confused and hesitant.

“Finally…”

All this time, she had been learning the proper form for holding sword. It was the first time she finally got to swing it, and she could not quite believe that she was actually doing it.

It was different from how she managed to use the Light magic and have the sphere float on the palm of her hand.

“You should start with the first movement. You know that, right?”

Having heard Sera’s question, Nainiae nodded.

It felt like she was taking a test.

In her mind, Nainiae murmured that she must do well. She tightened her grip on the sword.

“At first, you should get a feel for it, so try striking it with all of your strength.”

Having heard Sera, Nainiae adjusted her stance and aimed the sword she held in her left hand at the training dummy.

She briefly took a deep breath, placed a foot to the front and moved her shoulder and arm to…

“…Huaaaap!!”

Along with her shouting, Nainiae’s wooden sword struck the training dummy.

Perhaps it was because she had a solid training in the basics. She had a clean form. Nothing in particular about her movement could be faulted.

There was not much else to it other than the fact that Nainiae was actually thinking about Riley's movements in her head.

"...Huh?"

Sera's eyes became large.

It was because the end result was far from what she expected.

"...?"

The look on Nainiae's face was not so different from Sera's.

Thump.

With a blunt sound, the training dummy's upper body fell to the ground.

"This is... Why?"

Surprised, a question appeared in Nainiae's eyes.

Nainiae did strike the dummy with all of her strength. However...

She did not expect the training dummy to be cut clean in half.

She figured it would make a ‘puk!’ noise and make her palm feel shaken up from the impact.

“Nainiae…”

“Yes?”

“By chance, did you use it?”

‘Is she talking about magic?’

Nainiae shook her head and answered no.

“No. I just…swung the sword. That’s all.”

With a look of disbelief, Sera stared at the upper half of the training dummy that was on the ground.

The dummy that was rolling on the ground had a flat surface as if it was proudly showing off that it was cut clean.

She almost felt sorry for the straw and wood frame.

‘…This is impossible!’

On the other hand, the someone who was hiding in the corner could not hide the shock from witnessing the training dummy that was cut in half.

‘W-Where did a monster like her!?’

The one that was staring at Nainiae with a dumbfounded face and his jaw dropped was Lloyd, the mansion’s second eldest young master.

Chapter 66 - Picking A Fight

It was a little after lunch.

Today, Riley decided to read instead of taking a nap. He was sitting on the garden's bench and flipping pages.

Next to Riley was Ian who held a tea pot to tend to Riley's tea cup.

"...Young master."

Sararac

TL: This is the sound effect for flipping a page.

Riley was turning yet another page of the book, but he quietly shifted his eyes toward Ian after hearing his voice.

"Have you heard?"

It was a very general question.

Not having any clue as to what Ian was talking about, Riley directed his eyes back on chasing after the words on the book.

The book he was currently reading was about magic. It was one of the few that was in the library that was about magic.

It was a fiction titled ‘The Legend of a Certain Mage.’ Half of it was true and the other half was fiction. With those two mixed together, it made a perfect book to pass time away.

It also occasionally had explanation about magic, so it was helping Riley on magic lessons. He would have given the book a high score if it wasn’t for the part about a ‘mage swordsman’ that seemed to be forced into the story just to include a story related to swords.

“…What?”

“During yesterday evening…”

Riley asked back as he flipped the page. Ian continued,

“Nainiae obliterated the training dummy. She cut it in half clean in a single strike.”

Nainiae.

Training dummy.

A single strike.

Obliterated.

The four key words made Riley's ears rise up.

It was certain that what Ian was talking about was far more interesting than the book he was reading.

"Really?"

Riley took his eyes off the words and murmured.

Nainiae was a fragile looking girl. She looked like she could collapse to the side if you lightly bumped into her.

'Where was she hiding such a strength all this time?'

"She did it to Iphalleta Hause's training dummy? In a single strike?"

Riley had the tea cup under the shadow. It had become cooler, and it was at the right temperature for drinking. Riley put his hand toward the cup and took a sip as he complimented Nainiae.

"Wow, that's not bad, right? Could it be that she has a hidden talent that we didn't expect?"

"You think so too, right?"

It could be that she was talented at swords.

It could be just that she used a trick with her magic.

It could also be that she was just lucky.

Regardless... The fact remained that she cut the Iphalleta House's training dummy in half with her very first sword strike. It was something worthy of a praise.

"Maybe she could become a mage swordswoman like the main character from the book I'm reading right now. Wow... To think my servant is a mage swordswoman... That's cool, right?"

Riley cracked a smile as he mumbled.

Ian, who was standing next to Riley, smiled widely and said,

"Yes. By the way..."

Unlike his smiling face, his voice was serious.

Having heard his voice, Riley turned his head and looked at Ian.

"The training dummy that she struck was a training dummy, but..."

“Um?”

Noticing something strange in how Ian was going about it, Riley furrowed his brows.

Thinking Riley might change the subject, Ian quickly continued.

“That training dummy was a brand new one except that ‘a certain someone’ struck it once a few weeks ago for fun and then said ‘I’m sick of it’ as he left.”

“…”

“No matter how talented Nainiae may be… She has difficulties with her hand. How do you think she managed to cut it down so cleanly?”

Ian mumbled as he brushed his beard.

How he had a question mark added to the end of the sentence seemed like he would mumble one over and over unless Riley responded.

“Well. I heard she had a perfect form because she learned from Sera. Even so…”

Ian’s gaze moved toward Riley.

Riley was reading, but as if he felt awkward because of Ian's gaze, Riley started to scratch the back of his head.

"Young master, by chance, do you know anything about this?"

"...I'm not sure?"

After a brief moment of silence, Riley asked back as he turned a page.

He sounded like there was nothing wrong, but it was of course just an act.

Having served young master for a long time, Ian could tell.

"Could it be that she used magic?"

"..."

"Sera doesn't know much about magic. Maybe that rascal was sneaky about it and tricked her."

Riley mumbled as he drank tea. The tone of his voice sounded like he felt he couldn't let this conversation continue on.

"Um. As the master, I can't just sit and let my servant going about things in the wrong way. Don't worry, Ian. I'll scold her.

That rascal. Where is she?”

Unlike what he was saying, Riley was still looking at his book. It was not being closed.

Having noticed all this, Ian sighed heavily enough to make the ground sink and poured more tea into the tea cup.

Chorururuu

It was around when the sound of the tea being poured into the cup stopped.

“...Oh my? Young Master Riley?”

A clear voice could be heard from the back.

Ian was pouring tea, but Ian’s gaze turned toward the direction of the voice on its own.

“This is unexpected? Were you reading today instead of taking a nap?”

The woman appeared to be wearing a pretty tall pair of high heel shoes, but she managed to walk across the grass. It was quite impressive that she managed.

Annabelle Mogared, Ryan’s fiancée, made an entrance. Ian briefly lowered his head to pay his respect and hardened his face.

It was because he couldn’t show any strange expression to a daughter of a marquis family.

“Since you can’t hold a sword, if it is going to be something like reading, that’s not bad. It looks a lot better than you taking a nap.”

Annabelle quietly looked below as she talked to Riley. It was to check what he was reading.

After having glanced through the content of the book's open pages, she inquired quietly,

"Um? Magic? Magic? Young master. You are not serious about it, right?"

Annabelle was ridiculing Riley directly to his face.

Watching this, Ian had veins popping out on his forehead.

Currently, all he could manage to do was holding back his mouth that was itching. That was the limit of his patience.

"Magic in Iphalleta House? Ahhaha! You are reading it because you enjoy reading books, right?"

"..."

'You have no idea about our young master's true skills, yet... You have no idea about our young master's true power, yet...'

Ian chewed on the words in his mind. His shoulders started to flinch.

It looked like a time bomb that was about to go off.

“I heard you even received a medal of honor from the Solia Castle. From what I heard, you apprehended Astroa with another mage. Is that why you became interested in magic?”

“…”

Riley was not showing any response to Annabelle’s voice.

Instead, he only flipped the page as he made the page flip noise.

“Even magic will take talent, don’t you think? How should I say this… It seems a little hard for you? Well, either way, I don’t think you will be getting a good result from it.”

Either way.

Sword or magic, regardless of which one it was, it would be hard for Riley to get a good result.

Annabelle was saying that.

She was obviously patronizing Riley. Having heard what she said, Ian started to furrow his eyebrows. He was not able to take it anymore.

His mouth itched.

He wanted to say something.

‘Young master, I think I should just say it! If this keeps up, I’ll die from frustration!’

Ian felt like his throat was completely blocked.

Ian felt a strong urge to go shout it out loud to the entire town about Riley’s true power right now. He wetted the inside of his mouth. Ian was about to say something.

“…Pup, Fuhahahaha!!”

“…?!”

Riley suddenly broke into a laughter.

The way he was beating on the table that he had his book on seemed like it was definitely not an act.

“This is such a nonsense. If Andal saw it, he would be flipped and rolling on the ground! Kikic!”

It seemed that he found a funny part in the book.

Riley had the corners of his mouth slightly tilted up.

Noticing this, Ian thought Riley must have not realize the situation yet. Ian slightly bent his upper body and whispered to Riley.

“Young master?”

‘Did he not hear anything because he was so focused on the book?’

Riley was still laughing as he looked at the book.

Noticing this, Ian raised his voice a little and called him.

“Excuse me, young master?”

“Um? What? If it is about the training dummy, I’ll talk to Nainiae later…”

“You have a guest. A guest.”

“…”

Annabelle had veins popping out on her forehead because of the conversation that went on in front of her that completely ignored

her.

Fortunately for her, because of her makeup, it was not noticeable.

“...Um?”

Having heard what Ian said, Riley finally turned his head and looked at Annabelle.

Their eyes met, and it was Annabelle that greeted Riley first.

“Ah, how do you do? Young Master Riley?”

This was the second time she greeted Riley.

In order to straighten her crumpled pride, Annabelle flinched her facial muscles several times. She tilted her head to the side and showed a refreshing smile.

Those with keen eyes would have figured out that her smile was a forced one.

“...”

Riley gave a hollow stare at her face for a moment.

Breaking the silence, he simply answered,

“…Yeah.”

Riley said ‘yeah’ as if he was responding to a servant. He turned to look at Ian and quietly asked,

“…Who is this?”

His bent eyebrow was suggesting a question mark.

The look on his eyes seem to be indicating that he really didn’t have any idea who this woman was.

Ian whispered to Riley as he broke in cold sweat,

“It’s Miss Annabelle.”

“Anna what again?”

Mumble Mumble

It looked like he was trying to say things in a lower voice so Annabelle could not hear it, but their voices were leaking out.

The voices that she could hear were wrecking her pride. Annabelle's fingers started to twitch.

If there was anything that she could grab, it would have been torn to pieces by her artificial nails.

"She is Miss Annabelle! Young Master Ryan's..."

"...Ah!"

It looked like they could finally continue their conversation.

As if he finally realized it, he said 'Ah' in a long stretch. Riley still had a question mark above his head. He asked Ian,

"Is she my big brother's maid?"

"..."

"...?"

It was still in a low voice, but Annabelle could her it just the same.

It was not certain if Riley knew it or not.

Riley kept on asking more questions to Ian.

“By the way, Ian. Even if she is my big brother’s maid, you have no reason to use such respectful language toward her. Don’t you think?”

“N-No, young master… Miss Annabelle is not a maid…”

“…That’s enough, Ian!”

“…?”

Having heard a woman’s voice that sounded angry, Riley turned his head toward the direction of the voice and tilted his head to the sides.

“Yes. If that’s your wish… Yes! I understand!”

“Hey. You are just a maid. Why are your lips so light…”

Wheec!

Annabelle turned around before Riley could finish his sentence.

She took firm steps back across the garden toward the mansion. Watching her back, Riley shrugged and directed his gaze back to the book.

“…”

Riley was going to indulge in the book again, but he felt the heat from Ian’s gaze. Riley complained as if he was wronged.

“Seriously. I’m telling you. I really don’t know that person?”

The look on Riley’s face seem to be saying, ‘I don’t know her, so what am I supposed to do?’

Ian had a confused look on his face. He sighed heavily enough to sink the ground and started to rub his face with both of his palms.

It was inside the mansion.

Nainiae just finished dishwashing, the very last job for the day. She was heading toward the training arena to work on swordsmanship training with Sera, but she saw Annabelle walking toward this way from the other side.

“…?”

“How dare he… How dare he…”

It looked like something had happened.

She was breathing hard as she walked this way. Nainiae noticed Annabelle and pulled her chin a little as she looked at the direction that Annabelle came from.

‘It looks like she is coming from the garden… Did she run into our young master?’

It was a straight corridor, so Annabelle, who was quickly walking through it, found Nainiae who was standing on the other side with her head lowered. Annabelle furrowed her brows.

“…”

“…”

When their eyes met, Nainiae lowered her head first and paid her respect.

After that… It didn’t really lead to a conversation.

“Hmph!”

Annabelle was thinking about making a fool out of Nainiae, Riley's servant, but she soon snorted and started to walk again.

"He dared to ignore me? Just watch. I'll make him regret it. How could... How could a Lazy Sword dare to..."

Annabelle mumbled as she walked past Nainiae.

With the voice now behind her, Nainiae lifted her head. Nainiae narrowed her eye as she looked at the back of Annabelle walking away.

Judging from the situation, it looked like it could only lead to a trouble for Riley. It didn't look like anything good would come of this for Riley.

"...Nainiae. I kept you waiting, didn't I?"

It was when Nainiae was steadily staring at Annabelle's back.

Sera, who went off the tangent and had gone somewhere else for a moment, rushed back and tapped Nainiae on her shoulder.

"..."

"Nainiae?"

Sera was standing right next to Nainiae. When she couldn't hear any response, Sera checked the look on Nainiae's face behind hand and tilted her head to the sides.

"Miss Sera. Could you please wait in the training arena?"

"Pardon?"

Nainiae just finished the dishes, the last work for the day.

Nainiae agonized over how she was going to start explaining. Nainiae continued,

"Actually, I don't think I completely wiped off the stain on the very last dish that I washed. I think I should go check it."

Chapter 67 - Picking A Fight (Part 2)

“That lass... It seems there might be something more to her than meets the eye.”

It was at Ryan’s room.

With his older brother standing in front of him, Lloyd started to explain what he saw.

Two days ago, Lloyd saw the wooden sword that Nainiae swung sliced the training dummy in half. It was still clear in Lloyd’s head.

“I have no idea how she did it. It’s intriguing.”

“How about her form?”

“Her form was clean, but it was a basic stance.”

Having heard what Lloyd said, Ryan murmured as he fiddled with his chin.

“In that case... It couldn’t be that she is just powerful or is good at waving her hand around. It would be the most plausible explanation to assume she used mana without realizing it.”

‘She’s a maid who claims to have never held a sword in her life, yet she sliced the Iphalleta House’s training dummy in half? In one

strike? On top of that, it was a clean cut?'

Ryan, who was mumbling, had a pretty serious look on his face. As expected, the maid that Riley brought in was not an ordinary person.

'I had a bad feeling about this all along, but where did he find a maid like that...'

That story was already all over the place. It was the story about how Nainiae cut down a training dummy in half with just one strike.

Even Stein was interested. He was watching Nainiae.

Because of the situation with Nainiae, Ryan was concerned Riley might get pretty high points in the successor competition.

"If it is possible, I wish I could see it again."

Lloyd mumbled as he bit his lips.

After all, he was the second son of the Iphalleta House.

He was a swordsman, it was only natural to have emotions such as admiration or envy toward others who had better swordsmanship.

“What should we do?”

Lloyd was mumbling as he bit his lips, and how he asked Ryan a question.

Ryan had to make his thoughts brief, and he had to make a quick decision.

Lloyd was asking Ryan about what to do with Nainiae, Riley’s maid.

“Should I put pressure…on her?”

Lloyd asked carefully to his older brother.

It was understandable.

It didn’t seem like a good idea to do something to Nainiae, a maid that Stein would be watching.

“Hm…”

It was a problem that required a serious thought.

Ryan fiddled with his chin. He was holding himself from giving a reply. It was at that moment.

“…Ha!”

Baam!

The closed door opened wide and Annabelle walked in.

Judging from her red face, it didn’t look like she came with a good news.

“Annabelle?”

“Sister in law?”

Shocked by Annabelle’s sudden entrance, Ryan and Lloyd called her.

Step, step…

In her high heels, Annabelle walked in and frustratedly plummeted in the sofa.

“Did something happen outside?”

“Big bro. There’s no need to even guess. It must have been Riley. He must have done something bad to her…”

“…No.”

Annabelle opened her mouth and interrupted Lloyd.

With a question mark above his head, Lloyd looked at Annabelle,

“There wasn’t an incident…like that…”

Annabelle said as she bit her lips.

Again, she said there wasn’t an incident like that.

‘…It would be best if you didn’t touch my young master. Of course, I would like to also advise you against running your mouth carelessly.’

Those were the words she heard from Nainiae just now in the corridor. Annabelle ran into Nainiae the maid again in the corridor, and Annabelle just came from being threatened by Nainiae.

It appeared that Nainiae was a mage who had been hiding her true identity. Annabelle thought about how Nainiae made threats with a ball of flame floating on her palm. Annabelle’s shoulders were still shivering a little.

‘I heard you are a daughter of a famous House, however… That is not all that important to me. I only act for the sake of my young master.’

Annabelle was half scared and half infuriated.

‘That girl, she is just a lowly commoner, yet she dared to talk to me like that?’

The thought was dominating her head at the moment.

‘I’m not expecting an apology from you. So, I’ll advise…no. I’ll warn you once again. If you pester my young master again, I’ll demonstrate my abilities to you. Since you are well educated, you do understand that this is the first and the last warning, right?’

It was a threat that stated Nainiae will demonstrate her abilities if Annabelle displeased her.

‘She is just a maid, but she dared to make threats to a daughter of a nobility?'

This was the first time Annabelle ever heard of a threat like this. She felt there wasn’t anything more humiliating than this.

“…”

Although Lloyd couldn’t tell, Ryan noticed that Annabelle’s shoulders were shivering.

However, he didn’t know why she was choking in fear or why she

was so infuriated.

‘So, although I don’t know how many Circles she has, she is saying that she’s a mage, is that right?’

Annabelle tightly grabbed the sofa’s armrest.

When Nainiae made threats to Annabelle, Nainiae didn’t say anything about how many Circles she had.

Recalling this, Annabelle made up her mind.

‘I don’t know where she learned the magic, but I bet she is at three or four Circles at most.’

Annabelle knew that even three or four Circles was enough to hurt her.

Nainiae’s threat was effective.

This fact was the reason why Annebelle was so infuriated.

‘Engaging a Five Circle or above mage is enough to kill Nainiae.'

Because of her desire for revenge, Annabelle started to show deadly aura.

“Excuse me, Young Master Ryan.”

“Yes?”

“May I use a homing pigeon…for a personal reason?”

“A homing pigeon?”

“Yes!”

Annabelle responded with a smile.

It was a perfect control of her facial expression that belied what she was really feeling.

A day, or two…and subsequently… After several days have passed, Riley, who had been excusing himself from having to greet Annabelle, was finally going to see her when she was about to leave the mansion.

“…Riley. You can’t do that to her. Ms. Annabelle is a daughter of a nobility family.”

“That is, the thing is.”

Riley was at it because Iris advised him.

Riley said he will be having a word with Ian for reporting the incident with Annabelle to Iris.

Riley walked the corridor with Iris. He forced himself to hide the expression on his face that screamed just how annoyed he was.

He was annoyed because they were on their way to greet Annabelle in an official capacity.

“Her dress looked too much like a maid. There was the thing about the lace on her dress too.”

Riley mumbled and complained as he thought about the conversation with Annabelle a few days ago when Annabelle was pestering him.

Of course, Annabelle’s dress didn’t really look like a maid dress in Riley’s opinion.

“Ugh…”

Watching her son scratching the back of his head awkwardly, Iris sighed and continued.

“It probably could not be helped. Since it is dinner time now, looks like we could greet her by joining her for the dinner. You

need to apologize to her properly, do you understand?”

Although she just sighed, she smiled soon after. Watching this, Riley responded as if he understood.

“Yes.”

After walking for about three minutes, they reached the front of Annabelle’s room.

Iris first fixed her son’s clothes. After that, she raised her hand and knocked on the door.

“Who is it?”

“Ms. Annabelle. It’s Iris.”

“...Oh!”

A surprised response could be heard from inside.

Along with the stepping sounds of the high heels on the ground, the door opened, and Annabelle revealed herself. She welcomed Iris.

“Lady Iris, welco-...”

“...”

Annabelle’s eyes met with Riley who was standing next to Iris. That made her voice stop for a moment.

However, she smiled refreshingly soon as if nothing happened. She greeted both, including Riley, with a smiling face.

“Welcome! Young Master Riley. You are here too?”

“Yes. I was thinking if you would like to join us for dinner. You didn’t have dinner already, right?”

Riley asked with a refreshing smile.

Having seen this, Annabelle responded with a smile as if she was trying not to lose,

“Of course. As much as you want.”

Riley and Iris lead the way toward the dining room. Meanwhile, Annabelle stood there and watched the back of Riley and Iris. Annabelle’s face started to twitch.

It was because of the maid that was always sticking next to Riley

like glue.

'...It would be best if you didn't touch my young master.'

Nainiae, who was sticking right next to Riley, casually turned her head to look at Annabelle.

Nainiae looked at Annabelle with her narrowly open eyes. Annabelle felt like Nainiae was threatening her again.

Annabelle tightly grabbed her skirt.

"...Kuk."

"Nainiae, Sera is in charge of the kitchen today, right?"

Iris, who was leading the way in the front, asked Nainiae.

Having heard the question, Nainiae immediately changed the look on her face and lowered her head.

"Yes, Lady Iris. For today's dinner..."

Nainiae summarized what would be on the dinner table.

Meanwhile, Annabelle was following the group from the back as she watched the back of Nainiae. The inside of Annabelle was

boiling.

Riley did it once, and Nainiae did it once as well.

They both seriously spoiled her mood, but as if that was not enough, Nainiae even threatened her. This was the reason why Annabelle's insides was boiling.

'How dare…'

There was one thing that made her even more infuriated.

It was the fact that she was shaking in fear because of Nainiae's threat with a gray colored flame.

Annabelle couldn't snap back and say 'Do you have any idea who you are talking to? Just go ahead if you think you can do it' because of Nainiae's flame.

'…You just watch. Just wait and see.'

Annabelle thought about it over and over. Riley, Iris and Annabelle finally arrived at the dining room.

It looked like Stein, Ryan and Lloyd already came by and left the dining room. There were a few maids and butlers carrying empty dishes.

“Annabelle, I’m sorry about what happened before. I’m really dense, so. Haha.”

Riley said as he cut the meal on the dish with a knife.

“…I… It’s fine.”

Annabelle was scratching the dish with her dining knife. For now, Annabelle responded politely with a smile.

It was because she could not afford to reveal her blade edge of vengeance.

“So, when are you going back? When did you say it was again?”

“Ah, I think I’ll be heading back as soon as the carriage from the family arrives. I’m not in position to stay here for long. I also have personal matters to handle.”

She had two personal matters.

First one was investigating about ‘Tess Trading Company.’ It was Ryan that asked her that favor.

“Excuse me. A carriage has arrived at the mansion.”

“Ah!”

A butler came into the dining room to say a carriage has arrived.

Annabelle's face brightened in an instant.

The second personal matter was about the Five Circles mage that she called. She wanted to have him obliterate Nainiae.

"It must be the carriage from my family!?"

Annabelle's plan was to expose that a mere maid threatened her. The plan was to use that to corner Riley and make him lose the competition for Iphalleta House's successorship.

She was certain this was going to help Ryan, her fiancé.

"No. It is not from Mogared House."

"...Pardon?"

Until now, Annebelle had a bright expression on her face. Now, a question mark floated up on her face.

'If it is not the carriage I called for, then where did it come from?'

"It is a carriage from the Solia Temple."

“Solia…Temple?”

Annabelle tilted her head to the sides.

‘Solia Temple? Why would a carriage from the Solia Temple be here all of a sudden?’

“Ah, is it because of that?”

Riley mumbled with his mouth full.

Annabelle noticed that Riley seemed like he knew something about it. That made Annabelle to have yet another question mark float up above her head.

“Looks like he is here.”

The butler, who came in to tell everyone about the carriage from the Temple, left the scene.

Immediately after the butler left, an old man in white walked in.

Even at a glance, it was obvious he was a high ranking priest.

“Oh my? Archbishop Rebethra?”

Iris greeted him first.

“Haha. Lady Iris. Have you been well?”

“Of course! What brings you here?”

Annabelle had no idea what this was about, so she still had a curious look on her face.

‘Is he here to see Lady Iris?’

Annabelle knew Iris had an illness. It was an illness that Iris had for a long time.

‘Is he here to check up on her illness?’

Annabelle was thinking that. In that moment,

“Young Master Riley, and…”

With his head, the Archbishop Reberthra bowed to Nainiae who was standing next to Riley.

“Ms. Nainiae… It’s been a while.”

“…?”

Annabelle was surprised that he addressed the maid so respectfully.

Clueless about what's happening, Annabelle's face became weirder.

Chapter 68 - A Six Circles Mage

“Instead of standing there, please come and have a seat.”

Iris got up from her seat and recommended a seat for Rebethra.

Accepting her generosity, Rebethra sat down.

Iris was reaching for a fork on the table, but she asked as she lowered her head.

“Have you had dinner?”

“No. It’s embarrassing...but looks like I’ll have to be in your debt.”

“Actually, I’m glad you haven’t had dinner yet. I would have been disappointed if I didn’t get to have you eat dinner with us. Nainiae?”

Iris called Nainiae, who was standing in the back, and asked for a serving of dinner for Rebethra.

“Yes, Lady Iris.”

Nainiae bowed and received her order.

Nainiae left for the kitchen for a moment.

Impressed by the politeness that Nainiae just displayed, Rebethra said,

“Oh my... Ms. Nainiae became a maid in Iphalleta House. Even though I’m seeing it with my own eyes, I still cannot believe it.”

“She is a nice child. She is diligent too.”

“Right now, is she serving Young Master Riley?”

“Yes. It turned out that way.”

Rebethra was a famous archbishop from Solia Temple.

Even Annabelle knew of him well.

‘He said Ms. Nainiae? He is an archbishop, but he called her with respect like that?’

It did not appear to be out of his polite mannerism. How he greeted Nainiae was too proper and respectful.

“Excuse me for asking this so late. Who is this young lady?”

While Annabelle was in a deep thought with a vacant stare,

Rebethra turned his head and asked Iris.

“She is the fiancée of our Young Master Ryan. She is a daughter of Marquis Mogared Family. Please introduce yourselves. This is Archbishop Rebethra from the Solia Holy Temple.”

“Ah, it’s you, Ms. Annabelle!”

Having heard what Iris said, Rebethra opened his eyes wide and started to compliment Annabelle’s good looks. It seemed he have heard rumors about her.

“I kept hearing rumors that you are beautiful... It seems the rumors I have heard didn’t do justice.”

“Not at all. That’s too much of a compliment.”

They exchanged greetings briefly.

Afterwards, Annabelle had her gaze toward her dish, but she turned her head and looked at Rebethra.

It was because this did not make sense to her no matter how much she thought about it.

“But Archbishop...”

“Yes?”

“Why are you…using respectful language toward that maid?”

Annabelle had an anxious look on her face. Annabelle asked carefully.

Having heard her question, a question mark floated above Rebethra’s head. He asked Annabelle,

“What do you mean? Why do you ask?”

Rebethra turned his head to look at Iris and Riley.

Riley looked like he was not interested in the conversation. He was focused on enjoying his meal.

As for Iris, she only had an awkward look on her face.

“By any chance, are the people of this mansion unaware of it?”

“That is…”

Having heard Rebethra’s question, Iris blurred the end of her sentence. She agonized over what to tell him. Eventually, she said with a slightly embarrassed smile,

“Yes. I totally forgot about explaining that.”

“Oh my…”

“Pardon me… Just what are you…”

Annabelle revealed to everyone that she was anxious. She was not able to take it anymore, so she butted into their conversation.

She was well aware that it was quite rude, but the situation was such that it was difficult for her to assess what was happening.

“Here. I brought your meal.”

Soon thereafter, Nainiae, who went to the kitchen, returned to the dining room and laid down the dish for Rebethra. Nainiae returned to standing behind Riley.

“Ah, thank you, Ms. Nainiae.”

Again, Rebethra spoke to Nainiae in respectful tone.

Annabelle was not touching food. Instead, she had a confused look on her face. Noticing this, Rebethra, who picked up a piece of food with a fork, said,

“You asked why I’m using respectful language towards Ms.

Nainiae, right?”

“…Yes.”

After Annabelle’s response, Rebethra took a moment to look at how Nainiae was doing.

“That is because Ms. Nainiae…”

After observing how Nainiae was standing behind Riley, Rebethra concluded that it would be all right for him to explain it. He continued,

“…is the Six Circles mage that played a big role in stopping Astroa during the incident last time in Lower Solia.”

“…?!”

Crash!

The fork that Annabelle held was dropped to the plate and made a loud noise.

It was revealed that the maid that was hired in the mansion recently was a Six Circles mage.

Of course… The entire mansion was turned upside down.

“So, Riley…”

It was at Stein’s office.

There were three people there to have a conversation. Needless to say, the atmosphere was pretty odd.

Stein called for Riley and the maid that served him. Facing the two in front of him, Stein held his palm on his forehead and rubbed it. It looked like he was having a headache.

“I think an explanation is due. How did it all come to this?”

“About that… What you have heard is everything. There’s nothing more to explain.”

Riley scratched his cheek in a leisurely manner. Watching Riley doing this, Stein moved his hand from his forehead to his eye.

“I hear you heard from Ian?”

“I heard that she is a mage. I didn’t hear that she is a Six Circles mage!”

Bam!

Stein slammed the desk with his fist and threw a hissy fit.

Having noticed the look on his father's face, Riley's shoulders flinched. Right after that, Riley smiled like a good natured human being and put forth his palm.

"I have no talent for explaining things. Still, I can roughly answer your questions."

Tsk!

Stein was well aware of this about his youngest son. Stein clicked his tongue and sighed. It looked like he was thinking this could not be helped. He asked the first question,

"I'll ask first. Is she really…"

He asked as he looked at Nainiae, who was standing next to Riley.

"…a Six Circles mage?"

"Yes."

Riley answered promptly.

This was better than showing him her magic since Stein didn't

know much about magic. Stein was not going to be able to tell the differences between Five, Six or Seven Circles magic spells.

"If that is the case, then why?"

Stein asked as he glared at Nainiae. He looked like he was about to punch a hole through her with his gaze.

'What is she doing here if she is a Six Circles mage?'

"Why are you serving Riley as a maid? You don't have to do this."

She was a Six Circles mage. If the word got out, people from cities everywhere would be all over her and begging her to be their city's mage.

After all, a Six Circles mage was considered as powerful as someone classified as a grand mage.

She appeared to be in her teens, so she had a bright future ahead. That's what Stein was thinking.

"Iris told me not to scold her too much. Iris said she is a kind child. However, what I'm about to ask is a different matter. She could be a spy or have some other intent for coming to this mansion. Do you understand?"

Stein was the master of the Iphalleta House.

His reaction was understandable.

He had to consider the possibility, and the situation warranted such a concern.

“Yes, well… That makes sense.”

Stein had a serious look in his eyes.

Meanwhile, in front of Stein, Riley scratched his hair.

Riley’s response was so dense and nonchalant. It was making the person watching this to feel overcome with a sense of futility.

“So, Nainiae…”

Stein felt like he was going to explode from frustration if he stared at Riley any longer.

In the end, he decided to turn his gaze away from Riley. Now, he started to stare at Nainiae as if he was going to punch a hole through her with his gaze.

“I presume there is no need for me to address you with a respectful language. Is that right? After all, you voluntarily became Riley’s maid.”

“Yes.”

Nainiae gently lowered her head to express respect toward Stein.

“I’ll ask. You are a Six Circles mage. Why are you doing this then?”

“…”

Having heard the question, Nainie was hesitant to answer. She held her lips closed.

It appeared she was thoroughly considering what to say because she could not afford to respond so carelessly.

“You had a big role in apprehending Astroa in Solia… You are in a very good position to be treated accordingly for your exploit. Why are you working as a maid instead? You even hid your true identity as well. For what?”

Having heard additional questions by Stein, Nainiae carefully shook her head and opened her mouth.

“I was not trying to hide it.”

“You were not?”

“It is just that I forgot to tell everyone.”

“Forgot?”

“Yes.”

It was true.

Ever since Nainiae came to the mansion, she was extremely busy.

Ever since she started to work as a maid and even had the swordsmanship training, she felt like having two of her was not going to be enough.

She was actually really busy, but despite that, she never complained.

If anyone were to ask why, it was because,

“I like the diligent lifestyle in the mansion and working while breaking sweat as a maid. If you are asking why I’m working as a maid, that’s all there is to it.”

It was because she felt like she regained something that she lost when she was at the Magic Tower.

Stein steadily gazed upon Nainiae's eye.

His gaze was as expected of the master of Iphalleta House.

It felt like you could get sliced just by meeting his gaze. His gaze was sharp like that.

"..."

However, Nainiae was no pushover.

Stein was glaring at her as if he was going to punch a hole through her with his gaze, but she didn't even flinch. Instead, she only looked right back at him.

She was standing her ground proudly.

In a corner of her mind, she also had her pride as Riley's maid.

"All right. Fine."

People say that there are instances where a simple exchange of gazes is far more effective than a thousand words.

This was one of those.

Stein didn't let it show, but he was actually impressed by Nainiae's gaze. Soon thereafter, he asked the third question.

"I heard you followed Riley from Solia. Is that right?"

"Yes."

It was the truth, so there was no need to hide it.

So, Nainiae responded right away.

"How much did you know about Riley?"

"...Father?"

Riley felt that the conversation was going off the tangent to the wrong place. Riley furrowed his brows.

Stein raised his right hand and made Riley to close his mouth. Stein continued to stare at Nainiae's eyes.

"I'm aware that the rumors...are not good."

Although Riley received a medal of honor from Solia Castle recently, even now, the rumors about Riley were mostly bad.

Because of how Riley had been behaving until now, the Lazy

Sword trademark stamped on him was still firmly stuck there.

His reputation as the Lazy Sword had not left Riley.

“What do you think of Riley?”

“…?”

“You are a maid that serves Riley, so I would like to hear your thoughts.”

“…”

It was an unexpected question.

Nainiae had a blank look on her face for a moment, but she soon had a refreshing smile on her face.

Meanwhile, Stein was looking at Nainiae’s face, and he got a glimpse of her scar through her hair. Having noticed her scars, Stein narrowed his eyes.

“He is a good man.”

“Hey.”

Riley bumped Nainiae with his elbow.

“He is very kind, a lot more than how others know him as. Also…”

Bump

Bump

Riley kept on bumping Nainiae with his elbow.

Nainiae moved her eye toward Riley and noticed Riley's face. He was warning her with the look on his face. Riley didn't want her to say anything more. As if she figured she can't do this anymore, she smiled awkwardly and quickly stopped talking.

"Until the day my life runs out... I think I will have no regrets even if I served him until that day."

Autumn.

No. It could be up to the summer.

She didn't have much time left, and she was going to spend it for Riley's sake.

By doing so, she wanted to find the meaning of her life.

She mumbled those thoughts in her mind.

"..."

Stein didn't know about Nainiae's remaining lifespan.

However… It looked like he understood the sincerity in her gaze.

The corner of Stein's lips was slightly tilted up. That was the proof.

"I see. Did Ian make your life miserable?"

Stein smiled widely and asked.

'As expected, they are father and son.'

Nainiae noticed that Stein's smile was similar to Riley. Having watched it, Nainiae had a vacant look on her face for the moment. She said,

"Pardon?"

"That friend of mine doesn't like mages very much. I think there will be many instances of quarrels with him. What do you think? Won't that be of an inconvenience to you?"

Riley quietly turned his head away and started to laugh.

It was because Ian could get detached from Riley as his servant depending on Nainiae's response.

"N-No! Mr. Ian is actually looking after me in many ways. He is

teaching me so I won't make mistakes. He is being strict for that purpose, so no, not at all."

Nainiae's face was a little red. She looked a little embarrassed.

She was like that because, based on the flow of the conversation, she felt like Stein acknowledged her.

"Is that so? Well then..."

Stein slowly turned his eyes and looked at Riley.

Riley, who stood there with a nonchalant look, met his father's eyes.

"Continue to...take good care of Riley."

Stein finished the conversation and tilted his head to gesture that they could go now.

"Well then, I'll be going now."

Riley turned around first and escaped the room.

"..."

Nainiae stood there with a blank look on her face. She regained

her senses and bowed all the way down toward Stein.

It was an excessively large motion for a bow. It looked like she completely forgot the body posture education she received from Sera or Ian. Still, Stein didn't mind it much.

"I'll... I'll try hard."

Nainiae straightened her back. Because she felt like she was acknowledged, her face was quite red. It showed she was feeling very happy like nothing could top this.

"Hmm..."

Nainiae quickly tumbled her way out of the room to follow Riley.

Stein was now left alone in the room. He started tapping the finger he had on the desk.

"A Six Circles mage..."

'How did my youngest son, who I had no hopes or expectations for, ended up having someone with such a talent working for him?'

Stein was still tapping the desk with his finger. Before he realized, he had a satisfied smile on his face.

Chapter 69 - A Six Circles Mage (Part 2)

“Well then, please stop by later. I will always welcome you.”

Riley had Nainiae take the gift that Rebethra put forward. At the same time, Riley made a gesture with his hand.

It meant he roughly understood the meaning.

“Well, if I feel like it, I will.”

The attitude Riley had toward Rebethra was very rude. It would have been no surprise if someone saw this and cringed.

Despite that, Rebethra didn’t even flinch an eyebrow. Instead, through his entire stay here in the mansion, he maintained the respectful attitude.

“Please be safe on your way.”

“Young master, I’ll be praying for your well being as well.”

They exchanged farewells in the form of formalities. After seeing the Holy Temple’s carriage leave the mansion, Riley turned around and snorted as he glanced at the gift box that Nainiae received from Rebethra.

“He is making it way too obvious. Too obvious.”

Following Riley, Nainiae also looked below to see the gift box. She asked as she tilted her head to the side,

“What’s so obvious?”

“His official story is that he is here to check up on my mother’s illness, but the actual business is something else. What did you think it was?”

“Ah.”

It seemed Nainiae got what Riley was saying.

Nainiae, who was looking at the gift box, opened her mouth with a blank stare.

“Is it about that thing that Priesia… I mean Priestess Priesia said last time?”

Back in the Temple, Nainiae and Priesia became friends, so she had been calling Priesia by the name without the title. Out of habit, Nainiae casually called her by the name, but she corrected herself and looked at Riley.

“Right. It’s about that.”

Riley nodded and responded.

It was about the divine message.

Riley was thinking about the favor that Priesia asked. It was about slaying a dragon that was going to appear in Solia Castle soon.

“The real reason he came to the mansion yesterday is probably not about checking up on my mother’s illness. He probably came to give me that gift. What I’m saying is that this is a bribe.”

“Bribe…”

“Since you were fed, pay us back by working as much as you had been fed by us. Well, that’s probably what he is thinking.”

Riley was walking with his fingers locked between two hands and having them placed on the back of his head.

Nainiae carefully asked,

“Excuse me, young master, by any chance…”

“Are you insane?”

Riley felt like he knew what she was going to ask, so he cringed. He found the question unpleasant.

“Obviously, I won’t do it. Why would I bother with something that troublesome?”

“As I thought. That would be, right?”

Nainiae smiled awkwardly as she mumbled.

“He dares to think I’m a tool... He must be thinking I could be talked into being taken advantage of if he served up a few bribes. He doesn’t realize I’m a bastard who has seen it all.”

It seemed that the nobilities of this world had a pride of a specific kind.

It was about being sure to return the favor after receiving help.

It appeared that the Temple, hence Rebethra, had a plan to invoke that sense of obligation out of Riley and lead him to act... However, unfortunately, the person they were trying to do it to was Riley.

“Tell them this. Over my dead body. Tell them to gut my stomach.”

Actually, Riley was thinking about taking advantage of the Temple as if it was a tool. He was going to suck the honey right out of it. He cracked a smile and mumbled.

“Gut…stomach?”

It sounded pretty violent. Nainiae was concerned because of it, so she asked as she looked at Riley’s stomach.

“The Lower Solia doesn’t have a phrase like that about gutting stomach?”

“…?”

“It means I don’t care what happens afterwards although I received something.”

“Ah.”

Having heard Riley’s explanation describing it in plain words, Nainiae thought about what he meant as she coughed out a word of exclamation.

It was to make sure she does not forget what it means later and get confused again when Riley uses the phrase again.

“The divine message was definitely about a dragon, right?”

Having finished memorizing the phrase about gutting stomach, she nodded and then mumbled about the dragon.

“It turned out to be something that should not have been asked to you.”

During that day, in the Solia Castle’s bathroom, when Riley was asked by Priesia to do the favor, Riley suddenly started laughing as if he found the favor to be ridiculous. Nainiae felt like she could finally understand why.

“How would you feel if someone asked you out of the blue to slay your friend?”

Nainiae thought about Andal, a dragon who was on an amusement trip by having himself transformed into a human and running a pub in a town. Nainiae had a suppressed laugh.

“I think I would have found it funny.”

Nainiae was in middle of imagining about Sera insisting and begging Nainiae and saying ‘I’m very sorry, but please slay Priestess Priesia.’

“That’s right. It is ridiculous.”

As if she was indicating that she was not going to ask about it anymore, she used the ‘leather bracelet,’ one of Astroa’s belongings, to bring out the dimensional container from thin air. She placed the gift into the container and said,

“Young master, after this, I was thinking we could have the magic lesson until dinner time… What do you think?”

“All right. I think the timing works out well.”

Riley led the way, and Nainiae followed behind him.

“She is a Six Circles mage? What nonsense.”

“…”

It was at Ryan’s room.

The fact about Nainiae, her being the Six Circles mage that played a big role in suppressing Solia’s Grand Mage Astroa, became known to everyone in mansion. Lloyd was in a state of panic.

“Gosh. Like I said before, I thought there was something more to her… If this is the case, then what I saw before makes sense too.”

“Lloyd.”

“She used magic! She used magic to obliterate the training dummy in a single strike! She must have used a wind magic to…”

“Lloyd.”

Having heard his name being called for the second time, Lloyd closed his mouth that he was using to yap away. Lloyd looked at his older brother.

“For now, just proceed.”

“…I understand.”

“Annabelle, did you know about this?”

Ryan asked Annabelle who was sitting in front of him.

Annabelle, not being able to refuse to answer, nodded.

Her hand was shivering. It was indicating that something did happen.

“Still, I didn’t know…that she is a Six Circles mage.”

She wasn’t just any Six Circles mage.

Nainiae was a powerful practitioner of magic that brought down Grand Mage Astroa in a single strike when he was flying in the sky using the fly magic.

“Just how? How did Riley get…”

“It must have something to do with the medal of honor that he received from the Castle.”

Just like his father had, Ryan started to tap the table with his finger.

It looked like it must be a habit of his that came out when he got in a deep thought.

“What are you going to do? We can’t just sit and watch. We need to go achieve a great exploit of our own…”

They had to win the competition for the successorship.

They had to because that was the only way to bring back their mother who was kicked out.

In this situation, the news about Riley having Nainiae, a Six Circles mage who wants to serve him, was not pleasant to hear.

“That’s right! I heard that there is a dark mage that’s wreaking havoc all over the place and causing headaches. How about we go cut off this dark mage’s head?”

Ryan sighed with a clam face.

It wasn't that he didn't know how his little brother was feeling. However, it was going to be a difficult one to actually carry out. That was the reason.

"In that case, how about just telling people that the lass named Nainiae is the dark mage? It just so happens that her appearance..."

"That won't work."

With his face twitching, Lloyd was giving out his opinion.

Watching him, Annabelle quietly shook her head.

"I personally called for someone from the Magic Tower and asked. Her exploit was officially recognized. Also, she was even considered as the candidate for being the master of the Magic Tower. Because of this... I don't think your idea would be possible."

That someone, who she called from the Magic Tower, was the Five Circles mage that Annabelle called to return the favor to Nainiae for having humiliated her. However, the mage, after seeing that it was Nainiae in the mansion, simply said 'I can't do anything to that person.'

"Ha!"

Lloyd, acting frustrated, got up from his chair.

He started to grind his teeth and throw fists toward the wall.

He couldn't think of any other way to handle the situation with Nainiae.

"Damn it..."

"Lloyd. What's today's date?"

"Today?"

Having heard his brother's question, Lloyd, who just slammed the wall, tilted his head to the sides.

Lloyd was not able to answer.

Watching this, Annabelle responded instead,

"To be exact, starting tomorrow, probably, the summer will start. But...why are you asking about that?"

Summer.

Thinking about the season which was about to change soon, Ryan narrowed his eyes.

It was at the mansion's library.

Having finished their dinner, Riley and Nainiae were back in the library to study about magic. There were a few books open on the ground. They were studying about time magic.

"Time magic... It certainly is an interesting area of study. I think the magic could be used in various ways if we researched the time magic."

Although Nainiae was a Six Circles mage, even Nainiae didn't know much about time magic. Because of this, Nainiae had to study the area first before she could teach Riley about it.

The book she was reading was not about a mage. Instead, to the very end, it was about a mage swordsman. Because of this, the book had insufficient amount of explanations... However, she didn't mind it much.

"Things like the traveling speed of a magic is generally fixed. However, looking at it from theoretical perspective, if you utilize this aspect, I think it would be possible to shoot a fireball that would be fast enough to be undetectable to eyes."

It could be due to the experimental drugs from the Magic Tower, but her memory was pretty good.

She was able to mumble like that because what she read in the books when she was in the Magic Tower still remained in her head.

“I see. It’s intriguing. I like it…”

On the other hand.

Riley was listening to Nainiae’s mumbling through one ear and letting it out through the other ear. His eyes were lacking focus.

“Why do I have to be so bored?”

Riley’s eyes shifted in a three seconds interval.

They shifted toward the slowly falling stream of water on the right side, and then they shifted toward the books that were waiting to be read by him. His eyes moved back and forth like that.

“This is the Two Circles’…what again?”

“It’s the Two Circles’ slow magic.”

Riley asked the question.

Having heard the question, Nainiae responded.

The magic that Riley was practicing at the moment was Slow, a Two Circles time magic.

It was a magic that used mana to make the subject move slower.

“It’s boring me to death to just watch it drop.”

They had a glass container with water in it. The container was tilted to let the water fall by the gravity, and he was practicing the magic on it to make the water fall slower.

“I think it would be more fun to do something that is faster. Can we change the order of doing things?”

For the moment, Nainiae became a teacher instead of a maid. With an apologetic face, Nainiae asked,

“Young master, by any chance, have you ever tried riding a bicycle?”

“A bicycle?”

‘They have bicycles in this world?’

Although Riley never tried it in this world’s life, he had in his past life, so he told her that he had experiences in riding it.

“When learning how to ride a bicycle, we learn how to stop safely first before riding it fast, right? It’s to make sure you don’t get hurt.”

It was to prevent accidents.

The explanation was an obvious one, but it made sense.

Tsk.

Riley clicked his tongue and redirected his gaze back to the glass bottle where water was falling. He started to focus on the glass bottle again.

“It doesn’t feel like I’m using magic at all. It is somehow really boring.”

“Please be patient for a little while longer. At this pace, you will be able to get to the next step very soon.”

“When is the next step?”

“I’ll teach you the next step if you can make the falling water to stay in the air for two seconds.”

“Hm…”

Riley had his chin supported by his palm as he looked at the falling stream of water that was falling slower due to the time magic. Riley mumbled,

“Now that I think about it, it is going to be summer soon.”

“It will be.”

“It will be hot, right?”

“It will be…right?”

Nainiae was studying time magic that she was going to teach Riley. She turned her head and looked at him.

“I hate hot weather.”

Having heard her young master mumbling about how he hates hot weather, Nainiae tightened her fists and said,

“Don’t worry, young master! I can make it cool for you!”

“That means I’ll die from the heat during the morning and afternoon.”

“That is…”

Nainiae blurred the end of sentence as she thought about Ian greeting Riley with a smile and saying ‘Haha! Young master! It’s a great morning again today!’

It was because Nainiae could be next to Riley only during the evening and night.

Ian was the one that served Riley during outside of those time periods.

This was the ‘line in the sand’ that Ian proposed.

“To say it bluntly, Ian’s fanning is the worst.”

Riley made a tight fist with his hand that was open.

The water inside the glass bottle, which was falling slowly, started to fall at its normal speed.

“Ugh… Now that it has come to this, that’s the only answer.”

Riley was mumbling on in a frustrated tone.

Having heard this, Nainiae was feeling sorry for Ian.

Chapter 70 - Summer

"... It's hot."

The month changed.

Riley was under a garden tree's shadow and killing time. He murmured again.

"It's hot."

He had said it so many times. Countless times.

"Ah... It's too hot."

"Young Master."

"...?"

Riley, who was lying all stretched out while leaning against the tree, moved his eyes after hearing someone's voice calling for him.

"It will only feel hotter if you keep saying it is hot. How about you think of something else?"

It was Ian.

‘Look who’s talking. You are standing in the sun and sweating all over. How could you say that?’

Thinking that, Riley asked.

“Aren’t you hot?”

“If you change your attitude, it is possible to not feel hot…”

“Cut the nonsense.”

Riley furrowed his brows and interrupted Ian’s words.

It was summer.

Summer came.

It was the time period where the sunlight was at its hottest.

It was no use even if Riley surrounded his entire body with mana.

By the order of nature, it was still hot.

“It’s not like I’m mentally ill… It’s hot, so I should say it is hot. Am I supposed to say ‘Oh my! It’s so nice and cool?’ Should I?”

“Ugh. Young Master. That is a problem for you. It’s because you are not moving. If you broke some sweat as a youth, you would actually welcome a hot weather like this...”

“Bullcrap! Do dogs have horns?”

As if he was trying to tell Ian to stop, Riley waved around his right arm.

Ian’s face and neck was full of sweat.

If anyone was watching the two just to see who was going to collapse from heat exhaustion, it was probably apparent that Ian was in danger of collapsing that way. It looked that serious.

“It’s a matter of mental power.”

As if he was trying not to lose, Ian said one more thing.

Riley’s eyebrows wiggled.

“Ian, by any chance, do you want to quit?”

“Haha. Have you forgotten who recommended me for this job? There is Lady Iris, so... I think you can set aside a worry like that.”

“...”

Riley tightly shut his eyes and cursed inside.

To Riley, who always got stretched out from the heat during summer, as if that wasn't enough, Ian's existence was about as annoying as cicada or mosquito. However, Ian was also someone who Riley would miss if Riley sent him away.

"Ian."

After barely managing to suppress his frustration, Riley called Ian.

"Yes!"

Ian responded with a strong voice.

Unlike ordinary people that got warn out from the heat, Ian was the type that got stronger from the heat. He was an odd one like that.

Riley's frustration, which he just suppressed, came right back up. Riley mumbled.

"You. You are really terrible at fanning. Did you know that?"

"..."

Having heard what Riley just said, Ian, who was diligently fanning Riley with a fan, stopped fanning.

“You are absolutely terrible.”

It seemed Riley realized that attack on Ian was effective. He said it once again.

In fact, Ian was bad at fanning. It was enough to add the adjective words, ‘absolute worst,’ to describe his fanning.

“If there is a talent called only picking warm air to fan, then you have a talent.”

There should be cool breeze here and there. However, somehow, Ian only generated warm wind. It was making Riley feel disgusted.

Riley’s internal gauge for discomfort had reached its maximum value. Riley pointed at Ian.

“Really… You are really bad at this…”

“… Yes.”

In the middle of the sentence, Riley got stretched out due to the heat.

Ian's shoulder lost strength and lowered after hearing what Riley said.

From how Ian responded, it seemed that Ian was thinking he was pretty good at fanning.

"... Young Master!"

During a summer day, it was not certain how long Riley and Ian was there stretched out like that.

It was a little after 2 p.m. Nainiae, who just finished her work in the mansion, came to Riley. She rushed to be at his side. She even used 'Blink,' a Four Circles magic that enabled a short range teleportation.

"... Oh! You finished already?"

Riley, who was all stretched out, suddenly changed his attitude and welcomed Nainiae.

Having heard Riley's question, Nainiae gave a refreshing smile and responded,

"Yes. I got things done as fast as I could because I figured you must be feeling hot."

Her face was laced with sweat. That was the proof.

Nainiae, who rushed to finish her work and came right over to Riley, used her magic.

It was to cool Riley’s surroundings.

“First, I’ll vent the air.”

She used Ventilation magic.

It was a Five Circles magic that could cool and the surrounding area's air. It could even clean the area’s air and mana.

She even used a lower level wind magic to generate cool breeze toward her young master. Having finished all that, Nainiae looked at Riley with a concerned face.

“… Ah… I feel like I could live again.”

Riley stretched out again, but this time, in a different pose.

It felt like even his clothes, which were soaked with sweat, were being cleaned.

It made Riley smile.

“Are you… all right?”

When Nainiae carefully asked, Riley mumbled with a face full of contentment.

“Yes. It’s good. It’s perfect.”

“I’m… relieved.”

Nainiae sighed in relief.

In the contrary, the look on Ian’s face was not looking good.

“… Ugh.”

“Young Master, excuse me… I worked hard today.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“Yes!”

To Nainiae, Riley gestured as if he was trying to tell her to come to him.

As if she was waiting for it, like a little puppy, Nainiae approached Riley and carefully leaned her head toward Riley.

“You have done well again today.”

Riley gently patted Nainiae’s head in a natural motion.

How Riley was leisurly patting Nainiae…

The blushing look on Nainiae’s face as she smiled…

The scene looked very natural as if it had happened before.

“Young Master, can’t you say things like that to me too?”

Ian was glaring at Nainiae. Ian’s gaze was full of jealousy.

Instead of an old man, Ian looked more like a child.

Having seen the look on Ian’s face, Riley also said to Ian, as if he was trying to say that he was giving in.

“All right. Ian, you worked hard too.”

Ian had a look on his face. It looked as if he was protesting for a wrong that was done to him. Ian asked Riley,

“Somehow… The tone is different, don’t you think?”

“I think it’s the same. Why are you asking?”

Riley, who mumbled as if he was thinking it was all nonsense, leaned against the tree again.

He never thought it would be this nice to not worry about the heat anymore, thanks to Nainiae.

“Um. As I thought. A mage is the best.”

“… Kup!”

Riley unintentionally said it.

Having heard it, Ian brought out a handkerchief and started to wipe off the tears in his eyes.

“Come on. Mr. Ian. Don’t cry. It’s nothing.”

It was at the mansion’s corridor.

Ian was sniffling due to his runny nose. Sera, who was walking with Ian, was lulling Ian as if he was a child.

“Young Master doesn’t want… kuhup… me to be his…”

“It’s just because of the heat. You know how he becomes irritable like that every summer.”

“I’m crying because I’m not sure if I should be happy or sad. He had been studying recently… but he isn’t studying about swords. He is studying about magic.”

“Ugh…”

Sera sighed as she shook her head.

Ian, who barely managed to stop crying after sniffling several times, ask Sera about Nainiae.

“So, how is she?”

“You mean Nainiae?”

Ian nodded when Sera asked back.

“Well, lately, she is not doing so bad. Actually, I could even say that she is doing a lot better.”

“Better? For instance?”

“In the past, because of the scars on her face, people all clicked their tongues when they had their eyes met with Nainiae, but nowadays, how should I say this, things are completely different?”

“Hm?”

“As Lady Iris said, she is diligent at her work.”

As Iris said, Nainiae was working diligently as a maid.

“There are many people that are looking at Nainiae positively. Although she is a Six Circles mage, she doesn’t use tricks or try to cut corners. Also, we can see that she is working very hard for our Young Master, so…”

Ian couldn’t talk back because they were all true.

Feeling a sense of rivalry, Ian cringed.

Having noticed his face, Sera, with a mischievous look on her face, mumbled.

“Did you know? Nainiae is quite popular.”

“Popular?”

“Terry asked this last time.”

“What did Terry ask?”

Terry.

Of all the butlers in Iphalleta mansion, he was one of the younger butlers.

“He asked how old Nainiae was.”

“...bullshit?”

Having heard what Sera said, Ian’s bad habit popped out.

“Hey! Mr. Ian!”

“...”

In panic, Sera quickly turned around and looked at Ian.

Having realized his mistake, Ian covered his mouth with his hand.

Fortunately, there wasn’t anyone, Stein for instance, passing by there.

“Come on. He was probably just wondering how old she was. It didn’t have that kind of atmosphere.”

“…”

Ian, who just put down the hand he was using to cover his mouth, glared at Sera’s face as if he was going to punch a hole through her with his gaze.

Having noticed this, Sera looked away and mumbled.

“Probably.”

“Sera?”

“That is, you know? As I said earlier, Nainiae is quite popular. There are still a few people that avoid her because of her scar and missing fingers, but we know that people will get to realize she is a good kid once they get to have a conversation with her. That is why everyone!”

“Sera.”

Sera, who sighed because of Ian’s mood, declared surrender as if she had no other options.

“Ugh. I got it.”

“I know Nainiae is a kind child. Even Lady Iris said so. It would be fine to say it is proven. I was actually feeling quite proud for her when I heard that she was acknowledged by the Count.”

Ian continued, after directing his gaze to the front.

Ian was also well aware that Nainiae was a good child.

However... No matter how much he hated mages, Ian still knew how to separate private and business matters.

“It is just that... People shouldn’t go too easy on her. It has not been long since she started serving our young master. Having an atmosphere like this could actually have negative influence on her.”

‘She could get complacent and become overconfident.’

Ian was thinking that. It was because one could never tell how and when a person could have a change of heart.

Ian, who was betrayed by someone he trusted in the past, was painfully well aware of this.

“If she intends to continue to serve Young Master Riley...”

Therefore, Ian made up his mind to be very strict toward Nainiae.

Even if everyone else around her went easy on her, he was going to watch her with strict standards.

It was because,

"... she needs to do it right. I don't know how much longer I will be able to serve Young Master."

It was because he was hoping that Nainiae would take on the role when Ian was gone.

"Come on! Don't' say things like that."

Having noticed the sadness in Ian's face, Sera bumped the old butler's arm with her elbow.

"By the way, Mr. Ian. Still, Nainiae had many hardships and scars. I think this much is fine..."

"Sera! Can't you be mindful of the atmosphere!"

"Ah, I got it! Come on, Mr. Ian. Gosh!"

The face, which was all red and complementing Nainiae, was now yelling in anger.

Sera promptly ran away with a suppressed laughter.

“… I gave it a serious thought, and…”

It was dinner time.

In a place where the five people who were with Riley during his trip to Solia Castle, Riley spoke.

“As I thought, I think I’ll have to go there again this year.”

Having heard what Riley just said in the dinner table, Iris, with a question mark floated up on her face, asked.

“Are you talking about Rainfield?”

“Yes.”

Having heard his nonchalant response, Sera smiled with a suppressed laughter. Meanwhile, Ian’s face was gradually turning into a face full of pain.

Perhaps because this was the first time she heard about it, Nainiae was the only one tilting her head side to side.

“We went there every year. It’s not like we have a reason for not being able to go.”

“Still, I figured you won’t go this year because of Nainiae.”

Having heard what Riley just said about having been there every year, Sera shrugged her shoulders and mumbled.

“I think I’ll dry up and die during the morning and afternoon. It’s shortening my lifespan.”

“… Ugh.”

By the sound of Riley complaining out loud with no intention of hiding it, Ian flinched as if he just got shot by an arrow right on his chest.

“Y… Young Master. There are some bad rumors about Rainfield this year, so… I think it would be best if you just stayed in the mansion.”

Ian, who struggled and smiled, said it to convince Riley.

“Come on. You have been telling me to stop being so lazy and do something outside of the mansion, but why are you always like that during the summer? Why can’t you be consistent? Huh?”

Riley said as he pointed toward Ian with a fork.

Ian, who didn’t have anything in particular to say in response, looked at Iris for help.

“If it is Rainfield, won’t that be all right? As Riley said, we have been going there every year.”

“In Rainfield…”

Ian explained as he made a tight fist.

“You can’t break sweat in youth in Rainfield!”

“…”

Riley, who was pointing at Ian with a fork, stared at Ian as if he was staring at a lunatic.

Riley was wondering if there really was a dumbass that enjoyed heat, and today, it seemed like he discovered that dumbass.

“Excuse me. Ms. Sera. If it is Rainfield… Is it the Rainfield that I know of?”

Nainiae, who was looking at each of the three people having a conversation, quietly went next to Sera and asked carefully.

“Yes. It is.”

Rainfield.

It was a name of a city that was different from Solia.

According to a survey, it was the top-rated city for people wanting to go on a vacation during summer.

Chapter 71 - Summer (Part 2)

“Did you say it is a city where it rains all the time?”

“Yes.”

It was during the morning.

Nainiae, who was getting maid lessons from Sera, could not hide the surprise when she heard Sera’s explanation about Rainfield.

“The city’s name came from that fact. It rains whole day long without stopping. So, it is called Rainfield.”

Morning, afternoon, and even during the evening...

Not only that, during throughout the all seasons...

There was a city where it always rained.

Rainfield was that kind of city, and it was pretty close to Solia.

“Its land size is not as large as Solia, but it is still one of famous cities.”

Sera explained as she cleaned a porcelain decoration in the corridor by making mist to it with her breath.

“It’s a city where everyone, commoners, nobilities, and even royalties, goes to when the summer heat hits. There’s no sunlight there, and because it rains whole day, it is cool there.”

It was a city where it rains whole day.

Nainiae figured it certainly would not be hot there even during summer since it rains whole day in Rainfield.

Nainiae nodded as she cleaned a porcelain object like Sera.

“That’s probably the reason why Young Master wants to go to Rainfield. It gets pretty warm… when Mr. Ian is serving Young Master.”

Sera added that, just like how the Solia’s Main Plaza lighted up with festivities during the swordsmanship tournament, Rainfield also becomes lively with festivities during summer.

“A festival…”

“There are lots of beautiful things there. The fireworks along the waterfall path for instance.”

“Fireworks along the waterfall path?”

“It’s pretty complicated to explain… How should I put it?”

Having finished with cleaning one porcelain object, Sera put it down and started to explain more about Rainfield's waterfall path.

"Buildings on Rainfield are built with consideration for the endless rain. Thanks to this design choice, the roof design is quite unique. There is a pathway where the rainwater falls beautifully like waterfalls from these roofs."

Having heard what Sera just said, Nainiae flapped her wings of imagination, but then she tilted her head side to side because she couldn't quite get a feel for it.

"Anyway, it is a really pretty pathway. As for the fireworks, they are literal fireworks."

"Excuse me. Ms. Sera... You just said it rains endlessly in Rainfield City. In that case, how does the firework..."

'How could there be fireworks on a place that rains endlessly?'

When Nainiae pointed out the contradiction in the idea, as if Sera knew it was coming, she explained as she shrugged her shoulders.

"A long time ago, I heard a certain alchemist invented fireworks that does not get wet even in rain. The fireworks I'm talking about are these kinds."

Sera, who have picked up the next porcelain object, continued as she tilted up the tail end of her mouth with confidence.

“The waterfall path’s firework is pretty amazing. I can say with confidence that it is one of the most beautiful scenery I have seen in my life.”

“It’s that good?”

“Rays of lights and sparkling glitters of fire beyond beautiful waterfall are… Gosh… Although I’m from Solia, I can dare to say there is nothing in Solia that can beat that scene.”

Looking at Sera’s sparkling eyes, Nainiae also sparkled her eyes in curiosity.

“… All right. I’ll allow it.”

“You have been telling me every year to try going outside. Why are you being so hesitant this year?”

They were at Stein’s office.

Riley, who had a business with his father, looked away and peeked a smile. Stein answered,

“I was concerned you might bring something like another medal of honor.”

“Hahaha…”

Stein’s gaze was full of expectations. Having noticed this, Riley stopped laughing so nonchalantly. He shook his head and said,

“Absolutely no way.”

To Stein, who was shrugging his shoulders as he mentioned the medal, Riley said that will never happen. He promptly turned his body around and escaped his father’s office.

“Now that I have his approval, shall I make a quick preparation and get going?”

Having received Stein’s approval, Riley cringed as he flapped his clothes to vent the air inside.

“Ugh. It’s hot…”

With a cringed face, he thought about Andal, his buddy, as he looked out the window.

It was because of what Andal said before.

Because Andal, a red dragon, was within the area, Iphalleta manor's summer might be a little hotter than other places.

'A little? Do dogs have horns? If it is going to be like this every summer, I think I'll have to chase him away.'

Although Riley had been getting helps from Andal, it was still hard for Riley to endure the summer heat.

Even the servants in the mansion were rolling their tongues because of the heat. It was to the point they were begging Nainiae to use cooling magic. There was no need to explain it for a second time. That would have only hurt Riley's mouth.

"Young Master."

"Ah, Ian."

Ian greeted Riley from the other side of the corridor. With firm grips on his own hands, Ian asked Riley,

"Did he... approve? He didn't, right?"

"Looks like you were hoping that my father wouldn't approve the trip. Is that right?"

"Yes. Honestly, I was hoping he wouldn't approve it."

Ian, with a sincere look on his eyes, answered Riley.

Having heard Ian's response, Riley twisted a tip of his lips and said,

"Unfortunately, he approved?"

"This can't be."

Ian's palms, which were in praying position, moved toward his temples.

"To begin with, it would be odd if he disapproved it when he had been approving it every year. Don't you think?"

Riley, as if he was taking on the lead on the offenses, he started to make fun of Ian.

Ian was a strange man who liked sweating in the heat. However, he didn't like being wet due to rain.

Ian absolutely hated rain. It could be said that rain was Ian's mortal enemy.

"Ian. What about you? Are you going to stay in the mansion this year again?"

“Ugh!”

“Well, if you are going to stay here, I can have Sera to come with us… Actually, no. this year, I think I can just take Nainiae instead. It would be convenient too.”

Ian had a look on his face. He was protesting a wrong doing done against him. He stared at Riley with that look.

Ian was like a dog that couldn’t quite fight back.

It looked like Ian was not going to be able to go with Riley to Rainfield for vacation this year either.

“How long are you going to stay there?”

Ian, not able to figure out what to do, asked Riley.

He was asking when Riley was going to come back to the mansion.

“I’m not sure?”

Riley tilted his head side to side as he walked toward the library, a place that was at least cooler than the rest of the mansion.

“I probably will… stay there until late summer?”

“Late summer?”

“Why? I stayed there for about two months last year. Don’t you remember?”

“Two months…”

“I’m not sure about this year. How long will I be staying…”

Hearing Riley’s mumbling, Ian’s face became more serious.

It looked like he was agonizing over if he was going to go with Riley.

“I was hoping if you could look after my mother in the mansion while I’m away. Will that be okay with you?”

“Um…”

Having heard what Riley said, Ian started to make grumbling noise.

It was because Ian had no reason to refuse it if that was Riley’s wish.

“Actually, if I leave the house, having just Sera isn’t enough, isn’t

it? That's why I'm doing this every year too."

Having heard Riley's words indicating his trust in Ian's abilities, Ian asked carefully,

"You said two months... right?"

"Well, depending on the situation? It could be sooner, and it could be later."

"Ugh."

Ian sighed big enough to make the ground sink.

That was his answer.

Riley put his hand on Ian's shoulder. Riley was showing Ian that he is trusting Ian with the task of looking after his mother. Riley smiled big, and Ian too smiled as if he was trying to say he will yield.

It was the next day morning.

A carriage was prepared and waiting in front of Iphalleta mansion's entrance. It was waiting for departure.

“I installed a gate on Lady Iris’s hand mirror. It enables frequent communication using magic, so there is no need to worry so much.”

Having explained about the communication magic to Iris, Nainiae used Astroa’s leather bracelet and opened the storage space.

As Sera advised, Nainiae meticulously checked the items inside the storage space. They were the items necessary for the trip. Having finished checking the contents, Nainiae closed the storage space and looked back toward Riley. It seemed like she was meaning that the preparations are complete.

“We are ready.”

“Well then, shall we get going?”

Iris, Ian and Sera were there to see them off. Perhaps it was because it was still very early in the morning. The three were the only ones there.

“In that case, please have a safe trip.”

Ian decided not to protest anymore. It was because Riley asked Ian a favor. Hence, Ian was there to see them off. Ian was sniffling his runny nose.

Riley got on the carriage first.

Sera tapped on Nainiae's shoulder and said to Nainiae who was about to get on the driver's seat.

"Nainiae. You just need to do as you were taught."

"Yes."

Having heard Sera's advice, Nainiae gave a refreshing smile and sat on the driver's seat.

As Iris watched this, as if she suddenly remembered something, Iris called for Nainiae.

"Ah! Nainiae! Wait!"

"…?"

Iris was holding something. Iris lightly stepped toward Nainiae and gave Nainiae something that was wrapped in a fabric.

"What's this?"

The object inside the fabric felt thin and sturdy.

Nainiae, wondering what it was, floated a question mark on her face, looked at Iris and started to tilt her head side to side.

“I don’t know if you will like it, but I made it for you to say please take a good care of Riley during the vacation.”

Iris smiled with her mouth covered with her hand.

“It’s what Riley used to use. I fixed it a little. I wonder if it will look good on you.”

“It’s something that Young Master used to use?”

Nainiae looked once at the gift, which she was curious about, and looked once at Riley inside the carriage, who was eagerly waiting for departure. Nainiae decided to open the gift later. She lowered her head to express gratitude to Iris.

“Thank you, Lady Iris. Since I received a gift from you, I’ll work even harder and make sure to properly serve Young Master.”

“Okay then. I’ll count on only you, Nainiae.”

Iris took a few steps back and moved away from the carriage.

Because it looked like it was going to be okay for them to depart now, Nainiae waved her hand to the three and moved the carriage.

“Let’s see. According to the map... It will take about four days without taking any rest... With hotels in between, that is about a

week…”

Nainiae used a simple telekinesis magic to have the map float up next to her as she drove the carriage.

Using the map, she checked the distance and direction.

“… Hey.”

While Nainiae was in middle of driving the carriage, Riley poked his head through the window. With his head toward the driver’s seat, Riley started to talk to her.

“Yes, Young Master?”

Nainiae, who was going back and forth between looking at the frontal view and the map, responded in a hurry.

“Are you really going to drive all the way there with a carriage? Can’t we just teleport?”

When Riley asked about Teleportation magic, Nainiae responded in a bitter tone,

“Young Master, unfortunately, Teleportation is a Seven Circle’s magic, so I cannot use it. Also, even if I was a Seven Circles mage, it would be difficult to get the right coordinates without a tool because Rainfield is too far. If things go wrong, one’s body and legs

could be teleported apart, so…”

“Is that so?”

Her reasons made sense.

Riley, who still didn’t know much about Magic, scratched his cheek a few times and said,

“In that case, it cannot be helped. I’ll just use Chance again. Since there’s just two of us now…”

“Chance…?”

Nainiae looked back at Riley as she tilted her head side to side.

Riley continued as he twisted the tips of his mouth.

“If you go over the facts, it became hot all of sudden as soon as the month changed because of that rascal. He needs to take the responsibility.”

“…?”

“Take a left here.”

Nainiae, who had a confused look on her face, turned the carriage

to the left as Riley ordered.

“Excuse me, Young Master… By any chance…”

This direction…

It was familiar to Nainiae. It was a path that she traveled a few days ago.

The tree branches, the ones that she sliced with wind magic, passed by quickly.

With a mischievous smile, Riley said,

“After all, what do you do with a friend?”

Chapter 72 - Shortcut

It was a little after early morning.

Andal, who was asleep in his personal space under the pub's change room, was forced awake and made to stand in front of the pub by Riley. Riley had only one request to Andal.

"... You crazy rascal."

Andal, who didn't even manage to get rid of eyeboggers, first started to pour out curses and swears after seeing the carriage that was stopped in front of the pub.

"... You dumbass rascal."

Andal was annoyed all the way to the tip of his head. His curses and swears were sincerely coming from the bottom of his heart.

"Hey. Andal... What's so difficult about using Teleport for us? What's all this complaint about? It's a piece of cake for you, isn't it?"

Riley asked as he laughed mischievously.

With his face completely crumpled, Andal created a red hot flame on top of his palm and said,

“Hey you, god damn it. If you were sleeping comfortably but someone came and woke you up and told you, ‘Hey, chew on this cake!’ Would you feel great about that?”

“That would be the worst.”

Andal promptly threw the Fireball at Riley and shouted,

“You rascal!”

“...What?!”

“Then don’t pester a red dragon to buy you a cake!”

Riley pressed down Nainiae’s head and also lowered his body to barely dodge the Fireball that was coming right at them.

BOOM!

The lump of flame that Riley dodged collided with a tree in front of the pub and started a fire.

“Ugh! You piss me off! You are fucking good at dodging!”

“Just where did you learn that kind of language?”

“From a granny who is a regular to the pub. Why?”

“I don’t know who is the dumbass here…”

Although there was a loud ruckus happening right at that instant, the people of Iffa town didn’t even come out of their homes to check it out. Instead, it appeared they were still enjoying sleep through the morning.

It was probably Andal’s doing.

“Ugh…”

“I got it. I got it. I’ll pay you back later for this favor, all right?”

Watching Andal complaining and grinding his teeth, Riley started to laugh again mischievously.

Riley, who took a glance at Nainiae as he had a small quarrel with his friend, moved his eyes to direct toward the tree that was on fire.

“Yes. I understand.”

Although Riley didn’t say it in words, Nainiae, who figured out what he meant, carefully walked toward it and used water magic on the tree.

“Tsk.”

Nainiae was calmly suppressing the fire.

Andal, who was watching Nainiae's 'black colored' water magic, narrowed his eyes and crossed his arms. [TL: In some chapters, the author says Nainiae's magic has gray color, not black.]

"Hey, Riley."

"Yeah?"

"I'll shoot a Teleport magic. So, as a debt..."

Andal continued as he pointed at the back of Nainiae who was suppressing the fire,

"Give her to me."

"Andal. I have been telling you for a long time now. If you want to enjoy your amusement trip, you need to ease up on your tendency to treat people like objects. Also..."

Riley's tone toward Andal said he found the proposition to be ridiculous. Riley soon shook his head and refused.

"I can't give her to you. I'm going to use her as air conditioner during summer and a space heater during the winter."

Riley responded while putting up a high and mighty pose.

Andal looked at Riley as if he was looking at a weirdo. Andal asked,

“What the hell is an air conditioner? What’s a space heater?”

“There are things like that. Anyway, I’m telling you that I won’t give her to you.”

Having heard the response, Andal proposed something even more appealing.

“In that case, how about this? I have a guardian who’s quite useful. She has higher number of Circles than that lass, and she is very diligent at work too. She is a spirit type who lacks emotion, so she would be substantially more efficient at other tasks as well.”

Andal was talking about a guardian that he had in his cave connected to the basement of his pub. This guardian was among the best. Andal was making a proposition to exchange the guardian with Nainiae.

“Did you say she has higher number of Circles than Nainiae?”

Riley, with an intrigued face, looked at Andal.

Andal shrugged his shoulder and nodded in a pleasant mood. He thought an agreement was about to be reached.

“I’m not a human, so I don’t know much about your kind’s preferences, but I can proudly say that she is far prettier than Nainiae. Do you want me to show her to you?”

With just a hand wave, Andal created a mirror in midair and asked. Riley cringed and pushed away the mirror.

“Hey. No thanks. Do I look like I would decide things based on just the appearance?”

“Tsk…”

“So, you are saying that she is more skilled than Nainiae?”

Riley asked after moving the mirror away. Having heard the question, Andal nodded and explained more about the guardian he mentioned.

“That’s right. If she pushed herself to the limit, it is possible for her to use up to Eight Circles magic. She is an artificial spirit of the spirit king types. Because she is an artificial spirit, she doesn’t have a specific innate type. She’s very useful, I’m telling ya?”

“Is that so?”

Nainiae, who almost finished putting off the fire, even prepared a Plant magic to raise the collapsed tree back up.

Roots-like things grew from black colored buds and carefully surrounded the tree that was split. The roots started to slowly raise up the tree.

"... Well?"

Andal asked Riley again as he poked Riley with his elbow.

It seemed Riley was thinking hard about this for a while.

Riley had the same look on his face since a while ago. Soon, Riley shook his head firmly and responded,

"No."

It appeared that the answer was already decided before the proposition was made.

"No thanks."

"Why?"

It looked like Riley was intrigued, but the response that came back to Andal was still 'no.'

Andal stared at Riley with a look on his face that said he doesn't understand Riley's thoughts.

"That girl... She has a part that's similar to me. It doesn't feel right to hand her over to someone else. That's why."

Riley mumbled.

A similar part... To be precise, Riley was talking about himself from his past life.

"Similar to you?"

"That's right."

Looking at Riley mumbling with a look on his face that Andal have never seen in Riley before, Andal suddenly...

"Phup..."

Andal suddenly laughed as he blocked his mouth with his hand.

On the other hand, Riley's face was crumpled.

"What the hell?"

“Hey, that’s a nonsense… As you can see there, your servant is so diligent. What about you? You are here because you find it to be too much of a bother to go to Rainfield on a carriage. You are here throwing a tantrum at a dragon after waking him up from his sleep just to ask him to use Teleport magic for you. How could a runt like you claim to be… What was that now… Similar to her?”

Riley wiggled his eyebrows.

It was because Andal wasn’t wrong about it in any particular way.

“I have a reason. The kind that a dragon bastard doesn’t know about.”

“Yes, yes. It must be something quite extra ordinary, Young Master Lazy Sword.”

“Stop yapping your mouth and just get the Teleport spell ready.”

Riley, who had a vein popping up on his forehead, held in his anger and nagged Andal about the Teleport spell.

“You must be thinking everything will be easy if you just used Teleport. It actually takes planning.”

By making fun of Riley, Andal was able to relieve some of the stress he incurred. Andal said,

“First, tell her to come over here.”

Andal pointed at Nainiae, and Riley made a hand gesture to Nainiae to ask her to come.

“Yes.”

Nainiae, who restored the collapsed tree using her Plant magic, came toward Riley in light steps.

“Servant Nainiae, I’ll explain this to you only once, so listen carefully.”

“…?”

Because Andal started talking to Nainiae so suddenly, Nainiae looked at Riley as if she panicked.

“Hear him out. He said he has something to tell you.”

Nainiae nodded as if she understood.

Andal, who clicked his tongue, started to explain.

“Do you have a map?”

“Yes. I have it.”

“Bring it out.”

Nainiae brought out the map from her pocket and opened it.

The map had the path from Iphalleta mansion to Rainfield all marked up in wavy lines.

It was the line that Nainiae drew with a pen.

“When you two get on the carriage, I’ll use Teleport magic as requested by that wretch. I will. However, what do you think will happen if you guys suddenly appeared in middle of Rainfield City?”

Having heard Andal’s question, Nainiae, who thought about it for a moment, said what she thought might happen.

“Those that don’t know about magic would panic, and others that do know about magic… would be wary of us. In the worst-case scenario, they might even think about arresting us…”

“You know very well.”

Teleport was a Seven Circles magic.

Even if that fact was ignored, it was certain that the responses from the people would not be good if Iphalleta house's carriage appeared in middle of Rainfield City out of the blue.

"Therefore, in order to avoid bothersome consequences or chaos from that, I'm going to teleport you guys to..."

Andal paused for a moment and raised his hand toward the map that Nainiae was holding.

"... this location."

The location that Andal pointed at was in middle of a nameless forest that was not far from Rainfield.

"You understood, right?"

"Yes. I'll keep that in mind."

Having heard Andal's explanation, Nainiae promptly nodded as if she understood.

"You are bright. If it was Riley, he would not have understood it at all and asked me again."

"Andal, cut the crap already. Seriously? I'm going to kill you?"

“Ugh…”

Andal, who sighed big enough to make the ground sink, looked at Nainiae. It seemed Andal was disappointed that he didn’t get to have Nainiae.

Andal pointed toward the carriage with his chin.

“Get on.”

Having heard Andal, Nainiae, who glanced at Riley, went ahead first and got on the carriage’s driver’s seat.

“Riley.”

To Riley, who followed suit and was about to get on the carriage after Nainiae, turned his head in response to Andal’s voice calling him.

“… What now?”

“About Nainiae, your servant.”

Unlike his tone of voice until now, Andal’s voice was serious this time.

“…”

Riley vacantly stared at Andal's face.

Andal just stood there with a dramatic pause.

So, Riley asked first,

"... Is it about her lifespan?"

"As I thought, you already knew? Actually, it would be weirder if someone like you didn't know about it."

Andal mumbled like he figured as much. Andal continued,

"What are you going to do about it?"

"..."

This time, it was Riley who fell to silence.

Because Riley was keeping silence just like how he was a moment ago, this time, it was Andal that spoke first.

"Of the human guests who I met yesterday..."

Andal, who was on an amusement trip as a human, was currently

working as an owner of a pub.

“I met someone who had a unique kind of profession. I became very interested in trying that once.”

“A unique kind of profession?”

Listening to Andal continuing his story, Riley wiggled his brows.

‘… It’s taking him quite a while.’

Meanwhile…

‘Shall I clean the carriage a little?’

Nainiae, who was already sitting on the carriage’s driver’s seat, vacantly turned her gaze and looked at the carriage.

‘No. I heard that it rains endlessly in Rainfield, so… There is probably no need to wash the carriage. If there isn’t anything to clean at the moment, is there anything I can get done while I wait?’

Nainiae, who didn’t want to just wait without doing anything, moved her eye around. Her eye eventually found the gift that Iris gave him before Nainiae and Riley departed for Rainfield.

‘Should I open it now?’

Nainiae took a quick glance at Andal and Riley. It looked like their conversation was not showing any sign of coming to its end. She figured she will have time, so she moved her hand toward the gift.

It had been a long time since Nainiae received a gift.

She couldn’t remember how many years it had been.

‘… I wonder what it is?’

Nainiae traced back her feint memories of her childhood. The very last gift that she received was during her ninth birthday. It was a chocolate bread from her mother. That was all.

‘What’s this?’

Opening the gift wrapped in a fabric, Nainiae confirmed what was inside. Her eyes opened wide.

She was wondering what it was until now because it was something thin and hard. It was a mask.

“A mask…”

It was the mask that Riley was wearing when Nainiae met Riley for the first time in Solia.

The mask was modified by Iris. Now, over half of its coverage was cut off. The remaining coverage was just enough to cover Nainiae's scar.

"Ah... Lady Iris..."

Without her realizing it, Nainiae had a fragile and tender look on her face. Nainiae touched the mask.

For a mysterious reason, from the mask, which was modified to hide the injury on the wearer, Nainiae thought she could feel warmth.

She didn't know how others would feel about this gift. However, to Nainiae, it was the best and an incredibly warm gift.

"thank y..."

Kolok!

Nainiae was mumbling words of gratitude toward Iris for making this gift. However, Nainiae started to cough.

"... Kolok! Kolok!"

In haste, Nainiae covered her mouth with the top of her hand. She continued to cough.

“Kolok!”

For some reason, the coughing was difficult to stop. Nainiae furrowed her brows. With one of her eyes cringing, she looked at the top side of her hand.

‘… Ah.’

Coughing barely came to a stop.

Nainiae, who was looking at the top of her hand, couldn’t do anything but open her mouth vacantly.

There was lifelessly dark blood on the top of her hand.

“…”

Nainiae, who had her mouth open vacantly, recalled what Priesia said back in the Solia Holy Temple.

‘I can’t completely cure the illness. I can extend your lifespan… If it is short, it may last until the summer. If it is really long, it may last until the winter. I think it will last until the autumn.’

Soon, Nainiae, who had her mouth open, smiled gently.

“Still…”

Looking at the mask that she received from Iris as a gift, Nainiae was smiling. Her smile looked like she had never been happier.

“… I feel happy.”

Nainiae murmured as she touched the mask.

“Thank you, Lady Iris. A magnificent gift like this… Honestly, I think I don’t deserve such a gift.”

As if she was embarrassed, Nainiae was blushing as she smiled.

Chapter 73 - Shortcut (Part 2)

It seemed Riley finished his conversation with Andal.

He was walking toward the carriage to get on it.

‘Oh, right…’

Nainiae, who was sitting in the driver’s seat with a blank stare, was concerned that Riley might notice the black blood on top of her hand. She hurriedly cleaned it up and pretended everything was in order.

“Are you ready?”

Riley got on the carriage. Andal, who came to the front of the carriage after Riley, asked if the two people were ready.

“Yeah.”

Riley, who just got on the carriage, said as he peeked his thumb outside the window,

“Andal, when we are coming back, I’ll be asking for your help again, all right?”

“Stop talking bull crap.”

Andal cringed big time, snapped right back at Riley, and turned around.

Andal, who just looked at Nainiae sitting in the driver's seat, still had slightly crumpled face.

It was because he noticed a little bit of blood stain that Nainiae did not manage to wipe off.

"Ready?"

"..."

Nainiae, who had the area around her mouth hidden behind her right arm, nodded as a replacement for a response. Having heard it,

"... Teleport."

Andal moved his mana and cast Teleport, a Seven Circles magic.

He didn't recite any spell. A large magic circle was generated below the carriage just from Andal murmuring the name of the magic spell. Nainiae's eyes were wide open.

'Incredible... How is he able to do it?'

If Nainiae was going to cast Teleport, she would have first closed her eyes to focus on the coordinates and then recited the spell for a long while. Only then the magic circle would have appeared and activated the magic.

'I don't think it is a normal method. It is definitely different from how us humans use magic.'

The magic circle that Andal generated was at a whole another level from the Teleport that Astroa had been using.

It was not for just moving within a city. Andal's magic was for teleporting a great distance to a different city. It was perhaps obvious that the size of the magic circle would be larger. However… Nainiae was still impressed.

'Could I be able to do it?'

It was obvious why Nainiae would wonder about such a thing.

After all, she was a mage as well.

"Buy me a gift there and bring it to me."

"If I remember."

"You rascal. You gross me out."

As Riley and Andal's conversation continued, the silver light exuding from the magic circle underneath the carriage was starting to become more intense.

Soon, when the light was completely extinguished, let alone the carriage, there was no trace of Riley or Nainiae.

Tsuwaaaaaa....

'Is that the sound of rain?'

Because of Andal's Teleport magic, Nainiae's vision was blurry at the moment.

Nainiae, who blinked several times while sitting in her seat, could hear the sound of screams.

"... Kuuuurrr!!"

'What.... Is this sound?'

"Gosh. Of all places to send me, why did he send us here?"

Soon, she could hear Riley's voice.

It was a voice mixed with a full dose of frustration.

“Uuwarrr! Kuurr!”

As if it was in response to Riley’s voice, the roar could be heard again.

The roar was incredibly loud and fearsome. It was enough that Nainiae wondered if its breath could be felt on her face. Nainiae cringed her face and narrowed her eye.

It was to regain her sight somehow.

‘Just what is going on…’

Sururung…

While Nainiae still didn’t have her vision recovered, she could hear a sharp noise through the roar.

Have been taught swordsmanship from Sera, Nainiae was well aware of what the ‘Sururung’ sound she just heard was.

It was the sound of a sword being drawn.

“… Young master?”

STOMP!

STOMP!

Nainiae felt the seat… no… the entire carriage being shaken.

A large something was shaking the ground.

The shaking was growing stronger, and the roar was getting closer. They were telling Nainiae that there was something rushing toward where they were.

“You still can’t see, can’t you?”

Riley asked Nainiae.

Nainiae, ashamed, responded to him,

“Yes… I still can’t…”

“Gosh… That bastard Andal… He was going to send us to a crappy place like this, yet he wants a gift? What a nonsense. Really.”

Kiiiik

The sound of the carriage door opening could be heard, and...

Step, step.

Sounds of someone coming down from the carriage by stepping on its stairs could be also heard.

It was most likely Riley who was on the carriage.

“Wait quietly for a while. Keep your ears open.”

“Okay.”

Nainiae had no idea what was happening at the moment. However, Nainiae had made up her mind back in Solia that she will follow Riley unconditionally.

So, Nainiae simply nodded and sat there quietly in waiting for Riley’s next order.

“Kuuurrr!”

STOMP!

The sounds of steps that shook the ground stopped.

Nainiae could feel a chill above her head.

She figured that a giant existence must have come all the way to the front of the carriage.

Despite that, Nainiae waited quietly.

“From the distance, I thought it was just a stick, but I see you are carrying an entire piece of tree plucked right out of the ground. You are pretty strong? Uh?”

Riley’s voice could be heard.

The voice was somehow saturated in frustration.

“There will be blood splatter to the carriage, so have a protective layer cast.”

Nainiae immediately used a barrier.

Surrounding the carriage, a round semi-transparent layer was created.

“Kuuarrr! Uuur?”

Tsuwaaaaa…

Now that Nainiae listened to it more carefully, she realized it was not the sound of rain.

It was the sound of leaves shaking in the wind.

“… Kuuur?!”

In midst of the sounds of the leaves shaking, there was a very small sound.

Nainiae have heard that sound before.

It was the same sound she heard when Riley swung his sword back in Solia.

“Kuuuurrrr!”

After hearing a beastly roar…

Drip

Drip

Something was dripping onto her barrier.

It was not rain. It was something sticky.

She could guess that it must be blood.

‘Finally… my eye is slowly…’

Nainiae opened her eyes.

Her vision, which was blurry, gradually returned. She was finally able to observe her surroundings.

The carriage was in middle of a forest.

“Ah?”

With her vision back to normal, the first thing besides the scenery that she noticed was a giant monster that had one of its arm cut off clean. The monster was taking steps back.

It had yellowish peach colored skin. It had a huge stomach like a glutton.

Despite that, its face and arms were wrapped in tough muscles. It gave off terrifying aura. The creature was...

'Ogre!'

It was about five times the height of an adult human and had an ugly face with fangs popping out from the lower lips. It even had strange tattoos pasted on its face. Everything about the ogre was a match to what Nainiae have seen in a book.

"This is an ogre, right?"

Resting on his shoulder was the sword that he just swung. Having confirmed that Nainiae could see now, Riley turned around and asked about the identity of the monster.

"Yes. I believe it is."

"Look at this. Andal dropped us on a place with a monster. That lunatic bastard."

Riley, with an annoyed look on his face, tapped his shoulder with his blade to massage his shoulder. He turned his head again and looked at the ogre that had an arm cut off by Riley.

"Kuuuuurrrrr!!"

"It's so noisy. Nainiae."

“Ah, yes.”

Nainiae nodded and used silence magic.

The loud beastly roar coming out of ogre’s mouth was blocked, and the forest became quiet as if it regained its peace.

“That Andal rascal… No matter how I think about it, I think he sent us here on purpose.”

“Young Master. This ogre… If you don’t finish it off quickly, it will go berserk.”

Although the sound was blocked, it was still screaming with its mouth wide open. Nainiae noticed the ogre’s eyes were gradually getting saturated in bloody red. She prepared a magic and asked for her young master’s permission.

“Berserk?”

“Yes.”

Running berserk was an innate ability of ogres.

It became activated when an ogre’s eyes turned completely red. When activated, ogre used all of its might.

“If you do not mind it, shall I finish it?”

“No. There is no need.”

“Pardon?”

“Actually, I was in middle of testing it, so…”

“Testing it?”

“Well, it is actually working pretty well.”

Riley turned his body and shrugged his shoulder.

When he did, the ogre, which had its eyes turned completely red and entered the berserker mode, charged toward Riley with its mouth drooling to below the chin.

“Young Master! It’s dangero…”

Nainiae was going to shout that it was dangerous to stand there.

However, Nainiae stopped before finishing the words.

It was because the drop of drool falling from the ogre’s mouth

was gradually falling slower.

"I tried using the time magic, and..."

The ogre's drool drop fell from its chin first.

Following suit after it with a bit of time delay, the ogre's neck slid off and fell.

Perhaps it was because Nainiae's Silence magic was still in effect, but the silent scene was somehow eerie to watch.

"Ah..."

It started with the ogre's drool, then there was the head, and now, the head was faltering and tilting because the neck was cut off. The scene was quite disturbing.

"Since I can do this much, will it be all right if we got started on the next step?"

THUMP!

There was no sound from the impact because of Nainiae's Silence magic, but the ground shook quite violently from the impact of the ogre's body falling.

“Y… yes.”

Nainiae looked at the ogre’s shoulder and neck which were cut off clean, and then she looked at Riley’s sword.

‘As I expected, Young Master…’

There was so much blood splashed on to the Barrier that Nainiae cast. On the other hand, there was not even a drop of blood on Riley’s sword.

“What are you staring at so hard?”

Impressed, Nainiae was at a loss for words. Having heard Riley’s voice, she woke up from her shock.

“I was thinking you are simply amazing.”

“Are you trying to flatter me? So? What did you think of my time magic?”

After she came to the Iphalleta mansion from Solia, Nainiae had become Riley’s servant before long. However, when it came to magic, she was pretty strict.

It was to make sure Riley didn’t struggle in the future because of having learned faulty magic.

However, in this instance, Nainiae had no choice but to give him a great score.

“100 points… If I could give you more, I would. It was perfect.”

“All right.”

Riley murmured as if he was satisfied. He put the sword back in the sheath and approached Nainiae.

“Where are we now?”

“Please wait a moment.”

By Andal’s Teleport spell, they should be at a forest near Rainfield.

When Riley asked, Nainiae used the Astroa’s leather bracelet and brought out the map that was stored inside.

“I think we are near this area. However… There isn’t any definite landmark around us. So, making a hasty decision about which way to go is…”

With her finger at the map, Nainiae double checked the direction and path leading to Rainfield.

“… Ha!”

Finding all this to be ridiculous, Riley made a hollow laughter.

Instead of Rainfield City, they were teleported to a forest near Rainfield for a reason. It was to avoid unnecessary chaos or bothersome consequences.

“Avoid bothersome stuff? Do dogs have horns…”

Riley ground his teeth for Andal’s not so considerate consideration. He scratched his head hard. Meanwhile, Nainiae said,

“Young Master.”

“What?”

“I used the Search magic just in case, and I think there are a few carriages parked in a place that’s not far from here. I think they are headed to Rainfield… Should we join them?”

Riley was concerned that they might have to wonder around aimlessly. So, what Nainiae just told him was definitely a good news.

“Is that so?”

Riley could not think of any other option.

It was summer, and it was hot. Riley didn't want to stay in a forest in this weather any longer. He walked toward the inside of the carriage with a cringed face and said,

"All right. Let's join them. It's not like we have any other option, right?"

"That's right."

Having confirmed that Riley lied down inside the carriage, Nainiae removed the Barrier that she had cast around the carriage and started to drive the carriage.

"..."

It was after Riley left the scene.

Perhaps several tens of minutes have passed.

Ogre's dead body started to show strange symptoms.

"...!"

Twitch!

It moved. The dead body started to move and twist in all sorts of disturbing directions. Along with a sound of bones snapping...

“Kuuoooo.....”

The ogre, which was dead, opened its eyes wide.

Its eyes were completely black like black pearls.

Chapter 74 - Nara Basilisk

There were roughly eight or nine carriages that were parked and resting in a pretty wide empty space in middle of the forest.

"... I think this should be enough."

Nainiae parked the Iphalleta's carriage next to other carriages, put on the mask that Iris gave her, and approached the people gathered there.

"Excuse me."

The people gathered there, who were engaged in loud chatter, all stopped talking and looked at Nainiae.

"... Huh?"

People, who have discovered Nainiae in maid uniform, all tilted their heads to side to side with different expressions on their faces.

"A maid? She's a maid, right?"

"What's a maid doing here?"

"What are the mercenaries doing?"

“Hey. Hey. It’s not like an orc showed up. Why are you getting angry again?”

“What brings you here?”

Was it because of the mask that Iris prepared for her?

Thanks to the mask, Nainiae was able to avoid the worst first impression possible. Sighing in relief, Nainiae went straight to the point.

“By any chance, are you headed to Rainfield?”

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“In that case, will it be all right if we followed you? This is the first time I’m traveling to Rainfield, so I’m confused about the path…”

Having heard what Nainiae said, the people gathered in the open area all exchanged gazes and then looked at her.

“Are you alone?”

“No. There is another.”

Having heard Nainiae’s response, the people exchanged gazes

again.

Some were shaking their heads left and right. It seemed like not everyone was in agreement.

In middle of it, a young man that appeared to be the representative of the group smiled like a good man and asked,

“Excuse me, but if the other traveler is a nobility, then we will have to ask the name of the family. Is that all right with you? It would be even better if you could show us an identification.”

“An identification?”

“To put it bluntly, it could be that you are trying to scam us, you get it?”

Of the group, a boy that appeared to be the youngest of them all said it stingingly while glaring at Nainiae.

“Ugh. This runt is talking like this again. Excuse me, miss. Please don’t think of him too badly. You can see that it would be very bad for us if we ran into bandits. That’s the reason why.”

The man that appeared to be the representative of the group explained why he asked what he did.

“I see.”

Looking at from their perspective, Nainiae and Riley were definitely more of unwelcomed guests than anything else.

They had no way of knowing who Nainiae and Riley were. To put it bluntly, she would have been at a loss for words even if she was accused of being a henchman of some bandits.

“I understand. We are the ones asking you for the favor of leading us the way, so I see no reason why we can’t show you something like an identification.”

Nainiae nodded as if she accepted the terms. She sent mana to Astroa’s leather bracelet and opened the dimensional space.

“Huk?!”

“That, that is?”

People who witnessed the dimensional space opened their eyes wide.

It seemed that this was their first time seeing it.

“My young master is inside the carriage at the moment, so I cannot introduce him to you. However, I believe you probably have heard of him at least.”

Having finished her explanation, Nainiae put her hand inside the dimensional space, brought out a badge that symbolized Iphalleta house and showed it to the people gathered.

“This symbol is definitely from a house of count…”

“It’s a symbol of Fin Iphalleta from Solia.”

“Ah! It’s famous for swordsmanship!”

“Yes. My young master was heading to Rainfield for a vacation. However, because I started this job only recently…”

Nainiae placed the badge back into the dimensional space and bowed properly.

“Please. Can you lead us the way?”

Could it be that all the training she received from Sera finally showed its effectiveness?

People exchanged looks with each other, mumbled ‘it’s probably fine,’ and nodded.

“All right.”

After talking to the group for a while, it became apparent that the carriages that were resting on the forest's open field were not for people on a vacation trip toward Rainfield.

"We are not famous, so I'm not sure if it is worth mentioning this to you, but we are a small trading company that was established recently. We happened to have a business in Rainfield, so we are going there to sell goods that are in peak season."

It was middle of summer. The summer's heat wave was in full force.

Because of it, there were people from all over the world coming to Rainfield. If the group sold merchandises in Rainfield at this time, they would be able to make a good profit. That was the explanation by Reitri, the group's representative.

"So, what you are saying is, you are going to suck on the honey."

Having heard what Reitri said, Riley, who apparently came out of the carriage possibly due to boredom, mumbled as he got a piece of sandwich that the group was eating.

"Oh. This is tasty."

"..."

Soon, he even took the group's brown sugar beer.

Riley leisurely enjoyed the drink, but he felt a gaze glaring at him from the side. Riley turned toward the gaze and narrowed his eyes to glare right back. It was a ‘what are you staring at?’ look.

“You got something to say?”

Riley asked. The trade company’s boy asked with his eyes strained,

“You are supposed to be a nobility from a count’s house. Don’t you have any conscious?”

“What is this kid talking about?”

Riley chewed on the sandwich as if there was nothing wrong, turned his head, and asked.

“Ahah. My apologies. Horai, this rascal is still young... Also, he grew up in a city without any nobilities, so he is not used to this kind of things. Please understand...”

Having heard Reitri’s voice trying to mitigate the situation, Horai, the red-haired boy with a stern look on his eyes next to Riley, got up abruptly with a frustrated look on his face.

“Uncle! Are you a sap? A tool? You are a merchant. What are you going to do if you give everything away for free? If you give

something, shouldn't you receive something in return!"

"Horai, you..."

"Uncle... You don't know anything! Damn it!"

The body yelled and turned around. With his teeth locked, he started running.

It was an exemplary behavior for of an immature child.

"Horai!!"

Reitri hurriedly got up and put forth his hand, but he scratched his head awkwardly after looking at Nainiae and Riley.

"I'm sorry. He is still young..."

"Indeed. It shows."

Horai tripped over a rock and fell while he was running. Watching this, Riley peeked a smile and mumbled.

"He is like that because he is the type who only believes what he can see immediately in front of him. Does he know that his uncle is doing business right now on making connections?"

“Haha. Was it… obvious?”

“It’s a basic foundation for merchants, so…”

“Hahaha…”

A few sandwiches and a few glasses of brown sugar beer…

With just those, Reitri was being given an opportunity to make an impression to the Solia’s Iphalleta house in person.

Although he could not be certain about it, and even if that was not possible, this was an opportunity to have a conversation with a nobility. To Reitri, it was certain that this was a profitable business.

“I see that you have one… two… three… Huh? Weren’t you going for a big score? These carriages aren’t all that big, and there aren’t many carriages either. What do you plan to sell in Rainfield?”

Having counted the number of carriages with his fingers, Riley turned to Reitri and asked.

“Ah, they are umbrellas.”

Having heard Reitri’s response, Riley, with his head tilting side to side, asked back.

“Umbrellas?”

It rained endlessly in Rainfield. It didn’t skip a day for many long years.

If Reitri was going there to simply sell umbrellas, Riley could say with certainty that it was not going to be a particularly good choice.

“Yes. It’s not just an ordinary umbrella. It’s made to be a little special. It could be considered as an invention. That would make it easier to describe it.”

“Is that so? An invention…”

“Would you like to see it?”

“No. It’s fine. It’s not like I’m going to buy one.”

Reitri had a bright look on his face in excitement for the opportunity to show Riley his umbrella, but hearing Riley refuse so leisurely made Reitri’s face to sulk.

“What about guarding?”

Riley asked Reitri who had a disappointed look on his face.

It was because he didn't notice anyone around the carriages that looked like mercenaries or knights.

"By any chance, are the ones on the outer perimeters all you have? Four... No. About five people?"

"Ah, yes."

"Mercenaries?"

"Yes."

Riley looked toward the outer perimeter of the open area after widening his senses. Looking at the direction where Horai ran toward, Riley was asking about the guards. Having heard his question, Reitri responded awkwardly,

"This is my fourth time traveling with them. How should I say this? Quality over quantity? It feels like they are each worth a hundred guards. Instead of traveling around with many guards, I find this to be a far better arrangement. I can save on food as well."

Having heard Reitri explaining while scratching his head, Riley mumbled with a mischievous look on his face,

"Each worth a hundred guards? I'm not sure?"

"...?"

Riley soon turned his gaze.

His gaze met with Nainiae's, and Nainiae turned her head side to side, blinking her eyes and wondering what it was about.

"To claim that they are worth that much, I think they allowed our carriage's approach too easily. Isn't that right?"

Having heard Riley's question, Reitri flinched as if he just got stabbed right at the weak point.

"I guess... so."

Riley asked because there was no sign of any guards while Nainiae drove the carriage toward where the trade company group was resting.

"Where could they have gone?"

It was when Reitri mumbled on in panic.

Footsteps of approximately four people could be heard.

"... Hey!! Mr. Reitri!!"

Everyone's gaze, including Riley and Reitri's, were turned toward

where the voice was coming from.

“Uncle! Uncle! Take a look at what Basil hunted! Look!”

Horai, the one who ran off with gritted teeth, was among the footstep sounds.

He’s face was full of excitement. How he was talking seemed like he just saw something intriguing.

“Huh?”

“Mr. Reitri, I think this place is no good. In this area... I think there are ogres roaming about. I killed one that was coming this way, but if there is a partner, another bastard might come this way.”

Riley narrowed his eyes after observing the appearances of the people coming with Horai. It was because there was another boy, who was walking in front of the group, holding the head of a monster.

It was an ogre’s head.

“So, I think it would be best if we got ready fast and get goi...”

The boy, who had the ogre’s head on his right hand, quickly turned over the head to the back and moved his hand toward the

spear that was hanging on his back.

"... What's this? An unwelcomed guest?"

Noticing the boy's words and behavior, Nainiae, who was standing by behind Riley, narrowed her eyes and focused mana.

'Three seconds...'

Nainiae was going to make a pre-emptive strike against the boy using a wind magic if the boy tried to swing that spear to Riley or didn't let go of it within three seconds.

"Ah Ah! No! No! They are guests!"

Reitri hurriedly got up and waved his arms around.

The boy let go of the spear and sighed.

"What's this? I was worried that something happened while I was out killing an ogre."

"No! Basil! These guys are unwelcomed guests!"

What? They are?"

Having heard Horai's words, the boy was not sure what to make

out of the situation. He looked at Reitri again.

“No!”

Reitri immediately said that was not the case. Reitri came right up to Horai, made a tight fist, and gently nudged the top of his nephew’s head.

“Kek!?”

“They are guests! They are from pretty high nobility!”

The boy with the spear was laughing from looking at Horai in tears after getting a nudge from Reitri. Having heard what Reitri said, the boy tilted his head side to side and asked,

“High nobility?”

“Ah, now that I think about it, I haven’t made introductions yet.”

Reitri was nudging Horai’s head again, but he got a grip and started to make introductions.

“This is Mr. Nara Basilisk, the representative of the Lightning Boulder mercenary group. He is currently guarding our trade company group.”

Reitri finished introducing Nara Basilisk, the boy with a spear. Reitri turned his head to introduce Riley.

“This is…”

“… Iphalleta.”

Reitri was going to introduce Riley, but he stopped talking.

It was because a boy named Basilisk spoke first.

“You… knew?”

Having heard Reitri’s question, Basilisk pointed to the badge on Riley’s clothes and narrowed his eyes.

“That symbol. It’s the symbol of Iphalleta house, a house of count, right?”

Riley, with a ‘so what’ kind of look on his eyes, tilted his head side to side and asked back,

“So what?”

“…!”

At that moment, Basilisk moved his hand toward the spear on his

back.

Noticing this, Nainiae used Blink, a close-range teleportation magic.

Nainiae, who appeared in front of Riley in blink of an eye, widely opened the eye on the side that was not covered by the mask and had her right hand raised.

“Ian…”

Basilisk drew his spear in an instant and was in a stance to thrust the spear. Basilisk murmured someone’s name.

“What?”

Riley, who furrowed his brows, asked back.

Basilisk asked again by saying the name of someone.

“Ian, the mercenary hero… I heard he is currently residing there. Is that right?”

“…?”

Having heard Ian’s name being abruptly mentioned, Nainiae, who was shielding Riley’s front, narrowed her eyes.

Chapter 75 - Nara Basilisk (Part 2)

"You know... Mr. Ian?"

Nainiae had her right hand to the front and her left hand near the handle of a blade on her waist. Facing Basilisk who was wielding a spear, Nainiae asked.

"Of course I know who he is. There isn't anyone among those who make living as mercenaries that doesn't know his name."

With the tip of his spear aimed diagonally toward the ground, Basilisk answered. His eyes were still as fearsome as before.

'What should I do?'

Basilisk's attitude said to go ahead and fight him if she had any complaints. Noticing this, Nainiae looked toward where Riley was sitting.

'If he is someone that knows who Mr. Ian is, I don't think I should be rude and treat him carelessly. However, if I let it be like this, Young Master's position will be...'

Nainiae was hesitating for a while. Having decided that she could not let this be, she was about to demonstrate her abilities. It was at that moment,

Riley, who have successfully completed eating a whole sandwich while sitting leisurely, dusted off his hands and got up.

“So?”

Although there was a spear aimed at him, Riley’s attitude was still leisurely as if he was on a picnic.

“Why are you aiming your spear at me? You even mentioned Ian’s name. Why? You probably know that I’m a young master of a count’s house, don’t you?”

Since he knew the house’s name, Iphalleta, and Ian’s name, Basilisk probably knew Riley is a high nobility from a count’s house.

Basilisk’s behavior was most certainly rude.

“Rainfield may be a city without nobilities, but still, don’t you think you are being rude?”

Riley was right.

“I’m a guest of your employer. Can’t you see?”

“Excuse me…”

After that, Riley crumpled the look on his face that was leisurely only a moment ago. Riley glared at Basilisk and created a cold atmosphere. Because of this, Reitri, who was watching from the side, started to break cold sweat.

"... The mercenary hero..."

Responding to Riley's gaze, Basilisk also narrowed his eyes and said,

"Ian was... a mercenary that I admired the most."

Guwak.

Basilisk tightened his grip on the spear and said with his crumpled face toward Riley,

"However, when I heard that a hero like him retired, and he is now working at some nobility house as a butler... That felt like everything in me was being shattered."

"So?"

"So, I want you to show me."

'Show what?'

Before Riley could ask back, Basilisk's spear charged forward.

"…?!"

Nainiae was not able to respond to the situation that occurred in a blink of an eye. Concluding that it can't go on like this, she decided to use her Six Circles magic and fight back.

<There is no need.>

It was when she was about to use magic and send Basilisk's head flying away from his body.

In Nainiae's head, Riley directly sent a message, saying there was no need.

"…"

Wheec!

Slicing through the wind, Basilisk's spear charged toward Riley's face. It stopped just before his nose.

"Show me. Prove it to me that it was the right decision for Ian to work as a butler in that family."

'Using what method?'

It seemed like there was no need to ask that question.

The spear that was stopped right in front of Riley's nose was explaining how to prove it.

"All you are saying is that you just want to have a fight. Why are you going about asking it in such a brutal way?"

Peeking a smile, with the tip of his mouth twisted, Riley took a step forward.

He stepped forward despite having a spear aimed at him right in front of his nose. Seeing this, Basilisk shriveled and took a step back without realizing it.

The distance between the tip of the spear and Riley widened by that much.

"Seeing you asking me for a favor made me curious."

"…?"

Riley took another step forward, and the tip of the spear moved another step back.

Noticing Basilisk narrowing his eyes, Riley asked,

“… Why should I?”

“…”

Having heard the question that Riley tossed, Basilisk vacantly opened his mouth. It seemed he was not understanding Riley.

“Why should I fight you?”

Riley tossed the question at Basilisk and tilted his head to the side.

It was because Riley had no reason to fight him.

“What do I gain from fighting you?”

“That is…”

“There isn’t anything, is there? In that case, get that out of my face.”

Basilisk was not able to answer right away. Watching this, Riley waved his palm with a disappointed look.

Chalsak!

With that sound, the wide side of the spear's tip was slapped.

"There probably isn't any reason to have this conversation go on further."

Riley arrogantly slapped Basilisk's spear, vacantly turned his body around and started to walk toward the carriage.

"Ugh. I'm sleepy... I'm going to take an afternoon nap. Nainiae, wake me up when we get there."

"Ug.... Ug...!"

Riley stretched big, yawned and started to walk away.

Watching this, Basilisk started to grind his teeth.

It seems he felt quite humiliated by how his spear's tip was slapped by Riley's palm.

"Commander. Wait! Wait!"

"This isn't time to be waving a spear around in this place!"

"Have you forgotten about the ogre that you hunted down a moment ago? We need to pack up and move!"

It seemed that others thought they could not afford to let this continue.

Two of the members of Lightning Boulder, a small mercenary group, came to Basilisk, each grabbed his arms and started to drag him away.

“You think ogres matter in a moment like this? Let go! You guys remember Mr. Ian too, don’t you? You have not forgotten him, right?”

“He is our mercenary hero, of course! Still, it is no time to be indulging in such nostalgia! Don’t you see?”

“Commander! If we idle around like this here, what are you going to do if ogres come and attack us?”

While being dragged away by his comrades, Basilisk started to struggle.

“… Who cares about ogres! Who cares!”

“Did you say who cares? Nonsense! If a battle broke out near the carriages, that will destroy them all! It’s not like you can cover for the aftermath! Stop your whining and just go help people with packing!”

With Basilisk now gone, taken away by his comrades, Reitri, who was watching the situation with an anxious face, sighed in relief.

The carriages started to move.

Coming out of the forest, the carriages were running on open field. Their destination was Rainfield, a city with endless rain through all seasons.

“Perhaps I should say it was as expected of an ogre? We hunted it together, but I think it still took 30 minutes to kill it. I’m saying it was that tough!”

Basilisk, who was driving his carriage relatively further in front of everyone else, was telling others about the ogre that he ran into at the forest.

“... After a long battle, the final blow was delivered by me with my spear. It was a clean end.”

“Wow!!”

Of the three carriages in front, Horai, who was on the left side, was tuning into Basilisk’s tale of bravado.

“Horai. If you keep on sticking your face out like that, you might fall off from the driver’s seat?”

“Ah, come on, Uncle! It’s fine. You know how long I have lived my life riding the co-driver’s seat!” [TL: Normally, I would have said ‘shotgun seat,’ but since they don’t have guns or shotguns in this world, I cannot say that.]

“Hahaha! Mr. Reitri, please don’t worry. I just need to catch him when he falls!”

“Gosh! I said I won’t fall!”

Reitri drove the carriage on the far left.

Basilisk drove the one in the center.

Perhaps it was odd to call it naturally, but, to the right, Nainiae was driving her carriage.

“Excuse me. Miss maid.”

Having heard the voice coming from left, Nainiae slightly turned her head.

“Yes?”

It was a dry and uninterested response.

Nainiae was still cautious against Basilisk, the one who aimed his

spear toward her young master.

“What do you think? I’m talking about how our mercenary group killed an ogre.”

“Are you talking about… an ogre?”

“That’s right. Ogre! You have heard of it, right?”

Basilisk was asking with a proud face. Nainiae looked at him with a blank stare. With an unimpressed look, Nainiae answered,

“Yes, I have heard of it.”

Actually, she did run into one earlier today as well.

“Kuuu! As expected! Actually, now that I think about it, would it be odd if someone didn’t know what an ogre is?”

There was an old saying that if you tell a crying child that an ogre will come if the child didn’t stop crying, the child would stop crying. Just like that, it was a famous monster. [TL: There is an old saying exactly like this in Korea about a tiger.]

The sound of the ground shaking from its steps, generated by its mountain size body, was fearsome, but it was most famous for its ridiculous strength. Ogres were about as famous as orcs, the main foes of human race.

“We are always ignored because we are made of few elites. After this mission is over, if we toss this ogre’s head in front of the guild, even the guild members will see us differently.”

Dulkung. [TL: Sound effect for the carriage shaking from rolling over something on the ground.]

The carriages were driving through the field. One of it ran across a bump and shook.

Basilisk, who was mumbling on his own, turned his head toward Nainiae and asked,

“Miss maid, you work at Solia’s Iphalleta mansion... So, at the same place as Mr. Ian, right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“How is he?”

“What do you mean?”

Nainiae, who still didn’t relax her face, asked back toward Basilisk with a face full of wariness.

“I wonder if he is still in good health. He is quite old now.”

"..."

The mercenary hero.

Ian was like a god to mercenaries.

Not just from Riley, but from Sera as well, Nainiae have heard a bit of stories about Ian's past. Nainiae struggled because she could not think of a way to respond. Eventually, she answered honestly.

"He is doing just fine. If you don't count the fact about his back giving him a bit of trouble."

"Is that... so."

As if he was feeling awkward, Basilisk scratched his cheek after hearing Nainiae's response.

Basilisk's response was like a child who just received a gift.

Noticing this, Nainiae eased her wariness a bit and asked him,

"Do you admire Mr. Ian?"

"He is so cool! If we were to go over all of his exploits during the Great War, there would be no end to the conversation."

“That much?”

Because Nainiae have heard about Ian from Sera and Riley, she had some awareness to the fact that Ian is a skilled warrior. However, she believed it was exaggerated a little.

“Recapturing a forbidden herb field, rescuing a kidnapped queen, slaughtering orcs, hunting down silver witch… Beside those, there several dozen other smaller exploits. Also, number of towns he saved are in order of hundreds. Despite all that, he had no greed for wealth or entitlements. That’s why he is even more legendary.”

Basilisk proudly explained Ian’s accomplishments. Listening to his stories, Nainiae had an impressed look on her face. She thought about Ian who stayed behind in the mansion.

‘Is it because I only saw Mr. Ian hanging out with Young Master Riley in the mansion?’

Ian seemed to grow ever so weaker in front of Riley.

On the other hand, there was a different Ian that Basilisk was describing to her.

Comparing the two different versions of Ian in her head, Nainiae made a bitter smile.

“So? What do you think of the ogre?”

“…?”

“I’m talking about the ogre that we killed!”

Actually, of all mercenaries, there were only few that could kill an ogre in 30 minutes.

“Hu… This is the first time we ran into one. I didn’t think it would only take 30 minutes!”

With just three mercenaries from the Lightning Boulder, cutting off that monster’s head in just 30 minutes was definitely a jaw dropping story.

“Yes. Well…”

The problem was that it was Nainiae who was listening to the story.

“I guess about 30 minutes is pretty fast.”

She was the designated maid of Riley, the one who worked a red dragon as a friend. Also, she was a Six Circles mage who was not even in 20s.

“About 30 minutes?”

“Yes.”

“Pretty fast?”

Basilisk, who was driving his carriage, looked at Nainiae and flinched his facial muscles.

In response to his question, Nainiae said with an uninterested voice as if there was nothing wrong with her statement,

“Yes, it definitely is.”

Those who knew Nainiae well probably would have thought there was nothing wrong with her talking like that. However, Basilisk didn’t know anything in detail about Nainiae.

“Ha!!”

So… It seemed Basilisk found Nainiae’s response to be ridiculous. He sighed big toward the sky and hardened his face like the first time he met her.

“Miss maid, are you full of exaggerated sense of worth like your master?”

“…?”

Having heard the provocative question, Nainiae, who finally have just managed to relax her face for the moment, narrowed her eyes.

“I’m talking about making people angry just with words. That.”

Basilisk put up a violent look on his face and glared at Nainiae as if he was going to punch a hole through her face with his glaring.

“Are you… trying to pick a fight with me?”

The look on Basilisk’s eyes seemed like he would have grabbed the spear on his back and attacked if he was not driving a carriage right now.

“It was probably your side that picked a fight with me first.”

Although Nainiae merely told him the truth, Basilisk was not able to acknowledge it. Instead, he was exuding his intent for a fight. Looking at him, Nainiae didn’t just sit back and watch either.

“… Back then, you said to prove it, right?”

Nainiae, who just remembered how Basilisk was aiming his spear at Riley, asked casually. She continued before a response could be

heard.

“All right. I’ll really show it to you.”

Chapter 76 - Nara Basilisk (Part 3)

Riley noticed the carriage had stopped.

Of all the carriages stopped in middle of the field, Riley, who was inside the Iphalleta house's carriage, peeked his face out the window with his hair in a sleepy mess.

"Uuuu... Are we there now?"

"No. Not yet..."

The one that answered was not Nainiae.

It was Reitri sitting near the window. Noticing this, Riley tilted his head side to side and looked around.

"In that case, why are we stopped?"

"That is... It will be very complicated to explain."

Reitri mumbled as he scratched the side of his head.

Riley, who had been looking around the area, found Nainiae and Basilisk standing face to face in the distance.

"Ah."

Nainiae had a heavy atmosphere.

Basilisk looked like an infuriated bull. He was scratching the ground with tips of his feet to relax his legs.

Riley roughly figured out what was happening. With a quizzical look on his face, he asked,

“That… Is that what I think it is?”

“Yes.”

Although Reitri was new to being a merchant, he was a merchant.

He was pretty quick with his senses, so he knew what Riley was talking about. He nodded and said yes.

“Gosh, that kid…”

Riley comfortably leaned his arm on the carriage’s window frame. He supported his chin with his right palm and looked at Nainiae.

“She said she could not stand someone badmouthing about her young master.”

“What about the other side?”

Riley asked about Basilisk.

He figured that, if what Reitri was saying was the case, then the cause of it all must be Basilisk.

“You know about that ogre, right?”

“The one with a fat stomach?”

Reitri was confused for a moment and gave a blank stare when Riley said ‘the one with a fat stomach.’ Soon, he collected himself and answered,

“Yes. That monster with a fat stomach. Mr. Basilisk was telling a story about how he killed it in 30 minutes... and Ms. Nainiae said that is pretty fast. That’s how it came to this.”

Riley peeked a smile and twisted a tip of his mouth.

It felt like they both agitated parts they should not have.

In Nainiae, it was Riley. In Basilisk, it was pride.

“It’s not like they are little children.”

Riley still didn't change the look on his face. He was still smiling. He casually turned his head and looked at Horai, who was sitting next to Reitri.

"What? What are you looking at?"

"..."

"What is it... sir?"

It seemed like he was scolded harshly while Riley was not looking. He was pouting big time as he corrected himself and used respectful language.

'Anyway... this sure is a bother.'

Turning his gaze away from Horai, Riley looked at where Nainiae and Basilisk was having a face-off. Riley moved the index finger of the hand supporting his head and started to tap his cheek.

"Now that I think about it, that runt... He seems a little short. How old is he?"

Basilisk was definitely on the shorter side.

His body was about the size of Horai, who was watching the scene from the side.

Despite that, his hands had traces of training that indicated he have swung his spear countless times. It was hard to tell his true age.

“He is about… 15?”

“Yes. He is 15 this year.”

Having heard Riley’s question, Reitri asked a mercenary from the Lightning Boulder group. Having received the question, one of its members nodded and answered.

“15?”

Riley turned his head toward the mercenary and asked again with a look of disbelief.

“I didn’t hear that wrong, did I?”

Basilisk looked a little short and his face looked rather young, so Riley figured he just looked young. It seemed that was not the case.

“He is just 15, yet he is running a mercenary group as its commander? Do mercenaries not have any talented individuals fill the commander positions? Just what kind of screwed up place is this city?”

It seemed the mercenary knew Riley was going to ask that question. He explained with a bitter look on his face.

“That is... It was the last will of the former commander who passed away.”

“Former commander?”

“Count Riley... that is not right, is it? Will it be all right if I called you young master?”

The mercenary was not introduced to Riley yet, so he was confused about his title. He carefully asked Riley, and Riley nodded. The mercenary continued,

“The one you are looking at over there is Commander Nara. His late father... Garf Basilisk was the former commander of the Lightning Boulder mercenary group.”

To put it simply, Nara have inherited the leadership from his father.

“Garf Basilisk?”

“Yes. Do you know him?”

“No, it is just...”

Riley shook his head and asked a different question.

“It’s about the name, Basilisk. It is a family name. Were they a nobility in the past?”

What Riley wanted to ask was about the last name attached after Nara’s first name.

“Ah, yes… They are not anymore though.”

“Hm.”

The mercenary responded with a saddened face.

Judging from the look on his face and his tone, it seemed there was a circumstance that lead to that. Riley didn’t pry on it. With his hand supporting his head, Riley turned his gaze toward Nainiae and Basilisk.

‘Now that I think about it, there was one too back in my past life. There was a bastard with a spear that wanted to have a duel with me.’

With a vacant look, Riley thought about his past as he stared at Basilisk. Riley slightly furrowed his brows and wondered through his memories.

‘Back then… What did he say?’

Although he was born again in this world with all of his past memory intact, Riley was still a human.

It was impossible for him to remember everything of the past like a machine. He wasn't able to remember everything clearly.

'I remember the big parts…'

A sense of burden, responsibility, guilt, worries, and etc. There were many complicated emotions involved in it… So, in the end, Riley didn't join the man wielding a spear. Also, that man had a horrific end. Those were the things that Riley remembered.

'Some how… I think there is more that I should be able to remember… but it is not quite coming to me.'

Those were all of memories that Riley could recall about 'that man with the spear.'

"T… two of you… Are you ready? Ms. Nainiae, Mr. Basilisk?"

Perhaps… he should be called the judge. Horai was standing between Nainiae and Basilisk before anyone realized.

Horai was going back to his crass language, but feeling a suffocating atmosphere, he changed his attitude.

“Anytime.”

“Yes.”

Basilisk and Nainiae both answered at the same time.

“In that case, I’ll count down.”

Like the swordsmanship tournament in Solia, Horai started to count down from five seconds.

“5… 4… “

The rule was to make the opponent incapacitated.

Still, in order to prevent accidents, the weapons were wooden sword and spear instead of sharpened real weapons.

“3… 2…”

Nainiae was wielding a wooden sword.

Basilisk was wielding a wooden spear.

‘Is Nainiae going to use a sword?’

Riley, who was looking at the two, narrowed his eyes.

It was because it has not been long since Nainiae started to learn swordsmanship in Iphalleta mansion.

‘Is she going to be all right?’

Unlike Nainiae, Basilisk had been wielding a spear since his childhood. It seemed certain that he was a specialist in spear.

Just looking at his callused hands and mana unintentionally being exuded from his body, Riley could tell that Nainiae was definitely going to lose if the duel was going to be just with a sword and a spear.

“… Start!”

Horai shouted ‘start!’ with his eyes tightly closed. He then promptly turned around and started to run toward where Reitri and Riley was.

It was because he was instructed to do so by Nainiae and Basilisk.

“… Kuk?!”

It was Nainiae who furrowed brows as soon as the match begun.

Basilisk turned his body as soon as Horai's hand fell. Basilisk attempted long range first attack using the spear's length.

'As I expected, is he trying to squash the opponent using the distance?'

Nainiae was in trouble from the start.

Riley tapped the cheek with his index fingers as if he knew this was going to happen.

'Still, if she learned it properly from Sera, she probably knows what to do after this.'

It was right after Riley mumbled like that inside.

Using her wooden sword, Nainiae swept away the wooden spear coming at her with a narrow margin. With her sword still touching the spear, she charged toward Basilisk.

'Too slow.'

Her form was clean. There was nothing to fault. However...

There was a hesitation in her first movement.

It was because this was her first time fighting with a sword.

‘She should have charged in sooner.’

Before Nainiae could get close to Basilisk, he dragged his feet toward his back and increased the distance. He swung his spear from the opposite direction and turned his body again.

“What’s this? Your moves are full of awkwardness?”

Turning his body, Basilisk wiggled the tips of his mouth and swung his spear in a large motion toward Nainiae.

It was a large and confident movement. It seemed Basilisk was trying to show that spears are not just for stabbing.

“By any chance, is this your first fight?”

Nainiae quickly moved her arm and blocked the wooden spear coming at her. Having heard what Basilisk said, Nainiae gritted her teeth.

“…”

“It seems I was right? Judging from how you are cringing your face!”

Basilisk, who was trash talking toward Nainiae, took another step back and widened the distance. He turned his wrist, fixed his

grip on his spear, and attempted to stab Nainiae again.

'This one is too much...'

Riley furrowed his brows.

The stabbing move's power and speed was quite different from the first attack that Basilisk used in the beginning of the match to keep Nainiae in check.

"Kuk?!"

Although Nainiae blocked the first stab by a narrow margin, the problem started with the second strike.

"I'm sorry, but I am not the type that goes easy on someone just because it is the first fight!"

Basilisk wasn't a knight.

He was born as a son of a mercenary, so he was obviously a mercenary.

Showing consideration for the opponent?

That kind of generosity was perfect for getting oneself killed in the battlefield.

Therefore, Basilisk was merciless. He tried to stab Nainiae with his spear. Second, third… He kept attempting it.

'… Fast!'

Nainiae's wooden sword, which was held on her left hand, moved diligently.

Every time she blocked Basilisk's attack, not just the palm of her hand, but her fingers… even her arm, was aching.

'Also, it's heavy.'

It was a proof that Basilisk, the one Nainiae was facing right now, was definitely a skilled warrior.

Even when Nainiae was dueling against Sera who had a serious look on her face, Nainiae never have received a serious strike like this from her. Nainiae's face was gradually getting darker.

'Maybe… He is more skilled than Ms. Sera…'

Puk!

Nainiae was not able to block every strike. Eventually, she was hit on her shoulder.

If the spear that Basilisk was holding was a real spear with a sharp edge, one of her shoulder would not have been all right.

'Kuk. My shoulder…'

This time, Nainiae retreated to gain distance. She looked at her shoulder that was hit.

"For now, that's one strike! You are a girl, but you seem to withstand pain pretty well?"

It seemed Basilisk's attack had a spin to it.

The tip of the spear was blunt. Being stabbed by it, Nainiae's maid uniform's shoulder portion was wrinkled as if there was a small twister there.

"If it was an ordinary person, he would be screaming and yelling about how much it hurts."

Basilisk drew back his spear. He had it rested on his shoulder and looked at one of the mercenary members who were watching the duel. Looked at him, Basilisk mumbled above. The mercenary, who was being stared at by Basilisk, said,

"Why are you looking at me?"

“Nothing. I just remembered how you cried whole day about a bruise because you got hit by this once from me.”

“Gosh. That mouth of yours!”

Basilisk joked as he looked around.

Unlike Nainiae, he looked rather relaxed with margin to spare.

Basilisk may have been with his comrades during his fight against the ogre, but it seemed he was not lying about defeating it within 30 minutes.

‘Um. With that level of skill, I wonder who he would be able to go up against in the mansion?’

Watching the duel, Riley looked at Basilisk with an intrigued face.

‘Sera? Nah. She is not even close. Ian? Lloyd?’

Riley estimated Basilisk’s skill was on par with Ian or Lloyd. He turned his gaze and looked at Nainiae.

“I’m used to pain. This much is… well…”

Nainiae straightened the wrinkle on her dress and said with an

uninterested tone.

“Oh, used to pain?”

Basilisk raised his eye brow as if he was quite surprised and asked.

Nainiae didn’t answer his question. However…

“…”

She was probably talking about the experiments she endured in the Magic Tower.

She was subjected to pain that would be more accurate to call torture instead.

The idea of shedding tears from getting hit by a blunt tip of a wooden spear was not even worth a laugh to Nainiae.

‘Is it about time she used it?’

Watching Nainiae fixing her clothes and narrowing her eyes, Riley also narrowed his eyes and stared at Nainiae.

‘Well. It is worthy of a praise that she managed to block until now using just her sword.’

She never held a sword until recently.

It has not even been two months since she started learning.

Moreover, it was not like she was taught to the official capacity. She was casually taught by Sera... Whenever there was time in between maid training.

The fact that she managed as much as she has so far in this duel was worthy of praise.

'... Looks like she is going to use it.'

Having confirmed the look on Nainiae's eye, he mumbled inside.

Chapter 77 - Nara Basilisk (Part 4)

Nainiae was going to use magic.

That meant Basilisk, the one Nainiae was fighting against, was not some nobody.

‘What kind of magic should I start with?’

After fixing the wrinkle on her dress, Nainiae aimed her wooden sword toward Basilisk again. She started to think hard about which magic to use.

It was a different kind of question. She was not thinking about how to aim her sword, what angle to take, whether to stab or cut, or etc. Hence, the tips of her mouth was up a little.

‘That’s right. My young master is watching, so…’

She casually turned her head. Her eye met with Riley who had his head resting on his hand that was resting on the window frame of the carriage.

‘I think this one would be good to show to him as an example for his next study.’

Having decided what magic to use, Nainiae moved her mouth, recited a spell, and charged forward.

"... Haste."

Basilisk had the wooden spear resting on his shoulder. Noticing Nainiae closing in the gap in an instant, Basilisk strained his eyes.

“... What?!”

It was not that he was surprised by her action.

It was her speed.

“Kuk!”

Unlike before, her speed was increased to the point that only thing Basilisk could do was tracking her movement with his eyes. Basilisk hurriedly, without enough time to react properly, swung his spear and blocked Nainiae’s sword.

‘What’s this? All of sudden, her speed is?’

In a blink of an eye, sounds of woods colliding could be heard four times.

It meant she struck her sword four times.

“...Oh?”

Riley, who was watching the duel between Nainiae and Basilisk, opened his eyes wide.

'Is that the Haste magic that I'm supposed to learn next?'

It was because Riley noticed that Nainiae used the time magic so she could show it to her.

"Tsk!"

Meanwhile, Basilisk, who was skillfully angling his wooden spear and striking against Nainiae's sword strikes, clicked his tongue and swung his spear in a large motion like a windmill.

"Get off from me!"

"..."

Nainiae, who had one of her eye wide open to concentrate on the fight, bounced off all of the spinning spear movement and charged in again.

'What is this... It's like she became a completely different person all of sudden!'

With her right hand on her back, Nainiae was practicing all of the movements she learned in the Iphalleta mansion in flawless

motions. Watching this, Basilisk changed the look on his eyes. It seemed he felt he needed to do something different.

‘All right. You want to get serious, is that right?’

BAM!

WHEEC!

The violent sounds of wooden weapons colliding or crossing past clothes could be heard.

Except Riley, people were watching the duel while forgetting to breathe.

“Judging from your moves, it seems like you have basics down to some extent. However, you are forgetting one thing. A spearman doesn’t just use spear.”

Basilisk, who now had his eyes open wide like Nainiae, started to move in a way that was different from how he was until now.

He was not just using his arms and hands for swinging his spear. He started to use his legs as well to attack.

“...?!”

Basilisk, who was skillfully handling Nainiae's sword play using his spear, suddenly turned his body in a big motion and kicked with his right leg.

"Kuhup?"

By an unexpected strike, Nainiae was struck on the side of her body. She cringed her face.

"... Kuk!"

Nainiae's arm, which was swinging the sword, faltered for a moment.

Noticing this, Basilisk ceased the chance and started to swing his spear toward Nainiae.

"You said pain is nothing, but it seems like you can't take much hit?"

Unlike how he had been swinging and stabbing with spear from distance, he fought in close range. He started trash talking again.

"Now."

"Kuk?!"

“Immediately.”

Once with the spear, another with his elbow, Basilisk pressured Nainiae as he continued talking. He said as he kicked in a large motion,

“Surrender.”

“…”

Nainiae was forced back by a kick. With a violent look on her face, she glared at Basilisk.

“If you surrender now, I will go easy on you so you can avoid getting a broken bone.”

The way he was demonstrating his hand-to-hand combat skill as well was showing that he was not an ordinary mercenary.

‘As expected.’

Basilisk was definitely a skilled warrior.

Nainiae decided to acknowledge that. She dusted off the side of her body and fixed her stance.

“You want to continue? I think the difference in skill has

definitely been shown now?”

“Well, I think I got a feel for a real battle now. Swordsmanship is certainly a difficult discipline. I was reminded of it.”

Also, she realized Riley, the young master she served, was at a height in swordsmanship that nobody else could top. Nainiae shook off the sword with a ‘wheec!’ sound.

“… What?”

“Why don’t we stop here?”

Having heard Nainiae’s response, Basilisk gave a hollow laughter as if he was thinking it was a nonsense.

“Ha. You are ridiculous? If I refuse?”

Patronizing Nainiae, Basilisk acted high and mighty.

“…”

Having heard his question, she didn’t give a reply. She charged toward him again.

“No matter how many times you try, it will be the same…”

“… Grease.”

Nainiae decided that was enough for warming up and getting a feel for the battle. She decided to use various magic.

“Ugh? What is this?”

Basilisk had a look of panic. He waved around and struggled with his legs.

“… Were you thinking I would say that?”

It seemed the look on his face and his struggle were all just acts. Basilisk calmly glared at Nainiae, who was charging toward him, and stabbed the ground with the wooden spear he was wielding.

“…?”

Basilisk’s wooden spear, which carried his mana, pierced through the ground that had Grease magic cast on. The spear became a small pillar for him.

“I already knew that you are a mage when I saw you using Blink magic!”

Grabbing on to his spear with both of his hands, he lifted his leg from the ground and kicked Nainiae, who was charging toward him, with his right leg.

“Slippery magic like this… I have seen it enough times.”

Using Nainiae as the stepping stone, Basilisk used the reaction from the kick’s impact to bounce himself off.

While in mid air, he pulled out the spear and got out of the Grease magic’s effective range.

‘… This is the end!’

Basilisk fixed his stance in mid air and pulled the arm holding the spear to the back.

A spear was great for stabbing or swinging, but it was also a great weapon for throwing.

So, Basilisk decided to end the duel with this throw.

‘She may end up not being able to use a part of her body… Still, she is the one that refused to surrender, so don’t blame…’

Basilisk, who was straining his arm and ready to throw in midair, wiggled his eyebrows.

‘… What the?’

It was because he could see Nainiae's right hand. Until now, it was hidden behind her back.

'What is that? Why are her fingers... like that?'

It was a horrible looking hand with middle and ring finger missing.

With his gaze caught up in her hand, he had not thrown the spear yet. In that moment, a sharp wind came at his cheek.

"Ugh?!"

Noticing the blood spewing out from the cheek, Basilisk broke cold sweat.

'What?!'

Looking at Nainiae mumbling with her mouth to recite spells, Basilisk anticipated that there will be another invisible attack and quickly turned his head.

'Right!'

It was the experience from his work as a mercenary.

The experience was telling him that something was coming from

the right side.

“Kuk?!”

Nainiae created another wind magic, Airhammer. The attack struck Basilisk who was in midair.

‘What is this power?!’

It was at a whole another level from getting struck by a sword.

Appearing to be in pain, Basilisk cringed his face and fell to the ground. He got up immediately, fixed a stance and charged toward Nainiae.

‘I can’t let her have time to recite spells. That would be a disadvantage to me!’

One of his arm and entire shoulder felt numb.

Looking at Nainiae wearing a mask on one side of her face, Basilisk decided to attack that side and pierced into the side.

‘As quickly as possible!’

Not targeting the opponent’s blind side was going to be a foolish move for a mercenary.

Becoming of a mercenary who is all about practicality and achieving victory, Basilisk aimed for Nainiae's blindside. His spear charged toward Nainiae like a snake springing forward to bite its prey.

'Huh?!'

Basilisk, who was going at it with his spear, suddenly had his face turn pale.

He felt a deadly aura. It felt like something unknown was about to stab him in his neck.

"..."

Before he realized, Nainiae raised the right hand to her left shoulder. Only a moment ago, she had the hand to the front.

Her stance seemed like she was about to move the right hand in diagonal direction and cause something to come out.

'It's dangerous. I could be killed!'

Basilisk felt that he would die if she swung that hand.

He hurriedly retrieved his wooden spear and retreated.

At the same time, Nainiae swung the right hand that she had placed next to her face in a powerful motion.

“Icicle Nova.”

Nainiae waved her hand as she recited the spell name.

Spear-like sharp icicles were formed around her in a ring formation. They looked like they would pierce through anything that came near her.

“Ugh. Kuhuk?!”

Basilisk seemed extremely surprised.

Basilisk even forgot to run. He even forgot to take steps back. He was petrified where he stood.

“…”

Gulp.

Looking at a black icicle that stopped just before making contact with his neck, Basilisk gulped dry.

There were cold sweats falling on his back to let him know he

was not dead.

“Let’s continue…”

Having heard Nainiae’s voice, Basilisk looked at her.

“…?”

Like a hedgehog, protecting herself with a wall of sharp icicles, Nainiae held a black flame on her right hand and asked Basilisk,

“You are not going to say that, are you?”

Before she realized, she was back to using her crass language from Lower Solia. Nainiae said as she started down at Basilisk.

“Huh…”

It seemed Basilisk lost strength on his leg. Basilisk, who was looking at Nainiae, plummeted down on the ground with a vacant look on his face.

“It would be best if you did not pester my young master.”

Nainiae extinguished her black flame by closing her hand. Nainiae declared her victory.

“You most certainly have solid skills for someone of your age… However, I only spoke the truth.”

Nainiae also removed the icicles, walked toward Basilisk and tilted her head side to side.

“Young Master Riley is even stronger…”

“… Stop! Don’t get any closer to our commander!”

“…?”

A sharp voice could be heard from where the spectators were gathered. Nainiae floated a question mark on her face and looked to that direction.

“Why are you…”

The Lightning Boulder’s mercenaries had their bows tightly drawn and aimed the arrows at Nainiae. They had deadly looks on the faces.

Nainiae tilted her head side to side with a confused look in her eye.

She was aware that she used a pretty dangerous method to fight Basilisk, their commander, but she did not expect that they would react in such a drastic way.

“… You…”

Basilisk asked.

The look on his face was not different from his comrades.

“… Are you a dark mage?”

“…?”

Having heard the question, she asked back.

“Dark mage?”

Nainiae, with a surprised look, observed the surrounding.

“What are you… talking….”

Not just the mercenaries aiming arrows at her, but Reitri, Horai and others in the merchant group all had faces filled with terror as they looked at Nainiae.

“The dark mage that’s been active around Rainfield recently…”

Basilisk, who plummeted down with a vacant look on his face,

supported himself with the spear and carefully got up. He glared at Nainiae and murmured,

“To think that… I would run in to the dark mage here…”

Although the atmosphere was serious during their duel, it was not as serious as this.

‘What’s this?’

It was not just serious. The atmosphere was full of wariness. Riley, who was checking out the situation while having his head resting on his palm, furrowed his eyebrows as he wondered what this was about.

“Y… Young Master…”

Unable to withstand all the gazes glaring at her, Nainiae called Riley.

“… Ugh.”

Realizing the situation got tangled up into a complex mess, Riley sighed big enough to make the ground sink.

Chapter 78 - About The Dark Mage

‘Gosh, Andal, that dumbass… Really…’

He should have teleported Riley and Nainiae to a place that was easy for them to find the way.

Instead, Andal placed them in a spot that was difficult for them to figure out the way. Riley resented Andal a hundred times inside, sighed and opened the carriage door.

“Dark mage? What’s that about?”

“Young master, are you on the same side with the dark mage?”

When Riley made his way down from the carriage in frustration, one of the Lightning Boulder mercenaries, who had the arrow aimed at Nainiae, aimed the arrow toward Riley and asked.

“… Don’t aim your arrow at me.”

Noticing the arrow aimed at himself, Riley, displeased, furrowed his brows. He then looked at her with a gaze containing deadly aura.

“…Ut?!”

Noticing that Riley’s relaxed atmosphere unique to him has

changed to deadly mood all of sudden, the archer petrified with a pale face.

It felt like invisible hands grabbed tightly on to the neck and the heart. It felt like they were getting in the way of breathing.

“We need to know what’s going on too? Being accused as the dark mage out of the blue? We are the one who are finding all this ridiculous.”

Riley slowly closed one of his eyes and relaxed his deadly aura as he mumbled.

The Lightning Boulder’s archer, who was holding the breath hard, breathed out big.

“J… Just now, that… Did you do that, young master?”

Likewise, Reitri, who was also exposed to Riley’s deadly aura, was also focusing on calming his breathing with a pale look on his face.

“Just answer my question.”

Looking annoyed, Riley crumpled his face.

Horai, who was completely terrified, went into Reitri’s arms and started to shake.

“That is… The magic that Ms. Nainiae used… It was black color, wasn’t it?”

“What about the black color?”

“It’s black colored. Black color… It is a unique treat that all dark mages have.”

Having heard Reitri’s explanation, Riley looked at Nainiae with a confused face. Nainiae shook her head to say that this was not true.

“Is anyone and everyone with black colored magic a dark mage then?”

After seeing Nainiae shaking her head, Riley turned his head toward Reitri and asked.

Reitri had his mouth open, but he was not able to answer.

“This is her innate color, so what is she supposed to do?”

“Young master, it is not due to my innate treat, it is due to experiment…”

“The fact that you are not a dark mage is still the same, isn’t that right? That’s that!”

Riley yelled at Nainiae as if he was trying to tell her to stop talking. Riley looked at Basilisk and asked.

“Tell me. Why is she a dark mage? Besides the fact that her magic is black colored, what else do you have?”

Hearing Riley yelling at him, Basilisk was not able to answer.

He turned his head again and looked at Nainiae.

“…”

It seemed she was embarrassed about her horrid looking hand. She hid her right hand behind her back, bit her lips, and didn’t know what to do.

“Can you take responsibility for your claim? I can put my title, Iphalleta, a house of Count, on the line for my claim. What will you put on the line for yours?”

To the people of Reitri’s merchant company…

To the three members of the Lightning Boulder mercenary group…

Riley asked while mentioning his family’s name.

Nobody was able to answer right away.

"..."

"..."

After looking around the people who were in silence, Riley shrugged his shoulder and continued.

"I don't know about in Rainfield, but in Solia, if you are found guilty of insulting a nobility, the minimum sentence is a life of imprisonment. Did you know that?"

Riley's atmosphere started to get deadly again.

"I was going to relax because this is my vacation. You runts don't know your places..."

His relaxed tone of speech has left the scene somehow without trace. Riley, with his eyes narrowed, paused for a moment and opened his mouth again as if he was mumbling.

"If you still think she is a dark mage... All right. That's fine."

Right in front of everyone to see, Riley was glaring at Horai. With an annoyed look on his face, Riley scratched the back of his head and mumbled,

“We will just act like who we were accused of. Like a dark mage would… We will just kill all witnesses and get going.”

“…!”

Having heard Riley’s suggestion, the people flinched their shoulders.

“Isn’t that what you all want?”

“… No.”

Riley asked in a leisurely attitude, and Reitri got up while shaking his head left and right.

He answered as the representative of the group.

“I also… hope Ms. Nainiae is not a dark mage.”

“U… Uncle!”

Looking at his uncle working up the courage and getting up to respond, Horai tried to stop Reitri as he pulled on Reitri’s sleeve.

It seemed he was worried something terrible might happen to Reitri. Horai’s eyes were filled with tears.

“Horai. I think… Instead of sitting idly like this, I think it is only right that you should apologize first?”

“… Uncle?”

“You may be just a child, and you may have grown up in a place without any nobilities. However… Young master Riley is someone who is clearly above us.”

Horai, who was lead to get up by Reitri’s hand, started to shake his shoulders.

It was because he never saw his uncle so angry.

“Even if young master Riley is not a nobility, the way you treat a guest is… You were very wrong. Seriously wrong.”

“U… Uncle…”

“Hurry and apologize to young master Riley.”

Reitri added because he knew begging for mercy wasn’t going to be enough.

He looked at Horai with a cold gaze.

“U… Uncle… But… Still…”

SLAP!

Reitri's palm moved, and Horai's head was quickly turned.

The sound of flesh making an impact could be heard loudly.

"…?!"

"Hurry. Tell him that you are sorry."

"Uu… Uu… Ah…."

Reitri slapped Horai for the sake of discipline.

He was urging Horai to quickly apologize to Riley.

"Ah, that is…"

The atmosphere turned cold in a blink of an eye. The one who could not adjust to it the most was none other than Nainiae.

"E… Excuse me. Before it swells up, an ointment…"

Toward Horai, who was crying because he was slapped by his uncle, Nainiae came in hurry. She injected mana into her leather

bracelet and opened the dimensional space.

“Ointment… Ointment should be here somewhere.”

With a concerned look on her face, Nainiae brought out an ointment from the dimensional space. She was about to touch Horai’s swelled up cheek. It was at that moment.

“Just for a moment. I’ll apply this for y…”

“… Get your hand off me!!”

Slap!!

Horai, who was tightly holding on to his tears, swung his right arm in a big motion and swept away Nainiae’s arm.

“Ah.”

The problem was that the arm, which was swung aimlessly, crossed Nainiae’s face… To be precise, it crossed the part where she was wearing a mask.

“…?!”

Nainiae’s mask was undone. Horai found Nainiae’s scars below the mask and shook his shoulders.

“What…”

With her injury revealed, Nainiae panicked. Using a simple telekinesis magic, she retrieved the mask from the ground and placed it back on her face.

“I’m sorry. You must have been… shocked.”

Nainiae, who was concerned Horai might be scared of her because of her scars, carefully extended her hand.

On her left hand, which had all five fingers in tact, had some of the ointment that she brought out from the dimensional space.

“You don’t feel it now, but… It might hurt later, so you must apply this now.”

Nainiae gently applied the ointment to Horai’s cheek.

Looking satisfied, she took steps back.

“That… That is…”

Horai, with his face blushing out of embarrassment, carefully touched his cheek that had ointment applied by Nainiae. He looked at Reitri once and then Riley once.

“that is… That…”

Soon, Horai started to shed tears that were filling his eyes. His tears fell like chicken shit. He bit his lips tightly and…

[TL: Comparing the tears to chicken shit is a thing in Korean language. I think it is usually used when a person was subjected to unspeakable wrong and the person is hopeless against it. Perhaps it is not fitting the situation here since Horai was not subjected to such.]

“I… I’m sorry.”

Following Horai’s tearful apology, Reitri also lowered his head and apologized to Riley.

“Please forgive us for our rudeness, young master Riley.”

Reitri raised his head slightly and gave a look to Basilisk and everyone in the Lightning Boulder mercenary group.

“…”

It seemed they understood. They lowered their weapons and apologized to Riley and Nainiae.

“I’m sorry. It’s just… Can we please hear your side of the story?”

"... Kuhup. Kuhurng!!"

Having heard Nainiae's story, there was a boy who started to jerk tears like a certain 'butler' from the Iphalleta mansion.

"I... I see... So that's what happened to you! At the Solia's Magic Tower! That son of a bitch Astroa... Ugh!"

It was the commander of Lightning Boulter mercenary group, Basilisk.

"How could... How could they! Ugh!!"

The story about how she participated in Magic Tower's experiment for her mother's sake, the story about horrible experiments where she would have been better if she died, being abandoned by the magic tower as a disposed product after the experiment, being thrown away at the sewer, learning from the Solia's Holy Temple that she had a very limited life span left...

"Is there anything I can do for you? Do you have any wish? If it is something our mercenary group can help you with, I will definitely... Kuhup!!"

Having heard Nainiae's story, Basilisk was pouring out tears. Nainiae brought out a handkerchief from the dimensional space and gave it to Basilisk.

“H… Here. Please use this.”

“T… Thanks!”

SNEEEEEEEZE!

As Basilisk blew his nose into the handkerchief, Riley, who was sitting next to Nainiae, crumpled his face to the max.

“… Ha!”

It was because that was his personal favorite. It was also because Basilisk’s behavior was strikingly similar to someone.

‘I came here to avoid Ian, but oh my…’

Riley judged that it would be impossible to have a conversation with Basilisk at the moment considering that he was jerking tears. Riley turned his head away.

“So, has your suspicion been cleared?”

“If our commander is sure of it… We have no reason to be suspicious anymore.”

Rorona and Isen, two of the Lightning Boulder’s members,

nodded in response to Riley's question.

"How could you be so certain?"

Riley was thinking they would still be doubting Nainiae, but to the contrary, they nodded in agreement so easily. That was actually making Riley feel suspicious toward their behavior. With his eyes narrowed, Riley asked.

"It's because our commander is a great judge of character. He had never been wrong. Although it is an ability that's limited by a few conditions."

"Conditions?"

When Riley asked back, Rorona of the mercenary group opened the chest wide and started to explain about the commander.

"Yes, actually, the commander is human..."

"... Rorona."

By Isen calling her name, Rorona, the archer of the mercenary group, turned the subject as she showed the palm of her hand.

"Ugh, anyway... Should I say it is... something like his instinct? There is a thing like that. There is no need for further doubts."

Rorona opted for a wishy-washy explanation and clicked her tongue as she looked at Basilisk jerking tears as he firmly held both of Nainiae's hands.

"What about the Dark mage near Rainfield? What is that about?"

It seemed like they weren't going to tell Riley about the subject that Rorona brought up about Basilisk. So, Riley moved on to the next subject and asked about the dark mage.

"It is as the rumors say. An infamous dark mage that had been spreading terror for a long time is now active near Rainfield. It is a pretty well known news. I'm sure it reached Solia too... You didn't hear about it?"

Having heard Isen's question, Riley tilted his head side to side.

"Um... I feel like I have heard of it."

Riley rolled his head. He asked Isen to hear about it in more detail.

"About that dark mage. Are there people that actually saw the mage or were hurt from the encounter?"

"Yes, there were."

Isen responded with a darkened face.

Rorona also added with a darkened face.

“Our former commander is one of the victims.”

“…”

They must be talking about the late father of Basilisk.

“There are many other victims besides our commander. The number is probably growing as we speak. I have a wanted poster… Would you like to see it?”

Riley extended his hand.

Isen brought out a piece of rolled paper and gave it to Riley.

“What the hell?”

Having checked the content, Riley furrowed his brows.

The figure in the poster had a black hood on top of the head. It was difficult to confirm the face.

“Characteristics: Uses black colored magic. Animates corpses.. What the hell?”

“It is a little fuzzy in the details.”

“A little?”

“…”

Riley returned the poster to Isen. He realized the situation was seriously tangled up. Riley scratched his head.

“God damn it. This means there is no guarantee that an incident like this would not happen again.”

Riley was agonizing about Nainiae’s black colored magic. Looking at him, Isen said,

“that dark mage had not been caught for ten years. I think it was fortunate that Ms. Nainiae was in Solia all this time.”

“Ten years?”

“Actually, we… have also been hunting that dark mage. We had been active in Ansyrium, but there was an opportunity, so we came to Rainfield with the merchant group.”

Rorona added as she fiddled with her fingers that she had locked with both hands together. Riley turned his head and looked at Reitri’s merchant group which was getting ready to travel.

“They are also selected by our commander using his sense of judgment. You probably felt it too when he apologized to you first... His roots are strong and true. He will become successful.”

Isen complimented Reitri. Hearing this, Riley, who was staring at Reitri with a blank look, ran in to his eyes and peeked a smile.

“Well?”

It was because Reitri smiled gently and bowed with head first.

“In that case, this characteristic? What is this about? It talks about reviving the dead? What does it mean?”

“It means exactly that. That dark mage has an ability to animate a dead body by force.”

Kung...

Kung...

“... Um?”

“Ability to force a dead body to move?”

“Excuse me. Please wait for a bit, young master... Did you hear that just now?”

Sound of the ground shaking could be heard.

Isen raised his ears and focused on his hearing.

Rorona, the archer, seemed like she felt the sound well before him. She was already looking at the direction of the sound with a serious face.

“What? You mean like a zombie?”

Riley didn’t give a damn.

Although the sound of the ground shaking could be heard, Riley was only concerned about the dark mage’s ability.

“O… Ogre!?”

“Why is an ogre here!”

STOMP!

Noticing an ogre approaching with ground-shaking steps, Rorona and Isen were not able to answer Riley’s question. Instead, they picked up their weapons.

“Kuwaaarrrr!”

It seemed the ogre found its food.

Drolling, the ogre was charging toward where Reitri merchant group's carriages were gathered.

"Kuk. As I thought, is this the one paired with the other one earlier?"

Basilisk, who was jerking tears from eyes and nose from hearing Nainiae's story, immediately picked up his spear and got up.

"It's an ogre!"

"Don't panic! First, get the carriages out of the way!"

Although the people of the merchant group was hurriedly moving the carriages, Riley still only tilted his head side to side with a quizzical expression on his face.

"Wait, commander! That ogre... He is in a bit of an odd condition?"

"It looks like his arm and head are loose..."

Rorona, who narrowed her eyes as she looked at the ogre charging toward the group, noticed the ogre's eyes were 'pitch black.' She mumbled,

“Look…!”

It seemed there wasn’t going to be time to explain in detail about what she noticed.

The ogre was already near everyone, enough to cast its shadow to the people.

“Y… Young Master! Hey! Young Master! Get up! The ogre… The ogre is coming?!”

Basilisk was breaking cold sweats as he wielded his spear. Noticing Riley still sitting on the ground and thinking hard about something, Basilisk shouted at Riley,

“Young Master!”

“… Kuuuuwaaaarrr!!”

Ogre roared again with its fist raised up.

Having heard it, Riley cringed his face.

“Gosh damn it… That’s loud you bastard!!”

Riley moved his hand toward his sword that was sitting next to

him. He swung his arm in what appeared to be an aimless motion.

“…?”

STOMP!

The ogre, which was charging toward the group with a loud roar, suddenly fell on its knees and raised dust clouds.

“… What?”

Not just Basilisk and the mercenaries, but the people of the merchant groups were blinking their eyes in disbelief.

“Just now… what happened?”

The ogre’s head was, literally in a blink of an eye, gone without any trace.

“So, what did you say? Force a dead body to move?”

To people standing around dumbfoundedly, Riley asked again as if he didn’t quite understand it.

Chapter 79 - About The Dark Mage (Part 2)

"... Huh?"

It was inside the forest.

A man under a pitch-black cape with a hood quickly turned his head and stared at what appeared to be just an empty space.

"What's this? There is a dead one here?"

The man that mumbled raised his right hand, and he started to exude dark power from it.

"Who is it that died? Let's see..."

The man stood there for a long while and looked at his right hand. He eventually cringed and mumbled,

"It's a dead ogre? Geez. You ungrateful fool... I just revived you!"

Tsk.

The man under the hood clicked his tongue. He lowered his right arm and started to walk again.

"It's hard to come across a dead ogre. I wonder how it died?"

As if it was a complete mystery to him, the man, who was walking, crossed his arms as he held his chin with his hand. He tilted his head toward the side and said,

“I don’t get it. I really don’t. Do you have any idea?”

The man with a quizzical expression slowly directed his gaze toward the ‘corpse’ that was walking next to him.

“…”

Its face was pale, and its eyes were pitch-black as if someone poured ink in them.

The corpse did not respond.

With its mouth wide open, it only followed the man under the hooded cape.

“It’s a waste. No matter how I think about it, it’s such a shame! Instead of letting it roam around, perhaps I should have had it tag along with me? Should I have?!”

The man crumpled his face. He wiggled his fingers in bizarre shapes as he turned his head.

“You insolent fool! I’m asking you! Should I have had it tag along

with me?”

The man was asking to the corpse.

Despite the scolding, the corpse didn’t give any response.

“…”

“That’s right! As I thought, I should I have had it tag along with me, right?”

Although there was no response from the corpse, the man nodded as if he heard it. He mumbled alone.

“Uuuuu! It’s a shame! What a waste! I’m too far away to go retrieve it…”

The man under the hooded cape suddenly swung his hand, the one exuding dark power, and struck the neck of the corpse that was following him on the right.

“There is no answer to this. There isn’t one!”

THUMP

The corpse’s head fell.

“No… There is… an answer.”

The man bent all ten fingers on his hand in all sorts of bizarre angles. He suddenly stopped it and said,

“I just need to do as much as I have lost!”

The man vacantly lifted his head, and suddenly, a sudden flash of light happened in the sky, followed by thunder.

“That’s right. An ogre!”

Thook

A rain drop fell on the head of the corpse that the man cut off, and the man started to laugh with all of his facial muscles wiggling like a mad man.

“… An ogre!”

“So, this is it?”

The three members of the Lightning Boulder mercenary group were glancing and trying to get a read on Riley’s mood.

“Yes, that’s right.”

It was because they knew that the headless ogre that was lying on the ground in front of their eyes was Riley’s work. They knew Riley was the one that chopped off its head in a single strike.

That wasn’t all.

Although they were standing right next to Riley, they were having a hard time properly assessing his blade’s speed or power. It was an obvious choice that they would be cautious to not spoil Riley’s mood.

“I felt like I saw this runt a while ago.”

Riley kicked the ogre’s head, and black blood poured out of its neck.

This feels like taking a dump and not cleaning up the behind.

Riley was cringing as if he was looking at something filthy. He turned his body away as if he completely lost interest.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes.”

Although he only called her name, as if she understood, Nainiae took a step forward and put forth her left hand.

With a sound of flame burning up, a black flame bloomed on he left hand.

“Everyone, please step back for a moment.”

In order to cremate the ogre that died twice, Nainiae had the people, who were watching, to move back and swung the hand that held the flame.

“Huk!”

Horai, who was watching while shaking, said ‘huk!’

It was because the flame, which was the size of a palm when it was floating on top of Nainiae’s hand, grew in size in an instant when it touched the ogre’s corpse.

“As I expected, Big Sis mage…”

“Excuse me, Ms. Nainiae. How far have you reached in your magic?”

Reitri, who was throwing his gaze at a blade that Nainiae had on her waist, carefully asked.

“I’m at Six Circles.”

“Huk…”

Nainiae responded as if it was nothing. With the ogre’s dead body fully cremated, she shook her left hand and extinguished the remaining flame.

“Ah… I was surprised when I learned that the story about Astroa was true, but… To think you are at Six Circles…”

‘No matter how I look at her, she appears to be under 20 years old, yet she is at Six Circles?’

Basilisk shook his head as if he was sick of all this.

Nainiae was a Six Circles mage and he just called for a duel against that Six Circles mage. Even in his second thought, Basilisk found all of these to be ridiculous nonsense.

“Excuse me… Ms. Nainiae?”

“Yes?”

“From now on, how about you let it be a little obvious for others…”

Basilisk advised and suggested Nainiae to boast her height as a Six Circles mage.

“I’m not sure.”

Nainiae, who thought about it hard for a moment, continued in a leisurely manner and said,

“I should know my place. My Young Master is keeping quiet. It would not be the right thing to do if I boasted about it, don’t you think?”

Nainiae shrugged her shoulders and asked back.

Basilisk stood there with a blank look on his face.

Around that moment, Reitri’s shouting could be heard. Reitri said,

“We will slowly start heading out!”

Nainiae said,

“Shall we get going?”

She started to walk toward the carriage first.

“… Everyone is ready, right? We are heading out now!”

The carriages were heading toward Rainfield again after a small commotion.

Inside a carriage, Basilisk was pouting. He looked like someone who was holding his pee. He carefully asked Nainiae who was driving her carriage.

“Excuse me. I am sorry.”

“…?”

Nainiae turned her head to the side and looked at Basilisk.

As if she was asking what he was sorry about, she had a question mark on her eye.

“I feel like I should apologize to you again. About before, that… the accusation I made… how I ran my mouth.”

“… Ah.”

Basilisk was scratching his cheek as if he was ashamed and embarrassed.

Nainiae realized what he was trying to tell her. She relaxed the look on her face and smiled.

“It is all right. I was also able to clear some misunderstanding thanks to you, Commander.”

Having heard her response, Basilisk sighed in relief and acknowledged Riley and Nainiae.

“I see. So, the mercenary hero thinks a man like the Young Master is…”

“… someone to be proud of.”

Noticing that Basilisk blurred the end of his sentence, Nainiae opened her mouth.

Having said that, Nainiae still had a pretty smile on her face.

She was reminiscing about the days she spent in the mansion.

“Mr. Ian… has a strong pride about the fact that he is serving Young Master Riley. I even wonder if that is the strength that gives him the power to live.”

Just in case Basilisk was wondering about Ian, Nainiae talked about him. She then turned her head, looked to the front with confidence and said,

“I am also a maid who serves Young Master Riley. I’m sure my pride in our young master is not second to Ian.”

“…”

“Um?”

Nainiae was driving the carriage as she continued, but she felt a drop of water from the sky. She gave a vacant stare to the sky and raised her hand to feel the rain drops.

“… Rain?”

“Huh? It’s about to fall?”

Noticing Nainiae, Basilisk looked up the sky and murmured,

“This means we will be arriving at Rainfield soon.”

“Rainfield…”

The city of endless rain.

As if the sky was trying to tell them that they are almost at Rainfield, the rate and intensity of raindrops started to grow.

Swuuuuwaaaaa.....

It was pouring rain.

The sound of rain was filling the ears with its cool sound. Nainiae brought out an umbrella from the dimensional storage and came down from the driver's seat.

"This place is...."

Perhaps it was due to the myst, but the scenary could be described perfectly by the word, 'mysterious.'

"... Rainfield?"

The feel of the buildings and street signs were completely different from what she used to see in Solia. Nainiae had her gaze taken by the sight. She vacantly looked around the place for a moment. Having regained her senses, she started to walk.

"Young master."

Knock Knock

She walked toward the front of the carriage and knocked on the door. She carefully entered inside and shook Riley who was asleep.

“Young Master, we are here. We are at Rainfield.”

“Uu… Really?”

He couldn’t quite open his eyes properly because he just woke up. He rubbed his eyes, heard the sound of rain coming from outside, and quickly smiled.

“Wow… It feels cool already.”

Looking at the scenery outside the window, Riley coughed out words of excitement, got off the carriage immediately, and got under the umbrella below Nainiae.

“Should I cast a Barrier?”

“No, it is fine. It’s more like it to use an umbrella where it rains.”

“… Okay.”

Nainiae, who suddenly got to stand tightly next to Riley under an umbrella, shriveled her shoulder.

‘He will get wet like this.’

With a smile on his face, Riley was watching the scenery of

Rainfield. Nainiae was concerned Riley's shoulders might get wet, so she moved the umbrella toward Riley and pursed her mouth.

"What about the other guys?"

"If you are talking about Reitri's merchant company and Lightning Boulder mercenary group, we went our separate ways as soon as we arrived at Rainfield. He said he need to move quickly."

"Is that so? Well, he is not here for a vacation, so..."

Riley was going to ask Reitri about good restaurants serving delicious foods or good hotels to stay at since Reitri, a merchant, probably came here more often than Riley. Disappointed that he missed the opportunity, Riley clicked his tongue.

"Ah, and he told me to give you this."

Nainiae opened the dimensional storage and brought out a small piece of paper. She showed the paper to Riley and said,

"He said he will be staying in Rainfield for about a month. He said he will most likely to stay in the hotel written in the paper, and also that we can come by anytime if we have any business with them."

"Hm?"

Watching Riley narrowing his eyes, Nainiae added,

“… He said he will treat you for a big one.”

“Haha, great!”

Riley smiled big with satisfaction. He leaned the umbrella toward Nainiae and asked,

“Let’s see… We are here now, and the carriage is parked too. Let’s set a destination right away then? Where shall we go first?”

“Pardon? What do you mean…”

Her shoulder was getting wet from the rain, but now the umbrella was there again to cover her shoulder. Noticing this, Nainiae tumbled and opened her mouth.

“Let’s see… It’s dinner time, so…”

Koruruk [TL: Sound of Nainiae’s stomach growling from hunger.]

As soon as Riley said it, someone’s stomach was signaling that it requires sustenance.

“…”

“… we should go eat dinner.”

On their way to Rainfield, even when Riley was eating that sandwich, Nainiae was just watching from the back. Now, with her stomach growling, Nainiae dropped her head.

“… Please pardon me.”

With an empty stomach, she had a duel against Basilisk, incinerated the ogre’s corpse, the one that the dark mage probably had a hand in, and she had been looking after Riley all this time.

Even though she did all that, her stomach didn’t make a noise until now. It meant she was either ill or not human.

“This is your reward. Is there anything in particular that you would like to eat?”

Riley messed up Nainiae’s head with his palm and smiled big as he asked.

“Well…”

Nainiae, who was blushing, hesitated for a while, wondering if it would be really all right to ask. She eventually answered in a small voice.

“A warm fish soup…”

“What? Onion pancake?”

Riley stroke Nainiae’s head, smiled big and asked again.

“…?”

“Onion pancake! Onion pancake and liquors are perfect for a rainy weather. You know some stuff.”

Nainiae had a question mark floating on her face.

Riley took the umbrella from Nainiae and wrapped his arm around Nainiae’s shoulder.

“…!”

“Let’s go.”

It seems Nainiae was surprised by Riley putting his arm around her shoulder in a natural motion. Nainiae flinched her shoulder. She mumbled inside that she can’t beat Riley and said,

“… Okay.”

Nainiae actually didn’t know what kind of food Riley was talking

about, but she smiled and answered that she would like them as well.

Chapter 80 - Rainfield

Riley had always liked rain.

He liked rain in his past life, and he still liked it even in the new life.

He loved listening to the sounds of raindrops. With his head resting on his hand, he loved to watch the scenery of the sky with dark clouds while being intoxicated by the mood of the atmosphere.

Also...

“Your order is ready.”

“Oh!”

Like this, he loved drinking and eating onion pancakes on a rainy day. He loved it very much.

“It’s here. It’s here!”

When Riley came to a city called Rainfield for the first time before, on the first day of the visit, he discovered what appeared to be onion pancake on a menu just like what he used to enjoy in his past life. When he found it, he couldn’t shake himself off from the shock for a while.

There was a time when he ate onion pancakes for all three meals of the day.

“I get to finally eat it!”

Until now, Riley always came here with Sera. So, he didn’t get to eat Rainfield’s rice liquor, a specialty drink that was similar to Riley’s past life’s rice liquor. Now, that was not a problem.

[TL: The author is mentioning onion pancake and rice liquor, which are something unique to Korea. These suggest Riley was Korean in his past life.]

“What is this?”

With the food brought to the table, Nainiae just stared at flat shaped food. She asked Riley what it was.

“It’s a flat fried dough.”

“Flat fried dough?”

“It’s also called onion pancake. Well, this world doesn’t have such a name for this. The name is good enough.”

In fact, the menu had it listed as ‘Flat fried dough.’ The food was made of flattened flour dough that was fried with various vegetables and seafood.

“Now, shall we eat?”

Riley gave a piece to Nainiae and also recommended a black sauce that was on the table.

“You could dip on it. You can eat it without the sauce too.”

It was only right that a world had a type of food that was becoming of rainy weather.

This food at Rainfield was exactly that, and it was a famous specialty food from the city.

“In that case, thank you for the food.”

Nainiae carefully picked up a piece with a fork and brought it toward her mouth. The piece had steam rising from it. She started to chew.

“Ah…”

CRUNCH!

Along with the sound, Nainiae’s eyes opened wide.

Not able to wait any longer, Riley asked,

“How is it?”

“Um! Um!”

She was not able to speak because she had food in her mouth, but she nodded multiple times with her face slightly turning red from excitement.

“You are saying it is delicious, right?”

“…!”

Although Nainiae blew it before eating it to cool it down, it seemed the piece was still too hot. She was still not able to speak. Instead, she just nodded once again.

“By how it looks like, I thought someone threw up on the table… Unlike how it looks like, it is pretty tasty.”

Nainiae shallowed what she just chewed, and explained her impression about the food that she just ate.

“Threw up? That’s harsh.”

Riley peeked a smile.

Certainly, the food didn't look exactly like how it was in Riley's past life. The version in this world looked rather crude, so he could see how it could look like that to Nainiae.

"It's really delicious! Especially the crunchy part toward the edges!"

"Hey, don't go eating just those parts."

Those edges were Riley's favorite parts as well.

"The insides are tastier. Eat the insides. They are soft and moist."

"Ah, yes..."

Nainiae wanted to taste more of the crunchiness of the edges, but she had to give in to Riley. So, instead of the edges, Nainiae started to focus on the insides.

"Excuse me. The rice liquor is here."

"Ah, it's here."

It was around the time when Riley and Nainiae ate about half of the food. A waiter with a friendly smile brought the drink that Riley ordered with the flat fried dough.

“Young master, this is?”

It was a white liquid. It almost looked like milk. Noticing the mysterious liquid, Nainiae looked at Riley.

Despite Nainiae’s question, Riley omitted a response. Instead, he just drooled while staring at the food and the drink on the table.

“…”

On a rainy day, a rice liquor was perfect with a flat fried dough.

The rice liquor at Rainfield was made from the rain, so it was famous for its exquisite taste.

‘Huhu… Sera is not here. Today, I really get to drink it!’

A rainy day, flat fried dough, rice liquor.

The three things were perfectly set. Tips of Riley’s mouth were tilting up on their own.

“Young master. This is an alcoholic beverage… isn’t it?”

After fully preparing himself for the drink, he was about to quench his neck with it, but he flinched his shoulders after hearing Nainiae’s question.

"…"

"Excuse me, Young Master. I don't believe you are old enough to…"

Riley was 19. He was not yet old enough.

It was not like there was a law about the age limit for drinking, so it didn't matter. However, Iris had been telling Riley 'You can drink when you are twenty or older!' countless number of times to the point there is a nail with that message stuck on Riley's ear.

Of course, Sera and Ian always stopped Riley's attempts at drinking alcoholic beverages.

[TL: This means the so called 'brown sugar beer' that he had been allowed to drink all this time is not an alcoholic beverage. Is it like a root beer?]

'Ugh, seriously…'

Looking at Nainiae worrying about the rice liquor sitting on top of the table, Riley started to complain inside.

'She sure was taught well by Sera all right. Really… Uh?'

With his eyes narrowed, Riley was glaring at her. He quickly changed the look on his face and said,

“Ah, this is not an alcoholic beverage.”

‘If I count the life I had in my past life, I’m way past 20!’

Although Riley had been keeping it a secret from the family or Ian, Riley had been drinking often with Andal.

This was not his first drink.

“It is… not?”

Having heard what he just said, Nainiae started to look around the other tables.

The atmosphere was loud, busy and full of chatters.

There were others drinking the same beverage that Riley ordered, and they all had the same look on their faces. Their faces were all saturated in red. The looks on their faces were like they were proudly saying ‘Ah? I’m totally drunk!’

“It seems to be an alcoholic beverage?”

“It sure does, right? But it is not.”

“But…”

“It’s all right. It’s not going to kill me.”

With his eyes narrowed, he glared at Nainiae.

The look on his eyes were somehow looking sensitive.

Without realizing, Nainiae shriveled her shoulders. Not knowing what to do, she pursed her lips.

“It’s not a matter of life or death. It’s just that Lady Iris told me…”

Nainiae thought about the list of things that Iris explained to Nainiae before she departed to Rainfield to tell her to watch out for. Nainiae fiddled with the mask that was hiding half of her face.

It seemed Nainiae was still conflicted about the matter.

‘… That’s good enough!’

If she was conflicted, that was enough for Riley.

To him, it meant there was a chance.

Having thought that way, he reached for one of the two empty dishes and poured the rice liquor to the dish.

“It’s not a drink. Here, try it! You can confirm it for yourself, can’t you?”

Riley calmed the facial muscles on his face that was making small flinching movements. Hoping that this gamble would pay off, he recommended a glass of rice liquor to Nainiae.

“Um.”

“If you drink this and eat that… Kuuuu! It’s the best!”

“Ummmm….”

“Can’t you trust me? I’m serious!”

Having heard what Riley said, not able to refuse, Nainiae grabbed the glass.

“Try it first. If you think it is an alcoholic beverage, then I will not drink it.”

“…”

Seeing Riley saying it with confidence, Nainiae raised the glass and took a small sip.

Its first taste was mostly sweet with some bitter tingling sensation.

“Oh? It is… tasty?”

Riley actually ordered an extra sweeter version just in case something like this happened. He was glad he did. Riley sighed in relief.

“Right?”

Alcoholic beverages that Nainiae knew were the ones from Lower Solia that she drank because she was parched.

“… Yes.”

Nainiae knew them as something that were just really bitter and have terrible taste to them. She judged that this sweet liquid must be not an alcoholic beverage. She tilted the glass up once again.

“Hey, hey…”

She finished the entire glass in one shot.

Having finished it clean, Nainiae said ‘Kuuu!’ with satisfaction. Having witnessed it, Riley panicked and said ‘Huk!’

Riley said,

“That’s not water, you rascal.”

“…?”

For some reason, Riley was breaking cold sweat. Noticing this, Nainiae tilted her head side to side as if she was wondering if there was a problem.

“It’s just… It’s not water. It’s a sweetened beverage.”

Concerned about being found out, Riley spoke carefully and then poured some into his glass. Riley enjoyed the flat fried dough with the drink.

‘This is the taste…’

He filled his mouth with warm flat fried dough, quenched his neck with the drink, and indulged himself to the sound of the rain. It seemed Riley could not be any happier. With a satisfied look on his face, he started to enjoy it all.

Sound of the rainfall.

Flat fried dough.

Rice liquor.

Also...

“Um. Jup... Kuhup. Jup!”

He could hear sounds of someone chugging down the food.

“...”

Relaxed, Riley was enjoying the atmosphere, but the noise was ruining it. Furrowing his brows, Riley looked toward where the noise was coming from.

‘Who is it?’

The noise was coming from the table right next to where Riley and Nainiae was sitting.

“Jup. Um! Jup! Kuhup. Jup!”

It was a man.

He looked rather skinny for some reason. He was wearing a black hooded cape that was soaked completely wet. It seemed he starved for a few days. Instead of using utensils, with bare hands, he was making food disappear into his stomach in a hurry.

“You might upset your stomach. Please eat slowly.”

Concerned, a waiter even brought water for him.

The man with the cape seemed like he didn’t hear the waiter at all. Instead, he was busy with hurriedly putting food in his mouth.

‘Tsk. He is ruining the mood single-handedly…’

Riley was attaining the peaceful state of mind from having the sound of cool rainfall, crunchy fried food and sweet rice liquor. However, with the unrefined chewing noise that was shattering the peace, Riley was cringing.

“More, more…”

The man’s mouth was full of food. His both cheeks were ballooned up. Despite that, the man was mumbling.

“More… A lot more…”

Riley, who was cringing, decided to listen carefully to what the man was saying.

It was because Riley became curious about why he was eating in such a disturbingly disgusting manner.

“More… I need to make a lot more.”

‘More? Make more? What? Is he saying he need to make more poop?’

Riley had a glass of rice liquor on one hand, and his head resting on the other. He took a sip from the glass. With an uninterested look on his face, Riley lowered the angled of his gaze.

“More… more…”

Riley was staring at the man’s soaked cape. Watching the water drops falling to the floor from the cape, Riley decided on the next destination.

‘Once we finish eating, looks like we should go there.’

Riley figured that, once he get the must-have item in Rainfield, he should check in at a hotel or go to a library for a good book to read.

“… y… young masterrrr.”

“Um?”

Riley, who was planning what to do next with a vacant look on his face, heard a stretched out voice coming from the other side of

the table. He looked at Nainiae.

"... Ah."

"My head is spinning and spinning. It is dizzy for some reason... Is this.... By any chance..."

Nainiae's face was pretty much saturated in red. While Riley had his gaze turned away, Nainiae had been drinking the rice liquor as if it was water. Riley was certain of it.

"What?!"

He had no idea when it happened, but he just realized that the rice liquor bottle was completely empty. There were only few drops of the liquor left in the bottle. Looking at the empty bottle, Riley looked at Nainiae as if he was just robbed.

"Hey! I told you not to drink it like water!"

"Uuuuurrrr..."

As if she was proudly advertising that she was drunk, she faltered left and right a few times. Soon, Nainiae suddenly...

"... Ugh!"

She brought her left hand to her mouth.

Riley complained as he covered his face with his palm.

“Geez...”

It was not certain how long it had been.

It was around the time when the man’s soaked cape, which was dripping water when he first entered the restaurant, was about to dry completely.

“Huuuuaaaaa.”

The man, who was putting away the food on the table into his stomach in hurry, stroke his tightly full stomach and leaned on the back support of the chair.

“Have you finished the meal?”

Noticing that the man was finished with the food, a waiter came and asked carefully.

“Ah, ah ah... Ah! They were delicious! Um!”

Waving his hand around, the man said he was satisfied with the meal. The man with the black cape tightly closed his eyes.

“It was a feast! It was absolutely… delicious!”

“Is… Is that so? Haha… Well then… for the food…”

Rubbing his hands together, the waiter brought up the matter of the bill for the food.

The amount of the food that the man ate was beyond anyone’s wildest imagination. If he paid for it, it would have been enough to the point that the restaurant didn’t need to open the next day.

“Oh? The bill? Um. Ah ah! Bill!”

The man opened his eyes and murmured as if it slipped his mind.

“Of course. I should pay the bill! I can’t be ungrateful and commit a crime!”

“Ah, yes. The total is…”

“By the way.”

The waiter already counted the number of dishes, so he was going to tell the man the amount right away. However, he was

interrupted.

“Where are the other customers? There were a lot of them a while ago?”

The waiter had a petrified look on his face because the man who was staring at him had a haunting look on his eyes. The waiter smiled amicably and answered,

“You are the very last customer. It’s pretty late.”

“The last? I am?”

“Yes.”

The man’s face was crumpled when the waiter nodded.

“This is… This is no good! I was too indulged in eating!”

“… Pardon?”

“Ah ah. It’s too bad… but I guess I could only make ‘one’ here.”

When the man murmured, the waiter started to step back with a pale face.

“… Huh?!”

The waiter felt something tightly grabbing onto his ankle. He looked down.

‘A… at my ankle… there is something…’

Shaking in fear, the waiter looked down. What he saw was a tree root that penetrated through the restaurant’s wooden floor.

It wasn’t an ordinary root. It was exuding dark smoke.

“Hey, Mr. Waiter?”

Having heard the man with the black cape, the waiter said ‘huk!’ and tried to look at him. However…

“I’ll pay here.”

THUMP

The waiter’s eyes were saturated in black as if someone put ink in them. The waiter’s head was already on the floor

Chapter 81 - Rainfield (Part 2)

It was late evening.

Unlike her usual self, Nainiae was all stretched out like a laundry hanging on the string. She was being supported by Riley.

“Ugh... My stomach...”

Tricked by Riley’s lies, Nainiae totally fell for it and had drank rice liquor as if it was water. She was not looking so well.

“Was that your first drink?”

It seemed Nainiae didn’t even have the strength to hold an umbrella. Peeking a smile, Riley asked.

“No. That is... I had some while I was in Lower Solia. However, they tasted so terrible, so I spat them out...”

“So, you are saying that this one was delicious?”

Riley asked while suppressing his laughter.

Nainiae responded with a downed face.

“... Yes.”

She was disappointed in herself because she drank with Riley despite the promise she made with Iris.

So, in other words, now she was an accomplice to Riley on the charge of drinking.

“Uuu..”

Even though she didn’t realize it, it still was a sin.

She was feeling guilty. Also, she was dizzy from being intoxicated.

Nainiae placed her hand on her forehead. She agonized over how she was going to go back to the mansion with this shame. She also worried about what to do with the pulsating headache.

‘Of anti-toxin magic spells, there must have been one for removing intoxication too... Of all things, I forgot that one.’

She wanted to get a grip of herself even if it was now.

Nainiae, who was following Riley, faltered due to intoxication. She also nodded her head around, and then... suddenly, she raised her head while saying ‘huk!?’

“I... didn’t doze off just now, right?”

It seemed she realized she was tightly hugging Riley's arm. Nainiae, who had her face red from drinking too much, tumbled and let go of Riley's arms as she asked.

"You were dozing off big time? Why?"

It seemed Riley was having fun with this.

"That can't be... Ugh."

Nainiae shook her head vigorously to wake up from intoxication. However, her pulsating head was giving her headache again. Riley, with suppressed laughter, asked,

"What should I do? Should I get you a hotel first? Do you need to rest?"

Riley was planning on going to do things on his own if Nainiae had a bad attitude after being intoxicated. Fortunately, she was on the quiet side.

"Weren't you planning on going somewhere?"

Nainiae, who pinched her waist as if she was whipping her eyelids in order to wake up from intoxication and sleepiness, asked.

“That’s right. I was going to a clothing store.”

The must-have item for the vacation in Rainfield was there.

“A clothing store?”

“Look, look.”

To Nainiae, who was tilting her head side to side, Riley explained by directing her gaze to the people passing by with his finger.

“What are they wearing?”

It seemed she didn’t know about raincoat. She asked with a question mark floating on her face.

“Cape… right?”

Riley felt again that Nainiae was still lacking in basic knowledge on life. With his hand abruptly placed on top of her head, Riley explained,

“It’s called a raincoat. It’s a clothing that stops rain.”

“Ah.”

Looking at the people walking around without umbrellas,

Nainiae was wondering if they were trying to catch cold. Nainiae nodded as if she finally understood.

"I need to get one for myself and another for you. I was going to get hotel afterwards. We can't go around here with just an umbrella. Do you understand?"

Riley asked as he fixed his grip on the umbrella.

Nainiae quickly lowered her head.

"…"

'What is this? Is she really sleeping?'

Riley tilted his head side to side. In order to confirm if Nainiae was really sleeping, he started to shake the hand that he had on top of Nainiae and mess up her hair.

"It's fine with one umbrella…"

Nainiae, who had her head down, pursed her lips and murmured with a mosquito sized voice.

"Nainiae?"

"… Yes?!"

Nainiae, who just realized what she just said, tumbled, lifted her head and responded.

“J… Just now… I was dreaming, right?”

“What nonsense are you talking about?”

“Ah.”

Nainiae, with a vacant look on her face, opened her mouth.

‘Is this what people call drunk talk?’

“I’m sorry. For a moment… I was thinking about something else…”

Occasionally, Nainiae watched Ian making a fool of himself after being drunk, and she had concerned look on her face as she watched. However, she now realized that she was in no position to worry about someone else. She bit her lips.

“Are you really all right? You didn’t quite recover from the drink, have you?”

“I’m all right. You said you will be going to a clothing store, right?”

Nainiae, who was walking along with Riley as she stepped on puddled water, quickly glanced and checked Riley.

"..."

Perhaps it was because of dizziness from being drunk. Nainiae thought hard about if she should grab Riley's sleeves or not. In the end...

'Nainiae, wake up.'

She slowly shook her head and gave up her Young Master's sleeves.

It was at Right Solia.

While sitting on the resting area outside of the temple, the archbishop Rebethra was looking down at the scenery of the city's center. Having heard footsteps from the back, he turned his head.

"Archbishop! You were here?"

"Yes, have you looked in to it?"

"Yes! From what I found out, I heard that he departed to

Rainfield two days ago by carriage.”

Having heard what the priest said, Libethra cringed, got up from the seat and asked again. It seemed he was hard of hearing lately.

“Um? Where again?”

“Yes, it’s Rainfield. You know about the place, right? It’s a city where it rains whole day… It’s perfect for vacation during summer…”

“… Rainfield?!”

“Huk!”

The priest, who was explaining about Rainfield, flinched his shoulder after hearing Libethra shouting all of sudden.

“Yes… That Rainfield. That’s what I have heard.”

“Why!?”

Rebethra furrowed his brows and asked. The priest mumbled on as he broke cold sweat.

“If you are going to ask me about the reason, I don’t know…”

"..."

Rebethra narrowed his eyes and leaned his face right toward the priest's face. The look on Rebethra's face was trying to say that he wanted the priest to make a conjecture on the reason behind Riley's trip.

"Ah! It... it's hot, so won't that be it? It's summer."

"Because it is hot?"

Rebethra was still glaring at the priest.

It was certain water was not enough to extinguish the fire in his eyes.

"R... Rainfield is a city with endless rain. It's cool there, and... there are a lot of things to see. Those would be plenty of reasons for Young Master Riley to go there... don't you think?"

Hoping that he got the right answer, the priest smiled and tilted his head to the side.

"Ugh!"

Furrowing his brows, Rebethra turned his face.

Finally released from Rebethra's glare, the priest sighed in relief as he turned his head to the side.

"Ugh. It's so far to the Rainfield, so why?!"

"Well, it is pretty far."

When the priest mumbled, Rebethra glared at him again. Rebethra then cringed, appearing to be suffering from a headache, and walked to inside of the temple.

"... It cannot be helped."

"Uh? You are going?"

"I have to go! Is there any other way? He is the one in Priestess Priesia's divine message. If he is the one, then I need to go see him even if it is far!"

STEP

STEP

Though the quiet temple, Rebethra's steps echoed.

As if it was in response to his steps, from the other side, another

set of footsteps could be heard.

“… Ah, Priestess Priesia.”

Having discovered Priesia walking from the other side, the priest and Rebethra both bowed to express their respect.

“Archbishop Rebethra.”

Priesia also bowed and called Rebethra.

“Yes.”

Rebethra responded. Priesia, who had her face covered under a veil, lifted the veil and looked at Rebethra.

“Are you going to see Young Master Riley?”

“…”

“I believe I have told you many times already. Nothing good will come from it.”

Priesia narrowed her eyes and expressed indirectly that he shouldn’t go.

Having heard her words, Rebethra also narrowed his eyes and

lifted his head that was lowered.

“Priestess. Is that from a ‘divine message?’

‘…’

Having heard Rebethra’s question, Priesia’s fine eyebrows were furrowed.

It was because she didn’t want to say it was not the case.

“We should be focusing on Goddess Irenetsa’s divine message now. We can’t forego the message just based on your opinion. This is a matter where the fate of Solia… No, the fate of the world depends on this.”

Priesia lowered the veil she had up. With a frustrated face, she sighed.

It was because she knew that saying things like ‘it doesn’t feel right, so don’t do it’ was not going to work.

“I certainly have told you many times already.”

“Yes, Priestess.”

“Nothing good will come from getting involved with Young

Master Riley.”

“Yes.”

Rebethra responded politely and fiddled with his chin. He smiled like a good man and said,

“Still, he is the one in the divine message. He would at least hear out rambling of an old man… right?”

“Please wait a moment. I’ll dry it for you.”

“No.”

Having arrived at the clothing store, Nainiae was going to use dry magic to dry Riley’s soaked shoes and pants. Riley said there was no need, so she canceled the spells.

“Doesn’t it feel icky?”

“It’s fine. It’s not bad.”

Riley also liked feeling wet this way, so he asked her to cancel the dry magic and entered the clothing store.

“Ah, welcome! Are you here for raincoats?”

It seemed the store was busy because it was the peak season. The owner figured out what Riley wanted just based on his appearance and clothes and asked about raincoats.

“Yes. We are here for raincoats.”

“By any chance, are you a nobility?”

Riley nodded, and the owner changed the look on his eyes. Rubbing his hands together, he started to pour out questions.

“By any chance, is there anything in particular you had in mind? Things like color or price range, or we can perform waterproof treatment for you as well.”

Having heard the very last part, Nainiae, who was standing behind Riley, tilted her head side to side and murmured,

“Waterproof treatment?”

“It’s making your clothes waterproof. We can make it so that the clothes will not get wet from the rain.”

If it was Solia, it sounded like something only alchemists could do.

Nainiae could not believe that an ordinary clothing store could do something like that. Her eyes filled with curiosity.

“That is… possible?”

“Yes! It’s Rainfield!”

Riley looked around the store while Nainiae and the store owner had a conversation about waterproofing. He picked up a white raincoat that appeared to be the right size and of decent quality. Riley walked to the cash register and said,

“I’ll buy this one.”

“Oh my! You have an eye for things!”

The shop owner complimented Riley’s taste.

Meanwhile, Riley heard his words through one ear and let it leave though the other ear. He looked at Nainiae and asked,

“Did you pick one?”

“That is…. I…”

Nainiae didn’t even look at raincoats. It seemed she was still drunk. Her face was still red. Hesitant, she slowly raised her arm.

“Huk?!”

Mana was sent to her leather bracelet, and dimensional storage space was opened above. Seeing this, the owner of the shop, who was doing the bill, opened his eyes wide.

“I would like to… get waterproofing.”

“Waterproofing?”

“Will that be all right?”

Nainiae decided to ask for Riley’s permission before the shop’s owner. She asked carefully.

“All right. Go ahead.”

“Thank you, Young Master!”

It seemed she was very excited about the permission.

Nainiae smiled big and brought out Astroa’s cape. She handed it to the shop owner and said,

“This… Please make this waterproof.”

The cape, which had a hood attached, seemed like it would work just fine as a raincoat if it was waterproofed.

“Ah, yes! Could you wait for a while? I’ll get it done right away.”

The shop owner, who was handed the cape, went to the workroom behind the casher stand. Riley, who had his arms crossed, turned and looked at Nainiae.

“By the way, why did you choose that of all things? It has a hole in it, and its design stinks.”

The hole could be mended, so that was fine. However, even with that fixed, the cape’s design was not something that could be considered pretty.

“Ah, because it is efficient?”

Riley thought about the power that Astroa’s cape has. He remembered that the cape allowed the user to be unaffected by the weather.

“No. It’s not like that.”

“Really? Then why?”

“That is…”

Riley crumpled his face, not able to understand the reason.

Nainiae lowered her head a little and said,

“… Because it is something that you gave me.”

Chapter 82 - Why It Rains Here

It was the next day morning.

Riley slept in to his heart's content. He slowly, lazily opened his eyes and then smiled as he listened to the sounds of rain outside.

"Ahah."

The fact that there was nobody to wake him up despite him sleeping in...

The fact that he didn't have to see Ian's face as soon as he woke up...

The fact that he didn't have to wake up in sweat and feel icky...

"Is this peace?"

From one to ten, everything about the situation was to his liking.

"... Young Master?"

Knock Knock

A voice could be heard along with the door knocks. Riley turned his head toward the direction.

“Is it Nainiae?”

“Yes. Are you awake?”

Nainiae might have been standing in waiting since morning, or possibly early morning, in front of the door. She was responding to Riley who was mumbling after just waking up.

“Yeah.”

“Excuse me.”

Having heard Riley saying that he was awake, Nainiae carefully opened the door, entered the room, and bowed to greet him for the morning.

“It’s a great morning.”

“Morning? Um? It’s still morning?”

He slept for a long time, so he figured it was around lunch time. He tilted his head side to side.

“It’s around 11 a.m. How would you like your meal?”

11 a.m.

Riley thought it was a pretty odd hour to wake up. With a blank look on his face, he turned his head and look out the window to watch the rainy scenery.

“Um.”

Because it rained here all day, the scenery was always dark. Warm street lights were lit even during the day time to light the city. It felt like he was at another world.

“If I eat now, would that count as brunch?”

Riley vacantly mumbled, and Nainiae asked about the word as she tilted her head side to side.

“Brunch?”

“It means breakfast that’s also lunch.”

Riley got up as he explained. He cracked and relaxed his stiff shoulders and turned around to see Nainiae.

“I should eat.”

A beautiful person’s place of stay is also beautiful.

Those were the teaching from Iris. Following the teaching, Riley, with his own hands, tidied up the bed that he slept in.

Riley gave Nainiae the sleepwear that he took off and said,

“What should we eat?”

“…”

Nainiae held the clothes that Riley handed to her, opened the dimensional storage, and brought out the clothes that she had ready for Riley. She thought about what to suggest for the meal while at it. She answered carefully,

“Anything will do as long as it is something that you want.”

There was the incident from yesterday, so it was an answer after a careful consideration.

Somehow, the response was very much like Nainiae. Riley peeked a smile.

“What is it? Were you thinking about yesterday?”

“No… Not in particular.”

Riley wondered if Nainiae was feeling wronged by it.

Having heard his question, Nainiae shook her head and responded.

“I got it. I got it.”

Riley smiled mischievously and patted Nainiae’s head to calm her down. He grabbed the clothes that Nainiae handed to him.

“So, what should we go eat? What would spread rumors that we had a great meal?”

Riley placed his arms in the clothes and fixed the area around the neck.

He was not quite awake from the sleep, so he was feeling strange still. Having finished changing clothes, Riley turned around and looked at Nainiae as he stepped outside the room.

“Ah, that’s right!”

“…?”

Noticing Riley suddenly turning back to see her, Nainiae stopped walking and tilted her head side to side.

“How about a warm fish soup?”

“…”

She was not expecting it at all. Nainiae flinched her shoulder and bit her lips.

“That would be all right with you, right?”

Riley smiled and asked, and Nainiae, who couldn’t afford to not say anything in response, said,

“… Yes.”

“Where would you like to go today?”

“I’m not sure?”

Having finished brunch, Riley enjoyed Rainfield’s coffee which was supposedly made from Rainfield’s rain. Having heard Nainiae’s question, Riley didn’t quite answer.

“I do have a few places I have thought about.”

Since there was the atmosphere unique to the Rainfield, Riley was going to be comfortable and cool no matter where he went.

The question at hand was where he should go to enjoy it.

“For now, shall we stop by at a library?”

Nainiae was checking how much coffee was left inside Riley’s cup. Tilting her head to the side, she asked,

“Library?”

After thinking hard about it, Nainiae realized that she didn’t pack any books for Riley to read.

“In Rainfield’s library, there are a lot of fun books that you can read only in this place. It would be hard to take them outside the city.”

Riley took a sip of the coffee and enjoyed its aroma. He continued,

“Personally, I thought about yesterday. While we are on vacation, I think we should take a break from magic lessons.”

Riley said it with his eyes closed.

Nainiae floated a question mark on her face.

“Pardon? Why would you all of sudden…”

“It’s not enough.”

Riley narrowly opened his eyes, looked at Nainiae, and said that it was not enough.

“What do you mean?”

“Basic knowledge.”

“…?”

Nainiae seemed like she still was not sure what Riley was talking about.

She tilted her head side to side.

“I understand that you didn’t know about the rice liquor, but it is serious that you didn’t know about the raincoats.”

Riley put down the cup with a clank noise. He pointed at Nainiae, who had a vacant look on her face, and said,

“While we are on this vacation, I think I should widen your basic knowledge.”

Riley said it with a serious face.

As for Nainiae, she still had a confused look on her face.

“…?”

“If we kept this up, I think I’ll be having a hard time looking after you.”

Nainiae blinked a few times with a vacant look on her face. She thought hard about it for a few seconds, finally realized her shortcomings, and quickly lowered her head.

“Ah… Yes.”

After even finishing the dessert, Riley and Nainiae left the hotel after taking their time. Wearing the raincoats they prepared the day before, they started to walk toward the library.

“How long will it take to get to the library?”

“I’m not sure? Perhaps about 10 minutes walk?”

Splash, splash...

Listening to the sound of rain filling his ears, Riley walked as if he was on a walk on a park. He turned his gaze and looked at Nainiae.

To be precise, he was looking at the raincoat that she had on.

“By the way, about that raincoat.”

“Yes?”

Riley raised his hand and fiddled with Nainiae’s raincoat, Astroa’s cape to be precise, and asked about something he was curious about.

“I heard that the user’s magic will not be affected by the weather, but I don’t quite get it.”

“Ah.”

Realizing what Riley was trying to ask, Nainiae nodded and slowly put forth her left hand.

“Please watch.”

Along with a sound of flame burning, a black colored flame

bloomed on top of her left palm.

She created it after checking that there was nobody passing by in the area.

“As you can see, it is not being extinguished despite being in the rain.”

There were raindrops falling on Nainiae’s flame, but the flame was not showing any sign of being diminished. It maintained its heat.

“If it wasn’t for the cape, it would be impossible to maintain a flame like this under rain.”

Nainiae explained as she looked at the flame dancing.

It was thanks to the cape.

“As Mr. Andal said, this cape seems to have the power to make the user’s magic be unaffected by the weather.”

Nainiae tightly closed the palm and extinguished the flame. She checked the area to confirm that there isn’t anyone around and sighed in relief.

Ever since the incident with Reitri’s merchant group and Lightning Boulder mercenary group, it seemed Nainiae was quite

concerned about being mistaken for a dark mage.

“That’s quite a mystery.”

“Ah, is that the place?”

When Riley let go of Nainiae’s raincoat, Nainiae pointed at a square shaped building in front of them. She was asking if that was the library.

“Ah, that’s right. It’s been a year.”

There was a pathway with street lights lined up in a straight path.

It seemed that Nainiae and Riley were not the only ones headed toward the library. Now that they were at a fairly wide street, there were more people.

Nainiae thought the conditions of the books must be not very good because it rained endlessly in this city. However, the books in the library felt like they were surprisingly clean.

‘Let’s separate for a moment.’

‘Why?’

‘We probably have different tastes on books. We should each go pick out books that we want to read and then meet at the center. The one that gets there first should find the place to read.’

‘But Young Master, I’m supposed to be your bodyguard…’

‘Basic knowledge… You need to accumulate some basic knowledge about the world.’

‘…’

‘Don’t go just picking out books you are interested in reading because I said so. If you do…’

Pouting, Nainiae went over what Riley said. Nainiae started to carefully go over the books organized in arrays.

“This, and that… They all sounds fun.”

Same as Riley, Nainiae also had reading as the hobby.

“Should I get this one? No. that one seems more interesting… Um…”

When she was being experimented on in the magic tower, it could be said that she was able to endure the horrific pain because of a few books that Peruda gave her. Nainiae liked reading that

much.

“For now, I’ll take this one.”

Nainiae took a book with dark-blue colored cover. She leisurely walked and picked out another book.

“... and this one.”

Having picked two books, Nainiae started to look for a book that had basic knowledge that people should know for living. Nainiae looked around with her head and...

“Next is for basic knowledge... Huh?”

“Ah?”

She ran into Reitri, the one from the merchant group that they came to Rainfield with.

“It’s the big sis who is a mage!”

It seemed he came here with Reitri. Horai, who found Nainiae, opened his eyes wide. He came to Nainiae in small steps like a puppy and bowed in a large motion.

“About the last time, thank you. Here...”

Horai brought out something from his pocket and handed it toward Nainiae.

“It is all right if you don’t give it back to me.”

It seemed Nainiae was a little embarrassed. She smiled awkwardly.

It was the bottle for the ointment that Nainiae applied on Horai’s cheek.

“How’s your cheek?”

“It’s all right, thanks to you!”

Having heard Nainiae’s question, Horai shrugged and said he was all right.

“How do you do, Ms. Nainiae? Somehow... we got to see you again in the library. Are you here with Young Master Riley?”

Reitri walked to front of Nainiae, lowered his head to greet her and asked about Riley’s whereabouts.

“Yes. He is not with me at the moment.”

Nainiae stealthily put away two books to her back and asked,

“What brings you here?”

“Ah, I have heard a strange rumor lately... So, I came to learn about it.”

Nainiae slowly lowered her eye and looked at the book that Reitri was holding.

It was about medicine.

“Medicine? Why?”

“Ah, yes. They don’t have a holy temple in Rainfield.”

“Pardon? They don’t have a holy temple?”

“Haha. I figured as much based on the books you were holding, but since you didn’t know about this, I guess this really is your first trip.”

As expected of a merchant, Reitri already had looked at the title of the book that Nainiae held, which read “About Rainfield.” Reitri explained with a smile,

“As you know, it rains endlessly in Rainfield. People of holy

temple that worship Irenetsa don't seem to like it very much."

"Ah..."

"Saying the entire city is cursed, or other things... Because of various excuses, there isn't any holy temple in Rainfield."

Reitri showed the medical book that he was holding and continued,

"So, when someone is hurt or ill, people rely on medicines made by alchemists or doctors specializing in medicines."

Nainiae, who just learned about this from Reitri, nodded as she murmured 'So that's how it is...'

"The raincoat you are wearing is the same. Because there isn't any holy temple in the city, things like alchemy are developed here. That's why people here can easily make special clothes that only mages could make in places like Solia."

The raincoat that Nainiae was wearing was a special kind that was used in Rainfield.

Nainiae fiddled with her raincoat and murmured,

"Ah, so that's how it is."

Rainfield's raincoats proudly featured its ability to be perfectly waterproof once the wearer wrapped it around the body. It was said that the raincoats were one of the greatest treasure of the Rainfield where alchemy was advanced because the place didn't have a holy temple.

"The other one seemed to be about drinks... May I ask what it is about?"

Reitri asked what he was curious about as he scratched his cheek.

Nainiae flinched her shoulders.

"This... this is..."

Nainiae didn't know what to say. She spun her eye around. It seemed she was not able to figure out what to say as the excuse. She explained quietly,

"I think I should learn how to remove intoxication after drinking... So..."

"Pardon me, but what did you just say?"

"..."

"It... it's all right! If it is something uncomfortable for you to talk about, you don't need to answer."

It seemed Reitri was not able to hear Nainiae because she said it in such a small voice. He was about to change the subject.

“… Aaaaah!!”

Somewhere inside the library, from quite a distance, a scream could be heard.

“…?”

“…?”

It was a scream full of pain.

Having heard it, Nainiae and Reitri turned their heads toward the direction.

‘What is it?’

It was a serious scream. It didn’t seem like a joke. The scream turned the atmosphere inside the library into a creepy mood at an instant.

“U… Uncle… what was that just now?”

Choking in fear, Horai grabbed on to Reitri’s sleeves with a pale

face

Chapter 83 - Why It Rains Here (Part 2)

“Ms. Nainiae, the scream just now…”

“Yes, I heard it too.”

Reitri had his face turned pale just like Horai. Wondering what was happening, he looked at Nainiae.

‘This atmosphere feels like something is wrong.’

After hearing a scream of an unidentified man, the area had fallen silent. It was scary quiet.

This was a library, so it was natural to be quiet. However, the scream that was heard a moment ago was not becoming of the place.

‘What should I do? Should I go to the place of the scream’s origin, or stay here?’

With her eye narrowed, Nainiae started to think hard about what to do.

“This sensation is somehow…”

After agonizing over it, Nainiae decided to wait on making a choice. She turned around toward Reitri and Horai and said,

“For now, I think it would be best if both of you stayed close to me.”

It appeared that they were not the only ones who have heard the scream. One by one, other people in the library were starting to murmur ‘what was that sound just now?’

“… Kiaaak!”

Again, as if she was struck by something inside the library, a loud scream of a woman, just as loud as the man from earlier, could be heard.

“U… Uncle?”

“Horai… It’s all right. It will be all right.”

The two were choking in fear from hearing the second scream.

Having realized that Basilisk and the mercenaries are not around, Nainiae carefully allocated mana inside her body and looked around the surrounding.

‘Where is Young Master?’

Nainiae, thinking about Riley, narrowed her eyes.

‘Let’s meet up at the center area. The one that arrives first should find the places to sit.’

Remembering the promise made before going their separate ways to find books, Nainiae turned her body.

“For now, let’s go to the center area.”

“I’m guessing it is because of Young Master Riley?”

Reitri asked as if he figured out Nainaie’s reason.

Nainiae nodded and lead the way.

“Mr. Reitri, I could get lost, so please direct me to the place.”

“Ah, yes! Please take a right here!”

The Rainfield’s library was pretty wide. Although it was only five stories tall, each floor was a very wide square shaped area. The area size rivaled that of the Solia Castle’s arena.

“Please take a left on the next bookshelf, and you will be able to see the center area. There is a store that sells sandwich and drinks, and there are lots of benches…”

Nainiae was in the front while following Reitri's direction. After turning at the last bookshelf, she suddenly stopped with a vacant look on her face.

"..."

"Ms. Nainiae?"

Reitri and Horai turned at the bookshelf and got to where Nainiae was. Also having witnessed what Nainiae was looking at, Reitri and Horai, shocked from the sight, held their breath.

"... W... What is this?"

It was a cruel and horrible sight.

In front of them, there were corpses of people who died in horrible pain. The dead bodies lying on the ground had their mouths wide open.

"Ugh?! Uuuuwheck!!!!"

Because of the horrible scene, Horai, who was still young, could not hold it anymore and started to throw up.

Meanwhile, Reitri opened and closed his mouth like a fish with a pale face.

“Who could have done this?”

With a blank look on her face, Nainiae took a step forward, strained her eye and looked at each corpse.

‘… Magic?’

One corpse had the neck sliced by a sharp wind. Another had been pierced by icicle. Another was burned to crisp by flame. There was another who was killed by lightning bolt. The dead body was still twitching.

‘Someone used magic?’

Nainiae became certain that it was a mage that killed all these people. She opened her eye wide and looked around.

‘Who?!’

Her heart was pounding from seeing such a cruel sight. She barely managed to calm herself down. She spun her brain as she looked around.

‘There weren’t any sounds of explosions. It means the perpetrator did it while using silence magic. If that was the case, why weren’t the screams silenced too?’

There was the scream by a man, and then by a woman.

Despite that, there weren't any sounds of magic being used. Nainiae couldn't understand how it came to be.

"Kuhum. Kuhur..."

Horai stopped throwing up. It seemed he was in state of panic. Shaking, Horai got into Reitri's arms.

'Stay calm, Nainiae.'

Looking at Horai shaking in fear, Nainiae shook her head and calmed herself down. She thought about the screams once again.

'Now that I think about it... the screams didn't come from the center area.'

The screams of unidentified man and woman came from the direction of the library's entrance, not the center area.

'One more thing... When Young Master and I entered the library, the atmosphere was not like this. It means all these happened in a very short duration of time.'

Nainiae deduced that the unidentified mage, who killed and left behind dead bodies in the main area, must be still nearby, and the mage must be quite skilled. Nainiae unmasked and put the mask away into the dimensional storage.

“Mr. Reitri.”

It appeared Reitri was also in the state of panic. He was breaking cold sweat like rain. Having heard Nainiae, he flinched his shoulders and responded,

“… Yes?!”

“I know you are frightened to see my unsightly face, but…”

Nainiae, who removed her mask and revealed the scars on the right side of her face, thought Reitri must be frightened from seeing it. She apologized and said,

“Can you please think about Young Master Riley right now?”

“No. Something like that… Young Master Riley?”

Reitri started his response with explaining that he was frightened but not because of her face. Having heard Nainiae’s question, Reitri tilted his head side to side, wondering why.

“He said he will meet me at the center area, but he is not here… I think he got involved in a bothersome matter. I think I’ll have to go find him myself.”

“I understand, but why are you asking me all of sudden to do

that?”

‘Why is she asking me to think about Young Master Riley?’

When Reitri asked Nainiae why, Nainiae cringed and said,

“Cut your useless chatter. Hurry up.”

“Ah, yes.”

Reitri nodded as if he understood. He thought about Riley, a young master who is always somehow very relaxed.

‘Above? Second floor?’

Using her right eye, which had the tracking ability, Nainiae immediately determined where Riley was. She lifted her head up toward the second floor.

“We will need to go to the second floor. Where is the staircase for going …”

Nainiae was asking how to get to the second floor. However, she looked at Horai, who was vacantly staring at dead bodies, and furrowed her brows.

“Mage sis… These… people… You didn’t do it, right?”

Wondering why he is asking such a question out of the blue, Nainiae, who furrowed her brows, directed her gaze toward where Horai was looking at.

'Now that I see it...'

She couldn't confirm it on people who were killed using wind, fire or lightning, but she could confirm it on the one who was killed by a icicle.

'... Black color.'

The icicle on the dead body was black colored.

The color had a different feel from Nainiae's black color... However, this was most certainly not a good sign at the moment.

"Uh.... Ug...uuuuuu...."

Only a moment after Nainiae started to stare at the dead bodies, creepy moans could be heard from among the dead bodies.

"Uu... kuuuuuu."

There, a 'corpse' with loose head had its eyes saturated in black. It was struggling and getting up.

“W… What’s that?’

“Uncle… That… That man’s eyes… It’s the same as what we saw last time.”

Horai murmured as he shook.

Having confirmed the eyes of the corpse that struggled before getting up, Nainiae narrowed her eyes.

“Uuuuurrrr…”

“Kuuuuurrrrr…”

Not just the one killed by the wind magic, but other corpses all started to stumble and get up.

“… Oh my god…”

Watching the dead starting to rise, Reitri, panicking, quickly covered Horai’s eyes as he mumbled.

The dead bodies all had similar feels to the ogre with dark eyes that had its head chopped off by Riley last time.

‘What is this? It doesn’t seem like they are being animated by

mana?’

Nainiae used things like search magic and examined the dead bodies. Not able to figure it out, she furrowed her brows.

The corpses, who got up after struggling to do so, made phlegm filled noises and looked toward Nainiae.

“Kuuuurrr....”

Judging from the way they were all looking at the same direction, it seemed that they responded to living beings.

“Considering the situation, I’ll give up moving on foot.”

“Pardon?”

Hearing Nainiae mumbling in a cold tone, Reitri asked with a blank look.

“We will get to the second floor by flying.”

Having her raincoat waving in the air, Nainiae swung her right arm. The three people’s bodies started to float up in the air.

“Uh? Uhuh?”

“We are floating?!”

“Calm down. I merely used flight magic.”

Horai and Reitri panicked from flight magic being cast on them all of sudden. They kicked their legs around in the air, not knowing what to do. It seemed the dead bodies were reacting to their movements. Drooling, the corpses started to walk toward them.

“Kuuuaaa!”

“Guuuurrrr!”

“… Tsk.”

Looking disgusted, Nainiae clicked her tongue. Nainiae also used wind magic.

“Kek!”

“Kuuurrrk!”

Using fast wind magic, Nainiae sliced off the corpses’ heads. She also lifted off from the ground and narrowed her eyes.

‘They were killed twice, but they are still moving?’

After having Reitri and Horai on the air, Nainiae checked the corpses that had their heads cut off. Noticing that they were moving again, she started preparing the next magic.

‘If chopping off their heads is not the answer…’

She raised her right hand and generated a large ice spear.

‘… Heart!’

Wheec!

Nainiae strained her eyes and swung her arm. The black ice spear, which was exuding cold energy, pierced through the heart of a corpse and got stuck on the ground.

‘Did that work?’

The dead body fell to silence for a moment. However, betraying Nainiae’s hope, it started to move again.

“Guuuurrr.”

‘… Tsk.’

The dead body, which was stuck to the icicle on the ground, was

not able to get up. However, it was struggling to break free.

‘Piercing the heart won’t do either?’

Despite wind, ice, losing the head, having the heart pierced, the dead body was still moving.

‘Fire… is fire the weakness?’

Incinerating the dead body completely. It seemed that was the solution.

The dead ogre from the last time was disposed of by that method. Nainiae deduced that it would work. However, she was not able to do it.

‘That’s why the mage chose this place…’

It was a library.

If just one book caught on fire, it would have spread to tens, hundreds and thousands of books. It could lead to a large disaster.

‘First, we need to meet up with Young Master.’

For now, Nainiae could not think of another way to handle the corpses. Leaving behind the animated corpses on the first floor,

she joined Reitri and Horai who were already at second floor.

“Could it be… that the dark mage is in the library?”

Reitri, who was looking at the horrible sight on the first floor, asked Nainiae when she arrived at the second floor.

“Traces of magic, animated corpses with black eyes… It feels just like the ogre that we encountered last time. I think… it probably is.”

Nainiae, who looked around while standing in the corridor, confirmed that the dead bodies are not yet at the second floor. She walked toward the stairs.

‘Should I make a wall?’

Nainiae thought about the possibility of survivors in the first floor trying to seek refuge on the second floor through the stairs. She shook her head and created a wall.

‘If they were going to run, escaping to the outside through the window would be faster for the survivors. I don’t know where the dark mage is. If I want to stop the dark mage from coming to the second floor, this would be the best course of action.’

After creating a wall, Nainiae joined Reitri and Horai again. Using her right eye, she confirmed Riley’s location again.

“This way…”

They had been running through the corridor for a long while. Eventually, Nainiae found Riley who was thinking hard with his arms crossed in front of a bookshelf. Nainiae shouted,

“Young Master!”

“Um?”

Perhaps it was fortunate… It seemed he didn’t run into any dead bodies. He was in front of the shelf and taking his time to pick out books. Riley turned his head and looked at Nainiae.

“Did you pick the books already? We were supposed to meet at the center area.”

“Y… Young Master, the thing is…”

“Ah? Are the books that you want not at the first floor?”

“Ugh… Ugh…”

Nainiae’s face was full of sweats from having ran this far. Nainiae stopped talking for a moment to calm her breathing.

“… What is it?”

Riley moved his gaze and found Reitri and Horai who were standing behind Nainiae. Wondering what this was about, Riley tilted his head side to side

Chapter 84 - Why It Rains Here (Part 3)

It was at the library's first floor.

It seemed the cape was not waterproofed. The man's black cape, completely soaked in rain, was dragging on the floor and leaving water marks.

"Hm..."

There was a man walking with the cape dragging on the floor.

The suspicious man in black cape didn't bat an eye for the smell of blood that was filling the air inside the library since a while ago. Instead, he was carefully going over the books on the shelves.

"No, no... and no!"

Thump.

The man took a book from the shelf, but he cringed and threw the book in frustration.

"Damn it all! There are too many! Way too many!"

It seemed he could not find the book he was looking for.

He scratched his head hard instead to vent his frustration, but then he suddenly raised his ears in response to small sound of someone’s breathing.

“…”

“Um?”

Huup…. Huup…

The small sound of someone's breathing shaking was indicating that someone had the mouth tightly closed with a hand.

“Ummmm?”

The man had experienced situations like these many times, so he knew instinctively that there was someone hiding, choking in fear.

“Who could it be? Who is…”

The man in black cape laughed like a madman and finished the sentence he could not continue a moment ago,

“… playing a hide and seek like this?!”

Wheec!

The man in black cape turned the corner and had his eyes met with those of the person who was hiding in the corner. Having confirmed the woman's clothing, he wiggled his eyebrows as if he was overjoyed.

"Ohoh?!"

"P... please... my life..."

With an apron to the front, the woman was certainly a librarian who knew well about the library.

"A librarian! Ms. Librarian, you are exactly who I need right now!"

After seeing the man speaking in loud roar-like voice, the librarian, who was holding her breath on the corner with her mouth closed with her hand until now, thought she was going to die now. She was shaking with her tears hanging on her eyes.

"Please..."

It was because she witnessed how the man brutally murdered the people gathered at the first floor.

"... Sir dark mage..."

"Um?"

Librarian pleaded with shaking voice.

“Um?”

Black colored magic, black cape…

The man that the librarian saw had just those two characteristics. However, they were enough to make her think about the infamous dark mage.

That was the reason why she pleaded.

“Ahah! It’s nothing, nothing!”

“…”

Having noticed the librarian in tears, the man waved his right hand and said,

“I think there must be a misunderstanding. I’m not the dark mage.”

The man smiled like a good man to the librarian and extended his hand to her.

“I’m just a visitor who came to visit the library.”

“Is that s…”

“… Quiet….”

With hand extended toward her, he had the other hand’s index finger to his lips. He walked toward the librarian and said,

“I’m your customer.”

“…”

“Shouldn’t you treat me like one?”

The man, who had a refreshing smile on his face, opened his eyes narrowly.

The librarian was shaking in fear of the eyes looking down at her. She carefully grabbed his hand and stood up.

“There is a book that I’m looking for.”

“A book?”

“Yes! I’ll be leaving quietly once I find that book!”

“…”

The man said again with a smile.

The librarian nodded as she shook in fear.

For now, it was best for her to just do as he asked.

“Please, spare my life… I have a daughter at home. I’m all that she has… If I’m gone… She can’t be without me. So…”

For the sake of her daughter, the librarian had to survive this no matter what.

The librarian pleaded again.

“I’ll promise you. If you find me the book, I’ll leave quietly.”

The man smiled and promised.

“What is the book that… you are looking for?”

“Ah, it’s nothing special.”

The man kicked a book that was laying around the ground. He explained the book to the librarian.

“Not these kind of books. That.... The book about the weather, you know? It would be best if it was about the Rainfield’s weather! It would be even better if it was about the Rainfield’s clouds!”

Having heard what he said, she nodded as if she understood. Leading the way, the librarian moved toward where books of such subject would be.

“...!”

“Ah, don’t mind those people and just lead the way!”

The librarian, who was leading the way, ran into a corpse with black eyes. The man with black cape, who was following her, gestured and moved the corpse. The man asked the librarian to hurry.

“If you look at the books in this area, you probably can find the book that you are looking for. Books pertaining to Rainfield’s weather or rain clouds are all in this area.”

Having heard the librarian’s explanation, the man went over the books on the shelves. It seemed he found the book he was looking for. He opened his eyes wide and extended his hand towards the book.

“Ohoh! This is it!”

The book he picked up was titled ‘Regarding Rainfield’s Clouds.’

“H… have you found the book?”

Noticing the man acting happy about the book, the librarian asked carefully.

“Yes! I found it! This is it!”

The man put the book inside the cape, leisurely turned around and looked at the librarian.

“T… then?”

“Yes! As I promised, I’ll go, quietly.”

“… Ah.”

The man smiled big and walked away in back-steps.

Watching the man, the librarian sighed in relief.

“That’s goo…”

Thump.

The head of the librarian fell without being able to finish the sentence.

“I’ll be leaving quietly.”

It seemed someone used wind magic. Her head was cut-off clean. On her face, the look of her sighing in relief was still there.

“... quietly.”

Looking at the librarian’s head on the floor, the man whispered really quietly.

“As I promised, I’ll leave quietly, but I didn’t promise you that I won’t kill you.”

The man started to walk with a creepy smile.

“Kuuuu, Ku... Kuuuuuuu.”

The librarian’s dead body twitched once, and she struggled and got up like other dead bodies inside the library, in order to turn other living beings into corpses.

“Ah, should I attach the neck for you?”

With the book he needed now in his possession, the man no

longer had a reason to be in the library. He turned around to look at the librarian's dead body, which had the head and the body separated, and asked.

"..."

"I think you will need them together if you want to meet your daughter?"

"..."

The dead body was not able to respond.

"What? You say you don't need it?"

"... Kuuuu."

"Hm, how ungrateful."

The dead body barely responded with a sound. Responding to the sound, the man clicked his tongue and started to walk again.

"How ungrateful! You changed your mind so easily like flipping one's hand! You have no right to be a mother! You are totally disqualified!"

The librarian's head, which was on the ground, started to shed

black tears as she looked at the man's back.

Step, step.

The man with black cape casually walked out of the library. Fiddling with the book in his arms, he had a bizarre smile on his face as he said,

"Still, I should help you reunite with your daughter even if you don't care."

"Ang? Dead bodies are coming back to life? What kind of bull..."

'What kind of bull crap are you talking about?'

Riley was about to ask that. However, Riley followed Nainiae to the second floor's corridor and looked at the center area below. Riley didn't finish his sentence.

"..."

"What should we do?"

Noticing Riley being silent, unable to wait any longer, Nainiae asked.

“Those guys… They seem to be similar to the ogre that I saw last time. Am I right?”

Riley asked as if he was not sure. Nainiae nodded and explained what she knew at the moment.

“Yes. I think that dark mage is inside the library.”

“Ugh.”

Finding all this ridiculous, Riley cringed.

“… It’s not like this is a zombie movie…”

Having heard what Riley said, Reitri and Nainiae tilted their heads side to side.

“A zombie movie?”

“What’s a zombie?”

Riley would not have been surprised if they asked about the word ‘movie.’ However, Riley wasn’t expecting them to ask the meaning of the word ‘zombie.’

“… Ugh.”

Having realized that those words do not exist in this world, Riley sighed big enough to make the ground sink.

“Anyway…”

Riley decided to explain later. He looked at the corpses again in the center area.

‘Their hearts are not beating, so they are definitely dead. They are not being influenced by mana either… Still, they are moving.’

With his eyes narrowed, Riley observed the first floor. He turned his gaze to a side.

‘Is that… a survivor? That person seems injured?’

Riley found someone hiding at the corner. Riley stared at the survivor holding the arm dripping blood and asked Nainiae,

“By any chance, were the screams earlier related to these?”

“Yes, I believe so.”

Seeing Nainiae nodding, Riley asked the next question.

“How did the dead bodies attack?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like beasts, did they scratch, bite… Did they attack like that?”

“Ah, yes. It was like that. They seemed to be a little stronger than ordinary people.”

“Is that so…”

The explanation sounded like they were exactly fitting the descriptions of zombies.

Dead bodies.

Black eyes.

Charging at living people and biting them.

They were just like zombies from Riley’s past life.

‘If there is one thing different, that would be…’

He looked at the injured survivor in the first floor again.

‘Infection… is not part of it.’

The survivor had the injury, a bite, held for quite a while, but there were no symptoms of zombification. That made Riley certain of it.

‘Is it more like controlling dead bodies? In that case, one condition for making those must be that the subject has to be a dead body.’

Riley, who roughly organized the information in his head, slowly turned his head and looked at Nainiae.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes.”

“I roughly understand what is happening here, but…”

Riley didn’t bat an eye although he heard two different screams earlier.

“It seems like this is not important enough to warrant you coming to find me in a hurry like this?”

Looking at the situation in the first floor, Riley furrowed his brows as if he found all this to be a bother. He mumbled with an annoyed voice.

“My apologies, Young Master. I’ll need to use fire to neutralize

them. However… Considering the location, it would be difficult…”

Ashamed to face Riley, Nainiae lowered her head and explained why she came to see Riley.

“Fire?”

Having heard Nainiae’s concern for the books, Riley turned his head and looked at the library’s ceiling.

The top of the center area was covered in glass so people could see the rainfall outside.

“… Reitri.”

“Yes?”

“Is glass expensive in Rainfield?”

“I’m not sure? I don’t think it is too expensive. Why do you ask that all of sudden…”

Riley skipped answering. He turned to Nainiae and extended his hand.

“Here.”

"…?"

He pulled away her raincoat. Nainiae vacantly opened her mouth.

"Get going."

"… Ah."

Soon, Nainiae figured out what Riley's action meant. She nodded and placed her hand on the corridor's ledge.

"Well then, I'll be gone for a moment."

"M… Mage sis?"

All of sudden, Nainiae jumped down to the first floor. Horai, who was watching from the side, said 'Huk!' and looked below.

"Guuuurrrr….."

Nainiae, who jumped to the first floor, used gravity magic and landed gently. She said toward the corpses that were looking at her.

"… Soon…"

The corpses were all shedding black tears. She narrowed her eyes and ignited black flame.

“I’ll make you comfortable.”

Nainiae had black colored, closer to grey to be precise, flame on her right hand. On her left hand, she made a piece of ice with a similar color.

“Guuuuurrrr!”

Dead bodies charged toward Nainiae.

“… Ah?”

The man with black cape, who escaped the library with the item he wanted, changed the look on his face after detecting that his ‘puppets’ were being reduced in numbers.

“… Burned? They were burned?”

A blood vein popped up on his forehead.

It seemed he got quite angry because someone was interfering.

“Who… How rude. Who dares to burn my hopes!”

Badududuc.

He ground his teeth loud enough to make the sound of rainfall feel ashamed. With his eyes red, he turned to look toward the library.

“How dare! Such insolence! They don’t understand my grand plan for the greater good! They dare to interfere…”

The man with the cape was shaking in fury. From his back, Rainfield’s guards passed him by and ran toward the library. They were entering the library in an orderly manner.

“… No.”

Having seen the guards entering the library, the man barely managed to stop being infuriated and put his hand inside the cape.

“That’s right. It does not matter…”

Urururung….

It seemed there was a lightning strike nearby. The sound of thunder filling the air erased the sound of man’s mumbling.

‘Regardless, under this rain, only mine will remain.’

The man said those words during the sound of thunder.

“Huhu....”

The man suddenly started to twitch his shoulders and laugh.

“As much as I have lost, I just need to make more...”

Urururururung...

Another lightning fell.

“... more graveyards.”

Flash!

The surrounding area was bright for an instant from the lightning and darkened again. At that moment, the man with the black cape disappeared without a trace.

Loud steps could be heard inside the library.

They were the Rainfield’s guards that came to handle the

horrible situation that unfolded inside the library.

“Freeze… Huh?”

The leader of the guards was about to shout in a loud voice, but he tilted his head side to side.

‘Sound of rain?’

It was because he could hear the sound of rain inside the library.

Shuuuuwaaaaa.

Noticing the sound coming from the center area, the guards walked toward the area. What they discovered was a girl.

“Huh?”

In library’s first floor’s center area, there was a girl in maid uniform. She was standing on the floor covered in broken glass where the glass ceiling was broken and letting rain to fall inside.

“Young Master, it is done.”

Wharururuk.

Concerned that the guards may notice, the girl moved her feet

and extinguished a small black flame on the ground that still remained. She lifted her head up again.

“Oh, well done.”

The girl was looking up toward the boy who was standing on the second floor.

“…”

Unlike the look on the boy’s face, the orange haired young man and child next to the boy said,

“… Oh my god…”

They seemed impressed by the girl who was looking up toward them. The two were not able to close their mouths

Chapter 85 - Igniting

The Rainfield's library was surrounded by the guards.

The people, who were injured from bites or scratches by the corpses, were being treated by the guards.

"Ugh, is there a better medicine?"

"This is the best one we have."

As for other people, they just sat there with vacant looks on their faces.

They were waiting to give testimonials.

Because of this, people who were in the library could not leave the place.

"... And then?"

"In the center area of the library, there was a man wearing a black cape."

"A man wearing a black cape?"

It seemed that people were shocked from what they have

witnessed. The survivors were shaking as they responded to the questions by the guards.

“Yes... When he appeared, suddenly, nothing could be heard from the surrounding area. All of sudden, there were flames and pieces of ice flying around, and people... and people...”

Most of the people were choking in fear.

It was the same even for the people who have not witnessed the cruel massacre in the library’s center area.

“I... I entered the library... but there was someone with pitch black eyes charging at me, so I barely managed to escape... but the person next to me got bitten... From the neck, from that person’s neck, blood spread out like... a fountain...”

The survivors from the direction of the library’s entrance, in other words, the people who were near the screams, stuttered from being in the state of panic as they responded to the guards’ questions.

“I understand. Thank you for your cooperation.”

The guard took simple notes about the scene and witness' testimonials. As the last thing, he called Riley and Nainiae, who were held up inside the library.

“So...”

The guard, who was fiddling with his fingers, asked carefully to the two people in front of him.

“You are a nobility from Solia?”

“…”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Riley was not paying attention because he was busy reading a book.

Nainiae nodded and responded.

“I understand. This is not important at this time, so we will go over it quickly. First, I would like to express our gratitude.”

The guard bowed.

Nainiae, panicking and not knowing what to do, looked at Riley who was sitting next to her.

“…”

Riley still didn’t show any response in particular. He seemed to be still deep in the book.

“What’s your name?”

“It’s Nainiae.”

“Again, thank you. Thanks to you, Ms. Nainiae, the harm to the citizens and tourists were minimized.”

The guard bowed and expressed his gratitude. He started to ask about what happened earlier.

“By any chance, while you were neutralizing the situation at the first floor, did you see the dark mage?”

From the citizens’ testimonials, the guard was certain that it was the dark mage, so he asked about the mage’s whereabouts.

“This is the picture drawn based on all testimonials.”

On the paper, there was a man with a skinny build. His face had sunken cheek.

“He is estimated to be in late 20s to early 30s. By any chance, have you ran into him in the library?”

Nainiae looked carefully at the man’s face and shook her head to show that she was not sure.

“No. I didn’t run into him.”

“I see.”

Having heard her response, the guard casually directed his gaze toward Riley, who was focusing on reading.

“Excuse me, young master… by any chance…”

“…”

“Young Master?”

Nainiae carefully tapped on Riley’s shoulder.

Riley, who was focusing on the book, finally looked at the guard. Scratching the back of his head, Riley asked back,

“I’m sorry. What did you say?”

“this man here, by any chance…”

Before the guard could even finish his sentence, Riley responded,

“I haven’t seen him.”

Riley didn't even glance at the paper. Noticing this, the guard was not sure what to do. He scratched the back of his head.

"Excuse me, but you didn't even look at the paper..."

"We are done here, right?"

"Pardon? No, not yet..."

The guard said it was not done as he blurred the end of his sentence. Annoyed, Riley got up from the seat and mumbled,

"Well, I am sorry about shattering the glass on the ceiling, but... I did that because I was concerned about books catching on fire. As for compensations, that friend over there will take care of it."

Riley pointed at Reitri and Horai, who were waiting for their turn.

"...?"

Noticing Riley suddenly pointing at them with his thumb, Reitri, who was waiting for his turn from quite a distance, tilted his head side to side.

"If you have questions about the dark mage or whatever, then go talk to that friend over there. He probably knows more than we

do."

Indicating that he was done with all this, Riley got up from the chair.

“Let’s go.”

“Pardon?”

As if there was nothing to it, Riley turned and left the scene.

“Ah, yes!”

Nainiae tumbled and got up just like Riley. She bowed to the guard, who was sitting there with a blank look on his face, and went to follow Riley.

“... Ah, is it my turn?”

After Riley left, as if he was waiting for it, Reitri got up from the waiting bench and sat at the seats with Horai in front of the guard.

“Now, what would you like to ask?”

Rubbing his hands together, Reitri sat at the table not as a witness but as a businessman. His eyes were sparkling.

“It seems like we will have a lot to talk about?”

Reitri observed the guard in order to get on his good side.

“There is also the matter of the library’s glass ceiling.”

Reitri looked at Horai, and Horai immediately brought out three cups from his bag and placed them on the table.

“What are these? Cups?”

“Ah, it seemed that you didn’t get a chance to drink anything while getting testimonies.”

“Well, that’s right.”

“I just happen to have a famous tea. I’ve heard that it is especially good for men’s vitality, so…”

“… Kuhum.”

The guard bit the bait for making a good impression.

Reitri was certain after hearing the man’s fake cough. Looking at the bottle that Horai brought out, Reitri asked,

“Why don’t we talk while you have a glass? Let’s see, what

should I tell you first?”

“… Excuse me, young master.”

As already agreed, Riley escaped the library while leaving the rest to Reitri. Having heard Nainiae calling for him, Riley fixed the hood part of the raincoat and looked back.

“What?”

“I didn’t do anything wrong, right?”

“Why do you think that?”

Riley, who was walking in front, asked back.

Nainiae thought about it for a moment and answered,

“I was thinking it would be all right to talk to the guard for a little longer. We could help them a little to apprehend that black mage too… Also…”

Having heard what Nainiae said, Riley cringed and interrupted her. Riley mumbled,

“… That will get annoying.”

“Still…”

“Nainiae, I’m here on a vacation. I’m not here to hunt some bastard called the dark mage or white mage.”

Riley turned his face forward and murmured,

“There is no need to get involved in something so bothersome.”

Riley ignored what was happening in the library’s first floor.

He was feeling guilty… about that fact.

“…”

Riley, who was walking in the front, had his face crumpled.

He was feeling unnecessary guilt. Because of it… it made him remember something from his past life.

‘A brave hero? A brave hero saved us?’

‘Don’t make me laugh! If he didn’t come here in the first place, my son wouldn’t have died like that!’

‘Bring back my daughter! I said bring her back!!’

‘Get lost! Get the hell out of our town right now!’

‘Don’t ever come back!’

‘Who said we needed your help!’

There were thoughts of things that happened in his past life, people’s voices… Riley looked disgusted. He gritted his teeth.

“… Excuse me, young master.”

Nainiae, who was following right behind Riley, called for Riley carefully.

“What?”

“By any chance…”

Nainiae seemed like she wanted to talk about something. She was blurring the end of her sentence. Frustrated, Riley raised his voice and asked what she was going to say.

“By any chance what?”

“By any chance, are you angry?”

“What?”

Riley cringed and turned his head around.

Flinching her shoulders, Nainiae answered right away,

“No, it is nothing. My apologies.”

“…”

Riley realized that he was letting his frustration shown, although he was not intending to do so. He waved his hand as a gesture to say that it was all right. Riley said,

“Don’t mind it. I have a spoiled look on my face because it is just… I saw some disgusting things, that’s all.”

“Disgusting… things?”

Having heard Riley’s answer, Nainiae raised her hand toward the right side of her face.

“… Ah.”

She couldn’t feel the hard surface. She realized that she still did

not put the mask back on. She tumbled and brought out the mask.

“I’m sorry, young master.”

“No, I’m not talking about that.”

Riley explained that he was talking about the corpses in the library earlier. Riley sighed big and turned his head away again.

“…”

Nainiae, now wearing the mask, stared at the back of Riley vacantly. She started to fiddle with her fingers.

‘Young master.’

Just now, when she had her mask off, Riley was thinking about someone.

‘You are… okay, right?’

The problem was, the people, the existance, who Riley was thinking about could not be located using her right eye.

“…”

A situation like this had never happened until now. Nainiae, who

was following behind Riley, was looking depressed from the sense of helplessness.

It had been about two days since the cruel incident in the library.

As always, it was pouring rain in Rainfield.

“… Is that so?”

“Yes, tiding up the ends from that incident were completed perfectly. Even if it is later, our Reitri merchant group, please remember us. I would really appreciate it.”

Looking at Riley, who came as a customer, Reitri, who was feeling a bit awkward, scratched the back of his head and smiled.

“What is this? You sound like you are about to leave Rainfield tomorrow? I thought you wouldn’t have sold all of your goods already?”

“Hehe, that is true, but…”

Reitri flinched and mumbled. Riley deduced that Reitri’s business of selling the goods didn’t go well. Riley decided to not ask about it anymore. Instead, he changed the subject.

“So, up to what extent have you told them?”

Having heard Riley’s question, Reitri answered with confidence,

“Ah, as you told me before, to the guards, I briefly explained Ms. Nainiae’s exploits. As expected of Ms. Nainiae… they didn’t even ask any question about you, young master Riley.”

Riley seemed he was impressed. He looked at Nainiae and praised her.

“Wow, as expected, you are amazing?”

“I’m embarrassed. I feel like they are praising me beyond my worth.”

Nainiae blushed. Reitri also started to compliment her.

“It was about those grass, right? Even in Rainfield, the story about Solia’s Astroa is quite famous. It’s to the point that at every hotel you visit, you would be hearing about the story two or three times. There is no need for further introduction.”

Having said that much, Reitri, now with a serious face, gave a book to Riley.

“Also, young master… Could you please take a look at this?”

“What is it?”

“It is something I looked into after returning to the hotel after the incident… That dark mage who came to the library took a book like this with him.”

Riley received the book from Reitri. Riley furrowed his brows after reading the title of the book.

“About Rainfield’s Rainclouds? He took a book like this?”

Having heard Riley’s question, Reitri nodded. Also, in a serious face, he asked Nainiae,

“Ms. Nainiae, you said you are at Six Circles, right?”

“Yes, why do you ask?”

“In that case, by any chance… could you estimate the number of Circles of the dark mage that was at the library?”

“Um…”

Nainiae put her hand on her chin and narrowed her eye.

During that day, that tragic incident happened literally in an instant.

“I’m not sure?”

Using silence magic, the mage sealed off the sound coming from the center area. In less than five minutes, he killed the people in the area and left. He was no ordinary mage.

“Probably at least Five Circles... and possibly Six Circles like myself, however...”

Nainiae thought about the traces of magic left at the scene. She carefully deduced based on the facts. She shook her head and said,

“If he is a dark mage, a deduction like this is meaningless.”

A dark mage.

It was not yet known how someone could enter such a path. It was famous for making all of the mage’s magic to turn black. The title was referring to cursed mages.

“It didn’t look like shooting a bucket load of magic is all he does? How he controls corpses must be a different kind of ability. I didn’t feel mana at all.”

Having heard what Nainiae said, Riley added his opinion.

From the dead bodies, which looked like they were being

controlled, Riley could not feel any flow of mana that would have signaled the use of magic.

“So, why do you ask?”

Nainiae, tilting her head side to side, asked why Reitri was asking. Reitri, changing his look to a serious face, said,

“Actually, our merchant group is thinking about... today morning at earliest, or tomorrow morning at latest, we are thinking about leaving Rainfield.

Chapter 86 - Igniting (Part 2)

“Leaving?”

Having heard Reitri suddenly saying they will be leaving Rainfield, Riley tilted his head side to side.

“Are you saying you sold all of your goods?”

The question he asked earlier was brought up again. Reitri shook his head and said,

“No, it is not like that.”

Reitri added that he may have to sell the umbrellas at a bargain price or he may not be able to sell them at this place at all. Reitri sighed big enough to make the ground sink.

“You are not acting like a businessman? Like the kid says sometimes, what are you going to do if you go bankrupt doing things like that?”

Looking at Reitri sighing, Riley thought about how Horai complained to Reitri. Riley asked further.

“Well, is there something else more important that came up?”

“No.”

Reitri shook his head again.

“Then what is it?”

“It’s important to make a profit, but people’s lives are more important… That’s what we thought.”

Reitri answered with a bitter look on his face.

Riley wiggled his eyebrows for a moment. He eventually understood where Reitri was coming from. Riley bought up the dark mage that they talked about earlier.

“Because of that bastard?”

“Yes…”

As if he was getting a headache from all this, Reitri scratched his head and messed up his hair. He started to talk about the book that the dark mage took.

“It’s about the raincloud.”

“Raincloud?”

“I gathered some information, and this is based on that. Soon, I

think there will be acidic rain falling in Rainfield. On top of that... it will be a very dangerous one."

Rainfield never had acidic rain before. Now, Reitri was talking about the possibility of acidic rain on the entire city. He sighed and explained.

"I think that dark mage is going to do something to the clouds and cause acidic rain."

Having heard what Reitri said, Riley looked at Nainiae and asked.

"Is that possible?"

"... Theoretically, it is possible. Although it will take a very long time to prepare to make all clouds covering the entire city to be like that."

Having heard Nainiae's explanation, Reitri nodded and explained more.

"If what Ms. Nainiae said earlier is true, this acidic rain is probably... going to cause more than just little bit of hair loss or damage to properties."

Reitri murmured that the dark mage was going to cause a large-scale disaster. He shook his head, thinking there is no way to solve this.

“I think... With this incident, the bounty on that dark mage is going to go up even further.”

Judging from the tone of his voice, Reitri seemed to have given up.

Listening to him talk, Riley asked with a confused look on his face.

“About what you are saying now, did you tell it to the Rainfield’s guards?”

“Yes.”

Having heard Riley’s question, Reitri looked like he was wronged. It seemed like he was thinking about when he tried to explain it to the guards.

“I said that... the situation seemed very serious, so it would be best to have people leave the city for safety even if they plan on hunting down the dark mage.”

Reitri said that he didn’t just go meet and talk to the guards, but he actually explained it to someone who was a higherup. Reitri tightened his fist.

“But.. they said it will be a little difficult.”

“Huh?”

“It’s because of money.”

Rainfield was currently enjoying the greatest peak season ever in the history.

This summer was hotter than usual, so even more people came to visit Rainfield. It meant a lot of outside money flowing in to the city.

“They said… it’s just rain, and it falls every day, every week, every month, every year, so it’s no big deal.”

To summarize what Reitri was trying to say, it was something like this.

“The higherups have rotten heads on their shoulders, so they don’t give a rat’s ass about evacuating the tourists? Did I understand you correctly?”

Reitri nodded calmly.

“When the acidic rain hits Rainfield, many people will die, and the dead will be, just like the people in the library…”

“Become puppets?”

“… Probably.”

Finding all this to be ridiculous, Riley started to flinch his facial muscles.

“Ha! Seriously, no matter where I go, there always are bastards like these.”

If Ian was here, if he heard what Reitri explained, Ian would have chewed and spat out immediately the following, ‘Those fucking runts! Who are they? What kind of boneheads are these bastards.’

“Ugh, it hasn’t even been two weeks since I started vacation here…”

‘Should I step in? It’s such a bother, but still? What about the shit-storm after I resolve this?’

Riley agonized over all sorts of things. Reitri, who quenched his neck with a sip of tea, asked Riley.

“Young Master Riley, what are you going to do?”

Riley was keeping from giving a response. Reitri started to explain what his group was going to do.

“First, we will be… finding new mercenaries and try to move to a

different city. An umbrella could be used as a parasol too. Anyway, the loss won't be so severe that it will make us go bankrupt."

Having heard Reitri, Nainiae asked as she tilted her head side to side.

"New mercenaries? Aren't you with Lightning Boulder mercenaries?"

Now that Riley thought about it, he didn't see any of the Lightning Boulder mercenaries in the hotel.

"About that... I tried to convince them, but unfortunately, it didn't go well. All three of them said they want to stay in Rainfield."

"Stay here?"

Nainiae asked back, and Reitri nodded. He said,

"The commander's life is tangled up with the dark mage. There is bad blood between them. He said he will take this opportunity to put an end to this bad blood."

Having heard Reitri's explanation, Riley narrowed his eyes and thought about what one of the members of the Lightning Boulder mercenary group said.

‘The former commander is one of the victims.’

Riley understood why they chose to stay in Rainfield. Riley narrowed his eyes.

One of street lights on Rainfield flickered.

“… Found him.”

It seemed that the street light’s lifespan was almost over. Under the flickering street light, there was a boy with his spear leaning against his shoulder. With a deadly look on his eyes, he was looking at the area in front of him.

“Um?”

In the direction of his gaze, there was a man wearing a pitch-black cape waving in the air. The man was looking back.

“One of the high grounds in Rainfield… The place that would be best for interfering with clouds… As expected of Mr. Reitri. Although there were very few clues, he deduced the right answer just on these.”

The boy said he came to find the man. Having heard the boy, the man under the black cape peeked a smile and asked back.

“Are you a tourist?”

“…”

“This place has a great view. In Rainfield, there is no place better suited for vacantly watching the rainy scenery.”

The boy, who was listening to the man talking, tapped the spear on his shoulder and tossed a question at the man.

“It looks like you are not done with preparations?”

“…”

The boy warned the man to be ready.

The face of the man, who was smiling until now, started to wiggle.

“If I successfully pierce through your neck before you finish preparing, will I be getting a step closer to being a true hero like Mr. Ian?”

The boy stepped closer as he mumbled. A puddle on the ground made splashing noise as if it was cheering for the boy.

“Pierce through the neck? Who’s neck?”

The man tilted his head side to side as if he didn’t quite understand.

Watching the man’s arrogance, the boy started to grind his teeth.

“5 years ago…”

The boy flipped over the hood part of the raincoat that covered his head and said,

“There was a bastard who laughed like a madman after massacring our ‘kind.’ Today, I’ll be piercing through that bastard’s neck.”

With the hood turned over, the boy’s face was revealed.

The boy’s face was completely filled with fury and deadly intent. On his face, his eyes were changed to something inhuman, sharp like the eyes of snakes.

“Ah?”

Facing the boy’s eyes, the man in black cape lifted his hood and opened his eyes wide.

“Ah! Those eyes?”

The boys eyes, which became like snakes, were glaring at the man’s face as if he was going to punch holes through it.

“…”

The man’s face was most certainly the face of the man that was laughing like a maniac at the horrific scene that the boy witnessed five years ago.

“Ah, those eyes! I remember! I remember! It was incredible!”

Having noticed the eyes, the man in black cape started to wiggle his face.

“To avoid eternal life, they set fire on their own bodies and charged at me. It was really… Wow, it was really incredible!”

The man continued in an excited tone.

The boy’s hand, which was holding the spear, shook from fury.

“To think that there was a survivor among your kind!”

“…”

“Is this revenge? Of course, this is revenge, right? Ah, how ungrateful! I merely tried to be generous in giving them eternal lives?”

“… Shut up.”

The boy murmured as if he was whispering.

Perhaps it was buried in the sound of rain. The man was still wiggling his facial muscles as he looked at the boy.

“Are you going to set fire on your body and charge at me?”

“Shut up…”

“Ah, wait! This is Rainfield? Unfortunately, it would be hard to set fire on your body here!”

The man in black cape tapped his wiggling face. He started to laugh as if he was happy.

“Back then, I only managed to save ‘one,’ but to think a great opportunity like this would come! Your kind will become ‘two’ now.”

The man flicked his finger, and the street light, which was flickering, started to weaken.

“Now that I think about it, your face looks similar to the face belonging to the one I have with me.”

Dududu…

The ground around the man under the cape started to shake.

The boy, wondering what it was, narrowed his eyes. What he witnessed was… a black hand that suddenly came out of the ground.

“… Guuuurrrr.”

The hand, which came out of the ground, pressed on to the ground, and thereafter, a shoulder, a head with hairs missing here and there, and a face appeared.

“Coincidence is really…”

The man with the cape mumbled, and the boy strained his eyes.

“…?!”

“As I thought, I was right!”

Clap clap!

The man clapped as if he was happy about this.

“Ah ah, I got to do two things in just one day! It’s such a great day! I’m getting closer to the goal, and I also get to help out on reuniting a father and a son with my own hands!”

A corpse came out of the ground near the man with the cape.

The corpse was rotten, but it had facial features that the boy knew very well.

It was the person who the boy missed very much, and he was even in the boy’s dreams often.

“Father…?”

In an uncomfortable pose, the dark corpse was holding a spear.

That corpse was… not only a kin that he lost five years ago, but also his father.

“Of all of you, he was the one who was especially talented, right? I didn’t want to lose him, so I worked very hard!”

“…”

“Well, to salvage the corpse, he ended up losing some hair and

looks pretty bad, but... Still, you can recognize him, right? You are his blood!”

The man patted the corpse and smiled refreshingly.

Watching the man doing this, the boy, Nara Basilisk, tightly grabbed the spear, enough to break the part he was holding.

Ignoring the blood leaking out of his mouth, he said,

“I will kill you...”

“... Aw, come on...”

“Definitely... I’ll definitely kill you!!”

Swuuuwaaaa.

This time, his voice was loud enough to bury the sound of Rainfield’s rainfall. Basilisk roared loudly.

The man under the cape put up a scared look on his face.

“Aw...”

Along with a scream like sound, from the caped man’s blind side, an arrow came flying toward him.

It was from Rorona from the same mercenary group as Basilisk.

“Oh my!”

Before anyone realized, there was another corpse standing next to the man. Using its head, the corpse carried out perfectly the task of blocking the arrow.

“I allowed you meet your father again.”

Along with his mumble, the flickering street lights were turned off completely.

“Really…”

Along with a long echoing sound, several red lines soared up to the sky.

Boom…

Boom…

The waterproof fireworks, the specialty of Rainfield that were seen only in special occasions… started to decorate the sky.

“How ungrateful…”

The man with the cape looked at Basilisk and smiled.

It seemed Rainfield’s fireworks started.

Chapter 87 - Igniting (Part 3)

Rainfield's fireworks started.

"... Wow."

"It's so cool!"

Boom!

Boom!

People cheered every time the firework exploded.

Riley was also one of these countless people watching the fireworks.

"..."

Every year, Riley came to Rainfield and watched fireworks decorating the sky to find peace in his mind. However...

"It's so pretty."

"Wow, it's shaped like a butterfly!"

For some odd reason, this year, he was not feeling great.

"..."

Cutting through the rain, the fireworks rose to the sky and bloomed beautifully. Others were praising the fireworks, saying they are beautiful and magnificent. However, it was not making Riley excited.

'What is it? Why? Just why?'

Boom!

Watching bright fireworks exploding in front of him, Riley cringed.

It wasn't because the fireworks were bright.

It was just that unpleasant feelings were overcoming him.

'I'm here on a vacation, so why does it feel so awful?'

Riley felt like a mosquito that he didn't kill out of laziness came back to bite him before he went to sleep.

Boom!

A firework decorated the dark-cloud covered sky once again and brightened the surrounding. Riley cringed even more.

“Ha…”

Figuratively speaking, the part bitten by the mosquito was starting to itch.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes, Young Master.”

Nainiae, who was standing next to Riley and watching the fireworks, turned her head toward Riley and answered.

“Is it fun?”

Riley, with an uninterested face, asked her if she found the fireworks fun to watch.

“…”

Nainiae felt that she should think carefully before answering. With a blank look on her face, she turned her head toward the sky to look at the fireworks decorating the sky… and then streams of water falling from roofs of buildings in the area like waterfalls.

‘The fireworks in the waterfall pathway is incredible. I can tell you with certainty that it is one of the most beautiful scenery that I have ever seen.’

Nainiae thought about what Sera said about the fireworks before she came to Rainfield.

According to her, the scene before Nainiae was most certainly an incredible sight to behold and a precious memory to keep.

“Can I be honest?”

Nainiae redirected the gaze away from the fireworks and looked at Riley who had a blank look on his face.

“Haven’t you heard from Ian? I can at least tell when someone is lying or not.”

Riley responded with a bit annoyed tone. He was still looking at the sky with an uninterested look.

Boom!

Boom!

Despite the fireworks exploding one after the other, his slightly furrowed eyebrows were not showing any sign of changing their angles.

“Could it be that I had too high of expectations? Honestly… it is no fun.”

As if he knew she was going to say that, Riley peeked a smile.

“I see.”

‘Did I answer it wrong?’

Nainiae shriveled her shoulders and fell to silence after noticing that Riley looked angry somehow.

“Why is it no fun?”

Riley asked again.

“I’m… not sure?”

Riley believed that he should be happy and comfortable since he is on a vacation trip.

However, let alone being comfortable, he couldn’t hide feeling icky. It was extremely unpleasant.

“Is it because I didn’t realize some dumbass was going to do an incredibly dumbass thing to do that was beyond being a dumbass?”

Watching the fireworks, Riley mumbled.

“I can’t be certain little bugs flying in front of my eyes would bite me later or not. I’m not a fortune teller.”

“…”

From his quiet voice, Nainiae felt like she was watching a deadly predator who had his sleep disturbed. Nainiae gulped.

“If I kill the bug, then I have to go wash my dirtied hand, and I didn’t want to go through the icky process. So, I didn’t do anything, but…”

Riley wiggled his eyebrows and continued.

“… if that runt bites me?”

“…”

Riley was explaining why the vacation rapidly became no fun for him. Hearing his explanation, and sensing the chill coming from Riley… Nainiae couldn’t do anything but to hold her breath.

Boom…

Boom...

In middle of the fireworks, there were sounds of a spear cutting or striking corpses mixed in.

“As I thought, you are incredible! Your kind is truly incredible! I can totally sense that you are a human but not a human!”

The man in black cape opened his eyes wide and watched the boy fight the corpses.

“Hm... I think these are not going to be enough. How about I increase the number for you?”

“You bastard...”

In a single strike, the boy spun the spear and cut-off the arms of three corpses charging toward him. Basilisk counted ever increasing number of corpses and sharpened his eyes.

“My father... My father!!”

Basilisk pierced through the layer of corpses guarding the man in black cape. Basilisk thrusted the spear toward the man with all of his strength.

“Ah... How ungrateful...”

Despite the tip of the spear coming toward him, the man was looking leisurely as ever.

It looked like the man knew the spear was never going to reach him.

“Kuk?!”

“… Guuurrrr.”

It was because there was a tough bodyguard standing right next to him.

A corpse whose skin had turned black.

It was Basilisk’s father.

“No matter how much you want revenge, to think you would raise your spear against your father…”

Basilisk’s father’s spear blocked his spear. Panicking, Basilisk’s lips was shaking. The caped man laughed.

“How ungrateful.”

“Ugh!!”

“Guuuu…”

Basilisk wondered how could a corpse be so strong.

The spear that Basilisk had against his father was shaking. It gradually started to get pushed back. Basilisk’s face crumpled.

“Kuk!”

“You dare!”

Wheec!

Puk…

As if someone realized Basilisk was in danger, an arrow was shot from an angle and pierced the corpse’s arm.

“Gurrr?!”

It was Rorona.

“Rorona!!”

Basilisk was shocked to see an arrow stuck in his father’s arm. He

opened his eyes wide and quickly turned toward Rorona to shout her name.

“Commander! Get a grip! Our former commander has already passed away!”

Rorona shouted on top of her lung in order to cut through the pouring sound of rain and advise Basilisk.

“Ah ha, so that’s where you were?”

Noticing the voice, the caped man generated several dozen ice arrows above his head and started to shoot them one by one in an interval.

“Tsk!”

Every time she tried to aim an arrow, another ice arrow came at her. Rorona cringed and quickly took cover in a building.

“Archers are scary, especially the skilled ones that could load the arrow with mana.”

Archers were like arch-enemies to mages. Having suppressed the threat to some extent, the caped man shrugged his shoulders.

“As for your other comrade… Um… It seems like they are busy dancing.”

There were three of Lightning Boulder mercenaries currently fighting the dark mage.

“Kuk!”

Basilisk, Rorona and Isen were considered highly skilled warriors no matter where they were or what kind of standards were used to judge their skills. However, the opponent was a dark mage that was raising endless hordes of corpses from the ground.

“Commander! At this rate, we will get surrounded! I think we should fall back!”

Isen, who was fighting the corpses that the dark mage raised, had his face covered in sweats as he shouted.

“… But!”

Basilisk responded in frustrated voice,

“But my father!”

“Commander!!”

Watching the three shouting at each other, the caped man started to twitch his shoulders as if he could not hold it anymore.

“Hu… Huhu… Uh huhuhu!”

The caped man’s belittling laughter set fire on Basilisk. Basilisk, with his snake eyes, glared at the caped man.

“Boy, your comrades are right. It is shameless of you to run when you have your father in front of you, but just you three are not going to be enough to beat me.”

‘Who can’t beat who?’

Basilisk started to grind his teeth.

“You. Can you stab your father?”

“That mouth… If you don’t shut up…”

“How ungrateful?”

[TL: This mage says “How ungrateful” every 5 seconds. It probably is the intent of the author to make the character extremely annoying.]

The caped man laughed again.

Watching him, Basilisk could not take it anymore. He charged forward.

“That mouth…”

“Commander! No! Stop!”

It seemed the fuse was burned all the way to the end.

Basilisk charged toward the caped man like a firework rocket. He focused all of his senses to the tip of the spear.

The target was the laughing caped man’s neck.

“… Shut up!!”

It seemed Basilisk was not going to be able to resolve his fury unless he pierced through the caped man’s neck right this instant.

“Ahah, how ungrateful.”

Puk…

Basilisk’s spear pierced through a neck.

To be precise, it was a corpse’s neck.

“…”

“Gu… ughuk.”

“Father…?”

Basilisk’s spear only pierced his dead father’s neck, not his intended target.

“…”

Basilisk was shocked. He was petrified there with a vacant look on his face. Noticing this, Rorona and Isen shouted.

“Commander!!”

“Commander! Dodge!!”

It seemed the battle was decided.

The mage laughed as he looked at Basilisk who was standing there with a vacant look. Having completed the spell, the mage raised his right hand.

“Air Hammer.”

Along with a sensation of dense air rushing toward him… Basilisk was struck by something and was raised up to the air.

“Commander!!”

Piercing through the sound of pouring rain that was filling the ears, there was a clear sound of something being crushed.

It most certainly was the sound of Basilisk’s right arm or shoulder bones being crushed.

“… Ugh.”

Splash!

Struck dead on by the magic, Basilisk was up in the air for a moment and then fell to the puddle.

“This… God damn it!”

Isen and Rorona decided to ignore the corpses and ice arrows and just rush toward where Basilisk was.

“Commander!”

“Commander!”

Fortunately, it seemed Basilisk was still conscious.

Basilisk, who fell to the ground on his back, heard his comrades' voices. He strained himself to barely lift his head.

"Ku, ugh..."

Unfortunately, it seemed the damage from his last duel with the maid from a Count's house piled up with this one to bite him... His right arm was mostly immobilized.

"Well, this is probably the limit for all of you."

The caped man made a hand gesture, and the corpses that were charging toward Basilisk's group stopped. The corpses slowly stepped back.

"This is why it is necessary. For eternity..."

The caped man leisurely turned his head up to look up the sky that was pouring rain. Suddenly, he spread his arms wide toward the sky.

"Didn't you see that your father was liking it?"

"..."

Due to pain, Basilisk was not able to speak.

It was not certain if it was raindrop or tears that was flowing on his cheek… The boy's face was a complete mess to the point that he could not cringe any further.

"Timing is just right… The preparation is ready."

The man under the black cape peeked a smile and said.

"… What?"

Rorona and Isen, who were supporting Basilisk, furrowed their brows in disbelief. They were not expecting the mage to complete the preparation so quickly.

"Now, only the eternity will remain in this city."

The caped man had his arms wide open toward the sky.

He was the very definition of a madman.

"Also, we will be a step closer to our life long wish."

Not becoming of a madman, the caped man's face was full of hope. Looking up at the sky, he started to count.

"Three seconds from now."

“…”

“…”

“…”

Having heard the term, three seconds, Basilisk’s group’s faces became pale.

They knew that at this hour, especially near the waterfall pathway, there were many people watching the fireworks.

“Stop…”

Basilisk struggled and mumbled.

“2 seconds.”

“Please…”

Basilisk thought about the countless people who would be turned into walking corpses. They would never be able to close their eyes comfortably after death. Basilisk started to shake his head left and right.

“One second.”

“Stop…”

The man shouted in bliss filled voice,

“Now!”

Three seconds had passed, and there was silence.

“…?”

“…?”

Nobody was able to say anything. Not the caped man, not Basilisk and others.

‘Everything seems to be the same?’

Although three seconds passed and more time had passed since, there was no sign of anything happening.

“…”

Above all, it was quiet.

It was strange to not hear the sound that should be there naturally.

‘Huh?’

Basilisk was vacantly staring at the caped man, but he could see a raindrop.

‘The rain is…’

Slowly…

The raindrops looked almost like standing still instead of falling. There was no longer the sound of rainfall.

“The sound of rainfall…”

In middle of silence that came along when the sound of rainfall stopped… Basilisk vacantly murmured,

“… Ah.”

At the same time, someone shattered that silence.

“You were here?”

The voice was… despite suffocating atmosphere, the voice was overflowing with leisurely confidence.

‘This voice is?’

It sounded like a voice that he had heard before. Basilisk vacantly turned his head and looked at the man.

“… I found you. You insect.”

“…?”

“You… are?”

Along with the stopped rain, a young master from a nobility house made an appearance.

His face was filled with deadly aura

Chapter 88 - Extinguishing

“Huh? Mommy!”

People who were watching the fireworks started to stare at the sky.

“Look! Rain stopped!”

To be exact, the rain didn’t stop falling. The rain was falling very slowly.

“How could this be…”

The raindrops in front of people were falling so slow that they were making people think the raindrops were standing still.

“What happened…”

The citizens of Rainfield blinked their eyes with confused looks on their faces.

“Oh my god…”

“What’s happening?”

It was because they never saw rain falling this slowly.

“I don’t know what’s happening here, but…”

“This is really…”

People were staring at the sky with vacant looks on their faces. They started to show sparkles in their eyes.

“… Wow.”

A little kid looked up the sky with a vacant look and said,

“It’s pretty.”

Slowly falling raindrops were just as pretty as the fireworks decorating the sky.

Like the child said, it was a pretty sight to behold.

“Look, the rain…”

The raindrops were shining from the lights created by the fireworks. As if the raindrops were saying they have more to show, the raindrops started to narrowly shake.

“… They are going up?”

The raindrops were no longer falling by the gravity. Reflecting the lights from the fireworks, the raindrops now started to rise up toward the clouds.

“Wow…”

Grand? Magnificent?

No words could quite fit the scene.

“Huh… This is really…”

Not just the tourists, but the citizens of the Rainfield who saw the fireworks every year were just staring at the sky.

“…”

They were staring at the scene of raindrops returning to the clouds as the raindrops reflected the lights from the fireworks.

“…”

The scene was most definitely… the most beautiful firework in Rainfield’s history until now.

An uninvited guest who showed at the climax looked at slowly falling raindrops and mumbled,

“Time magic... It’s my first time, so controlling it is difficult, but this is pretty good.”

“... Who are you?”

The caped man looked at the uninvited guest who showed up at the same time as the slowed rain. The caped man asked with a violent look on his face.

“Did you ask who I was?”

“...”

With the rain stopped and the atmosphere calmed, the uninvited guest’s voice, which was leisurely somehow, was making the cape man feel anxious.

“I’m not sure?”

A street light, which seemed like it ran out of its lifespan, started to flicker again.

“I don’t think there is a need for you to know?”

The flickering street light occasionally showed who the uninvited guest was.

‘… Young Master?’

Basilisk, who was in the puddle, confirmed the man’s face and vacantly opened his mouth.

‘Why is he here?’

It wasn’t that Basilisk was mistaking the boy for someone else.

The black haired boy that showed up was definitely the young master of Iphalleta house that they came to Rainfield with from the forest where ogres appeared. The boy was Riley Iphalleta.

“I wonder how it feels to be interrupted in such a spectacular way?”

Splash.

The black haired boy took a step forward as he stepped on a puddle. Riley looked at the caped man and tilted his head side to side.

“Interrupted?”

Having heard the boy's question, the caped man vacantly mumbled 'interrupted.'

"I wish you stopped putting on a face as if you were wronged. You were the one that completely ruined my mood in the first place."

The boy had his head slightly tilted to the side. Unlike his voice, the boy's face was exuding deadly aura as much as the caped man.

"By any chance... by any chance..."

With his eyes met with the boy, the caped man started to flinch his facial muscles. The caped man looked at the raindrops falling slowly.

"This rain, this cloud, my life long wish... You are... you are?!"

The caped man twitched his ten fingers in bizarre angles. He started to shake uncontrollably.

"Why are you acting like you were wronged? If some bastard didn't ruin my vacation, I wouldn't have done it."

Riley glared at the caped man. As if he was trying to show that this was not the end of it, Riley raised his right arm and flicked it loudly.

“Just do it.”

Riley sent a signal to someone, and his clothes started to flap upward.

It wasn’t like there was a strong wind that caused it.

It was just…

‘… Raindrops?’

The gravity was changed.

The gravity was changed slightly so that just the slowly falling raindrops would float up.

[TL: From logical standpoint, this statement is absolutely flawed. Water and human body have density greater than the surrounding air, hence we sink in air when gravity is present. Some people can float in water because their body density overall is lower than water. We, and water, are denser than normal air, hence we will always fall toward the source of gravity, which is the Earth. If the gravity was changed to the point that the raindrops are not falling anymore, only way to accomplish this is to make the gravity zero. If that happened, everybody will be floating up.]

‘It’s her!’

Basilisk thought of Nainiae, the one who was instrumental in

defeating Solia's Grand Mage Astroa. Basilisk realized why the gravity changed and opened his eyes wide.

"This, this can't be! This can't...!!"

Realizing the raindrops were rising to the sky, the caped man mumbled that he can't let this be and started to move his mana.

'Again! Again!!'

With corpses in front of him, he tried to cast magic that would make the gravity heavy. He realized that his mana was moving slower. The man opened his eyes wide.

"It looks like this works well too?"

"What... are you talking...?"

Among the time magic, Riley cast the magic that made the affected mage take longer to cast spells. Riley seemed like he was glad he learned the magic. With a proud face, Riley asked the man,

"How is it? Is it actually difficult for you to cast magic now?"

"... Ungrateful, how ungrateful!"

Realizing Riley was interfering again, the caped man said

‘ungrateful’ as if it was out of habit.

“Ungrateful? How could you say that after interfering with my vacation?”

Hearing the man saying ‘ungrateful’ made Riley’s forehead to have a vein popped up.

“Ungrateful! Ungrateful! You, you ungrateful!!”

The mage with black cape was shaking in fury from watching the raindrops rising back up to the sky. The mage tightened his fists, and the ground started to shake.

“W… Watchout! The corpses that bastards raise won’t stop moving no matter how you cut them! Only way to stop them is to set them on fire! Be careful…”

Basilisk, who was watching the situation, struggled and raised his upper body to warn Riley. However, it seemed Riley was not listening at all.

“Guurrrr…”

Pak!

From below Riley’s feet, a black, rotten corpse’s hand popped up and tightly grabbed Riley’s ankle.

“How dare you, how dare you! How ungrateful! Our life long wish is...!”

With red eyes, the caped man glared at Riley. The man swung his hand wide and manipulated the corpses.

“...”

Riley looked at the corpses hand that grabbed his ankle. Finding it unpleasant, Riley narrowed his eyes and mumbled,

“About this thing you do, it is quite an intriguing trick.”

Riley didn’t sense any energy from the corpses. There was no mana or any kind of special energy. Despite that, the dark eyed corpses were moving on their own. They were certainly giving off a unique sensation.

“But...”

Riley furrowed his brows as he looked at the black hand and drooling corpses surrounding him and charging toward him. Riley finished his sentence.

“... in the end, it is just a trick.”

Riley leisurely finished the sentence. He focused mana toward his leg and exploded the corpse’s black hand that was grabbing his

ankle.

... Pop!!

The black hand of the corpse exploded as if it was a balloon that got struck by a needle.

'Huh?'

From a distance, it looked as if he exploded the corpse's hand just by his gaze.

Watching this unbelievable scene, Basilisk and others quietly gulped.

"Now, what's the next trick?"

Having freed his ankle, Riley leisurely looked to the front.

In front of Riley, there were corpses that the caped man just raised. The corpses were charging toward Riley with roars.

"Guuurrrrk!"

"Khaaaak!"

"Ah, so, this?"

Riley was surrounded completely, front, back, left and right. Still, he was not batting an eye. Riley started to move his legs again.

“This looks like the same trick.”

There were claws coming at him.

There were teeth coming at him.

There were other corpses attacking Riley with swords or spears. However, Riley dodged them all leisurely. Occasionally, Riley tripped the corpses with his leg and made them fall over.

“At best, these are petty tricks.”

Soon, Riley knocked over even the ‘corpse wielding a spear’ like it was nothing. Having gotten past all of them, leaving behind the struggling corpses on the ground, Riley walked forward.

“If I’m to tell you my opinion of seeing it, it feels like a puppet show.”

The corpse, that used to be a pretty famous warrior for his spear in his life, fell down without being able to touch even the tip of Riley’s toe. The caped man ground his teeth.

“This, this can’t be!!”

The man flinched his fingers and raised even more corpses from the ground.

“Guuuurrrrr…”

“Kuuuaaak!!”

There were corpses of monsters among them.

“Now, what are these?”

Anyone would have turned pale from watching this happen.

It was because… each corpse possessed different abilities.

“Orcs, goblins, and there are ones that are even weirder?”

There were unidentified, strange monster corpses. Also, there were corpses that were shooting arrows or magic attacks.

However… it seemed that these were not enough to make Riley’s face turn pale.

“This was a bit more fun.”

The corpses were increased in number and kind, but that was about it. The corpses were, yet again, not able to touch even a hair on Riley.

“Guuurrrr…”

Having realized that they didn’t grab Riley, the struggling corpses turned their body around and charged at him.

“Well, it is intriguing that you can do this without using mana. It is too bad that all you can do with it is putting up puppet shows.”

There were dangerous things rushing toward him from all sides, but Riley’s movements or tone of voice were still as leisurely as ever.

“How dare… How dare you. You ungrateful! My curse… You dare to belittle the present given by the one!!”

It seemed the caped man had lost his mind. With his red eyes, the man glared at Riley like he was going to kill him. The man opened his arms wide and shouted on top of his lung.

“If you are going to do petty tricks…”

While Riley was leisurely mumbling, the corpses came right up to Riley.

“Guuurrrr!”

They were very close... It would have taken just one swing of a corpse’s arm to have its claws tear off Riley’s back.

“... you should show at least this much.”

Until now, Riley was maintaining leisurely atmosphere. However, now, it changed in an instant.

“...”

Corpses’ arms, which were raised high toward the sky, stopped all of sudden.

‘My body... it won’t move?’

Everyone, not just corpses, but Basilisk and others, were petrified from deadly aura choking their neck like chains.

“... Ugh... Kuuuu.”

The man wearing black cape, who was exposed directly to Riley’s deadly aura, glared at Riley with his eyes wide open.

“Since you are a mage, you have a rough idea of this, right? Just

like you, who likes to do puppet shows, I did it without using mana. What do you think?”

Riley stepped forward and asked in a violent tone.

The caped man strained and opened his mouth.

“How… how dare…”

The caped man managed to move his mouth despite being crushed by the deadly aura. Riley, who walked all the way to the front of the man, asked as if he was impressed.

“Huh, are you holding on using your madness?”

“My life long wish… our life long dream…”

“Um… I can’t quite hear you very well.”

“How ungrateful… Our life long dream is still…”

The caped man struggled to say the words. As if he couldn’t quite understand the man, Riley furrowed his brows and mumbled in an uninterested voice.

“It’s fine. Just die.”

Thump.

"..."

To the end, the caped man was trying to do something with his hands which had black lights. However, his head fell.

"... Ah."

At the same time, the aura from Riley changed to his usual leisurely form. Basilisk vacantly opened his mouth.

"I finally got him, this insect bastard."

Riley mumbled, and the man under the black cape lost balance and fell to the front.

"Guuurrr..."

Along with him... the corpses, which were standing still, petrified, all became dust and slowly crumbled down.

"Let me live comfortably. Seriously.

Chapter 89 - Extinguishing (Part 2)

The rising raindrops was a combined effort by Riley's slow magic and Nainiae's gravity magic.

'That's enough.'

It was at the top of a clock tower.

"Phew..."

Unlike Riley, Nainiae didn't have as much mana, so she was at a place that would be optimal for using the gravity magic. She slowly took a deep breath.

'Slowly, slowly.'

With a calm face, she closed her eyes and faced the wind at top of the clock tower. Her hands were exuding steady gray light much like the color of the storm clouds.

'I must not be negligent in focusing on either side... Slowly, steadily, smoothly... maintaining this...'

She was using the gravity magic with her right hand and cleansing magic with her left hand.

Nainiae, who was using both magic at the same time, furrowed her brows slightly. It seemed there was a problem.

‘Kuk, at this rate…’

Water was obviously going to be harder to clean than to spoil.

‘At this rate, my mana will be depleted.’

Nainiae calculated the amount of mana left and compared it to the amount of water left to be cleansed. She realized it won’t work like this, so she changed the spell.

‘I should gently push the rotten clouds away.’

Both mana and time were at critical point. Like a surgeon, Nainiae’s face was covered in sweats.

‘Focus.’

Nainiae quickly cancelled the cleansing magic on her left hand and immediately used wind magic.

“… Kup.”

It seemed she overexerted herself. A stream of black blood started to flow from her lips and drop below her chin.

‘Did it work?’

The raindrops, which became lighter from gravity magic, started to get carried away by her wind magic.

‘It’s working.’

Nainiae didn’t even think about wiping off the blood flowing on her face. She smiled as she looked at the polluted rain being carried away to the distance.

‘It worked.’

The polluted rain was going to cause a huge casualty, but it was now moving far away from Rainfield. Relieved, Nainiae sighed.

“Ha…”

On top of the clock tower, dizziness suddenly overcame Nainiae. Her legs started to falter, and the rainfall and wind started again after the gravity magic was canceled.

‘I’m glad it turned out well.’

She was having difficulty standing. She struggled to stand and grabbed the lightning pole to support herself.

“Wow…”

“It’s amazing…”

Boom.

Boom.

She could hear the cheering crowd from below, and she could see the firework lighting the sky. Nainiae vacantly stared at the scenery in front of her.

“…”

From the tall clock tower, she could see the waterfall pathway down below.

There were people watching the fireworks.

“… I saved them.”

Nainiae looked at the people watching the fireworks. She smiled proudly and mumbled,

“I save them…”

There were people that Riley and Nainiae saved.

They were alive.

“I managed to save them.”

Nainiae watched the people enjoying the beautiful scenery. To Nainiae, who came to Rainfield for the first time to see the fireworks, it was the most beautiful grand scenery.

The flipping sound of newspaper was like in response to the sound of rainfall from outside.

[Slowed rainfall was observed in Rainfield. A phenomenon like this was the first in the history. Meteorologists and mana experts wondered if a dragon, which is only rumored to exist, passed by the city. The opinions were divided.]

Flip

The newspaper was turned to the next page.

[Also, the slowed rainfall started to rise up, which was a remarkable phenomenon. Combined with fireworks, it created the most beautiful scenery in the Rainfield's waterfall pathway firework history. This became a big news.]

The boy was vacantly reading the newspaper.

"... Hm."

Meanwhile, a maid carefully prepared a tea for the boy so she wouldn't get in his way. She carefully set the tea cup down and said,

"Young Master, here..."

"Oh, leave it there."

The boy didn't even bother to turn to look at the maid wearing a mask. He checked the news.

[The story is that the dark mage that appeared in the library recently was still not apprehended. The families of the victims, infuriated, confronted the guards, and this lead to injuries to people. The authorities involved in the investigation said they will

quickly find his trace and apprehend him. However, the families of the victims didn't seem to be believing them.]

Nainiae's voice could be heard from a close range.

"... So, in the end, it looks like the official story is that the dark mage was not caught."

Having heard the voice, Riley looked at the maid's face and furrowed his brows.

"Don't talk to me from the side so close."

"M... My apologies."

Nainiae was reading the newspaper from Riley's shoulder. She stepped back, lowered her head and begged for pardon.

"Anyway, judging from the news, Basilisk is keeping his mouth shut."

Riley folded the newspaper and smiled. Nainiae scratched her cheek and mumbled,

"Personally... I wish you got credited for the fact that you defeated the dark mage and saved the people in Rainfield. Just like how it was in Solia."

Riley didn't miss what Nainiae mumbled in a quiet voice. Appearing to be feeling unpleasant, he looked at her.

"Are you becoming like Ian now?"

"No, that's not it. I just... It felt great when I realized I saved people. I was proud too."

Feeling Riley's stare, Nainiae avoided Riley's gaze. Fiddling with her index fingers, she mumbled in even smaller voice,

"I wish you could feel it too."

"..."

It seemed she struck a chord in Riley. Riley narrowed his eyes and looked at Nainiae. Nainiae pursed her lips.

"Come here for a second."

Riley slowly raised his hand and cracked his wrist.

Looking at his hand gesture calling for her, Nainiae shriveled her shoulders and stepped toward him.

"..."

‘Is he going to scold me?’

She thought about what she did earlier and realized she overstepped the bound and ran her mouth. Nainiae was looking rather down.

‘Still…’

Nainiae went next to Riley who was sitting comfortably on sofa. Riley bent his wrist to gesture Nainiae to lower her head. Nainiae carefully lowered her body.

‘Not being acknowledged by young master is… Looks like I’ll be getting another knock on the head and told to stop lecturing him.’

Thinking that, Nainiae closed her eye tightly as she noticed Riley’s hand coming toward her forehead.

“…?”

Nainiae, who was prepared for a gentle knock on her forehead, felt Riley’s palm on her head instead.

“Young Master?”

Nainiae opened her eye and vacantly stared at Riley’s face.

“I don’t think I told you this.”

“… What are you…”

“You have done a good work.”

“…”

Riley was patting Nainiae’s head and praising her. Nainiae vacantly opened her mouth.

“How was that? Do you feel proud?”

“…”

She blushed a little. Lowering her chin, she said in a tiny voice,

“Yes…”

“Just keep doing as you have been.”

Nainiae looked overjoyed, and that gave Riley vicarious satisfaction. He turned his gaze away from Nainiae and mumbled,

“Anyway, I got to enjoy the vacation afterwards… I’m satisfied with that.”

Riley disposed of the dark mage that was causing annoyance like a flying insect, and since then, Riley had been enjoying sweet vacation in Rainfield.

“From time to time, I got to have you learn about the world too… It will make my life easier as well from now on.”

Riley swung his leg a little. He had a bitter look on his face, but he changed it and looked at Nainiae with a mischievous look.

“That’s right, right?”

Nainiae thought about the number of books she read while in Rainfield. She blushed and lowered her head deeply.

“… Yes.”

She read about twice more books than Riley had.

“Should I praise you again?”

“… No.”

She was here to serve Riley, but it felt like she enjoyed the vacation more than he had. It seemed like she was ashamed to face Riley.

“Well then, okay.”

Nainiae looked down. Riley smiled and leaned on the sofa’s back support. He closed his eyes.

“Huuuaaaam.”

Listening to the sound of the rain as lullaby, Riley blinked slowly. He suddenly mumbled,

“Now that I think about it, it is about time we went back.”

“Although we saved time with Mr. Andal’s teleportation, it has been a while since we came here. Soon… it will be autumn.”

Nainiae smiled lightly and said it.

Riley thought about home and asked,

“I guess everyone would be worried, right?”

Having heard the question, Nainiae opened her eye wide as if she was forgetting something.

“… Ah.”

“…?”

Nainiae was just standing there with a blank look on her face. It was afternoon nap time for Riley. He was blinking his eyes from sleepiness. He had a question mark on his face as he asked,

“… What is it?”

“Young Master.”

“What?”

“We… have something we had been forgetting about, don’t you think?”

“Something we had been forgetting about?”

Riley looked up the ceiling and thought about what he could have forgotten. He tilted his head side to side and rolled his brain.

“Um.”

If she was talking about the dark mage, Riley turned the corpse to dust, so that couldn’t be it.

“Um.”

‘Is there a book that I missed?’ Is there a food that I missed? In Rainfield… in Rainfield…’

“No, I can’t think of anything?”

All questions returned the same answer, no.

“Just what is it? Why are you saying it with such a serious face? If it is something trivial, handle it yourself, ok?”

Frustrated, Riley demanded an answer.

Not knowing what to do, thinking she made a mistake, Nainiae cringed and said

“About that…”

“About that what?”

Riley asked her to hurry up.

Almost in tears, Nainiae said,

“… We didn’t do it.”

“Didn’t do what?”

“Contacting them.”

“…?”

“About that, to the mansion… We never contacted the mansion ever since we arrived at the Rainfield.”

“…”

Riley’s mouth opened on its own.

It was because what Nainiae was saying was correct.

He couldn’t recall a time when he contacted the mansion.

“You really didn’t?”

“… That’s right.”

“Not even once?”

“… That’s right.”

“…”

Riley fell to silence. Nainiae injected mana into her leather bracelet and brought out a small mirror.

“It’s this.”

It was a hand mirror that she had gate magic installed before leaving to Rainfield.

It allowed face to face communication from a long distance.

“How do I use it?”

Riley asked, and Nainiae asked back almost in tears.

“What should we do?”

“… T… To begin with, it is your fault that you didn’t contact them!”

Riley thought he was not at fault for this. With his face full of panic, he pointed at Nainiae.

“I… I beg your pardon.”

Nainiae bit her lips hard and lowered her head.

“I’m sorry, Young Master.”

Of course, it could not be said that Riley was blameless on this one. However, Nainiae was thinking it was all her fault.

Looking at Nainiae apologizing sincerely, it was stabbing Riley's conscious. He made a strange sound and shook his shoulder.

'... Riley? What are you doing?'

"Ugh!?"

From behind Nainiae, he thought he saw his mother's face.

"... Ah, no, it is fine."

Riley gulped big time and stopped scolding Nainiae. He reached for the hand mirror.

It wasn't that he was scared of his mother.

It was just that there wasn't going to be answer for this problem even if he talked to her.

"T... this. How do I use this?"

Riley's voice was shaking without him realizing it. Riley asked Nainiae about how to use the mirror.

“I’ll give you a signal when you open the mirror. When I used the magic and the other side opens the mirror as well, you can have a face-to-face communication through the mirror. Please wait for a moment. Young Master, you are sweating...”

He was about to do a face-to-face chat with his mother through the mirror, and it had been months since he saw her last time. If he looked ill, that would not have led to a good conversation.

“I... is it all right now?”

Nainiae, who wiped off the sweat from Riley, nodded and raised her hand.

“Yes... I... I’ll cast the magic.”

Nainiae was nervous just like Riley. She cast the gate magic to the mirror.

“...”

After a few seconds later, he could see the view inside the mansion. It looked like it was inside Iris’ room.

- Riley? It is you. Phew.

- Lady Iris, did you just say... What did you just say? Did you say

it is Young Master?!

- Young Master? Young Master Riley?

Not just Iris' voice, but Ian and Sera's voices could also be heard. Nainiae, who was hiding behind and looking at the mirror in secret, shriveled her shoulders after hearing Ian and Sera's voice.

- Mr. Ian! Mr. Ian! Please stand back... a little! I can't see Young Master's face!

- Young Master! Why! Why are you contacting us so late! I thought something happened! I should have gone there with you! Huuuurrrrrng!!

They were not giving any chance for Riley to open his mouth to speak.

Riley was initially looking nervous. Listening to Sera and Ian making noises from the other side of the mirror made Riley's face relaxed.

- Ian. You were so sure that nothing bad will happen to Young Master. Why are you so agitated... Ian?

Ian's face, which was filling the mirror until now, was pushed aside all of sudden. Instead, Iris' face appeared.

- Did something happen to Ian?

From beyond the mirror, Iris, Riley's mother, asked with a concerned face.

- ...

Silence continued.

They could not be sure how long it had been quiet like that.

Soon, someone whimpering in pain could be heard.

- Kuk, my back...

- Mr. Ian? Ugh, really! It's not like you are a child! Why are you doing that! Seriously!

It wasn't much of a response, but Riley could hear Ian whimpering and Sera clicking her tongue.

"... Nice going, really."

"Puhup!"

- Puhup!

Nainiae, who was looking at the scene beyond the mirror, and Iris beyond the mirror broke in to laughter.

Chapter 90 - How Is Everyone Doing?

- So, Riley?

Smile.

Iris smiled from the other side of the mirror and called Riley. Riley, who had a stiff look on his face, flinched his shoulders.

That pretty smile of hers was definitely carrying fury.

Riley was certain of it.

- There must be a reason why you contacted so late, right?

Unlike her smiling face, her voice sounded deadly. Riley gulped big time and put up a forced smile on his face. He said,

“A... About that...”

- You must have a reasonable explanation, right?

“Ah, yes! Of course! About that, about that...”

- ...

Riley smiled like a fool. He kept on blurring the end of the sentence. Iris, with a smile on her face, tilted her head side to side.

- Why don't you explain it to me?

It could be that Riley didn't know what to say. Riley's smiling face petrified.

- Oh? Did this thing freeze? Nainiae?

"Yes! Lady Iris!"

- Is this thing still working?

"Yes! Of course!"

Riley glared at back of Nainiae's head.

"…"

With his gaze, he was saying, 'hey, after all those books you have read, how could you be so dense?' Riley said,

"About that, there were a few things that happened."

- A few things?

“Yes! It would be a bit disappointing to explain it through this, so I’ll explain it all when we return. I want to do justice to the explanation by explaining them all in person.”

Riley brought up his plan for explaining it when he returned, which was about two weeks in traveling time. With his shoulder, Riley wiped off the sweat that was flowing on his cheek and smiled like a fool.

- Ugh…

From beyond the mirror, they could hear Iris sighing.

It seemed she was very worried.

- Nothing bad happened, right?

“That’s right.”

“Yes, Lady Iris. I can guarantee it.”

Nainiae added promptly after Riley responded.

It seemed Iris was relieved. She relaxed her face.

- Since Nainiae said so, I’m relieved.

Riley, who was flinching on every word his mother spoke, calmed his shaking heart and asked about her.

“How about you, Mother? Nothing happened, right?”

- I’m fine, of course. I’m recovering from my illness too.

“That’s great. How about the mansion?”

- Other than you not being here, it is the same.

Iris turned her head lightly to look to the side. She corrected herself on the words she just spoke.

- Although Ian doesn’t seem to be well.

“I was expecting that.”

Having heard what his mother said, Riley shrugged as if he figured that was going to happen. At that moment, someone’s cry could be heard.

- Young masterrrrrrrr!

Riley simply ignored the cry and looked at the mirror with a bright face.

“Anyway, we will be coming back to Solia soon. We will contact you again before we head out, so please keep the mirror in a safe place.”

- Okay.

“Also… I’m sorry.”

- Um?

“I’m sorry I didn’t contact you until now.”

Riley apologized, and Iris smiled proudly.

- Huhu. If you know that, then it is all right. You know what to do after making an apology, right?

“Not repeating the same thing again.”

- That’s right.

Iris was about to wave her hand to say that Riley can hang up now. At that moment, Sera asked from the side,

- Ah, Lady Iris! Please wait!

- Sera?

- Young Master, before you hang up, can you please put Nainiae...

This time, Nainiae's shoulders flinched.

He figured what was about to come. Riley smiled big and handed the mirror to Nainiae.

"Enjoy it?"

"Ugh..."

Nainiae received the mirror. She looked like an animal going to a slaughter house. With her shoulders shriveled completely, she looked beyond the mirror.

- Nainiae.

"Yes, Ms. Sera."

To be respectful, Nainiae took a step away from Riley and responded quietly.

- Aren't you supposed to do your job right?

As expected, the scolding started. Nainiae, on brink of tears, bit

her lips.

- Even if Young Master Riley forgot, still...

"..."

It seemed that Sera figured out Nainiae also forgot about contacting the mansion.

It seemed Riley was feeling uncomfortable hearing what Sera was saying. It was stabbing him in his conscious. Riley flinched big.

- Nainiae, you should have kept your mind sharp and contacted us!

"... I'm sorry."

- Seriously... Young Master Riley went there for vacation. It's not like you went there on vacation, right?

Nainiae turned the body so the pile of books that she read didn't come into Sera's view. Having heard Sera's scolding that was piercing through her chest, Nainiae repeatedly said 'I'm sorry." She lowered her head toward the mirror.

"..."

- Nainiae! Are you listening?

“I… I’m sorry.”

In light of Sera’s scolding, Nainiae was ashamed, and she couldn’t say anything. Nainiae lowered her head. Someone’s voice, an old man in his dying breath, could be heard.

- I… I’m disappointed, Nainiae… When you return… be prepared… Kurrrk?! My backkkkkk!

- Ugh, Mr. Ian! Please be still and lie down!

- K… Kuuuk… Why should I get scolded…

Not just Nainiae, but Ian beyond the mirror was getting scolded. Riley, who was sitting in a sofa and listening in on the conversation, peeked a smile.

- Anyway, Nainiae, stay sharp, all right?

It looked like Sera was not done. She was pouring advice like a waterfall. Nainiae kept on lowering her head toward the hand mirror.

“Yes, yes… I’m ashamed. I’ll reflect on this.”

They lost track on the number of times Nainiae responded to this.

Sera's voice was relatively calm now.

- So, did you go see the waterfall pathway? How about the firework?

After scolding, Nainiae was asked about the pretty things to see in Rainfield.

"..."

- Nainiae?

Nainiae took a moment of pause and responded with a satisfied smile.

"Yes, I saw them."

- How were they?

"To put it in a word..."

Nainiae was certain.

That day, the scene that she saw from the top of the clock tower,

the waterfall pathway firework was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen in her eighteen years of life.

After saying that they will be returning to Solia soon, Nainiae disconnected the gate magic. Exhausted, Nainiae leaned on the wall and sighed.

“Is it over?”

“Yes.”

Looking at exhausted Nainiae, Riley peeked a smile. He showed the empty cup and tapped on his wrist.

“In that case, get me a refill.”

“Ah, I’ll right away.”

Nainiae quickly came next to Riley and used magic and warmed up the tea pot. Nainiae told Riley what Sera said at the very end.

“Young Master, Ms. Sera said... Solia Temple was looking for you.”

Nainiae brought heated up tea pot, and Riley leaned his tea cup as he tilted his head side to side.

“From the temple?”

“Yes.”

Nainiae carefully poured the tea to Riley’s cup. Nainiae continued as if there was more.

“Yes. Having heard that you went to Rainfield… the Archbishop Rebethra started heading to Rainfield.”

Riley was about to drink the tea. However, having heard that, he opened one of his eyes big and looked at Nainiae.

“All the way to Rainfield?”

“Yes. I heard that he was traveling on a carriage… It’s about time he will be arriving at the Rainfield, so Sera said it would be good to let you know.”

“Ugh… on a carriage?”

Riley was finding all this to be ridiculous. Right at that moment, he could hear approximately three people outside.

“Ah, could it be?”

Nainiae mumbled as she wondered if it could be Rebethra. She looked out the window to see the front of the hotel.

“Is it here?”

Kiiiik.

The hotel’s door opened with a squeaking noise. A boy wearing a raincoat entered the place while holding a spear on his shoulder.

“Ah?”

Riley vacantly opened his mouth as he looked at the three that suddenly came to visit him. Riley remembered the three. They were the people that he ran into before arriving at Rainfield.

“Oh, he is here.”

It was the Lightning Boulder mercenaries.

Of them all, the one standing in the front, a smaller framed boy, Basilisk, found Riley in the hotel’s first floor, sitting on a sofa. Basilisk opened his eyes wide.

“Young Master, how do you do?”

Basilisk walked toward Riley. He raised his hand, the one that

wasn't holding the spear, and greeted Riley. It seemed he was glad to see Riley.

"I think I didn't say hello to you, so..."

Right after that, Basilisk also greeted the owner of the hotel. Basilisk casually walked toward Riley and set next to him.

"Should I get you some tea?"

"Ah, Ms. Nainiae, I'll be fine. I'll be drinking something else."

It seemed like Basilisk came to the hotel as a customer. Nainiae nodded and stepped back.

"Can I have a cold one here?"

"Yes, yes!"

Basilisk shouted toward the kitchen and looked at Riley.

Riley couldn't be certain about Basilisk's reason for coming here. However, judging from his looks, it seemed Basilisk didn't have any ill intent.

"You were still here?"

Riley took a sip of tea and asked. Basilisk, with a bitter look on his face, responded.

“To us, Mr. Reitri was like our lifeline... Finding a new client who is as good as him is turning out to be difficult. I feel like I’m still tied to him. So... we thought about it hard and...”

After the dark mage incident, Basilisk’s group became unemployed after Reitri left Rainfield. Basilisk explained it all to Riley and looked at him steadily.

“...”

Noticing that their commander was not able to continue, Rorona, the archer, spoke for him.

“Please hire us.”

“... What?”

Riley narrowed his eyes and asked back.

“Why should we?”

“If hiring us is not quite to your liking, then let us accompany you at least. Please.”

Rorona lowered her head and pleaded.

Confused, Riley looked at the three people and looked at Nainiae who was standing on the side.

She looked just as confused. She only shook her head left and right.

“You said we need to watch our mouths, right? In that case, won’t it be more convenient for you to have us be at your side so you can watch us?”

To convince Riley, Isen asked with a serious face. Having heard it, Riley cringed.

“Are you blackmailing me?”

The mood took a sudden, downward turn. Having realized his mistake, Isen blurred the end of his sentence.

“No, we are not blackmailing…”

If keeping their mouths shut was the goal, killing them all without anyone knowing like Tess merchant group, unknown even to rats or birds, was a way to go about it.

“Don’t pester me.”

To Riley, it was certain that they were pestering him. Riley narrowed his eyes. He was about to warn them again, but he felt another presence outside the hotel.

"... Young Master."

Nainiae saw who just walked into the hotel and called Riley quietly.

Having heard Nainiae, Riley looked toward the entrance and cringed his face even more.

'Ah, that guy.'

The old man in white clothing was the kind of man that was hard to see in a place like Rainfield which didn't have a holy temple.

"Ah, Young Master Riley... You were here! Haha! I asked around and barely managed to find you."

It was Rebethra, the Archbishop of Solia Temple.

With him, an uninvited guest, making an entrance, not just Riley, but even Basilisk cringed.

"Oldman, you appear to be someone from a holy temple... What business do you have in Rainfield which doesn't have any?"

Basilisk had his arm resting on top of the back support of the chair. In a thuggish pose, Basilisk stared at Rebethra and asked.

“Ahah, you already had a guest. I should have introduced myself first. My apologies.”

Despite Basilisk’s violent attitude, Rebethra shrugged his shoulders, smiled and offered a handshake.

“Hello. I’m Rebethra, the Archbishop from Solia’s Holy Temple. I’m here to see Young Master Riley, but… Is there a problem?”

With an awkward face, Basilisk accepted the handshake. Basilisk wiggled his eyebrows and answered in an annoyed tone,

“What a coincidence. I’m here for the same reason.”

“I see.”

It seemed Rebethra was feeling awkward about it. With his hand retrieved, Rebethra looked toward Riley and lowered his head.

“Have you had a good vacation?”

Riley was seeing through the man’s question. Riley didn’t like it, so he responded indirectly.

“It would have been good if it wasn’t for meddlers.”

“Ah haha. Oh my… My apologies. There was something I had to give you.”

Rebethra broke cold sweat, placed the fabric wrapped item on the table, and stepped back.

“What’s this?”

It must have taken him a long time to get here from Solia, but Rebethra was stepping away after just handing over a gift. Riley tilted his head side to side.

“As I said earlier, I came here just to give you a present.”

Rebethra added that it was a high-quality raincoat as he smiled.

“I happened to have a business here in Rainfield, and I also heard that you were here on a vacation. I hope you wouldn’t misunderstand me.”

Having heard what Rebethra said, Nainiae narrowed her eye.

His explanation was different from what Sera said.

“This is all thanks to the Goddess Irenetsa, who we should be

grateful.”

Rebethra prayed for a moment. As if he was really done with his business here, he turned around without hesitation and left the hotel.

“…”

Riley vacantly stared at the fabric wrapped item. He slowly moved his gaze toward Basilisk.

“Aren’t you going?”

“… Young Master.”

Riley asked in annoyed tone. On the other hand, Basilisk mumbled something completely unrelated to the question.

“About that Oldman.”

“…?”

“He smells rotten?”

Before anyone realized, Basilisk was staring toward the hotel’s entrance as if he was going to punch a hole through it with his gaze.

“What?”

He looked serious, so Riley tilted his head side to side, wondering why.

Basilisk mumbled again as he turned his head.

“A rotten stench, stench. He smells like he is rotten inside.”

Basilisk’s eyes were changed to sharp snake like eyes.

“How should I say this? So…”

It was at an uphill on Rainfield.

Of all dirt on the road, the man in white clothing carefully observed the parts that were especially dark. The old man furrowed his brows.

“Huh…”

It was Rebethra.

“Huerial, I told you to be careful, didn’t I?”

Rebethra took a knee. With a frustrated face, he reached for the black dirt, ash to be precise.

“Still, you were one of the hard-working ones among us all... With you gone ahead like this, other parts won’t be able to handle the aftermath. You knew that, didn’t you?”

Rebethra grabbed a handful of ashes on his hand. He placed the ashes into a pouch he brought with him and continued to mumble.

“Everything is.... For the sake of our life long wish.”

The dirt inside the pouch started to vibrate. Rebethra peeked a creepy smile.

Chapter 91 - An Eye For Seeing Through People

“How should I say this... It feels like I can smell a familiar stench?”

Basilisk, who was sitting in front of Riley, had a serious look on his face as he thought about the back of Rebethra.

“Stench?”

Riley, who was sitting there in a relaxed pose, furrowed his brows.

It wasn’t because of what Basilisk said. It was because of Basilisk’s eyes, which turned sharp like snakes.

“I’m not sure? From where I see it, I think your eyes are weirder?”

With his finger, Riley pointed at Basilisk’s eyes. As if he had totally forgotten about it, Basilisk returned his transformed eyes back to normal. Embarrassed, he scratched the back of his head and looked at Riley.

“This is... How should I say it... A habit? Should I call it my instinct... When I shake hands with someone who has bad aura, my eyes turn like that.”

“Commander, please wait.”

Rorona suddenly stepped in.

“You don’t really need to explain that…”

“No. This Young Master is all right. If he is someone that Mr. Ian acknowledges, then it would be wrong of me to hide it. Also… My father would have done the same.”

Riley tilted his head side to side and mumbled.

“Habit? Instinct?”

It was because Riley remembered what Rorona said before they arrived at Rainfield.

‘Our commander’s intuition had never been wrong. Although the ability is limited to a few conditions, actually, our commander is…’

Regarding the intuition, and regarding the conditions that limits the ability, Riley remembered how she blurred the end of the explanation.

“You, by any chance…”

Riley narrowed his eyes and glared at Basilisk. Basilisk bit his lips a little and faced Riley.

“That’s right. I… look like a human, but I’m not a human.”

It seemed it took a lot for Basilisk to say it.

Basilisk bit his lips again and looked at Riley. Basilisk’s eyes were sharp again like when he was looking at Rebethra earlier.

“…”

Riley steadily stared at Basilisk’s eyes.

The boy’s eyes were definitely well beyond those of humans.

“I’m the last survivor of Basilisks… the existence who were indebted to the Mercenary Hero Mr. Ian during the Great War.”

Basilisk brought up Ian’s name and continued in a serious tone. Riley’s eyes were filled with interest.

“By Ian?”

Riley became intrigued about the existence who Ian saved when he was called the Mercenary Hero in the past.

“The name, Basilisk... It is not a name of a nobility?”

Riley directed his gaze toward Rorona. Last time, she was wishy-washy about this question. Now, she nodded apologetically.

“Please forgive me. I couldn’t tell you about our commander back then. As he just explained... our commander is the last of the Basilisks.”

Rorona explained that it was also because of the former commander’s last will. She said she had done so in order to protect the young boy named Nara, the last of the Basilisks, from danger.

“It would take a while to explain about the Basilisks in detail. To tell you the most relevant part for the moment, they have an eye for seeing through people... In other words, they can detect people’s innate nature.”

Nara pointed his finger toward his eyes. To explain Basilisks more easily, he looked at Nainiae and asked,

“There is such a thing called the innate type in magic, right?”

Nainiae nodded as the response. Nara explained further.

“You can just think of it as something like that. I could say that we don’t look at people through their appearances. Instead, we see them through their color.”

“Color?”

“There are people who are red, blue, or pitch black. They are all different. For instance, Young Master, you are white... no, more like silver color. Ms. Nainiae, you have the white color.”

“...”

Noticing the color was changed in the middle, Riley glared at Nainiae.

“Excuse me. Do you believe me? What I’m saying?”

Nara, who just revealed that he was not human, asked Riley and Nainiae carefully.

“Well, in the situation right now, It is not important for me to believe it or not.”

Riley responded in an uninterested manner.

Nainiae added awkwardly,

“I believe you.”

Nara was worried he might be met with hatred. He sighed in

relief and continued what he was saying earlier.

“Anyway, about that man who is an Archbishop… His rear end stinks. He was purple… and I think it would be best if you didn’t go near him.”

Having heard Nara’s advice, Riley still kept his uninterested look on his face. Riley took a sip from the tea.

“I’m already aware.”

“Pardon?”

“I already know. That oldfart wants something from me.”

Surprised, Basilisk blinked his eyes. He asked,

“By any chance, Young Master… Do you have something similar to…”

Finding his question to be ridiculous, Riley crumpled his face. Riley interrupted Nara.

“You think I’m the same as you?”

“In that case, just how?”

“An intuition.”

“An intuition?”

“How should I put it? Past experience? I have seen runts with rotten behind like him countless times. I’m sick of them. Well, it’s something like that.”

‘I have plenty of experience from the past life. You think I can’t tell them apart from the good people?’

Riley thought to himself inside. Riley put his leg on top of the other and looked at Nara.

“What?”

Nara, who had his mouth open vacantly, asked Riley with a confused look.

“You know he is up to no good, but… you are letting him be? Although you know what that old man is up to?”

Riley shrugged as if it was nothing and said,

“That’s right. I know what he is up to, but I’m letting it be.”

“… Just… why?”

“They are giving me good stuff on their own.”

With a relaxed gaze, Riley directed his eyes toward the gift that Rebethra left behind.

“I can’t gut him right away just because he is an eyesore. Taking advantage of him first beforehand is the wisdom for living this world.”

Nara was still finding it all to be ridiculous. He had a confused look on his face still. Nara finally realized why Riley’s color was silver.

“Well, the beings called Basilisks are interesting. I’ll handle the things about Rebethra, so don’t worry about it. Why don’t you be on your way now?”

Riley sipped on the tea and enjoyed its taste. He waved his hand as if he was asking them to leave.

“Young Master, please let us go with you to Solia. Just up to there… Will you please let me see Mr. Ian’s face once?”

In response to Riley’s hand gesture, Nara shook his head as if he couldn’t let it end like this. He pleaded to Riley.

‘So, that was the goal?’

“Young Master, please…”

Nara bit his lips and lowered his head. Uninterested, Riley stared at the boy’s head. In the end, Riley still didn’t want to let them accompany him back to Solia. Riley shook his head and said,

“No. You can’t.”

Riley didn’t want to carry an unwanted bag on the way back home. He promptly said no.

“Young Master, please.”

“I don’t want to.”

Nara pleaded again, but Riley refused cold heartedly. He shut his eyes slowly, signaling that the conversation was now over.

“I won’t get in your way. Please allow us to accompany you at least.”

“…”

If he just wanted to see Ian, he just needed to visit the mansion as a guest. Nara was probably doing this so he won’t get in Riley’s wrong side.

“If we stalked you, that would be more of an inconvenience for you, isn’t that right?”

It was going to be more than just an inconvenience.

Riley might pull out his sword out of feeling the inconvenience.

“Please… I beg of you.”

Because of his desperate voice and pleading look on his face, Riley cringed big time and asked Nara,

“Ugh, just why do you need to see Ian so badly?”

Riley could understand that Nara wanted to see his savior, the Hero Mercenary that saved Basilisks’ kind. However… Riley couldn’t understand why Nara was risking having his head chopped off.

“That is… My father…”

“… Here!”

While Nara was blurring the end of the sentence, the hotel owner brought the cold rice liquor that Nara asked for and placed it on the table before rushing to get out of there.

‘Drink…’

Nainiae narrowed her eyes cautiously after seeing the drink.

It seemed her memory of the drink from the first day at Rainfield was still clear.

“… Ms. Nainiae?”

Nara was about to continue talking about Ian, but he noticed her gaze. Feeling uncomfortable, Nara called her name.

“Drinks… are dangerous.”

“Ignore her. Continue. What about your father?”

Riley, who was cringing, interrupted the conversation. Thanks to that, Nara barely managed to redirect his gaze away from Nainiae. Looking at the rice liquor on the table, Nara continued with a bitter look on his face.

“As a last request… My father said he wanted to see Mr. Ian.”

Nara mumbled with a bitter look. He looked behind to see Isen. Isen nodded as if he understood what he was asking, and brought the leather pouch that he was holding in his arms.

“What is this?”

It looked like it contained ashes.

“It’s the ashes of my father’s bones.”

“…”

“It was his testament. Before he died, he said he wanted to see Mr. Ian. So…”

Nara bit his lips for a moment. He chugged on the rice liquor and continued with hesitation.

“After showing this to Mr. Ian, I plan to bury my father in a sunny place.”

Nara couldn’t look more serious. With that look, Nara stared at Riley.

“To repay our debts for saving our kind, and also to find a good place to bury my father’s bones… please allow us to accompany you to Solia.”

Nara bowed.

Rorona also lowered her head. With a bitter look on her face, she also added her opinion on the matter.

“It didn’t seem like a good idea to bury our former commander at Rainfield. It rains endlessly here…”

The man was someone’s father.

He was also someone’s strong commander.

The three mercenaries’ wish was to bury that man’s bone ash at a sunny place. Having heard this, Riley…

It was late summer.

Riley used the hand mirror to communicate to the mansion that he will be heading home today. While getting on the carriage, Riley was cringing.

“Ah, in the end, I’m going back.”

“Don’t worry too much. By the time you are back, it would be not as hot in Solia. It’s autumn soon.”

Checking the carriage, Nainiae carefully checked all items necessary for the return trip. She casually turned her head and

looked at the Lightning Boulder mercenary's carriage.

"Ms. Nainiae, are you ready?"

"We are ready. How about you?"

Having heard her question, Nara sat on the top of the carriage as if he had a carpet there to get comfortable on. He smiled and said,

"Have you heard of the old saying that says an unprepared mercenary is useless? It's one of Mr. Ian's statements! We are always ready thoroughly! Just say the word!"

Riley, who was still just standing on the steps on the carriage, looked at the mercenaries' carriage. Having heard Nara's words, Riley cringed and complained,

"Damn it all... That guy... that guy... If he meets Ian, I think he is going to cause quite a scene."

"I think so too."

Nainiae peeked a smile and said,

"Just like how Mr. Ian says, 'Oh, Young Master!' and cries, I think Nara will say, 'Oh, Mr. Ian!' and cry."

Riley was acting all uncaring and complaining, but he was generous without knowing the bounds. Noticing this in Riley, Nainiae came to respect Riley even more. She smiled and mumbled,

“I think a strange situation will unfold once they meet.”

“Ugh, that sounds horrible. Don’t even mention it.”

Riley shook his body as if one of the raindrop went through the raincoat and fell on his back to give him a chill. He rushed to get into the carriage.

“Well then, we will be slowly heading out.”

“Oh, okay.”

Nainiae closed the carriage door after Riley entered inside. She was about to get on the driver’s seat. However, she suddenly flinched and became petrified.

“Ms. Nainiae?”

“…”

Nainiae was flinching her shoulders with a pale face, breaking cold sweats. She was not able to answer Nara.

“Ms. Nainiae!”

Having realized the voice calling her name, she quickly hid her hands and arms, which were shaking, and responded,

“… Yes?!”

“Why are you so surprised? You said we are about to head out, right?”

“Ah, Yes… That’s right.”

She tried closing and opening her hands. She tried massaging her arms.

Her body was screaming through shivering. Nainiae barely managed to calm her body down. She tried hard to smile and responded,

“We will be heading out now. I’ll lead the way, so please follow me.”

“Don’t worry! Our Rorona had been driving carriages for years. That’s right, right?”

“Commander. If you want to keep the space on the carriage’s top for yourself, don’t you think it would be a good idea to say things in a nicer way?”

“Ah, I got it! I got it!”

Nainiae smiled as she heard them bicker and then worked away. She sat on the driver’s seat. Finally able to hide her face from others, she bit her lips hard.

“…”

Pain was spreading through her entire body. Through her lips, which was firmly closed, there was a stream of black blood falling out from it.

‘… Just a little longer.’

It was late summer.

The fall was approaching fast.

Chapter 92 - On The Way Back Home

They couldn't have Andal teleport them on the way back.

So, that meant that they had to experience the long distance travel from Rainfield all the way back to Solia.

"So, back then, that happened."

Riley thought it would be a bother to have extra people tagging along. However, fortunately, it wasn't all bad.

"Really?"

One of the good things was that he won't be bored on the way back.

"Why didn't he just smack him or something?"

"Because our commander was the youngest there. In terms of skill, he was second to none. It was ridiculous."

Someone said that reality was more like a fiction than a fiction.

The stories from the mercenaries were more interesting than fictions. Riley, who usually took a nap during the afternoon, opened his ears wide and tuned in to their stories.

“I really thought he was insane. He was telling us we should charge in to something we couldn’t even tell if it was really there or not. We just gave up trying to convince him otherwise.”

It felt like he was lying here and there. However, even when Nara was boasting about slaying an ogre, he wasn’t lying. Nara’s stories felt real.

“Tell me more. So what happened?”

“What do you think happened? Our commander couldn’t hold it anymore. He exploded in anger.”

While the carriages were on the move during the morning and afternoon, they spent their time chatting on top of the carriages.

“Shall we rest here for a while?”

“Okay. The horses are exhausted too... and the place looks good too.”

Whenever they had to give the horses some rest or had to stop because it was the nightfall, there was one more thing Riley got to see. It was another good thing about having them tag along.

“Well then, Ms. Nainiae, shall we go stretch ourselves?”

“If you are fine with me, okay.”

While they were resting, while the campfire was going on, to make use of the free time, Nainiae and Nara decided to do sword practices together. It was Nara’s idea.

“You can’t use magic, okay?”

“I know.”

Tadak. Tadak. [Sound of the campfire wood cracking.]

With the campfire going on, Nainiae and Nara stood in front of the fire. They aimed their weapons, which were carved from woods, at each other.

“The time limit is three minutes. I’ll be the judge. The side that scores most hits or disables the opponent is the winner. Do you understand?”

Rorona, who was an archer with good eyes, took on the role of being the judge. After the countdown, Nara and Nainiae’s duel began.

‘As expected of Young Master Riley’s servant.’

Nara was exchanging blows with Nainiae. He spun his spear in circle and mumbled.

‘She’s not like the first time. Her skill improved substantially. It’s surprising.’

She was not using magic. However, Nainiae’s skill was significantly improved in comparison to their first duel. He was surprised.

‘I’m still better when it comes to techniques. Still, she is no pushover… She might surpass me eventually.’

Although it was a practice, a duel was a duel.

Nara decided he won’t go easy on her anymore. He sharpened his eyes in the middle of the duel and charged in to strike her in the gap in her defense.

“Kuk?!”

Nainiae cringed in light of Nara’s calculated attack. She lost her balance and tilted back.

“It seems like you are conscious about your right hand. In a real fight, if you mind things like that, you won’t last long, Ms. Nainiae.”

The duel was decided. Nara pulled away the tip of the wooden spear, which was aimed at Nainiae’s neck. He tapped the spear at

his shoulder and then tilted his head side to side.

“Ms. Nainiae?”

“…”

This was her third practice duel.

Up to her second duel, she responded promptly to Nara’s advices. However, this time, for some reason unknown, she was just sitting there with a blank look in silence, frozen.

‘Is she upset about losing?’

Nara got closer to Nainiae. He furrowed his brows.

“Ms. Nainiae.”

“… Yes?”

Nara saw that Nainiae’s face was full of sweats. Nara was going to tap her shoulders, but he retrieved his hand and called Rorona.

“Rorona, could you bring some towels here!”

“Ah, yes!”

It seemed she noticed that something was not right. Rorona rushed to the carriage and brought a towel.

“Oh my… You are sweating a lot… Here. Please wipe it off with this.”

“Ah, Yes… thank y…”

Thump.

Nainiae held the towel that Rorona handed to her. However, because of her shaking hand, Nainiae ended up dropping it to the floor.

“Ah, I’m sorry.”

Embarrassed, Nainiae blushed. She carefully picked up the towel and used the part that didn’t get dirt on to wipe off her neck.

“Excuse me, Ms. Nainiae.”

“Yes?”

She responded promptly this time.

“By any chance… Is it because of what you told us before? Is that

why your body's condition is..."

Nara only knew that Nainiae's lifespan was very limited. He didn't know exactly how long it would last. He asked carefully.

"No, it is not really...."

Nainiae avoided Nara's eyes. She had her right hand hidden behind her back. Fiddling with the right hand, she blurred the end of her sentence.

"Not really? What's not really?"

As a woman, Rorona could tell Nainiae was hiding something. Rorona brought out her bow and looked at Nainiae.

"Try holding it."

"Pardon?"

"Your sword."

"Ah, okay..."

Rorona was asking in a serious tone. Not able to say no, Nainiae held the wooden sword in front of her.

“You are holding it firmly, right?”

“…”

Nainiae was not able to give a response.

Rorona tried pushing Nainiae’s wooden sword with the side of her bow.

“… Ah.”

Her hands, which were shaking, were not able to hold the sword until the end. The sword was dropped to the ground.

“…”

Nainiae’s condition was more serious than it appeared to be. Nara cringed big time and looked at Nainiae.

“You fought a duel with me in that condition?”

Nara thought that Nainiae’s response was slower and her strikes were weaker. Nara had extremely infuriated look on his face.

“Ms. Nainiae, if you are ill, you should just say so… Why did you fight in this condition?”

Nara crossed his arms and scolded Nainiae.

Rorona turned her body toward the carriage.

“Please wait… I’ll report this to Young Master Riley.”

Perhaps because he didn’t nap during the day, he was already asleep in the carriage for the night.

“… Wait!!”

Nainiae quickly raised her hand to grab Rorona’s arm. Nainiae bit her lips.

“Please wait, Ms. Rorona.”

Nainiae’s hand was shaking so much that Rorona could hardly feel any strength in her grip.

Feeling desperation in Nainiae’s hand, with a saddened face, Rorona stopped and turned to look at Nainiae.

“To Young Master… Please don’t tell him.”

“Ah, why?!”

“…”

Frustrated, Rorona raised her voice. In response, Nainiae lowered her head with a downed face.

“Don’t… Please don’t tell him.”

The two carriages took two short breaks around noon and one long break during the dinner time.

As always, today, they found a suitable place for the evening and were resting.

“Are you guys not going to duel today?”

Riley didn’t see the duel last night because he went to sleep early. Sitting on the carriage’s steps, Riley asked.

“Ah, about that…”

Nainiae, who was preparing lunch with Rorona, broke cold sweat and blurred the end of the sentence.

“My condition isn't so good today. Nothing good will come of having a duel at this time, not to me nor Ms. Nainiae, so… I told her that I’ll be taking a break today.”

Nara stepped in and answered for Nainiae.

Nainiae secretly sighed in relief. She casually turned his head, but her eye met with Riley's.

'... Ah.'

Nainiae flinched and quickly turned her head away to hide her face.

"..."

Although she quickly turned her head away, Riley was still steadily staring at the back of Nainiae's head.

Nobody could tell what Riley was thinking. As if he was examining something, he was glaring at Nainiae as if he was going to burn a hole through her with his gaze. Eventually, Riley turned his head, looking uninterested.

"Excuse me, Ms. Nainiae. Does the Young Master really know about it?"

Glancing over at Riley, Rorona asked Nainiae.

"..."

Nainiae responded with silence.

“Just tell him. Your health is getting worse, so you will need to rest.”

Nainiae shook her head left and right as the response.

“Young Master would understand that much! Driving the carriage is not very hard. Also, even if he doesn’t, our commander can drive it for you, so for now, you should rest and…”

Clank.

Nainiae avoided the question by bringing out the dishes for the lunch. Avoiding Rorona, Nainiae walked away.

“…”

Looking at the back of Nainiae, frustrated, Rorona sighed big enough to make the ground sink.

“Ha…”

“It’s frustrating to watch Ms. Nainiae.”

“… No.”

Before she realized, Isen was next to Rorona. He picked up a sandwich and mumbled as he ate. Rorona, with her arms crossed, disagreed.

“I understand her a little.”

Isen tiled his head side to side.

“…?”

“There is a thing like that.”

Rorona decided to postpone explaining it. Just like Nainiae, Rorona picked up some dishes and sandwiches and started to walk.

“Um?”

Holding a dish with both of her hands, Rorona was about to give Nara his sandwich. She suddenly stopped walking and raised her ears.

‘Something is coming?’

Riley noticed it before Rorona. With his ears wide open, he had his head turned to the direction of the sound.

“Carriage?”

“It is a carriage.”

Rorona mumbled. Having heard that, Riley, now sure of it, picked up a sandwich that Nainiae prepared and said it.

“I think there are many of them. Should I go check it out?”

The rumbling sound on the ground was pretty loud. It seemed like there were many carriages heading this way.

“Do as you wish.”

Riley was certain that the carriages were going to pass through where they were. He chewed on the sandwich with an annoyed face.

“I’ll go check it out then.”

Rorona gave the dish to Nara. She jumped up to a tree nearby.

“… Nainiae.”

With Rorona gone to identify the carriages, Riley, who was taking care of a sandwich, quietly called Nainiae.

“Yes, Young Master.”

“Isn’t there something you should be telling me?”

“…”

Having heard his question, Nainiae fell to silence for a moment. She smiled awkwardly and asked,

“Is the sandwich to your taste?”

Having heard the question, Riley gave a blank stare at Nainiae. He peeked a smile and raised his hand.

“… Yes. It’s not bad.”

He patted her on the head. Nainiae could not be happier. She was smiling, satisfied. She even forgot the pain.

“I’m back.”

About three minutes had gone by.

There were sounds of fallen leafs cracking. Rorona, who went to investigate, came back.

“Who was it?”

Nara, who was chewing on the sandwich, asked. Rorona, who landed on the ground gracefully, swung her ankles around and responded.

“They were all mercenaries.”

“Mercenaries?”

“But why do you have that look on your face?”

Rorona looked displeased somehow. Nara tilted his head side to side and asked.

“It was Kabal Mercenary group.”

“Kabal? In that case, that bastard Kabal is there too?”

“Yes, he was.”

“Ugh. That muscle head dumbass is there?”

Riley was listening to the conversation. It was right around when Riley started to tilt his head side to side because of the stories about some mercenary he didn’t know.

“… Wow, look who is here?!”

Swarming...

There were sounds of a few dozen carriages swarming to the place. Kicking up the dust, they stopped in the open space where Riley's group was resting.

"The commander of the Lightning Boulder group is here?"

Of the few dozen carriages, from the one in the front, there was a muscular man that jumped down from the driver's seat. He made 'boom!' sound upon landing.

"..."

Concerned that dust might get on Riley's sandwich, Nainiae used magic and hid her hand. She fiddled with her hand, opening and closing it.

"Small world, really! I didn't think I'll run in to you again in just half a year. Are you coming from Rainfield?"

The man was wielding a mace that was becoming of his size. Kabal came right up to Nara and asked.

"What about you, Kabal? Are you going to Rainfield?"

Kabal was a giant. Nara had no choice but to tilt his head up and look at Kabal. In uninterested tone, Nara replied.

“You are just a 15 year old kid, but you sure know how to run your mouth? That’s right. I’ve heard that an old friend of mine is going to be in Rainfield. I just finished a job, and I’m headed over there.”

Kabal shrugged his shoulder and explained. Nara wiggled his brows and said,

“Is that so? In that case, won’t it be best for you to get lost, fast? The summer is almost over. What are you going to do if you get there by fall and catch cold?”

The boy was picking a fight with the man. Kabal tapped his thigh loudly and laughed over it.

“Haha. Bullcrap! A cold? That’s something a little pip-squeak like you should be worried about.”

“This works out well. There is an archbishop with similar aura as you walking around in Rainfield.”

Nara was glaring at Kabal with deadly eyes. When Nara mentioned the archbishop, Kabal furrowed his brows.

Chapter 93 - On The Way Back Home (Part 2)

“They say there is no cure for stupidity. Looks like you just need to go see that archbishop.”

“An archbishop?”

“That’s right.”

“Hm.”

While furrowing his brows, Kabal fiddled with his chin. With a strange look on his face, he nodded.

“Well, I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Tsk.”

Not liking Kabal’s arrogant attitude, Nara clicked his tongue. Kabal casually turned his head and looked at Riley who was eating a sandwich.

“Who’s that young man? A nobility?”

“Mind your own business. Quit it while I’m still being nice to you.”

Kabal, the giant, looked at Riley. Riley, who was chewing on a sandwich, narrowed his eyes to say ‘what are you glaring at.’

“Ah, oh my… Looks like he has quite an attitude!”

Kabal awkwardly scratched the back of his head and redirected his gaze to Nara.

“I don’t think you and that young master are a good fit. Are you sure you are doing well? Should I help you a little?”

“Don’t mind others business. Just get lost.”

“Ah, all right, commander! Uuuhahahaha!”

Kabal laughed it off. Kabal was moving his hand toward the top of Nara’s head, but his hand was slapped. Kabal took steps back.

“Oh, how cold.”

“Get lost.”

Nara, with cautious eyes, glared at Kabal. Nara had deadly aura in his eyes. Kabal looked toward Riley once again and noticed the insignia on the carriage. Kabal wiggled his brows.

“That insignia. Is that Iphalleta from Solia?”

“Are you trying to say that you won’t get lost?”

Nara grabbed his spear. Kabal nodded as if he got the memo. Kabal smiled as if he figured something. His eyes met with Riley again.

“…”

“…?”

Kabal lowered his head to show respect to a nobility. Because of Nara’s threats, Kabal could not stay here anymore. He walked to his carriage and got on the driver’s seat.

“Well then, I’ll get going. Basilisk? See you again?”

“Cut the bullcrap. I don’t want to see your puke-inducing face. Just die somewhere in Rainfield’s puddles or something.”

Just like how loud they were when they first showed up, Kabal Mercenary group disappeared to Rainfield while kicking off dust. Nara spat to the ground as if all this was a foul luck.

“What was that? It looks like you know the man.”

Having heard the question from Riley, Nara, who came next to Riley and picked up a sandwich, put down his spear and answered,

“Bad blood. It’s bad blood.”

Riley wanted to hear more. He was about to ask the same question again, but Rorona added,

“Kabal Mercenary group is pretty famous… No. Right now, they are having a monopoly in almost all of the major exploits. They are famous for that.”

“Famous?”

Rorona nodded. Holding an empty dish, Rorona continued.

“To explain how famous they are… Some mercenaries think Kabal should be called the Mercenary Hero, following how Mr. Ian was called the Mercenary Hero. There’s even rumors like that.”

Having heard Rorona’s explanation, Nara was infuriated. In anger, he spoke with sandwich still in his mouth. He said as he spewed out spits and pieces of the sandwich.

“Who is spreading bullcrap rumors like that?”

“Ugh, disgusting… Swallow and then speak.”

“It’s just a rumor. A rumor.”

‘He might get a title, following after Ian?’

It was a pretty interesting story. Riley’s gazes were saying they should tell him more. Rorona looked at her commander and continued.

“Well, as our commander said, there is probably exaggerations. However… I have witnessed the monstrous strength of that man named Kabal. I don’t think all of the rumor is a lie.”

“Hmp.”

“Ah ha ha…”

Displeased, Nara quickly turned his head away. Rorona smiled awkwardly. Isen, who was leaning against the carriage, started to explain Kabal’s monstrous power.

“When I was working as a mercenary with him, one time, he lifted a house with his right hand and threw it. It was… truly overwhelming.”

‘Lifted a house and with one hand and threw it?’

Nainiae, with a look of disbelief, tilted her head side to side.

“By any chance, is he a mage? Did he use something like the telekinesis?”

Isen shook his head and answered no.

“No. He didn’t use magic. It was using his raw physical strength. He is like a monster.”

Isen couldn’t exactly explain Kabal’s monstrous strength, so he decided to move on to the next story. He shrugged his shoulders and continued.

“Well, that’s not the only reason why our commander hates him so much.”

Riley and Nainiae both had question marks on their faces. Rorona said,

“He keeps on pestering.”

“Pestering?”

“Since a long time ago, he had been trying to hire our commander. It’s because our commander’s skill is well guaranteed.”

Besides the fact that Nara was not a human, certainly, the fact that Nara was as skilled as he was with spear at the age of 15 was an

incredible feat.

“That piece of shit. I wouldn’t be this infuriated if that was the end of it all.”

Nara glared at both Rorona and Isen. Nara pouted and made his eyes sharp like snakes.

“His aura is purple!”

“Ah, right. There is that too. He had such an appalling color when our commander saw him with his eyes. So there is the fact that Kabal doesn’t seem like a good man.”

“… Purple?”

Riley remembered that Nara said Rebethra was ‘purple’ when Nara saw him at Rainfield. Riley narrowed his eyes.

“How should I put it? His inside is different from his outside? It feels like he is scheming something? People like that have purple color.”

Riley asked,

“Are people with purple color common?”

“Common? I’m not sure?”

Nara stared at the empty space. He counted all the people he met that had purple color. He answered finally,

“They are not common. So far, I met four of them.”

“Four?”

Nara nodded. He started to explain each of them.

“In a nameless town, there was a homeless that had that color. There was that old fart archbishop that we met in Rainfield. There’s that bastard Kabal… and…”

He paused for a moment and then said,

“That dark mage that you killed in Rainfield.”

“The dark mage?”

“Yes. That dark mage.”

“… Hm.”

Riley thought about all four people that Nara just mentioned. It looked like he was thinking hard for a moment. However, he

picked up a sandwich with an uninterested face.

“… What?”

Suwaaaaaaaa. [Sound effect for rain.]

At Rainfield, a giant man was talking to an old man in white robe. He looked at a pouch full of ash and tilted his head side to side.

“This is Heurial?”

“Yes.”

The old man nodded as he fiddled with his beard.

“Crazy. If he was going to die, he should have died peacefully. He died in a fire? Did he die this way because of his ability?”

“Most likely.”

“He had been overdoing things… I had a fishy filling about it since he got listed in the bounty. I knew this was going to happen. Damn it.”

The giant scratched his head as if he was getting a headache.

“How long will it take?”

“Considering the condition, a very long time. I can’t be certain when that would be exactly.”

“This is just great. Great.”

He seemed frustrated. He pounded on his chest with his right arm. He pointed at his right arm, cringed and said,

“This rascal lost his qualification to be the left hand.”

“Well, calm down.”

“How could I calm down? I thought I will get to see the faces of the parts after many long years, but only three of them are here, and the rascal called the left hand, who was carrying out an important work, became fertilizer?”

Crack!

The giant, out of frustration rushing through his head, took out the hammer from his back and destroyed a street light. He was breathing hard.

“We can assume the left leg guy is as good as being absent. However, what about the other two rascals? I, the great Kabal, came all the way here! How come?”

The giant, Kabal, was breathing hard out of anger. The old man in white robe took the pouch back and mumbled,

“I’m not sure?”

“By any chance, did they die somewhere?”

Kabal did a neck slice gesture with his hand and asked the old man. The old man shrugged and said,

“You can hear the news about the head from anywhere, so you know well, right? Given her title, she is taking care of something very important, so she couldn’t come. You need to be understanding of that for her.”

“What about the right hand?”

“I don’t know about that.”

“Shit. What a bunch of ungrateful rascals.”

He ground teeth hard. Kabal crossed his arms and glared at the old man.

“So, Rebethra, what are you going to do now?”

“I’m not sure. For now…”

Rebethra brushed his white beard and mumbled quietly.

“First, we need to decide on the order of things and proceed with the work.”

“Ugh… This means our life wish will be delayed.”

“Our left hand became like this, so it cannot be helped. Still, Heurial was the most hardworking of us all. It’s too bad.”

Rebethra fiddled with the pouch in his arms. He looked up the Rainfield’s clouds and said,

“The right leg will join the head when there’s a chance. They will go find the right hand. The heart will fix the left hand and wait for the ‘moment.’”

“Wait?”

Kabal tilted his head side to side for a moment. Soon, he realized what Rebethra was saying. Kabal crossed his arms and asked,

“Ah ah, you are talking about that thing from the holy temple,

right? What was it called? The Divine Message?”

“…”

“By the way, that lass looked quite pretty. When you get the chance, introduce me to her, all right? What do you think? I think I’m on her league?”

“…”

Rebethra glared at Kabal with a deadly look. It couldn’t get any deadlier than this. Kabal clicked his tongue and pushed Rebethra’s shoulder.

“Ugh… It’s fine. Fine.”

“Don’t forget our life’s wish, Kabal.”

“I have not forgotten it. I haven’t.”

Kabal and Rebethra, who were having a conversation, disappeared into the darkness of the Rainfield with the pouch of black ashes.

“Phew… We are finally here.”

Riley seemed he was exhausted from a long ride on the carriage. He looked like he was sick of it. Looking at the scenery of Iffa village on the side, he seemed like he was feeling better.

“We are almost at home. Home.”

It seemed like Nara heard what Riley was saying because he had the window open on the carriage. Nara, who was enjoying the scenery of Iffa village, was mumbling Ian’s name in pure excitement.

“Finally, finally…”

Rorona, noticing the noise coming from the two men, casually turned her head and looked at Nainiae.

“Nainiae, how’s your body?”

“Yes, it’s fine.”

Ever since the summer came, the pain came without warning. It seemed she was fine now. Her face also looked like she was not in pain anymore. Nainiae shrugged her shoulders and responded.

“I’m relieved to hear that.”

Noticing the look on Nainiae’s face, Rorona smiled and continued,

“Anyway, I’m looking forward to it. We will be meeting Mr. Ian.”

“Is he really that amazing?”

Nainiae looked at Nara on top of the carriage who could not hide his excitement. Nainiae asked as she tilted her head side to side.

“Of course! I know I’ve said it so many times, but he is a legend among the mercenaries. This will be my first time seeing him in person as well.”

They went past Iffa village and then the forest. In the distance, Nainiae could see the entrance to the Iphalleta mansion. The tip of her lips tilted up slightly.

‘Ah… We are almost at home.’

Home.

Without realizing it, just like Riley was mumbling inside, Nainiae also mumbled.

Chapter 94 - About A Maid In Training

Maybe it was obvious. Perhaps it wasn't. Regardless, the very first person to come and greet Riley and Nainiae for their return from the trip to Rainfield was none other than Ian, the old butler.

"... Ah."

It seemed he was wondering around the garden all this time. His white hair headed toward Riley, who just stepped into the mansion's entrance.

"I'm here."

"We are back."

Riley raised his hand to greet others lightly. Nainiae lowered her head to greet others respectfully.

At that moment, Ian's eyes were starting to fill with tears.

"Hup. Kuhup... Kuhuhup!"

"..."

Ian's reaction was exactly as expected. Riley peeked a smile and opened his arms.

“Young Masterrrrrr!”

Riley was sick of hearing that during the summer. Maybe it was because Riley was away for so long... Riley opened his arms because it was so great to see Ian.

“Yes. I’m back home.”

“Do you know how worried I was?”

When Riley opened his arms, Ian poured out tears like waterfall. He ran toward him and hugged him.

“I think it would be weirder if I didn’t know it.”

Riley hugged Ian as if Ian was his own child. Riley casually turned his head and looked at the three members of the Lightning Boulder mercenary group who were walking toward the entrance of the mansion.

“That is...”

“... the Mercenary Hero?”

“Really...”

In Riley's arms, Ian was crying like a little girl. However, his shoulder, his back, his arm... With his white hair, his hardened physique indirectly explained how many battlefields he fought in.

"Stop crying so much. Get a grip."

Ian was pouring tears and runny nose. Having heard what Riley said, Ian barely got a hold of himself and cleaned up his face. Ian looked beyond Riley's shoulder.

"... Who are they?"

"They are guests."

"Guests?"

"That's right. They are here to see you."

"Young Master, by any chance..."

A man, a woman, and a boy... They were each wielding a different weapon. Ian could tell with the first glance that they were mercenaries. The look on Ian's face became serious.

"That's right. They are mercenaries."

With Riley's introduction, Nara brought out the pouch that

contained the bone powder of his father's remain. Nara looked like he might be smiling. It could have been that he was crying. It was a strange look. Nara tilted his head side to side.

"Mercenary Hero. It's a great honor to meet you. I'm..."

The boy's emotion was running wild. His eyes suddenly changed to a sharp inhuman shape. Noticing this, Ian remembered seeing it before. Ian's eyes became wide.

"Basilisk?"

Ian said it as if he couldn't believe this. Nara nodded and answered,

"... Yes."

"... I see."

Ian asked Nainiae to do his work for the moment. Ian mumbled in a bitter tone.

"Garf... in the end, he was killed by that dark mage..."

In the garden, on a table for tea, Ian had the Lightning Boulder mercenaries and Riley sit with him for a tea. With his thumb, Ian

fiddled with the cup's handle and said,

"This is the reason why I hate mages. Mages took away people so easily... The people who were precious to me."

Ian added that he doesn't hate Nainiae. Ian put his hand toward the urn that had the bone remains of Garf Basilisk.

"I don't know how Garf introduced me to you, but I think I should make certain for you to know this."

Ian couldn't bring himself to touch the urn. He lowered his head and said,

"I'm retired, but I'll put my title as the Mercenary Hero on the line to say this. A Basilisk named Garf was definitely a great father."

Nara tightened his grab on his hand that was laying on top of this thigh. It wrinkled his pants.

"Nara, you should be proud of him."

"..."

The Mecenary Hero that Nara admired was praising his father.

Nara could not imagine a situation that was more touching than this.

Despite that, Nara couldn’t say anything.

"When I saw you in the photo, you were just a child. Now, you have grown… You look magnificent like your father.”

“…”

Drop, drop.

On top of the table with white cloth, thick stream of tears, which fell along Nara’s cheek, dropped and made stains.

“You must have had it hard… All by yourself.”

He nodded, and nodded again.

He bit his lower lips hard. Nara was still grabbing hard on to his thigh. He couldn’t wipe off his tears. He nodded repeatedly to respond to Ian.

“…”

He was still a child.

A 15 year old boy was there.

It seemed he was remembering all the hardships he endured. In Nara's face, there were not just tears, but also runny nose.

"... Thank you..."

Ian raised his right arm, which he couldn't bring himself to touch the urn that contained Garf's remains, to pat Nara's head.

"... for surviving."

Ian said with a bitter smile.

Nara strained himself to respond with a tearful voice,

"... Yes."

Perhaps it had been about ten minutes since Nara was in tears.

Ian left Nara be so he could calm down. Ian turned to Riley, who was sitting next to him, and asked about the mercenaries.

"About the Lightning boulder mercenary, I'll tell the Count later that they are here as your guests."

Ian said as he filled Riley's empty cup. Riley tilted his head side to

side and mumbled,

“Later? Not immediately?”

“Ah, yes. Actually, two days ago… The Count received an urgent message from the Solia Castle. He left the mansion with his sword.”

“He left the mansion?”

“Yes. There was a story about the Solia’s boarder being attacked. I think this might be about that.”

“What about my two big brothers?”

“Young Master Ryan and Lloyd are here in the mansion. Because you were not present at the time, they couldn’t all leave the mansion empty.”

“Hm…”

Riley narrowed his eyes. He looked around the mansion and asked Ian.

“How’s my mother? Is she doing well?”

“Yes.”

It seemed Ian had been watching out for Iris through the day and night. The dark circles under Ian's eyes were darker than usual.

"Actually, ever since the Count left, I was concerned something might happen, so I had been extra cautious. It had been strangely quiet."

Riley narrowed his eyes and got up from his seat, slowly.

"She's at her room, right?"

"Yes."

Riley ordered Ian to have conversations with the mercenaries. Riley walked toward the inside of the mansion.

"... I'm going to let this slide because you are still in training. If you were no longer in training, I would not have gone easy on you if you made a mistake like that."

It was at the mansion's kitchen.

Sera and Nainiae were preparing dinner. It had been a while since they got together like this, so they were having their girly chats.

“Seriously, I wish I could give you lectures for one or two hours.”

“I’m sorry, Ms. Sera.”

Before preparing the meals on the menu, Nainiae was doing the dishes. With a downed look on her face, Nainiae said,

“It won’t happen again.”

“Um. If you look so gloomy like this, it makes me feel sorry for scolding you instead.”

It seemed Sera felt it. Sera broke cold sweat and said she was just joking as she picked up the dishes again.

“Anyway, how was it? How was the Rainfield?”

“Ah, it was great.”

Nainiae, who was washing dishes, stopped her hands for a moment. She smiles slowly and said it was great. Sera had a mischievous smile on her face and asked,

“It was great?”

“…”

Nainiae flinched without realizing. She strained her lips and froze.

“That’s strange. Serving the Young Master by yourself would have not been easy. What was so great about it? You even forgot to contact the mansion?”

Sera’s mischievousness was getting activated. Not just her smile, but her laugher was like that as well. Sera moved her legs and got right next to Nainiae.

“…”

Was she nervous because Sera was standing right next to her? Nainiae was still petrified. Nainiae was still just holding the dish. She wasn’t able to answer Sera.

“During the evenings, nothing strange happened, right? Ah, you said you had a separate room, so that probably didn’t happen?”

Sera wiggled her brows and asked.

Perhaps because Nainiae was embarrassed, she started to shake her hands that were holding the dishes.

“Come on. Still, it is hard to believe that nothing happened?”

Sera, with her mischievous look on her face, asked again.

As a woman, perhaps it was only natural for her to be interested in things like this.

"..."

"Excuse me, Nainiae, nothing really happened..."

Before Sera could finish her question again, Nainiae's hands, as if they reached their limits,

"... Huh?"

Crash!

Dropped the dish she was holding.

"Nainiae?"

The crashing sound interrupted Sera's thoughts. Sera vacantly stared at the broken pieces of dish on the floor for a moment and was about to redirect her gaze toward Nainiae. However,

"..."

"... Nainiae!!"

It seemed Nainiae lost strength in her legs. She was faltering where she stood, right where the pieces of broken dish was. Sera quickly supported Nainiae.

“Nainiae? What’s wrong? Nainiae!”

Nainiae’s body was not just shaking. It was almost at the state of shock. Having realized this, Sera, with a desperate look on her face, called Nainiae’s name.

“What… What’s wrong? Are you hurting somewhere?”

The pain that came all of sudden had subsided a little. Her vision, which was filled with white for a moment, was gradually returning. Nainiae desperately tried to open her lips.

“… Ah.”

Looking at Sera’s face, which was filled with concern for Nainiae, Nainiae squeezed out her voice and stumbled to say,

“I’m… not hurting.”

“Nainiae…”

“I’m… fine.”

Sera was holding on to Nainiae's arm. Nainiae pushed Sera's hand away and tried to pick up the broken pieces on the floor. However, she ended up plummeting there.

"I... just sat down so I could pick up the broken pieces. It is more efficient... that way. So..."

With shaking hands, she was reaching for the broken pieces of the dish. Her wrist was grabbed by Sera.

"Your hands are shaking so much. What could you possibly clean up with these?"

"..."

Sera was holding Nainiae's right arm's wrist. Nainiae looked at her right hand.

"Ah, ahah..."

Without giving it any thought, she tried to grab the pieces with her right hand. Her right hand was unlike ordinary people's hands. It was missing two fingers. Her right hand was grotesque. Looking at her right hand, Nainiae was...

"I... I am..."

“Nainiae?”

Nainiae was shaking her head left and right. She was choking in fear.

“I’m sorry. I’m terribly sorry. I’ll work hard. I’ll do my best. I’ll work harder, so please… please don’t abandon me. Please praise me…”

Sera wondered if Nainiae was seeing things through her right hand that was missing two fingers. Nainiae was constantly shaking her head and mumbling. Concerned, Sera shook Nainiae.

“Nainiae, Nainiae! Can you hear me? Get a hold of yourself!”

“No… No more of experimental medicines. I won’t be greedy anymore… I won’t expect anything. I won’t hope for anything, so please… please, no more of that. Not that medicine…”

Nainiae was in a state of panic. She raised her severely shaking hand and stated to scratch the mask on her face.

“Ah, ahah… No… No…”

Looking at her right hand that had fingers missing, re-experiencing the pain she felt in the basement laboratory, Nainiae brought her right hand, her normal thumb toward her mouth.

“Nainiae!”

Nainiae was about to bite off her thumb. Sera quickly stopped her.

“… Hey.”

“Um. There’s still two hours left until the store opens.”

Riley kicked the back of the red-haired young man who was still traveling through the dream world.

“Get up you rascal.”

“Ugh. What the hell? Who dares to… Um?”

Andal, the red-haired young man, woke up. As soon as he woke up, he found the blacked haired boy next to him. As if he was extremely annoyed, Andal cringed.

“It’s that dumbass.”

Chapter 95 - About A Maid In Training (2)

“Ugh, you… I just fell asleep.”

“You live over 10,000 years. I don’t want to hear that from a rascal like you. Do you understand? Just get the hell up.”

There was a face looking down at Andal with the tip of his lips tilting upwards, full of mischievous atmosphere. Andal was annoyed all the way to the top of his head. He got up as he cursed at Riley.

“Ugh…”

Andal woke up with a fuzzy look on his face. The pub was a mess, but Andal cleaned it up completely with a sweep of his hand and walked toward the kitchen.

“Why are you back so soon?”

“Soon? It’s been months.”

Riley looked around the cleaned pub and said the duration of his stay in Rainfield as he shrugged his shoulders.

“Not several years?”

Andal was looking at Riley with ‘why are you back so soon’ look

on his face. Andal was pouting. Seeing his face, Riley talked back, finding the idea to be ridiculous.

“Are you bragging about your several tens of thousands years lifespan?”

“Ludicrous... I’m saying this because I’m sure of it. There isn’t a single dragon in this world that brags about one’s lifespan.”

“Ah, is that so?”

Riley sat on one of the chairs that Andal tidied up. Riley ordered the usual, locked his fingers and rested his chin on it.

“How’s that lass?”

Andal, who was preparing the drink Riley ordered, asked as he added ice into the glass.

“Lass?”

“Your servant... What was her name?”

“Nainiae.”

“That’s right. Nainiae.”

He was talking about Riley's maid in training who had a very limited lifespan left because of drug experiments at the Magic Tower.

It seemed Andal was curious about how she was. With a question mark on his face, Andal turned his head and looked at Riley.

"How is she?"

"What do you expect?"

Riley took a sip from the drink that Andal handed to him to wet his lips. Riley continued as he tasted the sweetness of the drink.

"It's close."

"Close?"

Close.

From Riley's perspective, it seemed to be the case.

"She can barely move her body, but she insists that she is not ill or in pain. It seems close."

Riley fiddled with the ice inside the glass as he leisurely mumbled Nainiae's condition. Watching Riley, Andal cringed big time.

“That’s inefficient. The way humans think… I cannot understand it. Won’t it be more comfortable to just say she is ill and then rest?”

Andal was tilting his head side to side with a question mark on his face. Andal even prepared a glass for himself and sat in front of Riley.

“There are many different kinds of people in this world. There are foolish people like that who keep on working even when they are sick… The fools who do not realize they are falling deeper into a swamp.”

Riley looked at the drink in the glass wavering as he explained it about people. However, Andal still had a confused look on his face and tilted his head side to side.

“Um.”

“…”

Past.

Past life.

Riley was like Nainiae once. There was a time when Riley struggled in futility without realizing he was in a swamp.

“Why do you think humans are humans?”

Riley was thinking about his past, which was strikingly similar to Nainiae. Riley mumbled,

“Humans are humans because they are like that.”

Riley was like that once. To save the people, to save the world, in order to live up to others’ expectations… There was a time when Riley marched on restlessly without caring for his own wellbeing.

Shattered in pieces…

The end result could be summarized in those words.

It didn’t end very well.

“As I thought, humans are very interesting. Their way of thinking is different from dragons, way different. It probably is because of the lifespan?”

“Perhaps.”

With Andal bringing up Nainiae’s remaining ‘lifespan,’ Riley slowly narrowed his eyes and thought about Nainiae, a maid who was much like himself from his past life.

‘Young Master, I wish you could feel this sense of having accomplished something too.’

Even if it lasted long, her life was going to last until the autumn. Because she used magic excessively in Rainfield, her lifespan was shortened even further. If nothing was done, she would have burned out and became dust by now.

“Lifespan….”

Her slightly extended time was from Riley patting her head.

Riley thought of a different way to use the time magic that Nainiae taught her. However, in the end… it was not possible for Riley to cure her illness.

“Hey, Andal…”

Riley, who was sitting there in silence, called Andal as if he made up his mind.

“What?”

“By the way, it’s about the thing you mentioned before… Do you still want to try it?”

“Thing I mentioned before? Ah, that?”

When Riley asked, Andal wiggled his eyebrows as if he was waiting for this. Andal nodded and said,

“Of course, I still want to try it.”

It was about the idea that Andal discussed with Riley when he teleported Riley and Nainiae to Rainfield’s nearby area. Andal said he was still interested in ‘that profession.’ Andal asked,

“By the way, what about it?”

“Try it.”

Riley said as if he was tossing the words out. Andal, with a look of disbelief, blinked his eyes.

“Are you being serious? You were absolutely against it before. Why are you changing your mind now?”

Andal was rubbing the palms of his hands. He was implying that if there’s something that Riley want in return, then he should just spell it out. Riley, displeased with the gesture, cringed and said,

“Did I say I’ll give her to you? I’m not saying I’m going to hand her over.”

“In that case, what is it?”

“You said you want to experience that profession, didn’t you?”

It was late summer.

The autumn was already almost here before anyone realized. The weather was pretty cool nowadays. It was perfect for Riley to sleep under the apple tree on the mansion’s garden.

“Young Master, are you sleeping?”

Looking at Riley leaning against the tree with his eyes closed, Nainiae asked carefully.

“…”

There was no response.

He had his eyes closed, and he was making regular light movements. They were telling Nainiae that the boy was taking a nap.

‘It’s pretty cold now. He might catch a cold like this.’

Nainiae, concerned, turned around to go back to mansion to get a blanket. However,

“… Uuuuuu.”

She heard a cry from Riley. She stopped walking and turned her head to look.

“Young Master?”

Riley was furrowing his brows as if something was bothering him. Concerned, Nainiae turned around and came next to him.

“Young Master, are you all right?”

Nainiae’s mask was broken during the seizure she had last time. With her scar fully exposed, Nainiae looked at Riley.

“… Uuuuuu.”

“…?”

Having noticed that Riley was occasionally struggling as he slept, she looked at Riley with concerned eyes. Nainiae started to blink her eyes.

‘Just now?’

Through her right eye, which was no longer covered by the

mask, she could see sceneries in her head. She tightly closed her eyes and shook her head.

'What is this? Just now, something strange?'

She thought about the scenery, the people in Riley's dream to be exact, and opened her mouth vacantly.

'This is?'

It was a very strange sight.

'This view is...'

There were highly angular buildings made of stones.

There were things with wheels moving around quickly.

There were people walking around in strange clothes.

They were all things that Nainiae had never seen before.

'Oh no, this is not the time for this.'

Riley was struggling as if he was having a nightmare. Noticing this, Nainiae got a grip and realized perhaps it was not a good idea to go all the way back to the mansion. She used the leather

bracelet.

‘Instead of a blanket, at least this…’

She brought out her spare maid dress and covered Riley with it like a blanket.

“…”

It seemed he was spared from the nightmares thanks to the maid dress blanket. The look on his face was back to normal. Nainiae sighed in relief.

‘Young Master, the vision just now…’

Nainiae looked at Riley with concerned look. However, a terrifying pain was creeping up again. With her left hand, she started to tightly grab her chest.

“Nainiae.”

“…?”

Nainiae’s face was completely crumpled. However, having heard Ian’s voice coming from the back, it changed in an instant.

“Yes, Mr. Ian.”

Nainiae straightened up the look on her face by force. With a normal look, she turned her head and faced Ian who was walking toward her.

“Rest today.”

“…”

“I heard from Sera. She said you are not feeling well. Why didn’t you tell us about it all this time?”

Nainiae shook her head. Tightening her grip on her chest, Nainiae said,

“I’m not… ill. I’m fine.”

“You are not ill?”

“Yes.”

“How about saying that after your hands stop shaking?”

“… Ah.”

Nainiae was able to put up a look on her face, but her hands and arms were shaking as Ian said.

“This isn’t just for Young Master… I’m saying it as a family and an elder who had lived longer than you have. Rest today.”

“But… Mr. Ian!”

“Silence…”

Nainiae was gradually raising her voice. In response, Ian narrowed his eyes and said with a deadly aura,

“You’ll wake up our Young Master.”

“…”

Having realized this, Nainiae had a look of panic on her face. Not knowing what to do, she bit her lips.

“Rest today.”

“… Yes.”

She had no choice but to listen to Ian. With her shoulders down, she started to walk.

“Nainiae.”

She was on her way back to her room in the mansion. Having heard Ian's voice, she stopped for a moment.

"One's health is very important. If you are going to continue to serve our Young Master, you need to look after your condition. It's one of important skills you should learn."

'Continue to serve…'

Nainiae stood there vacantly. She had a bitter smile on her face as she looked at the ground.

"Yes, Mr. Ian. I'll keep that in mind."

Nainiae figured Ian was looking at her back at this moment. However, she was not able to turn to look. She just answered like that and walked toward the mansion.

'If I'm going to continue to serve Young Master…'

Nainiae was thinking about what Ian just said. In order to get a hold of herself, she shook her head wildly and tightened her fists.

'Nainiae, get a grip. That's just being greedy.'

Her life was going to end when the autumn came.

She decided not to be pathetic. She decided not to cling on to her Young Master. She decided to firm her determination. As she thought that, she walked toward her room. However, she ran into someone on the way.

“Oh? Who is this?”

“…?”

“Our very own famous Six Circles mage?”

It was Lloyd, the second born Young Master of Iphalleta mansion.

“What’s going on? Shouldn’t you be right next to Riley at this hour?”

To pay respect, Nainiae lightly lowered her head. She responded as respectfully as possible.

“Due to a personal circumstance, I was ordered to rest today. So Mr. Ian is serving Young Master Riley at the moment.”

Having heard what Nainiae said, Lloyd opened his eyes wide. Soon, he put up a look on his face. It was saying that Nainiae was a fool.

“Huh, rest? Wow, this is just… You are that Young Master’s

servant?”

“…”

It was a low blow, unbecoming of a nobility of his status.

However, Nainiae knew that nothing good will come from expressing anger here.

So, she didn’t fight back. She was going to just walk past him and go back to her room. However,

“… Up. Cholok! Cholok!”

Because of something coming out of the throat, she couldn’t hold it anymore and started to cough.

“What the?”

She quickly closed her mouth with her hand. She was coughing hard as if she was about to cough blood. Watching this, Lloyd panicked and broke cold sweat.

“… Cholok! Cholok!”

It didn’t look like her coughing was going to stop any time soon. Nainiae’s eyelids started to shake uncontrollably.

‘My sight…’

Every time she blinked, her vision was getting whiter. Nainiae was desperately holding on to her consciousness. However, with each cough, that was getting harder.

“What, what is this? Hey, what’s wrong?”

Having noticed the black blood flowing out from Nainiae’s left hand that was covering her mouth, Lloyd flinched his shoulder.

“…?!”

“Cholok! Cholok!!”

“Hey… Hey!!”

Lloyd realized this was serious. In a hurry, Lloyd turned his head. He was about to call for someone. However,

“This is crazy. Hey! Is there anyone…”

“… Stop it, Lloyd.”

However, he was stopped by someone grabbing his shoulder.

“B… Big Brother?”

It was the eldest Young Master in the mansion, Ryan.

“… Cholok!!”

Nainiae’s left hand could not take it anymore and fell. As if a dam broke, lumps of black blood poured out and made a mess on the corridor’s carpet.

“… Khurhuk, cholok!”

“…?!”

The amount of black blood pouring out from the girl’s mouth was enough to make Lloyd flinch once again.

‘What is this?’

Lloyd panicked after seeing the black blood that Nainiae spread to the carpet. He believed that calling for people was the right answer. However,

“… Just let it be.”

“Pardon?”

However, he was stopped by Ryan once again.

“Just letting it be is the right thing to do.”

“But…”

Right in front of them, there was a girl, moreover, a person who was a part of the Iphalleta’s household, was dying. However, Ryan was telling Lloyd that ‘just letting it be is the right thing to do.’ Lloyd questioned Ryan’s judgment.

“But Big Brother!”

Even though Nainiae was a formidable supporter of Riley in the successorship… Turning a blind eye to a dying girl was a disgraceful act that would taint the name of Iphalleta. It was unbecoming of the family name.

“If our father was here… He would not leave her be like this…”

Slap!

With the sound, Lloyd’s head was quickly turned to the side.

“Big… Brother?”

Lloyd, with a look of disbelief, looked at his brother.

“Get a grip, Lloyd.”

The look on Ryan’s face could not be colder.

“That lass is going to die anyway.”

Ryan was aware of this because he got a letter from his fiancée a few days ago, which explained that the Six Circles mage maid has a very limited lifespan, so they don’t need to worry about her.

“… Cholok, cholok!”

Not able to endure it anymore, Nainiae suddenly fell to her knees as she poured out black blood from her mouth. Ryan said once again.

“Let her die.”

By his Big Brother’s threat, Lloyd was petrified as he looked at Nainiae.

“…”

Lloyd was not sure if this was the right thing to do or not. With a vacant look on his face, his lips was shaking. It was at that moment.

“… Ah, you were here.”

From the direction of Nainiae’s back, there was a man with flame-like red hair. He fixed the glass that fell almost to the middle of the nose as he showed himself in front of Ryan and Lloyd.

Chapter 96 - About A Maid In Training (3)

“That’s quite a state you are in. Um… Should I say you are lucky that you are still not dead yet? Ah! That’s not it… Riley, that rascal, probably did something, so it isn’t just luck.”

The red haired man with glasses didn’t look like a servant at all. Ryan and Lloyd, both with confused look, stared at the man.

‘Who is this?’

Other than the three members of the Lightning Boulder mercenary group, they were not aware of any other guests at the mansion. It was only natural that they had confused looks on their faces.

“Let’s see.”

The red haired man walked over to Nainiae in a leisurely pace. He came right behind Nainiae, who was coughing, and started to examine her condition here and there.

“Wow, it’s super convoluted and tangled up. It doesn’t look like hammering in mana is going to make it better…”

Nainiae was not in good condition. The red haired man felt like he knew why a ‘certain monster’ that he knew was not able to make Nainiae better. The red haired man nodded repeatedly.

“… Um.”

There was black blood on the floor that Nainiae coughed out. The man touched it with the tip of his finger to check its color and characteristics and slowly narrowed his eyes.

“I think I’ll have to examine this in detail.”

The red haired man got on his knees to sit next to Nainiae and mumbled. At that moment, Ryan took a step forward and said,

“Who are you?”

Like how a human being wouldn’t care about what insects are up to, the red haired man casually ignored Ryan’s words in the same manner and mumbled,

“Um. As I thought, this is quite something… Although that kind of magic was not fiddled with, the color was changed like that.”

Ignored, Ryan was not able to stand it. Ryan’s hand was moving toward the sword’s handle on his waist.

“I asked who you are.”

Ryan was holding the handle of the sword. However, the red haired man wasn’t even glancing at Ryan.

“There is no innate type or opposing type at all. This is impossible even for us... With this, not just magic, but summon spirits could be utilized skillfully. Interesting. It’s very interesting.”

Toward Ryan, the response from the red haired man was smaller than that of an ant passing by. Not able to stand the insult, Ryan took out the sword.

“I asked who you are!”

The sharp sound from the unsheathing of the sword filled the corridor.

“...?”

The red haired man finally responded. Just like a certain young master in the mansion, with an annoyed look on his face, the man looked at Ryan.

“Andal.”

“What?”

“Are you deaf? I said it’s Andal.”

Nainaie, who was still coughing blood, heard the name, Andal, among the voices that sounded very distant to her. The name made

her shoulders flinch.

'Andal? Mr. Andal? Why is he here?'

Was it because he did something? Nainiae's inside felt significantly better than before. Her blurred white vision was gradually returning, and her coughing was slowly subsiding

"Andal?"

In light of the red haired man's response, Ryan furrowed his brows big time. With the sword still aimed at Andal, Ryan asked again.

"You runt. Is that your name?"

"Runt?"

With his sword to the front, Ryan had a deadly look on his face. Watching this, Andal snorted, thinking how childish it looked. Andal said,

"That's right. That's my name."

"In that case, what are you?"

"What am I?"

Andal tilted his head side to side and mumbled. Ryan ground his teeth hard and poured mana into his sword.

“If you ask back again instead of answering, you better be prepared to be off with your head.”

Watching the sword exuding steady light, Andal had the tip of his lips tilted up, finding it fun to watch. Andal straightened the leg he had bent from kneeling. Andal got up and said,

“I’m a Doctor. Why?”

Instead of choking in fear, the man was still smiling. With the man claiming to be a doctor, now Ryan tilted his head side to side.

“A Doctor?”

Andal was full of confidence. He even had an air of, ‘what’s your problem?’, as he crossed his arms. Watching this, Ryan’s face turned violent again.

“Are you messing with me…”

“… Ah, Doctor. There you were!”

There was another voice from far away in the corridor. Everyone other than Nainiae turned their gazes toward the direction.

“…?”

“I’m sorry, Big Brothers.”

The person that just spoke walked past the corner of the corridor toward them. He lowered his head in front of Ryan and Lloyd.

“This is a famous Doctor from Rainfield that I went to vacation on. I asked him to come with us.”

Along with Ian, Riley made an appearance in the corridor. He introduced Andal to Ryan, who was aiming a sword.

“… A Doctor?”

“… A Doctor?”

Finding it to be suspicious, Ryan and Lloyd mumbled with strange looks on their faces.

“…?”

Andal also vacantly looked back at Riley. He had a ‘what the hell are you barking about?’ look on his face as well.

“The thing is… I brought him here because I was worried about

my mother's illness. It seems Ian forgot to tell you about him."

Riley slowly moved his elbow to bump Ian's arm. Ian, who was nervous for some reason, flinched and responded right away.

"Ah, yes! I'm sorry. I was supposed to report to you about the guests. After telling you about Nara and his group, I forgot to tell you about the Doctor. Please forgive me."

Ian lowered his head big time.

"You are saying you are a Doctor?"

People who didn't know Ian would have thought that what he just said sounded like he was just acting. However, given the situation, the nervous look on Ian's face was that of someone who made a grave mistake. That's what Ryan thought.

"Rainfield doesn't have a holy temple. It's a city with advanced medical science, so I asked around to see if there was anyone who is an expert at the particular illness that my mother has, and this is the Doctor who is fairly well known in Rainfield."

Riley slowly tilted his head and looked at Andal.

"Isn't that right? Doctor?"

"…?"

This was different from what they talked about in the pub. With a confused look on his face, Andal was going to furrow his brows, but soon, as if he realized something, he straightened his brows.

‘Ah ah.’

A dragon was a supreme being, yet Riley had no problem pouring out insults and crass language at Andal. However, now, all of sudden, Riley was treating Andal with the uttermost respect.

‘Why? I think I get it now.’

Having realized Riley was just acting and this was his scheme, Andal tilted the tip of his lips as if he understood.

‘Moreover, it took a lot of effort to build what I have around me… It would be a waste to fold my amusement life here because of this.’

To Andal, it most certainly was going to be a waste.

‘… How? Did you watch some stage acting?’

Riley smiled as he asked that with his gaze. Andal responded with his gaze.

‘Of course I have.’

‘So you know what acting is, right? I’m counting on you to put up a good act on your own.’

‘Hup. Who do you think I am?’

After exchanging looks with Riley, Andal, with a confident look on his face, turned his head toward Ryan and Lloyd.

“You there.”

Andal pointed at Lloyd, and he tilted his head side to side, wondering why he was pointed at.

“How many times do you do it per day?”

“… What are you talking about?”

“By yourself, twice… or three times?”

“…”

Having realized what Andal was talking about, Lloyd’s face turned red.

“Tsk. Take it easy. It will make your bones brittle.”

Andal turned his gaze away, uninterested. This time, he looked at Ryan and said,

“You, do you have sleep deprivation lately?”

“…?”

“You should reduce training at night. Like this third Young Master here, it would be good for you to get some sleep. Otherwise, it will shorten your lifespan.”

Andal said as he narrowed his eyes. As if he was exactly right, the tip of Ryan’s sword flinched slightly.

“…”

Actually, everything Andal just said were accurate.

‘Is he really a doctor?’

Ryan was not sure what he was talking about with Lloyd. However… in fact, Ryan was not getting good sleep at night, and he closed his eyes only after exhausting his body from training.

‘No. Even if… even if this runt is a Doctor…’

The look on Ryan’s face became sharp again.

Even though this Doctor came from Rainfield which didn't have any nobilities, the man was definitely being rude to Ryan. This was the reason.

"What are you glaring at? Is there something you don't like?"

The man was talking so carelessly toward a Young Master in a Count's family. There was a need for Ryan to teach him a lesson.

However...

"You are a funny runt. Just be grateful that I won't charge you."

However, Ryan couldn't talk back.

It was because, when Ryan looked at Andal's eyes, it gave him the creeps.

There was a sense of existence that could not be explained in words. There was an aura.

Overwhelmed by Andal's red eyes, Ryan could not dare to speak.

"..."

As a human, as a living organism, his instinct was... yelling at

him to say he shouldn't dare to challenge a predator above his level.

It was obvious.

Although Andal had the form of a human being, inside that shell, there was an incredibly fearsome being.

"Also..."

Ignoring Ryan and Lloyd, who were not able to say anything back at Andal, his gaze now turned to Riley.

"Our third Young Master should cut down on the sleep a little?"

"Pardon? What are you talking about?"

Riley smiled and looked at Andal, and Andal also smiled and said,

"I think it would be good for you to move your body."

"..."

A blood vein was popping out of Riley's forehead.

Maybe he knew, or maybe he didn't, but Ian, who was standing next to Riley, was beating the drum along with what Andal said.

Ian said as he splashed spit from his mouth.

"Yes! That's right! As expected of a Doctor from Rainfield! With just one look, you picked out the thing that our Young Master should improve on!"

With Ian's support fire, Andal tilted up and wiggled the tip of his lips. He looked as refreshed as if he just chugged on a full glass of brown sugar beer. Andal advised,

"From now on, I think it would be best if you went easy on taking advantage of a certain friend of yours. You should move on your own, on your own."

Having heard this, Ian mumbled 'I agree. You are totally right.' Riley's forehead now had a few additional veins popping out.

"Ha, haha..."

"Young Master, did you get what I just said?"

Andal asked as he twisted the tip of his lips. With all of his strength, Riley curled the toes that were hidden inside his shoes. With his facial muscles twitching, Riley responded,

"... Yes. I look forward to having you here."

... as he said to himself that he will definitely make Andal pay for

making fun of him today.

‘Young Master…’

Meanwhile, with a vacant look on her face, Nainiae was looking up at Riley while still in kneeling position. Unable to fight the eyes that were slowly closing on their own, Nainiae lost consciousness.

‘Nainiae, your mother is sorry. You must want to… live like other kids your age too.’

‘No mother. It’s all right.’

‘Sorry… I’m sorry.’

‘Please don’t say that. I won’t want it. I won’t ask for anything more. So, just like this… just hold my hand. That’s my only wish.’

‘Nainiae.’

‘Just… count on me.’

The things she could see in front of her were very vivid.

‘Please… please no more!!’

‘Now, you need to work hard for your mother’s sake, isn’t that right?’

‘For my mother…?’

‘We only emptied just one bottle. You need to keep up the good work. Today, we are going to empty seven bottles, so we need to hurry. Now, try drinking it.’

‘For mother.’

‘That’s good. Good. You are drinking it so well.’

‘… Hu… Kuk. Ugh. Ugh.’

‘As a reward, I’ll give you a new medicine. Drink this and it will make you a little better.’

‘It hurts… Hurry. Hurry.’

‘Oh? My hand slipped…’

‘Ahhhhhhh!!’

‘… Yes.’

‘Ku, Ugh… Uuuuuaaauuuu…’

‘I’m sorry, sorry. Well, it won’t kill you, not immediately.’

‘Kill… Kill me…’

‘Hm, it got on the eye. It cannot be helped.’

‘… Please.’

‘No, you can’t die yet.’

Her short life, things she experienced, were flashing past her.

It was horrible.

‘… Mom. I’m back.’

‘Who… are you?’

‘Mom?’

‘I don’t know who you are, but…’

‘It’s me. It’s Nainiae.’

‘Nainiae…?’

‘Yes!’

‘Don’t lie… to me.’

‘…?’

‘My daughter… doesn’t look like that.’

‘Mom? Mom? Wait, please wait! Please open the door! Mom! Mom! I won’t expect much! I… I won’t even ask you to hold my hand, so… My hand…? Why is my hand like this? It’s missing fingers… No, this can’t be, no!!’

Maybe…

From the moment she had to drink the chemicals at the Magic Tower, ever since then, just like how she screamed and pleaded back then, she might have been thinking that way all along.

She want to die.

Just let me die.

‘It’s all right, Beta, even if I died here…’

‘No, you useless bitch!’

‘…?’

No! You still have work to do! You can’t die yet! You can’t die before finishing it all. If you died already… then you will be just a garbage that could not return my good will of having high expectations for you! Do you understand?’

‘B… but, because you said you believe in me… that’s why…’

‘If I saved you, if I rescued you… if I fed you and gave you place to sleep! You need to at least do your part, don’t you think? Why do you think we picked you up? You make us puke just from looking at you! Why do you think we used all of our savings to buy you?! This! Useless runt!’

‘No, no… I’m…’

‘Ugh, ugh, you disgusting bitch… that’s why you were thrown out from the Magic Tower.’

If this was a nightmare, it would have been nice if Nainiae could wake up from it quickly.

However, it was not a nightmare.

She felt like she knew what these views were.

‘How long will I be able to live?’

‘That is… I can’t completely cure your illness. So… About that… I can extend your lifespan, but… I’m sorry.’

‘It’s all right. I had my mind prepared for this.’

That’s right. She was prepared for this.

From the moment she was suffering at the Magic Tower…

On the day she was abandoned by his mother…

On the day she heard all those harsh words from Beta…

Nainiae was prepared for it.

‘If it is short, it will last until the summer. If it is very long, it will last until the winter. However… I think it will be until the fall.’

‘Fall…’

What she was seeing right now was not nightmare.

It was the light at the end of the tunnel.

Nainiae was certain that this was what people saw before they died.

“Will I be able to die now?”

Looking at the things quickly flashing before her eyes, Nainiae mumbled quietly.

“Finally… I can die.”

It was the wish that she had for a long time. Her wish was finally coming true.

Finally, she was going to be comfortable.

However…

However…

“Finally…”

As if they were broken, there were tears pouring out from her eyes.

It was not certain if they were out of joy or sadness.

Her ambiguous tears were flowing endlessly.

“… Nainiae?”

“…?”

Nainiae opened her eyes.

She could see the ceiling that was familiar to her.

‘This place is?’

“Nainiae… Are you all right?”

“…”

The area near her eyes were wet.

Realizing that she was crying, Nainiae barely managed to turn her head to look toward the direction where warmth could be felt.

“… Lady Iris?”

“It looks like you had a nightmare.”

Her hand, which looked horrible because it was missing some of the fingers, was tightly held by Iris. Iris had a relieved look on her face.

Chapter 97 - About A Maid In Training (4)

“Nainiae, it’s all right. A dream is just a dream.”

Iris showed a refreshing smile toward Nainiae and gently wiped off the tears around her eyes. Iris continued and said,

“What did you dream about?”

“Dream?”

Nainiae, with her mouth wide open, thought about what she just saw, and then bit her lips lightly.

“That was…”

It didn’t feel like a dream.

It was the light at the end of tunnel.

“Nainiae?”

Noticing Nainiae was just biting her lips and not able to say anything, Iris asked if Nainiae was uncomfortable in any way as she tilted her head side to side.

“No. It’s nothing.”

“It cannot be nothing.”

While Nainiae was asleep, Iris heard what she was murmuring while shedding tears. Iris clearly remembered them.

“Tell me. I’ll listen.”

Instead of keeping it to herself, perhaps it would be better for Nainiae to spill it out. Perhaps that would make Nainiae feel better.

“Really, really, it is nothing.”

Not able to look at Iris in the eyes, she directed her gaze toward the ceiling and shook her head.

She couldn’t tell her.

There was no way she could.

Nainiae could not tell Iris that she was going to die soon, that what she saw was her life flashing before her eyes. Nainiae could not tell Iris that she won’t be here with her when the fall comes.

“…”

“Excuse me, Lady Iris.”

Nainiae, who was staring vacantly at the ceiling to calm her mind, felt the warmth reaching her hand. Nainiae said,

“About this…”

Sitting next to the bed, Iris was holding Nainiae’s right hand. Iris tightened her grip, keeping Nainiae’s hand feel warm.

It seemed like Iris knew that if she let go of the hand now, she may never get to hold Nainiae’s hand again.

“Lady Iris?”

Nainiae was embarrassed about her disfigured hand being held by someone. Nainiae pulled her shoulder. However… despite that, Iris firmly held Nainiae’s hand. She refused to let go.

“Riley told me.”

Nainiae, who was trying to make her let go of the hand in any way she could, heard what Iris just said and flinched her shoulders.

“…”

“It may last until the fall, right?”

“What… are you talking about?”

“It’s about how long you will be able to stay with us.”

Nainiae tried to feign ignorance, but Iris had a serious look on her face.

Unbecoming of her, Iris’ eyebrows were slightly bent. Her face almost looked angry.

“Why?”

It was no longer looking like Iris just seemed to be angry. Iris really was angry.

“Why didn’t you tell us?”

“…”

Having heard what Iris said, Nainiae’s lips opened and closed again several times.

“That is…”

Nainiae carefully moved her gaze and looked at Iris’ eyes.

Perhaps it was because Iris’ eyes were gentle just like Nainiae’s

mother who she said goodbyes to a long time ago.

‘…’

Nainiae, who was about to say something, had her lips frozen shut.

“That is?”

Nainiae had been longing for those eyes for a long time.

Nainiae also had been wishing for the warmth as well.

Nainiae could feel her heart being crushed in sorrow. Nainiae tightly grabbed on to the blanket with her left hand so Iris would not be able to see and then said,

“… I didn’t want to be a burden to you.”

It was a lie.

Nainiae managed to avoid Iris’ gaze and gave an answer that was different from what she was really feeling.

“Nainiae.”

Looking at Nainiae, who was trying to avoid her gaze, Iris tightly

held Nainiae's hand again and asked gently.

"By any chance, did you want to die?"

Nainiae, who had her true feeling found out, flinched her shoulder.

'How did she figure it out? Did I let it show on my face? Does Lady Iris have any special power?'

Nainiae, petrified, was confused. Noticing this, Iris raised Nainiae's right hand and said,

"Your hand is shaking."

"... This is."

It was something Nainiae had not noticed.

Having realized it late, she shook her head left and right and said,

"This is... because of my condition..."

"As I thought, you are not well, right?"

In the end, Iris got to the point. Nainiae was petrified again.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes, Lady Iris.”

“You are curious about how I figured out what you were thinking, right?”

Honestly, Nainiae was curious about that.

However, she couldn’t just say, ‘yes, I am curious.’ Nainiae just pulled her chin and waited for Iris to continue.

“… It’s your eye.”

“… Eye?”

“Nainiae, of many good qualities you have, one of them is that you do not avoid eye contact when having a conversation with someone.”

With her thumb, Iris gently brushed the top of Nainiae’s right hand. With boundlessly gentle and loving expression on her face, Iris continued, and Nainiae had a vacant look on her face.

“Just now, Nainiae, did you look at me in the eyes?”

“I was…”

“You weren’t, were you?”

Nainiae could not talk back.

It was true.

‘Why?’

Nainiae felt that she might get greedy and dare to want to live longer if she looked into Iris’ gentle eyes. So… Nainiae could not look at her eyes.

“… Lady Iris, how long have I been asleep?”

“Nainiae.”

Nainiae was still acting the same.

Despite what Iris just said, Nainiae was still not looking at Iris in the eyes. Moving her left hand that was tightly holding on to the blanket, Nainiae lowered the hand to below the chest and uncovered the blanket.

“Looking at where the sun is, I think I slept through the whole day. It’s way past the time I should be working. If I keep this up, I

wouldn’t be able to face Mr. Ian and Ms. Sera.”

Nainiae used frictionless magic to free her hand from Iris’ warm hand. Nainiae got down from the bed immediately.

“I’ll be going to work now.”

Nainiae reached for the bracelet sitting next to the bed and opened the dimensional space. Nainiae changed to the maid uniform inside and walked away as if she was running from something.

“… Nainiae.”

Nainiae was about to escape from the room. However, she stopped after hearing Iris’ voice.

“I wish you could stay with us.”

It was a gentle tone like talking to her daughter. Nainiae’s lips were twisted. It was not certain if it was out of happiness or sadness.

There were just Riley and Andal at the mansion’s library.

Riley sipped at the tea that Sera prepared, narrowed his eyes and

looked at Andal.

Riley decided to pospone paying back Andal for what he did at the corridor. Riley asked,

“What do you think?”

“So, what would you like to hear first?”

Instead of tea for humans, Andal was fixated on books rolling around on the library. In response to Riley’s question, Andal asked a question. He was asking if Riley would like to hear about Iris or Nainiae first.

“Andal.”

Riley was annoyed. Riley, who was drinking tea, mumbled the name.

Noticing the look on Riley’s eyes, Andal had an exaggerated look on his face. Laughing mischievously, Andal asked again.

“Ah? I suppose I don’t need to act anymore?”

“... Ugh.”

As Andal said it like a fool, Riley had a vein popping up on his

forehead. Riley started to click around the leg he had on top of the other leg.

“I’m the one who is pissed, you rascal. I thought you said you will let me experience being a teacher, so I came here, but you made me into a Doctor? Unbelievable. You are working a dragon, you know that, right? You should be grateful that I’m going easy on you.”

Andal fixed the glasses that slid down the nose. He decided to answer the question before Riley exploded.

“That child, Nainiae. Her condition was not looking good. With your permission, I think it would be best if we brought her to my lair right away.”

Having realized Andal had a serious look on his face, Riley leaned on the back support and sighed.

“It’s that serious?”

“You had a rough idea already, didn’t you?”

Riley was not able to answer. He brought the tea cup to his lips and started to tap the arm rest with his left hand.

“It feels like there are more to her than what I can see with my eyes. How should I say this? There are more convoluted things tangled up inside? I also find it intriguing that humans were able to get a person’s inside to be so messed up.”

Andal was flipping through a book that he picked up in an uninterested way. Having lost interest, he put it down and said,

“Well, there’s what you had me keep, but even without it, my personal opinion is that this child must be saved no matter what.”

“No matter what?”

“Yes, no matter what.”

“Why?”

Riley, who had his chin resting on his hand, asked. Andal had a confident look on his face. He pumped up his shoulders and said,

“It’s because I decided to have her as my pupil.”

Riley found it to be ludicrous. With a look on his face, Riley kept silent for a moment and then asked,

“… Are you still trying to play that role?”

“Play?”

Despite Riley’s disapproving tone, Andal responded with a serious face.

“This is not a pretentious play.”

Andal was the kind that just had to try what he wanted. He was a greedy and supreme being like that.

“Oh, is that so, oh great being?”

‘If I remember, Andal said he found it intriguing when some of the customers introduced themselves as a teacher and a pupil?’

Before Riley went to Rainfield, Andal was asking Riley about the profession called teacher. Thinking about it, Riley peeked a smile.

“So, what’s the plan?”

“Just say the word, and I’ll take her to the lair and work on the tangled up things inside her body. Her lessons as my pupil will be after that.”

“How will the lessons be like?”

“For now, I’ll be starting with the basics. I’ll hammer in the basics in to her using my way. After that, I’ll have her fight relatively weak guardian spirits to raise her skills.”

Andal answered thoroughly without pausing to think once. It made Riley realize that Andal was really eager to do this. Sickened

by it, Riley shook his head.

“So, can I bring her to my lair now, right away?”

“Right away?”

“That’s right. Right now.”

“Um.”

Riley took a moment to organize his thoughts. He shook his head and said,

“No, now is not a good time.”

Riley concluded that it would not be good for Nainiae if she left too late. Riley said,

“I think today evening would be good.”

“Today evening?”

“We should give her time to say goodbyes to the people in the mansion at least.”

Not just to Iris, Ian and Sera, but she was close to other people in the mansion as well. Telling them that she will be gone for a while

with a Doctor named Andal because of her illness was going to be enough.

“What about you?”

Riley pushed the chair to the back and got up. Andal tilted his head side to side and asked what Riley was going to do.

“I’ll be taking a nap for a moment.”

Riley said he will be taking a nap as if he didn’t care at all. Andal, surprised, looked at Riley and mumbled,

“Wow, sleep again? You are unbelievable, you rascal You sleep longer than dragons.”

Having heard what Andal said, Riley, who was about to walk out of the library, slowly turned his body and raised his hand toward Andal. Toward Andal, Riley raised the middle finger.

“… What’s that?”

Andal saw that gesture before, a fist with just the middle finger raised up. He tiled his head side to side and asked.

“It’s a compliment.”

“A compliment?”

Riley peeked a smile. With the tip of his lips raised, Riley complimented Andal.

“That’s right. It’s a compliment. You were very good at acting.”

“…”

The shape of Riley’s hand gesture was something that Andal saw often in the pub that he owned.

“Isn’t that supposed to be an insult?”

Andal saw customers swearing at each other and showing the middle finger. He saw it many times. Finding Riley’s answer to be suspicious, Andal asked. Riley shrugged his shoulder and said,

“Come on, how could that be? There are times when what people do and say do not match. You know that, don’t you? This is one of them.”

Andal figured that Riley’s explanation was plausible. Andal scratched his hair and asked back,

“… Is that so?”

In fact, Andal did not have full understanding of people's hearts or emotions.

"It's something like that. You should know things like these in detail if you want to enjoy your amusement trip."

Riley continued like a pro. He winked and said with a leisurely face.

"Hm..."

Andal thought it was strange. However, when Riley said the thing about the amusement trip, Andal asked again with a confused look,

"The middle finger means compliment?"

"That's right. I'm complimenting you for the awesome acting you did at the corridor."

Riley smiled again as he flipped the finger at Andal. Andal's face became full of confidence.

"Huhu. That's right... There is nothing I that I cannot do."

Andal was pumping up his shoulders as if he could take more compliments. Riley turned around and left the library. Riley had a dark smile on his face. It looked like he paid Andal back after all.

‘You still have a long way to go, you rascal.’

Chapter 98 - About A Maid In Training (5)

Nainiae was dreaming.

It was an incredibly blissful dream.

However, a dream was just a dream.

She had to get a hold of herself after waking up.

‘Nainiae, get a grip.’

Nainiae said that to herself over and over in her head. She checked again to make sure there was nothing out of shape on her maid dress. She started to walk.

“I’m sorry. I’m very late.”

She came to the mansion’s dining hall and then followed the corridor to the kitchen. There, she met Sera and others who were busy doing dishes and preparing the dinner.

“Nainaie?”

“Oh my, Nainiae! I heard you collapsed. Are you all right?”

“I heard Young Master Lloyd was shocked.”

“Let me see your face. You are all right now, right?”

As soon as she entered, everyone turned to look at her direction. They all had concerned looks on their faces.

“… I’m all rig…”

The emotions were rushing at Nainiae. She was about to have her eyes filled with tears. However, Nainiae kept the expression on her face in check. Maintaining a normal look, she lowered her head and responded,

“I’m all right.”

Although she said that, it didn’t change the concerned looks on people’s faces.

“I think I took too long of a break. I’ll get back to work right away.”

Trying hard to ignore the people looking at her, Nainiae walked toward the dishes that still needed to be washed. She reached for the dishes, but then Sera snatched her wrist. Sera looked angry.

“Nainiae.”

“M… Ms. Sera?”

Sera was biting her lips. Just like how she was when she woke up in front of Iris, Nainiae slowly avoided Sera's eyes.

"I heard everything."

Nainiae's face crumpled.

'Was it Lady Iris? Was it Young Master Riley?'

She was not sure who, but Nainiae thought it was something they shouldn't have. Nainiae thought nothing good would have come from it.

"I don't know what you have heard, but it must be very exaggerated, so..."

"Nainiae, I heard you are dying."

"..."

With difficulty, Sera said it. The kitchen became quiet as if someone just poured cold water on everyone.

"It's an exaggerated story."

Nainiae broke the silence and said it.

“I don’t know who told you that, but it is an exaggerated story, so…”

Unable to look at people in the eyes, Nainiae picked up a dish and tried to wash it. In the end…

Crash!

Because of her shaky hand, she ended up dropping it.

Because the kitchen was in silence, the sound of the dish being shattered sounded much louder than the last time.

“Nainiae.”

Although someone called her name, Nainiae did not respond. She directed her hand toward the broken pieces on the ground. Usually, she would not have used magic, but this time she did.

“I cleaned it up.”

She learned the “Rewind” magic so she could teach Riley. She used the magic and restored the broken dish back to its former shape.

“Nainiae!”

Sera grabbed Nainiae's shoulder and called her name. However, Nainiae only flinched her shoulder for a moment. She only focused on the dishwashing, ignoring Sera.

"You should rest. The Doctor from Rainfield said you absolutely need to rest."

She was probably talking about Andal.

"It's all right. I'm completely fine."

Crash!

While Nainiae said she was all right, she broke yet another dish.

"It's all right. I just need to use Rewind again."

"Nainiae."

"..."

Nainiae lowered her hand toward the broken dish. She was about to use the Rewind magic again, but she stopped after hearing someone calling her name.

"I'm ordering you as the manager of all maids. I forbid you to

enter this kitchen. I also forbid you to wear the maid uniform."

"Ms. Willa....?"

"What is it?"

"I... I'm.... I'm perfectly fine..."

"I'm not saying this because I'm worried about you in particular."

Willa came next to Nainiae, steadily gazed upon her as she explained,

"You used magic, didn't you?"

"That, that's."

Nainiae knew that she couldn't make an excuse like 'it could not be helped.'

The dish was broken because of Nainiae.

If she denied it, it would make Sera look bad because it would imply that Sera didn't educate Nainiae properly.

"By any chance, did Sera taught you to be like that?"

“No! That’s not it. That’s not!”

“In that case, you have no objections, right?”

Nainiae was afraid that it will be like facing a brick of ice if she faced Willa. She couldn’t dare to look up toward her. Nainiae looked at the ground as she bit her lips.

“Why…”

As if she was whispering, Nainiae started to speak.

“I just did it efficiently.”

“…”

“When I used magic for Young Master Riley, you left me be, didn’t you?”

Tightly grabbing on to the skirt with her hands, Nainiae slowly raised her voice.

“Occasionally, for the people who were in trouble…”

What she had been holding down very hard started to come out of her eyes.

“For Ms. Sera, Sofia, Ms. Hellen, Laura, Gemini, Rebecca... Mr. Ian, Terry, Allen, Mr. Albert... When I used magic in secret to help them... Ms. Willa, you didn’t say anything back then.”

Nainiae carefully spoke the names of the people she helped in the mansion. She spoke them carefully as if they were precious. Not able to hold it anymore, with tears hanging in her eyes, she continued.

“All of it...”

Drop.

Drop.

The stream of tears flowing along her cheek started to drop on the broken dish.

“You saw all of it, didn’t you?”

“Nainiae.”

“This is not fair. You had been watching me do all that, so I thought... you would allow me this much.”

She was only 18. It was not going to be strange for an 18 year old to speak about something unfair being done to herself.

This was the first childish tantrum she ever threw in her life.

With a wronged look on her face, Nainiae lifted her head and looked at Willa.

Her tears were flowing. They were like waterfall.

The tears touching the scars on her right side was making it ache. However… Nainiae was not able to stop crying.

“Is it being considerate?”

Nainiae faced Willa, who was panicking, and asked,

“Is that what this is?”

“Nainiae.”

This was the first time for Willa to see Nainaie cry. Willa just managed to get a hold of herself, calmed her face, and was about to say something. However,

“We are…”

“It is trying to be considerate, isn’t it?”

She was stopped by Nainiae's question.

"Because I lost my parents, because I was subjected to chemical experiments in the Magic Tower, because I lived in filthy Lower Solia... you think I don't notice things? No! In fact, I'm great at noticing things because of that! I'm filthy amazing at it! Because you can't survive there without it!"

Without her realizing it, she had some of her foul mouth from Lower Solia mixed in her speech. Still pouring tears out from her eyes, she continued.

"Chasing me out of the kitchen because I used magic? Forbidding me from wearing the maid uniform because I used magic? Things like that... Things like that!!"

Her vision was blurred because of tears. However, she saw the looks on people's faces beforehand.

"Things like that..."

Everyone was looking at her.

Gently, with concern.

Some maids were in tears.

Some butlers had tight fists.

“… I don’t need it.”

It felt like her voice was going to grow without bounds. However, her voice rapidly calmed.

“I…”

‘Don’t expect things from people.

Don’t want things.

Don’t be greedy.’

Nainiae was thinking those over and over.

“Such gentle, caring gazes… I don’t need them.”

She was afraid. She was afraid that if she hoped for something… she might lose the people who were with her, just like before.

She was afraid that the warmth that barely managed to reach her might slip away like water through the sand. She was afraid and scared, so… She didn’t hope for such things.

“Can’t you just tell me that you need my help… that you are counting on me so it would be good if I kept on working… Can’t

you just say that to me?”

That was Nainiae’s only wish.

If someone was counting on her, and if she worked hard to return the favor of being counted on...

At least, while she worked hard to meet the expectations of others... negative thoughts did not reach her mind.

“Nainiae.”

“Please do not abandon me.”

While tightly grabbing on to her skirt, Nainiae said with difficulty. She did not want to be thrown away.

“Please count on me. I won’t disappoint you, so...”

There was something else she wanted to say. It came up to the top of the neck. However, she swallowed it back down. To shake off the tears, she shook her head hard. She said something that was different from what she was wishing for in her heart.

“Just let me die.”

“Nainiae.”

"..."

Nainiae had her head lowered and was tightly grabbing on to the skirt with her hands. Her hands were shaking in sorrow.

Her middle and ring fingers, which were gone because she bit them off while she was being experimented on at the Magic Tower, seemed to be more noticeable today.

"Leave the kitchen."

"M... Ms. Willa."

Willa said heartlessly. Having heard it, others called her in tearful voice.

"But, you can keep the maid dress on."

Before the looks on other people's faces brightened, Willa continued.

"Rest just for today. I heard Mr. Ian hurt his back, so after today, you will be taking off the maid uniform as scheduled."

Nainiae gritted her teeth. She quickly turned her body. With her tears scattering to the air, she ran out of the kitchen.

"..."

Completely disregarding the proper manner she learned until now, she ran, opened the door hard enough to make 'bam!' noise, and got out.

"Ms.... Willa."

"Why did you do that? That's not like you."

Others in the kitchen, with gloomy faces, started to express their disappointments in what Willa did.

"You know what her life was like. It would've been better if you were just a little nicer, so why did you..."

Willa did not answer.

She just stared at the kitchen's door which was half open because it was not closed properly.

"This is too bad."

"That's right. This is too unfortunate."

"We may never see her again."

“D... Don’t say things like that!”

“It is true! She threw up a bucket full of black blood on to the carpet! Even at a glance, it looked critical!”

Maids that knew about Nainiae’s condition, thinking about the fact that Nainiae’s life could end today or tomorrow, finally broke into tears.

Sera, who had known Nainiae for a long time, was the only one who was holding tears.

“... She need to take off that maid uniform so that...”

In silence, she was listening to the cries of the maids, but Willa spoke.

“She needs to take that off so she can leave the mansion.”

“Ms... Willa?”

And then, Willa, who had been acting cold all this time, started to show tears in her eyes.

“She’s a strong girl. She is also kinder than anyone, so... She will definitely.... Definitely come back. I believe in her. I believe in her.”

Listening to her meaningful words, others started to tilt their head side to side in tears.

“Come… back? What do you mean by that?”

“Probably today… Nainiae will be leaving the mansion.”

“Nainiae is?”

“I’ve heard that Young Master Riley brought a famous Doctor from Rainfield.”

“A Doctor? You mean that red haired man?”

Willa nodded and continued.

“I heard that Doctor can cure illnesses that the Holy Temple cannot. However, she needs to be hospitalized for it. I don’t know how long it will take.”

Willa wiped off the tears with her finger. She turned to the other servants and continued.

“Somehow… Amongst ourselves, we should make a small, surprise party for her, don’t you think? Becoming of servants of Iphalleta Family… Instead of a farewell, as a promise for seeing each other again in the future, we should hold a party for her.”

Willa smiled and said that.

Other servants, who had been just listening with their mouth wide open, said,

“… Yes!!”

“… Yes!!”

All in tears, they agreed unanimously.

Chapter 99 - About A Maid In Training (6)

‘After today, as scheduled, take off the maid dress.’

Having heard maid manager Willa’s words, Nainiae gritted her teeth, rushed out of the kitchen, and ran straight to the garden.

It wasn’t exactly because of the order.

Her Young Master… It was because she was certain that her Young Master would tell her differently.

‘Young Master definitely would.’

Nainiae just got out of the mansion’s corridor and stepped into the grass on the garden. She suddenly stopped and opened her mouth.

‘Wait… am I… being greedy?’

Nainiae, who was standing there with tears flowing endlessly, rubbed her eyes with her sleeves in order to erase the greedy thoughts in her head.

‘Just what are you hoping for, Nainiae? Wake up. That’s right. Just don’t think anymore. Just let things flow as they should. When the time comes, you will be able to close your eyes comfortably. You can hope for that much…’

Having thought that, she even used water magic to clean her face so there wouldn't be any trace of tears left.

'It's for just a little while longer. Not much longer.'

Slap!

She tapped on her cheeks with her hand, got a grip of herself, and started to walk toward the apple tree where Riley lied down often.

'The fall will be here soon.'

When the fall comes, she will be able to close her eyes.

"... Ah, you are here."

In the garden, where the apple tree was, Nainiae walked to the front of Riley and bowed to tell him that she is now back to do her work, although it was going to be until just today evening.

"Ian, can you please excuse us for a second?"

Riley, who had been lying on the ground with his fingers locked together to support his head, ordered Ian who was standing next to him.

“Yes, Young Master.”

Having heard the order, Ian lowered his head and stepped back away. Nainiae, wondering what this was about, tilted her head side to side.

‘Mr. Ian, you didn’t hurt your back?’

Unlike what Willa said, Ian, who was on standby next to Riley, seemed to be quite all right.

‘Nainiae.’

Ian had his eyes met with Nainiae, but he remained silent, took a moment to steadily gaze on her face, and walked away.

‘… You have been crying.’

It looked like she washed her face in a hurry, but her face near the eyes were swollen red, indicating that she cried her eyes out. Having realized this, Ian left the scene so others cannot see his face filling up with bitter sorrow.

“You are here?”

“Yes.”

As usual, with a relaxed, leisurely face, Riley greeted Nainiae. Seeing his face actually made Nainiae's heart more complicated instead.

'I thought I would feel a little better if I saw Young Master, but…'

She opened and closed the right hand she was hiding behind her back. As usual, she walked over to stand next to where Riley was lying down.

"…"

Riley closed his eyes, and…

For a moment, silence flowed through the air.

It appeared that he was taking a nap. Lying down, he was completely still. Taking a glance at Riley, Nainiae asked carefully,

"Young Master, are you sleeping?"

There was no response from Riley.

Perhaps Nainiae was unconsciously hoping for a response.

Nainiae unconsciously had a disappointed look on her face.

‘That’s right. Just like this.’

Nainiae, in a respectful posture, stood by Riley.

She was thinking,

‘It’s nice to spend time like this… No, I wish the time could stop like this.’

“Nainiae.”

At the end of the silence, Riley opened his mouth.

‘Perhaps he was not sleeping, but then why didn’t he answer earlier?’

Nainiae had a lot in her mind, so she responded a little late.

“Yes, Young Master.”

“Autumn will be here soon.”

Having heard what Riley said, Nainiae cast shadow on her face as she answered,

“Yes, Young Master.”

Riley slowly opened his eyes and looked at the apple tree's leaves that were shaking in the wind.

"When the autumn comes..."

One, two, three, four...

There were countless leaves hanging on the tree.

There were things besides leaves too.

"... you have something that you are supposed to do for me, isn't there?"

"Something that... I am supposed to do for you?"

Having heard the question, Nainiae vacantly asked back.

Riley didn't open his mouth anymore.

"..."

He just lied down there with a blank look on his face.

He just watched the leaves flowing in the autumn wind.

‘Is he counting the number of leaves on the tree?’

Noticing that Riley was very focused on staring up there, Nainiae followed Riley and looked up toward the apple tree leaves.

“… Ah.”

Above her head, Nainiae realized that there were things besides leaves that were shaking in the wind. Nainiae vacantly opened her mouth.

“Nainiae.”

“…”

Riley finally called Nainiae.

Meanwhile, Nainiae was not able to answer because she was vacantly opening her mouth while looking up the tree.

“You do have something you are supposed to do for me, right?”

Having heard Riley’s question again, around Nainiae’s eyes, which were already completely swelled up, tears started to form again.

“…”

With the wind blowing on her face, the tears rolled down.

With a heartbreaking voice, Nainiae struggled and answered,

“… Yes.”

“Okay.”

Riley dusted himself to remove grass on his back and butt as he got up.

“I lived comfortably through my entire life as a lazy sword young master in Iphalleta House without ever having to lower myself to anyone. So, it would sound ridiculous for me to say this to you… However, there was a time when I was having similar thoughts as you. I have a pretty good idea about how you must be feeling right now.”

Riley mumbled monotonically without any emotion. However, Nainiae, who was still looking up, couldn’t dare to turn her gaze away.

“Back in Solia, when I brought you under my wings, I think I said it like this? That I know the answer to the question you have been agonizing over. That you should take a step back and watch, and you will be able to find the answer from doing so.”

Perhaps his shoulders were sore. He spun his arms around and said to Nainiae, who was still keeping silence in tears.

“So? Have you found the answer?”

He said ‘Have you found the answer?’

Having heard the question, Nainiae, who had her mouth open vacantly, started to have her lips shake.

She still couldn’t find the answer.

No, perhaps…

“No, Not yet… I have not found it yet.”

Perhaps, finding the answer to the question was no longer important.

There was something else now, something besides the question that she had back in Solia. It was because she now had something else that she was wishing for more strongly than that.

It was…

“Nainiae.”

Riley took a step toward Nainiae and called her name.

“Don’t you have something you should tell me?”

“…”

It was not about having something that she should do for him.

Instead, it was about something she should tell him.

To that question, Nainiae was…

“… Actually, about ‘taking a step back and watching from there’ that you told me, I am not so sure.”

There were tears hanging on her face.

It was not certain if it was due to the setting sun or if it was due to her trying not to cry. With reddened cheeks, Nainiae continued.

“It’s difficult. Honestly, I cannot get a feel for what it means at all. But… but…”

Like something that had been pressed down for so long was finally coming out, her tearful voice cried out and said,

“Young Master, I…”

In struggling voice, with great difficulty, she cried out and said,

“… It is too hard…”

“…"

“I am miserable. There are still pretty things I have not seen yet, delicious food I have not yet tasted… and there are so many of them. I have to say farewell forever to the kind people that I like. I’m so scared.”

Her tears, which rolled down along her cheek, hung on the chin before becoming falling droplets, wetting the garden grass.

“The warmth was… It is too brief. It was too brief. It is so unfair. I still…”

Nainiae tightly shut her eyes. With more tear drops falling from her eyes, Nainiae tightly grabbed on to her skirt, hard enough to almost tear it apart, and cried out.

“… Not yet… I don’t want to die yet.”

Although she made up her mind to not expect more…

Although she had given up on her life…

Although that was the case…

“For just a little longer.”

Crying her eyes out, she was even showing her disfigured right hand that she always hid. Nainiae started to rub her face with both of her hands’ top side.

“For just a little longer, just for a little while longer, I would like to be at your side.”

It must be because she didn’t want to hide her tears more than her disfigured hand.

“Soon…”

During the fall, which was approaching fast…

During the fall where she was going to pass away…

During that fall, Riley asked if there was something Nainiae should do for him during the fall.

“Apples, which will be ripe soon…”

A moment ago, among the leaves flowing in the wind above Nainiae's head, she noticed green apples that were showing their shy faces from the branches. She was staring up at them with blank look on her face. She was finally able to answer the question Riley asked earlier.

"... I would like to pick them for you. I would like to peel them myself and feed them to you."

Sound of Nainiae crying her heart out could be heard.

She must be overwhelmed with her heart full of sorrow. She even had runny nose from tears.

Riley, who had been watching this, smiled gently.

"I..."

In tearful voice, Nainiae told him her true wish.

"... I want to live."

Actually, instead of the wish about wanting to die, her wish for wanting to live was desperately stronger.

The scenery in Rainfield that she saw was so beautiful, and the daily lives in the mansion with the people were so happy.

She wanted to see that scenery again, and even if it was going to be just a while longer, she wanted stay with the people she cherished.

She wanted to gather good memories.

“Young Master, I…”

‘Is it all right for someone like me to dare to wish for something? Will I just get hurt again?’

She finally poured out everything she had been holding on out of fear.

Nainiae’s face was a mess, a face full of tears and runny nose. With her face toward Riley, Nainiae asked carefully,

“I… will it be all right if I lived?”

The sun was setting now.

Nainiae’s face was red from having cried so much for so long. Maybe he found her reddened face to look too similar to an apple that Nainiae mentioned earlier, but Riley was not able to hold it anymore but to break into suppressed laughter.

“I said earlier, didn’t I?”

With a smiling face, Riley took a step toward Nainiae, raised his right hand and started to pat her head.

“You pick the apples.”

Those words...

That one sentence...

Could it mean an order?

Also, what could the gentle pat on her head mean?

The answer was already out.

“I hate bothersome things, so I need you.”

In that one sentence, there were,

You have done well.

Thank you.

You worked hard.

I need you.

I’m counting on you to continue to help me.

… The sentence contained everything she had been longing to hear.

“… Huup.”

With her eyebrows pointed upward and her lips pursed, Nainiae was desperately trying to hold her tears. Now, she started to pour out the leftover emotions that were inside.

“Huup, huk… Huhuk…”

“It can’t be Ian. He makes me tired with his nagging.”

“Hu… Huk… Huuuunng!!”

In silence, Riley slowly brushed Nainiae’s head. He casually looked up at the apple tree.

“…”

During this fall, the apple tree in Iphalleta mansion’s garden was changing its color a lot later than before.

It was as if someone rolled back the needles on the clock…

It was at the corner of the garden.

“… Hup, huhuhuhuk!”

“Uuuurrhuhuhu…”

There were a few people hiding in the bushes, crying and sniffing.

“Hup… Commander, Mr. Ian, please cry quietly. At this rate, those two will notice us.”

“But, but… Ms. Nainiae is…”

“Kuhup, huhuhuk…”

There were the three of the Lightning Boulder mercenary group, Ian that just left Riley’s side, and also Sera who came here under Willa’s order to watch Nainiae so their surprise party won’t be found out by Nainiae.

There were five hiding in the bushes.

“Nainiae, Nainiae…”

Watching Nainiae crying with reddened face in the garden, Sera bit on to her handkerchief and tightly held her urge to rush out there.

“Lazy-Sword, Lazy-Sword, there were a lot of talks about that, but… Looking at him like this, I think the rumors are just wrong.”

“He is a really… magnificent person, Young Master Riley is…”

Standing in the middle of the ocean of tears, Isen and Rorona murmured with smiles on their faces. Sera, who was biting off her handkerchief, nodded and agreed.

“Yes… Mr. Ian, today, I got to respect our Young Master again.”

“I… I have been since a long time ago…”

It seems Ian already completely forgot about ‘it can’t be Ian’ comment made by Riley earlier. Ian was mumbling like that with face full of tears.

“Kuhup… As a fellow man, he is really cool. I understand why Mr. Ian is serving Young Master Riley.”

Nara wiped off the runny nose with his sleeve and nodded.

“Right… It’s not the time for me to be doing this.”

Ian, who was nodding his head after hearing Nara's words, quickly cleaned up the tears on his face and turned around in duck-like steps.

"Let's go help with the preparation too."

Sera realized Ian was talking about the surprise party for Nainiae. She slowly turned her head and looked at Nainiae who was still crying in front of Riley.

"But..."

"I think we won't have to worry about being found out."

"Pardon?"

"Because Young Master is there."

Standing next to Nainiae, Riley directed his gaze toward the bush that Ian and Sera were hiding in. Riley winked and sent them a signal.

"... Ah."

Perhaps it was as expected of the Young Master.

Noticing Riley’s wink, Sera couldn’t help but to smile awkwardly.

Chapter 100 - I'll Come Back

Nainiae was standing in front of Riley. Riley touched Nainiae's face and wiped off her tear with his thumb. Riley was annoyed.

"Ugh, stop crying now."

Nainiae could feel the warmth on her face.

That hand, the warmth, felt so good and happy. Nainiae was blushing from it. She had a hiccup and nodded.

"... Hup. Yes."

It was not certain if Riley knew that the setting sun was not the reason why Nainiae's face looked red. Riley, who was looking at her face, opened his mouth with an uninterested look on his face.

"Anyway, after today, you will be living with Andal until you are cured of your illness, so that's all you need to know."

"Pardon? With Mr. Andal?"

This was the first time she heard about it. Nainiae, tilting her head side to side, asked Riley.

Riley continued as he clicked his tongue.

“You didn’t know? Um, I guess you would not have. What can we do? That’s how it turned out. He has a terrible personality, but you will have to stay there for a while so I can continue to have you do things for me, so…”

“Who has a terrible personality?”

Riley realized there was Andal walking toward them with heavy steps. Riley stopped talking and shrugged his shoulders.

“… You’re here.”

“What a ridiculous rascal. Look who’s talking. Hey, no matter how terrible my personality is, it couldn’t possibly be worse than yours.”

Andal ground teeth as he looked at Riley. Riley looked apologetic as he raised the middle finger toward Andal.

“What’s that compliment for?”

“Oh, this is a compliment for your kind heartedness.”

“…”

Andal, dumbfounded, looked at Riley’s middle finger. Still finding it to be suspicious, Andal asked,

“… Are you being cynical?”

Nainiae was surprised by Riley raising up his middle finger in middle of the conversation. Having heard Andal mentioning ‘compliment,’ Nainiae tilted her head side to side, confused.

“…?”

“I’m not being cynical.”

Riley shrugged his shoulder and asked as he looked at Nainiae who had a question mark floating on her face.

“I’m not, right?”

Nainiae, who noticed Riley’s eyebrows wiggling, roughly figured out what Riley was up to. She nodded and said,

“Yes, that’s right.”

If it was before she finished the trip to the Rainfield, she probably would not have realized the meaning behind Riley’s facial gesture with the wiggling eyebrows.

“… Tsk.”

Andal, not able to dig in further into questioning, clicked his tongue, redirected his gaze upward, checked the color of the sky and got to the main point.

“Well then, can she go with me now?”

“No, not yet.”

“What? You said to come for her on the evening, didn’t you?”

Riley shook his head, and Andal had a confused look on the face.

“It’s still evening, right?”

Riley looked up the sky and asked back.

The sun was almost set now. Instead of orange color, the sky was filled with dark blue color. The stars were starting to show themselves here and there.

“You are so fickle…”

“You are going to be living for several thousand more years. Can’t you wait a few hours? Stop mumbling around and just wait.”

Riley scolded Andal for complaining and then looked at Nainiae who was just standing there and watching what was happening.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes, Young Master.”

“It’s about time for you to go back to the kitchen area.”

“To … the kitchen?”

Perhaps it was because of what Willa said earlier. Hearing Riley’s order was making Nainiae’s shoulder to fall down all the way.

‘Get out of the kitchen.’

Nainiae felt like she could hear Willa’s voice. Hoping Riley will change his mind, Nainiae asked carefully,

“Excuse me, is there a reason for going to the kitchen…”

Riley had an ambiguous smile that seemed to indicate there was something to it. However, he didn’t answer. Riley grabbed Nainiae by the shoulder, turned her around toward the mansion, and ordered once again.

“… Get going.”

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By Riley's order, Nainaie ended up back at the kitchen.

She was hesitating in front of the closed kitchen door. For no reason, she grabbed on to the tip of her skirt and checked her cloth's condition over and over, knowing already that it was completely fine.

'Will it be all right?'

For several tens of minutes, she hesitated about entering.

Nainiae vacantly tried touching the cheek that Riley's hand touched. As if that gave her the courage, she nodded and raised her hand toward the door.

'That's right, this time, I should do it right.'

Right now, she had a look on her face that was quite different from how it was when she entered the kitchen earlier today.

'I should look at them properly. To the people who I cherish, I should look at them in the eyes and say it properly.'

That was the only thought in her head. She had her hand on the kitchen's door hand and carefully opened it.

"... S... She's here!"

“I think she’s here now!”

“M… Mr. Ian! What are you hiding there for? You should give it to her first!”

“Oh… The thing is… Maybe it would be better for Sera to go first…”

“Ugh, this is so stupid! Mr. Ian, you should be the one to go first!”

“Ugh, please act like the elder!”

“W… wait!”

It seemed like there was a commotion happening inside, so Nainiae entered carefully. As soon as she entered, she saw Ian standing in the front. Nainiae couldn’t help but to flinch her shoulders.

“M… Mr. Ian?”

For some reason, Ian had a petrified look. Nainiae looked confused. She flinched again when she heard a voice coming from the back.

“Ugh, the Mercenary Hero? What Mercenary Hero.”

“W… Willa.”

“Step aside please.”

Both Ian and Nainiae shriveled after hearing Willa the maid manager.

“Nainiae.”

Ian was standing in front of the door, petrified. Willa pushed Ian aside and approached Nainiae.

“M… Ms. Willa…”

‘Try not to be afraid… Think about how Young Master patted me on the head. Look at the people in the eyes.’

Having reminded of herself of those things, Nainiae, with courage, lifted her head.

“Excuse me, I’m sorr…”

“Nainiae.”

“…?”

Perhaps it was because the look on Willa's face was not what Nainiae expected, not what Nainiae feared would be. Nainiae opened her eyes wide.

"Take this."

To Nainiae, who had a confused look on her face, Willa presented something that she was holding to Nainiae.

"What is this?"

It was a piece of fabric that was neatly folded into a square.

It was a handkerchief.

"The fact that I'm giving you something I used to use gets me a little, but this is the only thing I own that is the most precious to me."

She couldn't explain the reason for the handkerchief being a little wet. It was because Willa wiped off her own tears with it. Nainiae was vacantly staring at the handkerchief.

Willa said,

"It's basic function is handkerchief, but you can also use it as a scarf, so... You are a girl. As becoming of a girl, I wish you could put in effort into making yourself look your best too."

Nainiae had a look on her face. She was wondering what this was. She was also wondering what Willa was saying. With that look, Nainiae looked up at Willa.

“…?”

“You are not like how you look… No, it’s nothing. I was not talking about your scar.”

Perhaps she realized she didn’t say it correctly. Embarrassed, Willa corrected herself in the middle and continued.

“You cry a lot. You did earlier too, so… I believe this handkerchief will be of use to you.”

Unlike the advice she was giving, Willa turned her head away because her eyes were tearing up. She quietly wiped it off with her finger and ended her sentence.

“You use it. It’s a gift.”

“A… gift?”

Willa nodded and stepped aside. To front of Nainiae, who still didn’t quite figure out the situation yet, Ian tumbled forward.

“Ku… Kuhum.”

“Mr. Ian, you need to understand what’s happening here right now, read the atmosphere, okay?”

“You know what that means, right?”

Pushed by others to stand in front of Nainiae again, Ian barked at the people behind him to say that they should just shut up. Ian put his hand toward the sword resting at his waist.

“… Here. Take this.”

“Mr. Ian?”

Ian brought out the sword that he loved. Along with the sheath, Ian presented the sword to Nainiae.

“When a swordsman trust another with his sword, you know well what that means, right?”

Nainiae had been working in Iphalleta, a house of sword.

Nainiae had learned at least that much basic etiquette from Sera. Still confused, Nainiae received the sword from Ian.

“Wh..y?”

Nainiae knew that Ian's gesture was of a great significance. She was having a hard time understanding the situation.

"In this mansion, next to Young Master Riley…"

Nainiae was standing there with a blank look on her face. With a serious look on his face, Ian continued.

"… I'll wait for your return."

Having heard those words, Nainiae's grips on her hands, which were holding the handkerchief and the sword, tightened.

"It's not for myself, but for our Young Master."

The serious look in Ian's face didn't last long.

Perhaps his sensitive heart was at its limit. His eyes started to get wet.

"You must return."

Ian also wanted to say that there is no other talent that's better suited to look after Young Master than her, and it will always be. However… Ian was not able to hold it anymore. He started to sniff like a child.

“When you return, my sword… you can give it back to me then.”

“Mr. Ian…”

“Ugh! I told you not to, but again! Again! You are ruining the mood!”

Nainiae was vacantly staring at Ian who was crying. His body was pushed aside by someone. Nainiae blinked her eyes.

“Seriously! You are a man, so how come you are crying on a day that’s a happy day? Nainiae isn’t going there to die. She is going there to be cured! Why are you acting like you are never going to see her again?”

With his crying, Ian was going to ruin the mood. Looking at the maid that pushed him aside, Nainiae mumbled her name.

“Ms. Sera…”

“That is… I’m sorry, Nainiae. I’ll apologize first. I wanted to give you a present too… Unfortunately, I found out about this today. I didn’t have enough time.”

Sera smiled awkwardly in front of Nainiae. It looked like she was scratching her hair. Along with a sound that seemed like something was untied, Sera walked toward Nainiae.

“Now that I think about it, I didn’t get to give you a good ribbon on the day you arrived.”

The sound just now was Sera pulling the ribbon that was holding her hair to the back.

“That day, because we were not close yet, I gave you a really old one on purpose… but you didn’t complain at all.”

Sera gave the same advice that Willa gave about how it would be good for Nainiae to start caring about looking her best. Sera stepped forward to stand right in front of Nainiae.

“Nainiae, I’ll apologize again. I’m sorry I gave you a worn out ribbon that day. Actually, I felt pretty guilty that day. It hurt me in the conscious when you looked happy about the ribbon and told me it was pretty…”

Sera held the ribbon on her hand. Sera raised her hand above Nainiae’s shoulder and started to fiddle her hand on Nainiae’s hair on the back.

“If you asked me to give you a different one, I would have acted like I’m just giving in and gave you a new one. I’m not that bad of a person.”

Sera and Nainiae’s faces were getting very close. Their faces were close enough to hear each other’s breathing. Nainiae, with overjoyed face, barely responded,

“Yes, I know.”

“… When you return, when you do, I’ll prepare another one that’s even prettier.”

Sera untied the old ribbon on Nainiae’s hair and replaced it with her own. Sera’s voice was, before she realized, tearing up like Ian.

“Yes.”

“… Hup.”

Although she was finished with tying the ribbon, Sera was not able to take her hands back. Not able to hold it anymore, Sera tightly hugged Nainiae.

“Sera, I can’t breathe.”

“Just for a moment… just for a moment, like this.”

It was so Sera won’t have to show Nainaie her crying face. Nainiae knew that.

“I memorized it properly.”

While crying and hugging Nainaie, Sera sniffed. Soon, with

awkward face, Sera stepped back and said,

“I memorized it, your scent.”

“Ms. Sera…”

“You know I have a great sense of smell, right? You can’t run. You better not dare to come back before your illness is cured.”

With her eyes tearing up, Sera smiled big as if she was daring Nainiae on running. Sera slowly stepped back, and…. Other servants of the mansion, who were waiting for their turns, smiled big and greeted Nainiae.

“Excuse me…”

Willa, Ian, Sera… Not just the three, but others were also welcoming Nainiae. She vacantly looked around.

“All this… just what is it for?”

Nainiae was still confused. Looking at her like that, others started to tease Nainiae.

“Nainiae, I thought you said you learned some common sense while you were at Rainfield?”

“What was that for? It seems like you are still lacking in the sense department!”

It looked like they were just made. There were foods exuding steam. They were making people’s mouth to water from just looking at them. There was also a chair-size cake. It was making people’s heart flutter.

“This is a surprise for you, you dumbass!”

“Before you go, you should have a full stomach, don’t you think?”

“A surprise… party?”

‘A party?’

This was the first time for Nainiae.

A cake made just for her, and gazes full of warmth were all new to Nainiae.

Nainiae realized that the people she cherished were also caring about her like this. This was also her first time to experience it.

“For… me?”

Nainiae, who had her mouth open vacantly, mumbled with shaky voice. It seemed like she was being overwhelmed with emotion.

She cried her eyes out earlier in front of Riley, but it seemed she still had tears to shed.

“Uh?! Nainiae is crying!!”

“Ugh, this is not good! Ms. Willa, you made her cry!”

“What? What are you saying? I don’t have anything to do with this.”

“You made her cry earlier!”

“That was then, and this time, I think it is purely because of Mr. Ian or Sera.”

“Ku, kuhum!”

“Puhup. Mr. Ian… looks like you know what we are talking about.”

Listening to the people talking out loud to each other, Nainiae, with her face full of all the happiness in the world, said without hiding her tears,

“… Thank you.”

It was because she wanted to properly face the people that she cherished.

“Thank you, all of you, thank you so… much.”