# 122 - Emil (4)

1. Emil (4)

It felt somewhat bizarre, but Carla could tell that the scene unfolding before her was a dream. Otherwise, there was no way to properly explain the strange feeling she was experiencing.

Before Carla's eyes stood Carla and Venere. There was no way she could forget Venere's face—so it was definitely Venere. And the woman confronting Venere was none other than Carla herself.

There couldn't be two of herself.

So this was a dream.

It was merely a glimpse into past memories, Carla thought, trying to suppress the rising excitement. Getting worked up here would only waste energy on an illusion. There must be a reason for this scene to be shown.

The Carla confronting Venere was also a sight she remembered well. The fight where her left arm was intact, and then disappeared. The moment she lost her left arm in that fight, that was the scene.

Bang, Carla's left arm exploded without fail.

Venere watched Carla, approaching the completely helpless Carla and babbling something, but Carla couldn't hear a word.

Carla knew what would happen next. Albina and Ivan would tear through space and rescue her… it would follow that exact flow. Unable to bear watching that scene, Carla squeezed her eyes shut and tried to turn away.

—Carla.

Ivan's calm voice.

This wasn't how it was supposed to go. Why was Ivan talking to Carla?

How was this unfolding? Unable to understand, Carla squinted and cautiously looked ahead.

And then, Carla's eyes met Ivan's.

Ivan, holding up his left arm dripping with blood, thrust it towards Carla and said.

—This arm, it's yours.

Carla's gaze darted around.

She looked at Ivan's face, then at the left arm, then back at Ivan's face.

—It's the power you wanted.

—The power you wanted to defeat me with.

—Accept this arm.

—Accept this arm, and acknowledge it as your own power.

—Then you will surely be able to defeat me—

'No, no… no, not that far… no…!'

She wanted to defeat Ivan.

That much was true.

She wanted to overcome Ivan, to prove that she surpassed him in everything, including talent.

But now, none of that mattered anymore.

Defeating Ivan was meaningless in this situation.

Now that things had come to this, the spirit of competition was no longer a meaningful emotion for Carla.

—You wanted to defeat me, didn't you?

—If you accept this power, you will…

—Surely be able to defeat me.

"Not now, not now…!"

Carla, with her eyes wide open, saw the somewhat familiar ceiling.

The ceiling of the infirmary, bathed in moonlight, and Carla stared at the pattern on the ceiling, letting out a long sigh.

Her feverish body seemed to have cooled down considerably.

Her temperature always read normal when checked, but the feverish feeling had finally subsided to some extent.

"Ivan…?"

Carla turned her head to look for Ivan.

Ivan, who had been by her side every time she opened her eyes, was nowhere to be seen.

"Ivan, Ivan…?"

Ivan was nowhere to be found.

Carla was alone in the infirmary.

An uncontrollable tremor shook her body.

Unable to calm her trembling body, Carla kept looking around, searching for Ivan.

But Ivan was nowhere to be seen.

Ivan's figure was nowhere to be found, and Carla's eyes frantically searched for Ivan, scanning every shadow in the corners that vaguely resembled a human figure.

"Ivan… I…"

Carla's voice stopped abruptly.

More than the strangeness of her trembling body, Carla's gaze turned to her left arm, feeling a strange foreign sensation on her left side.

Her left arm was bulging and moving.

Her left arm, not obeying her control, not following her will.

Her left arm was writhing and pulsating as if something was about to burst out—

"Th-this…"

Carla's eyes shook endlessly.

Ivan's absence.

Her left arm, not listening to her control.

All of this began to erode her mental strength.

The carriage sped along relentlessly, and Ivan knew that they would soon arrive at the Aufstieg mansion.

A place that exuded a dirty, gloomy, and evil atmosphere, the carriage traversing the forest was consumed by that atmosphere, giving the feeling of plunging into an endless swamp.

"...I will conceal myself around here. It seems someone has come to meet us."

At Lorenzo's words, Ivan nodded without hesitation.

Even Ivan had been feeling it.

A chilling sensation.

The feeling that something filled with extreme malice was blocking the path they were heading towards.

And the feeling that it had business with Ivan and Lorenzo, who were traveling on this road.

Lorenzo's figure blurred like mist and finally disappeared completely.

Only after he disappeared did the sound of a crow's flapping wings become audible.

Feeling the sensation growing closer, Ivan opened the window connecting the carriage cabin to the driver's seat and said.

"Please stop around here. I will go alone from here."

"We still have to go further to reach the Aufstieg mansion!"

"I know. So please stop."

No sooner had Ivan finished speaking than the rough snorting of the horse was heard.

The carriage slowly came to a halt, and after it had completely stopped, Ivan opened the door and got out of the carriage.

"Return directly to the academy by this road."

"Well, alright then."

The coachman had an expression of not knowing what was going on.

But he couldn't involve the innocent coachman, so Ivan left him behind and started walking.

The chilling sensation was getting stronger and stronger.

Ivan, who was crossing the forest, slightly changed direction and headed into the forest.

He didn't worry about getting lost—

The chilling sensation he was heading towards was more like a signpost telling him where to go.

Not long after entering the forest a little further.

As soon as Ivan reached that place, he made a small humming sound and looked around.

A cold and eerie wasteland.

A place where piles of stones that once seemed to be splendid decorations had collapsed to the point where it was difficult to recognize their original form.

A place that was not very wide, a place where a medium-sized country house could be located.

There, she was standing.

"You found the answer surprisingly quickly?"

"...Venere. Give me back the way to restore Carla to her original state."

There was no reason to speak at length.

Ivan bluntly stated his business, and Venere widened her eyes for a moment, then smiled slightly.

"Why are you doing this? Do you have any proof that I did it?"

"Proof is not necessary. All circumstantial evidence points to you. You and Aufstieg."

"Don't you have something like presumption of innocence?"

Ivan grinned at those words.

"Presumption of innocence, why do I need something like that?"

"You'll need it?"

"Your very existence is guilty, you damn Mage. You seem to have lived a long life with cheap and low-quality Magical Engineering, but you won't last long with such petty tricks."

At those words, Venere frowned slightly.

Then, she tilted her head, and soon clapped her hands together, exclaiming, "Ah!"

"You're not a split personality or anything like that, are you?"

"...Yes."

There was no reason to hide it now.

She wasn't someone who could be hidden even if he tried.

That's why Ivan readily acknowledged it and nodded.

"As expected, that idiot Lucas did his part properly."

"...I thought so, so you were the one who instigated Lucas."

"That's right, that's right. Isn't it obvious?"

"What exactly are you trying to do? You and that old geezer."

"Old geezer? You should call him Elder Dremalo."

"Elder, my foot. You should call someone you respect Elder. That kind of guy should be grateful for being called an old geezer."

"How cold."

Dremalo, Venere.

Ivan didn't know what the purpose of these two people was, not even that far.

But what was certain was that the purpose of those two bastards was Ivan.

"Do you think I'll go to Aufstieg by doing this?"

"Well. You'll come, won't you?"

"You seem so confident, it's annoying."

The reasons to go to Aufstieg were constantly disappearing.

It wouldn't work even if he persuaded her nicely, and she did this to Carla—even though the original target was Ivan.

"If Regina, that stupid bitch, had done her job properly, you would have come here on your own two feet and begged to be accepted into Aufstieg. But well, it wasn't bad. Either way, you have no choice but to cooperate with us."

The desire to punch Venere's sneering face.

Ivan stared at Venere, suppressing that burning and desperate desire.

"That will never happen."

"Oh my, goodness. But you know, you will. Carla, the girl you love so much, will be in considerable pain right now."

"...What do you mean?"

Venere smiled and approached Ivan.

Ivan clenched his fists tightly, and had to suppress the desire to rush at Venere right away.

"I mean. Carla, that girl's left arm…"

Carla's left arm.

It was an Artificial body torn from the Artificial body Venere had created.

And it was the arm that Ivan had personally attached.

"That, thanks to that potion. Carla will have to remove her left arm again."

Finally, he reached the limit of his patience.

Ivan's fist was embedded in Venere's face.

Author's Note

Current backlog: 128 chapters

I bought a custom keyboard called neo60 cu

Since the number of keys is small, I have to adapt the key assignments here and there

I put the Korean-English key on Caps Lock and made it a Ctrl key when pressed and held

I applied Shift and Function keys to the left Shift (I did it on the space bar, but it caused a serious problem in writing)

As a result, a great keyboard with less wrist movement was born, ta-da

# 123 - Venere (1)

1. Venere (1)

ㅡ Thwump!

There must have been a sound mixed in there, a crack of bones breaking or twisting, or at least a splintering noise.

Ivan thought that Venere could never be unscathed. Considering the feeling in his fist and that sound, it was certain.

A precise strike aimed directly at her jaw.

A blow that carried the unrestrained fury swirling like a torrent.

His fist, tightly packed with magical power condensed like a hunk of metal, struck Venere with such force that her body flew like a severed string, tumbling through the air.

* Kuda-dada-dang!

Venere rolled amidst the piles of stones scattered here and there. Ivan chased after her, delivering kicks and punches, determined to turn her into minced meat with a fierce barrage.

* Crack, crack, snap!

Sounds of breaking, shattering, and bursting echoed around.

Blood splattered, and pieces of flesh scattered.

With the final kick, her head burst open, and Venere's body tumbled as if it were a rag.

“You're really angry, Ivan.”

Without even breathing heavily, Ivan kicked Venere's corpse, and her voice came from behind him.

Ivan slowly turned his head to glare at Venere.

His blazing gaze pierced through her, and Venere shrugged her shoulders, looking at him with a sly smile.

“You know I can't die, right? Seeing you waste your strength like that, it seems you still have some left?”

“...Stop talking nonsense. Tell me how to return Carla to her original state.”

“Oh my, that's funny. Ivan, no, Evan.”

“......”

Ivan did not respond.

He was well aware of the name Evan—it was the name he had been called before ascending to the throne, a name that had hardly been used, so to speak, a childhood name.

“Whether it's Evan or whatever, my name is Ivan now.”

“It doesn't matter, does it? Those names wouldn't mean much to you anyway. The emperor who was obsessed with magical engineering, the emperor who abandoned governance for his obsession with magic. The emperor who was even called the embodiment of magic. To think such an emperor would go this far for a girl, it's a feeling of a different era.”

“What do you know about Carla to be talking like that?”

“Living with flesh and blood is so terrifying. Isn't it? The emperor who was said to be inhuman has become this way over a girl.”

“I told you not to speak carelessly about Carla.”

“Oh dear, how frightening.”

Venere pretended to tremble in exaggerated fear.

Seeing the clear mockery in her gesture, Ivan frowned, and Venere spoke.

“Anyway. But you know, Ivan. It was you who attached my artificial arm to that girl. I had no part in that. It's a fact, isn't it?”

“That pathetic artificial body crafted with that inferior magical engineering.”

“That's right, that's right. It may seem that way to you. But how about thinking of it this way?”

Venere approached Ivan with a sly grin.

Ivan was ready to snap her neck at any moment, but Venere stopped just short of him and said,

“During the gap between Evan's death and your rebirth as Ivan, how many hundreds of years was that? What do you think our mages were doing during that time? Just playing around?”

Ivan could not answer that part.

In reality, it was true—between Evan's death and his rebirth as Ivan, a significant amount of time had passed. Changes would have been immense, so even with Evan's knowledge, Ivan could not know everything.

“Do the magical engineering of your time and the magical engineering I wield now match? Is it not possible that you were too thoughtless to just slap my artificial body onto Carla without considering that?”

“Stop dragging this out. Give me a way to return Carla to her original state.”

“There's no such thing. You fool.”

The smile vanished from Venere's face.

Instead, with a stiffened expression, Venere said,

“Do you think something like that exists, you fool? Knowledge, development, and progress.”

A magical circle suddenly appeared on Venere's palm.

Then, in an instant, the surrounding air began to freeze.

“Compared to the mages of today, you are just a rookie, Evan. Whether you are Evan or Ivan, your talent is overwhelming, and so is your magical power. But your knowledge is just that of the past.”

“You're spouting nonsense.”

Magical power began to rise from both of Ivan's arms.

A whirlwind of Dust Storm magic, and the Lightning Bolt of Lightning Magic.

“You thought there would be no side effects from attaching my specially made artificial body to someone else. You must have been delusional, you fool.”

“If that's the case, then I can just drag you back myself. You can make a custom artificial body for Carla yourself.”

“Do you think I would do that? Am I crazy?”

Venere gritted her teeth and crossed her arms.

Though not flashy, a thick magical barrier wrapped around the open space.

Not wanting to watch that, Ivan charged at Venere again, and she raised a barrier to block his punch that came flying from the whirlwind. However, the impact did not stop and pushed through, and Venere was pushed back, barely managing to stop.

“It's a foolish combat style from the old days, just mindlessly pouring in magical power.”

As Venere smiled, Ivan narrowed his eyes and glared at her.

“That means you lack sophistication.”

As soon as those words left his mouth, Ivan charged again.

The whirlwind accelerated and danced, and the Lightning Bolt burst forth with a loud crack, flying toward Venere.

Venere surrounded Ivan with three, five, seven—growing numbers.

Even without a dazzling display of magic, even if it was just a barrage of mana bullets, the overwhelming number of Venere's attacks far surpassed Ivan's.

“There couldn't be a better battlefield than this!”

Ivan shouted, raising his fist imbued with Lightning Bolt.

* Do you understand? If you can't release magical power externally, then use the arena as your own body.
* Do you think that would work?
* You won't know until you try.

One of the spells that Ivan and Carla had researched together.

The fist imbued with Lightning Bolt shot up into the sky, scattering a deep purple flash and an equal amount of explosive sound.

“Thunderstrike—!”

That one Carla had unleashed.

With the foolishly gathered magical power, striking the ground—

ㅡ Boom!

With a tremendous sound, a cloud of dust rose.

The thick cloud of dust that billowed up was not the usual gray.

The blood-soaked cloud of dust was not a typical color.

The artificial bodies caught in the explosion burst apart, scattering flesh and blood, and the mist of blood mixed with the Thunderstrike rose up.

“…Now I understand my emotions, what this is.”

Amidst the billowing cloud of dust, Ivan slowly rose to his feet.

“I just want Carla to be by my side.”

Even now, his heart is with Carla.

He wants to hold her hand so she can sleep peacefully.

“I can now understand what it means to regain humanity, that magic is not human. I must have lost those things.”

Venere's eyes widened as she watched him.

At first, it was surprise.

The magical power emanating from Ivan, which had always been overwhelming, had already surpassed its limits.

The second was admiration.

The pure magical power bursting forth was so vast that it was hard to believe it could belong to a human.

The third was ecstasy.

He had finally returned to his prime—complete awakening had finally been achieved.

“I'll say it once more. Return Carla to her original state.”

Venere did not respond to Ivan's words.

It was almost as if she couldn't respond.

She had been waiting for this moment.

Sometimes, she had doubts.

Even though she knew Ivan was the reincarnation of Evan.

If he did not awaken, she would never achieve the goal she pursued.

She would not be able to take proper revenge on that damned Cascata, which is why she had waited so long.

“It seems this was indeed the right answer.”

“...Stop spouting nonsense, Venere.”

“No, it's not nonsense. Dremalo and Contred. Both were wrong. My thinking was right. If you want to aim for longevity, you said to shoot the horse. Yes, that was correct.”

“You're testing my patience.”

Ivan charged at Venere.

Just as he was about to smash her head again, Venere smiled.

“It doesn't matter now; everything is going according to my plan. I clearly said it. Carla, that girl's arm cannot be returned.”

“Shut your mouth!”

The head of Venere gripped in his hand.

“It's already too late, Ivan. Your dreams, Schyskeil's and Aufstieg's foolishness, all of it is over. Everything will go according to my will, my plan.”

As soon as Ivan's grip tightened around Venere's head, it burst with a loud pop.

“…Damn girl. How well you slip away like a rat.”

Ivan realized that he could no longer feel Venere's presence.

Since she was a mage moving around with an artificial body, it would not be resolved until he killed the original body.

“Instructor Lorenzo. Are you listening?”

A crow flew in.

It landed on a branch, and a weary-looking man appeared.

“I didn't expect to hear the names Dremalo and Contred here.”

“I'll leave the aftermath to you, instructor.”

Ivan brushed his disheveled bangs and spoke.

His eyes shone brightly—

“I must return to Carla.”

A word from the author (Author's Note)

There will be no updates on weekends!

# 124 - Benevere (2)

1. Venere (2)

Direct contact with Aufstieg is beyond Ivan's authority.

Since Venere herself mentioned that Aufstieg and Schyskeil are related, it is now right to leave it to Lorenzo.

“Leave the rest to the instructors, Ivan. You should go back to Carla.”

Lorenzo said, patting Ivan on the shoulder.

He knows Ivan's strength as well.

He had seen Ivan fight while disguised as a crow, and from the ramblings of Venere, he could roughly understand what had happened.

Though he had never believed in such absurdities conveyed through whispers, he could not deny the events that unfolded right before his eyes.

Moreover, he had seen Ivan wielding dual magic and overpowering Venere; from the momentum alone, he could grasp a certain level of understanding.

“If Schyskeil is involved, it explains how that potion was made, Ivan. So there's no need to wear such a fearful expression. You should go back to Carla first. Go back and take care of her.”

“......”

Ivan did not respond.

Even though he was the one who first said he should return to Carla, he was filled with a desire to charge into Schyskeil right now.

He wanted to grab them by the collar and shake them, daring to create such a potion and wondering what they intended to do with it. However, the world does not operate according to one's temperament—Ivan had to accept that what Lorenzo was saying was the right course of action.

“...Yes.”

“For Carla's left arm, ...you don't need me to say it.”

At Lorenzo's words, Ivan nodded.

The left arm for Carla.

The left arm she had already lost once.

It was all the more precious now; she did not want to experience the pain of loss again.

How could he tell her that she could not get her left arm back, that it would not return to how it was?

“You don't need to say that, Ivan.”

Lorenzo said, lighting a Magic Herb.

The faintly twisted lips indicated that he was smiling.

“Just stay by Carla's side and protect her. Returning Carla's arm to its original state is the job of the adults. Me and Albina. The academy is an institution that teaches and protects you, after all. It's funny to say this when we've only been attacked so far, but still.”

“That's true.”

He knows it can't be done.

He knows it won't happen.

He knows it can't be returned to its original state.

Even knowing that, he understands he must still affirm it.

“Right. So hurry back. Stay by Carla's side. We'll help with the rest.”

Lorenzo dusted off Ivan's outer garment here and there.

“If you go back looking like this, won't Carla worry? You don't plan to make her worry the moment she wakes up, do you?”

“That's true.”

Ivan managed a difficult smile.

It was hard to smile, but he did so, albeit with great effort.

“Then go back now. I need to prepare in my own way as well.”

“...I’ll ask you to take care of it.”

“Yeah. Don't worry too much. It'll be fine.”

Will it really be fine?

Will it really work out?

Ivan turned around, carrying a heart full of worry.

Hoping that Carla would not worsen any further.

— Your magical power is running low? Worrying about salt drying in seawater. Foolish boy.

Returning to the academy, literally flying back while pouring out Dust Storm magic without reservation, Ivan headed straight to the infirmary.

The deep night had already passed, and the moon was quite low in the sky.

Without even catching his breath, Ivan returned, adjusted his clothes, and cautiously opened the door.

“Ivan.”

“Carla?”

It was just a moment, but he could not see Carla's expression due to the moonlight behind her.

As soon as Ivan entered the infirmary, he carefully closed the door and approached Carla.

“When did you wake up?”

“...Just a little while ago.”

“How do you feel?”

“I'm okay...”

She did not look okay.

To Ivan, Carla appeared extremely haggard, and perhaps due to the moonlight, she looked pale.

It seemed like the first time he had seen her so weak, but that was not true.

Ivan had definitely seen Carla in a weakened state before.

Wasn't it during that time when her left arm was the issue?

Ironically, this time too, Carla was having problems with her left arm.

But Ivan could not tell her the truth.

He simply sat silently beside her.

“Where have you been?”

“...To meet Venere.”

Carla fell silent.

But Ivan could understand.

The look in Carla's eyes as she gazed at him spoke volumes.

Was there something? Did she gain something...?

Ivan's gaze naturally turned to Carla's left arm.

It was obscured by the patient gown, but it was undoubtedly still not healed.

Carla also noticed Ivan's gaze.

She touched her left arm, looking thoroughly dejected.

“...It's still the same.”

“Show me.”

“It's ugly.”

“It's not ugly. Carla, you can't be ugly.”

“It's not that I'm ugly... you fool... sigh.”

Carla sighed a couple of times and slowly began to unbutton her patient gown.

She could have just rolled up the sleeves, but it seemed there was something uncomfortable for her, so Ivan remained silent and watched her actions.

“I'm so used to having both arms that unbuttoning this is quite difficult.”

“...It doesn't move?”

“It doesn't move.”

Her left arm hung limply.

Struggling to use only her right hand to unbutton, Carla slowly took off the top of her patient gown.

Then, revealing—

“......”

Ivan quietly stared at Carla's arm, her left arm.

What should he say... it seemed to have worsened even more.

It would be more accurate to say it looked worse.

Such a shocking sight.

Carla's left arm was pure white.

So pale that it could be described as pale.

Thus, the bluish blood vessels that wrapped around that arm were flowing.

Those veins stood out, pulsating from her arm, creating a horrific sight.

“...It's ugly. That's why I didn't want to show it.”

Carla smiled as she put her patient gown back on.

“Carla.”

The words that had been stuck in his throat returned as guilt.

It was such a shocking sight that he could not bring himself to say anything, and that guilt returned to Ivan.

He reached out and took Carla's hand.

Her hand, which had always radiated warmth, was now cold, feeling as if he were holding a corpse's hand, startling Ivan.

“It's not that. It's ugly, that's why...”

“It's ugly, isn't it? That's why you... you couldn't say anything.”

“It's not like that.”

“Don't try to comfort me, Ivan. I...”

Carla could not finish her sentence.

Once her mouth had closed, it could not open again, and her tightly shut lips turned pale, losing all color.

Her thinly trembling lips seemed to want to say something, silently quivering again and again.

The words that could not be completed were pitiful, and Ivan looked at Carla while holding her hand tightly.

“Don't look at me like that, Ivan...”

Carla lowered her head.

Her left arm, which did not move properly, and her right hand, held by Ivan.

The heart and body that had so easily been caught by Ivan returned as pain.

“It's foolish, really foolish. I feel so, so... so foolish...”

Was it only her gender that the waterfall god took away?

Perhaps it was the future that had surely existed in her life, which might have shone brilliantly.

Maybe it took that away too—such thoughts crossed Ivan's mind, this dreadful pain.

With her head bowed, Carla entrusted her hand to Ivan.

Drops of water were spreading across the blanket.

“Carla...”

“Don't say anything, Ivan. Don't say anything... I was foolish, I did something stupid...”

What has happened cannot be undone.

Carla knew that.

Yet the desire to turn back was due to that terrible regret.

She regretted that she should not have done such a thing, that it was such a foolish act, and even regretting it again and again, it was already too late.

If only she could shout that she wanted to go back, but it was all in vain.

Carla bowed her head, shedding only tears, saying nothing.

“…It’s my fault. I did something foolish.”

Pulling her hand away from Ivan's, Carla sniffled and wiped her eyes.

Wiping the moisture from her hand on the blanket carelessly, Carla coughed a few times and then cleared her voice.

“Nothing will change by doing this. Right, Ivan?”

Ivan did not respond.

Perhaps he could not—closer to that, it was due to his complicated feelings for Carla.

“So, before this consumes me even more than it already has.”

Carla lifted her head.

With a face that looked as if she had never cried, Carla looked at Ivan, her lips quivering repeatedly, and finally parted her lips—

“...Ivan. I have one request.”

“Sure. Anything.”

“Cut off my left arm.”

Ivan was speechless.

“I believe you’ll reattach it again.”

Carla was smiling.

Covered in tears, she was smiling.

# 125 - Benevere (3)

1. Venere (3)

"I'll reattach it for you. You're practically my husband. So, so... I believe you'll somehow make it happen. So... cut off my left arm, the one I have now."

Carla seemed to have already made up her mind.

Perhaps she knew as well.

Even Ivan is not omnipotent.

There are things he cannot do, things he cannot achieve.

Yet, Ivan does not know how painful it must be for Carla to directly ask him to cut off her own arm.

He doesn’t know, but he knows it must be done.

The sickly blue blood flowing from Carla's left arm was gradually creeping upward.

It was clearly invading Carla's body, and if left in this state, no one knew how it would progress. And if that artificial body completely consumed Carla, who knows what would happen then.

Cutting it off is the right thing to do.

It is right to cut it off now.

It is right to cut it off before it gets any worse.

Ivan knew this fact, but he could not bring himself to respond.

"If we leave it like this, we don’t know what will happen. So it’s right to cut it off now."

Ivan did not answer.

What could he say—he couldn’t just agree immediately, nor could he say he would fix it, so wait.

"I don't want to have any foolish hopes. So let's just cut it off. Cut it off... and somehow it will be fine again. You can take care of me like before. So, let’s cut it off."

It's your arm, this is your arm—Ivan wanted to say that.

But he couldn’t, because Carla knew better than anyone that this was her arm.

"Please, Ivan. I can't cut off my own arm. You're the only one I can trust. So."

Carla's hand pulled Ivan's hand.

Placing that hand on her left shoulder, Carla smiled sadly.

"This is now, just... think of it as not my arm anymore. So cut it off. Just like that... without pain."

Ivan bit his lip.

What kind of emperor, what kind of magic, what kind of power—he couldn’t even solve this one thing, and yet what was he doing?

"Without pain... please, Ivan."

Carla smiled.

On her tear-streaked face, a smile bloomed.

"...Alright, Carla. I understand your wish."

Ivan bit his lip tightly.

As he slowly raised his hand, the magical power of the dust storm began to swirl.

The magical power flowed vigorously, gradually becoming the blade of the wind that enveloped his hand, and the moonlight shattered on the blue edge, boasting a cutting power that surpassed any ordinary sword.

"Without pain..."

Carla turned her head as she spoke.

No matter what, she didn’t want to see her own arm being cut off.

Ivan bit his lip once more.

The coldness flashed on the raised edge of his hand, and in that moment—

—Sshh...

A short moan escaped from Carla.

"I believe there’s a good reason for calling me at this hour."

It was late at night, and although it was an unexpected visit without prior notice, Lord Cascata's attire showed no signs of disarray. His hair, though not slicked back with oil, was naturally tousled, revealing a hint of humanity.

"Yes, I know it’s rude. However, the matter is urgent."

"Is that so? Then speak. Tell me."

Lorenzo slowly placed the crow he had been holding on his shoulder onto the table.

The crow made a small croaking sound as it looked around, then hopped back onto Lorenzo's finger and settled there.

"Good. Now... will you tell me exactly what you saw?"

Lorenzo spoke in a soothing tone, as if comforting a child.

Knowing that this was his magic, Lord Cascata silently watched the crow.

The crow hopped back onto the table.

Then its black eyes turned white, and it let out a strange sound as it croaked.

—Indeed, it seems this was the answer.

—No, it’s not nonsense. Dremalo and Contadino. Both were wrong. My thoughts were correct. If you want to target a general, you should shoot the horse. Yes, that was the right thing to do.

—It doesn’t matter anymore; everything is going according to my plan. I clearly said it. Carla, that girl’s arm cannot be returned now.

—It’s already too late, Ivan. Your dreams, Schaiskeil's and Aufstieg's foolish actions, are all over. Everything will go as I wish, as per my plan.

It was Venere's voice.

Although it was filled with excitement and mixed noise, it was not difficult to understand what was being said.

Lord Cascata, who could not possibly fail to recognize that voice, frowned and stroked his chin.

"...Once more."

At those words, Lorenzo stroked the crow's head, and the previous lines were replayed once again.

"Again."

"Again."

"Again."

"Again."

After hearing the same lines several times in a row, Lord Cascata finally stopped the playback.

"Where did you record this?"

"This is a conversation between Ivan Contadino and a mage named Venere. As you heard, Ivan didn’t say much."

"Venere... a mage, huh."

"That’s right."

Lorenzo was unaware of the troops led by Lord Cascata.

Thus, he did not know that Venere was affiliated with the troops led by Lord Cascata.

"Schaiskeil, Aufstieg. These two fellows... no, that’s not it. I’ve heard that Ivan Contadino caused a rampage. And I’ve also heard that my niece is involved."

"...We are putting all our efforts into treating Lady Cascata."

"I’m not blaming that. As long as nothing happens to Fabio, that’s fine. That said, it seems Ivan got enraged over Carla and went looking for that woman named Venere... that’s my deduction. So this means..."

The connections were quite complicated.

It seemed that Ivan Contadino was convinced that Venere was the one who gave the medicine to a girl named Regina, and from the conversation, it appeared to be true.

However, as far as Lord Cascata knew, Venere had no expertise in medicine.

It meant she could not have created such a potion alone, but even so, if Schaiskeil made the potion and Venere gave it to Regina, and Regina targeted Ivan but Carla ended up taking the potion... that was the conclusion.

'Then what is Aufstieg aiming for?'

At first glance, Aufstieg seemed to have no connections.

But Lord Cascata knew that the family Venere belonged to was Aufstieg, and if Venere was plotting something, Aufstieg could be involved in it—but from Venere's words, it seemed she was scheming something different from Aufstieg.

"...Venere, huh. I guess I’ll have to start unraveling the problem from there. But if two pillars of the Empire are involved in something, I cannot just stand by."

"That’s right. As a mere instructor, I judged that it was beyond my capacity to respond, which is why I came to see you at this late hour. Please forgive my rudeness."

"Not at all. It’s a matter of urgency, so don’t worry about it. I have no intention of making an issue of it."

Lord Cascata had decided that it would be best to move quietly regarding this matter.

After all, the operation to deal with Ivan was about to begin, and once that was handled, he would need to start investigating those two families immediately.

"Then you may take your leave. I will also prepare my response to this."

"Understood."

After Lorenzo left, Lord Cascata remained seated in the reception room for a while.

Unresolved questions—though sitting here in the reception room wouldn’t yield any answers, he was waiting for just one thing.

After a considerable amount of time passed, dawn finally began to break.

The early morning sunlight started to creep in through the window he glanced at, and Lord Cascata finally rose from his seat and called for a servant.

"Prepare the carriage. I will go to the Imperial Palace."

He thought it would be a complicated preparation in many ways.

After hastily wiping the floor of the infirmary, now stained with blue blood, Ivan brought fresh bandages.

The bandages that had wiped Carla's shoulder were a mess, mixed with blue and red blood, and thanks to the potion generously applied to the severed area, the wound itself was healing considerably.

As he unwrapped the bandages soaked with red and blue blood and tossed them to the floor, a nasty sound echoed.

"Does it hurt?"

"You said it wouldn’t hurt... you bad guy."

Carla, with a pale complexion, seemed to Ivan to look much better than before her arm was cut off. She had been weak and listless, but now she seemed to have regained some of her spirit, making her feel more like herself.

"I did my best to be careful. I’m sorry if it still hurt."

"It’s fine..."

Carla slightly moved her left shoulder.

It hadn’t been long since she had enjoyed the use of her limbs, and now she was back to being one-armed, but perhaps because she had experienced it once before, she seemed somewhat accustomed to the absence of her left arm.

"You probably won’t have many experiences of having your left arm cut off twice."

"Not just rare; you might be the first."

"I’m having a rare experience multiple times, too."

Carla smiled faintly.

After rewrapping the bandage, she poured another bottle of potion over it.

Only then did Ivan let out a long sigh.

"It’s my arm that got cut off, so why are you sighing?"

"Well, it turned out this way."

"...Just in case, I want to say I won’t have any regrets. Losing an arm is better than dying. I don’t know if I would die, but since it’s come to this, I probably won’t. I can start over as many times as I need."

"I’m good at trying," Carla said, and Ivan quietly watched her.

"Yeah. I will help you and protect you, no matter what path you take."

"You say nice things."

Carla smiled.

That smile was so lovely that Ivan found himself smiling back awkwardly.

# 126 - Venere (4)

1. Venere (4)

‘I should start by organizing my thoughts.’

Given the nature of the matter, haste was paramount.

He was tempted to act first and report later, but there was no way those two rats would leave evidence of their cheese-nibbling plans, so he couldn't.

Lord Cascata closed his eyes and pondered in the carriage heading towards the Imperial Palace.

Circumstantially, it was clear that Schyskeil and Aufschtig were colluding on something.

So, how should he organize this information to report to the Emperor?

First, he would convey the truth.

The evidence was the data Lorenzo had submitted.

He would submit that, and explain that Venere, under his command, was plotting something, and that it was clear from their conversation that the two were working together on something.

However, it couldn't be seen as evidence that they were targeting the Empire.

They were after Ivan Contadino, and it was impossible to know whether they wanted Ivan himself, or something else related to him.

‘Schyskeil is nothing. But Aufschtig is the problem.’

They were practitioners of Descent Magic.

It was Magical Engineering that required a very long casting time, a lot of preparation, and a complex process, which was problematic, but if it was in the rear rather than the front lines, there would be no difficulty in avoiding the eyes of others while preparing something…

“Sir, we have arrived.”

Lord Cascata opened his eyes at the coachman's voice, announcing their arrival at the Imperial Palace entrance, even though he hadn't finished organizing his thoughts.

“Thank you for your trouble. Wait here.”

It wouldn't take long.

The Imperial Palace at dawn was still cold and silent.

Inside, countless servants would be preparing for the newly dawning morning, but the Imperial Palace was not so small that their bustle would be noticeable.

The sun was just peeking over the horizon, burning away the darkness beyond, as Lord Cascata stepped out of the carriage.

The weather was still chilly with the morning air, so Lord Cascata fastened the cloak that reached his waist and entered the Imperial Palace.

The guards, who knew him well, quietly bowed their heads slightly and opened the gate, and Lord Cascata returned their greeting with a nod as he moved on.

His steps were efficient, as if it were a prearranged matter.

“I have come to see His Majesty.”

“Yes, I have informed him. He said to let you in as soon as you arrived.”

After receiving the gatekeeper's report, he passed through the slowly opening door into the office.

The Emperor was waiting for Lord Cascata inside.

He was the one who started the day earlier than anyone else in the world.

A position that required one to work harder than anyone else in a place where others could not see, in order to maintain authority.

He was a man fit for such a position, and the man to whom Lord Cascata pledged his loyalty.

“Please forgive my rudeness in visiting you at this early hour.”

“It's fine. If you ask to see me at this hour, there must be a good reason. Everyone, leave. I'll call you separately if I need you. Ah, Lord Cascata, would you like some tea?”

“No… yes.”

“Then prepare some tea. And leave.”

While the maids prepared the tea, the Emperor moved from the desk to the sofa in the office, taking the seat of honor.

Lord Cascata also sat on the sofa at the Emperor's invitation, and soon a plate of refreshments and a teacup were placed before them.

Silence fell in the office as the maids and guards withdrew.

“Well then, tell me now.”

“Schyskeil and Aufschtig have joined forces. They are plotting something unknown.”

“Hmm.”

The Emperor stroked his chin and pondered.

Schyskeil and Aufschtig… two of the four great noble families in the Empire.

Although Brione's presence was so faint that it was difficult to even call them a great noble family anymore, Schyskeil and Aufschtig were not so small. If they were working together on something…

“It's difficult. Hard to read.”

“Indeed. But the target is certain.”

“Ivan, I presume. Ivan Contadino.”

“That is correct.”

Although it was not yet widely known, Ivan Contadino was the person the current Imperial leadership was most concerned about.

He was considered to be the reincarnation of the last emperor of the ancient empire, a figure shrouded in legend, and due to his innate talent, he would one day…

“Become a threat, or a pillar of support, or… a member of the Imperial Family.”

“Your Majesty.”

“We must face reality, Lord Cascata. You know it too. If I die as I am, the succession to the throne will fall into chaos.”

“……”

Lord Cascata closed his mouth at the Emperor's words.

Those words were not wrong… an empty throne with no heir.

That was a position that everyone would covet, and how fiercely they would compete for it.

“It seems he will face his final test.”

Lord Cascata did not answer.

He no longer explained the situation with words.

Instead, he simply held his hands tightly together, protecting his position.

“Then, how will Cascata move?”

“I have stepped away from family matters. My brother will make his own judgment.”

“Your prediction?”

Lord Cascata was silent for a moment at the Emperor's question.

However, there was only one thing to do.

Then, there was only one thing to say.

“…Cascata will be loyal to the Imperial Family. That is all.”

\*

“Wasn't failure within the expected range anyway?”

Contred nodded at Dremalo's words.

“The vessel… I apologize. Is the young lady returning today?”

Dremalo nodded at Contred's words.

It was Saturday morning.

Dremalo's daughter, Emil von Aufschtig, was returning today, Saturday.

He had already sent the order by letter, and although there was no reply, Dremalo had no doubt.

Emil could not disobey his orders, and was bound to follow them.

“When the vessel returns today, we plan to prepare tonight. Just in case, we plan to prepare thoroughly so that we can respond to anything that happens.”

“Is there no possibility of failure?”

“None. Haven't we been preparing for this day for 20 years? With Schyskeil's power added, it will surely proceed even more smoothly. Haven't we already completed the experiment?”

Aufschtig's retainers were hiding in the academy.

The faculty members were secretly aware of this, but under the pretext of protecting the heir attending the academy, even the faculty's protests could be ignored.

Thus, the fact that Carla was taken to the infirmary in a coma was already known. In other words, the efficacy of the medicine Contred had prepared had already been proven.

A drug that transfers the body and consciousness.

In other words, it meant that the tightly bound body and consciousness could be separated.

If Aufschtig's Magical Engineering was combined in that state… then from there, it might be possible to separate consciousness from the body and attach consciousness taken from somewhere else entirely.

‘A terrifying man.’

Contred thought as he looked at Dremalo.

Even Contred, who cherished his son Lucas, who only did foolish things, felt a slight sense of disgust towards Dremalo, who treated even his daughter as a vessel.

“Anyway, all the preparations are complete. So, now we just need to coordinate the timing.”

Contred smiled.

His smile was so chilling that Dremalo couldn't even manage an awkward smile.

\*

“Is this all your luggage?”

“I have everything at home. It's okay, I'm just going for a quick visit.”

Emil's luggage was very simple.

She said she was only staying overnight and coming back tomorrow, so she didn't need to bring anything because she already had everything she needed at home.

Liam was dying to follow Emil.

For some reason, he had a bad feeling, and he wanted to go with her and make sure Emil safely received the adjustment and returned to the academy with him.

“I wish I could go with you.”

“There's no need… my father might get nervous for no reason. Then I'll get tired.”

“We can't have Emil getting tired. Then I'll wait here quietly. What time are you planning to come back tomorrow?”

Liam was planning to pick Emil up when she returned.

That way, meeting up and coming back together would be a good thing.

“You're going to pick me up, aren't you? Don't, don't do that.”

“This isn't allowed, that isn't allowed. Why are there so many things that aren't allowed?”

“It can't be helped. I have to graduate from the academy safely, don't I?”

“Hmm, that's true.”

Liam was the only one who officially knew Emil's secret.

She had only revealed it to Liam, and had not revealed it to anyone else.

“And I'm not going to run away from my father anymore. If I keep running away from my father… there's no end to it.”

“Good, you've thought it through. Think of it as you have a backer.”

“There you go again.”

Emil chuckled and opened the carriage door.

Liam pushed the bag he was holding to Emil's feet and patted her knee.

“I'm not just saying it, Emil. If anything happens, we can go to my country together. The expiration date is a million years, so think about it.”

“Okay, I got it. I'll think about it when I graduate from the academy safely.”

Then I'll be back—Emil waved her hand.

Soon, even that figure disappeared as the carriage door closed.

Liam stood still, watching the carriage drive away.

He still had a bad feeling.

# 127 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (1)

Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (1)

As Emil gazed at the garden of the Aufstieg mansion, shrouded in twilight, a sudden sense of unease washed over her.

Though it was the mansion where she had been born and raised, it now felt strangely unfamiliar, as if she were a guest in someone else's home.

The scene inside the room retained the same appearance it had before she left for the academy, and in fact, it was even tidier than before, but that perfection only made her feel more uncomfortable.

‘It’s a strange feeling…’

Perhaps it was because she had tasted freedom at the academy.

Yet, even at the academy, she hadn’t been entirely free.

Until she confided in Liam, she had been a being harboring secrets.

But she had revealed that secret to Liam, and he had accepted her—thus, for a single day, she had been able to savor a freedom that barely lasted a day.

That might have been detrimental.

The fact that she now felt discomfort even in her own home.

‘What is Liam doing?’

She wondered if she should have brought him along. While she had a fleeting regret about it, Emil knew that such thoughts were nonsensical.

The purpose of her return home was to adjust her magical circuit.

To involve an outsider like Liam in such a procedure would have been something her father would never have allowed.

Even if she had brought Liam with her, her father would have sent him back without hesitation.

As she pondered this, Emil felt her chest tighten unconsciously.

“It’s always suffocating here.”

Emil muttered absentmindedly as she leaned against the window.

She missed the chaotic days at the academy.

The moment she opened the window in her frustration, the cool night air brushed against her face.

Just as she was about to enjoy a brief moment of tranquility, someone knocked on her door.

“Come in.”

The door opened, and a family servant appeared.

With an expressionless face, he spoke to Emil in a monotone voice.

“Miss, the head of the family is calling for you.”

“…I understand. I’ll be there shortly.”

As the servant bowed and stepped back, Emil let out a small sigh and gazed out the window.

She looked toward the direction of the academy, which was somewhere in that darkness, and thought of Liam.

— You should think you have a backing. I will be your backing.

Liam’s words somehow comforted her.

Rather than running away from her father, she felt it was time to confront him head-on.

A sense of unease, a foreboding feeling seemed to envelop her, but Emil tried her best to ignore it.

Due to the nature of the Aufstieg mansion, the corridors were inevitably long.

With its unique shape, neither high nor particularly wide, as Emil walked down the long corridor, she thought that the time had finally come.

Adjusting her magical circuit was something she needed to do.

With her current magical circuit, she couldn’t learn the summoning magic, so it was essential to make adjustments now to be able to learn it properly.

She didn’t know why her father had ruined her magical circuit like this, but since it was a necessary condition for summoning magic, she had quietly complied with that statement.

However, now that she was told she needed to adjust it again, she should have been happy, but Emil couldn’t feel any joy… why was that? With a heavy heart, Emil stood before her father’s office, took a deep breath, and knocked.

— Come in.

Receiving her father’s permission, Emil opened the door and stepped inside.

True to her father’s preference for dim candlelight over bright illumination, the shadows of the candles danced in the room, and Dremalo beckoned her from behind the desk in the center of the office.

“Come, come closer.”

“…Yes.”

“It’s time.”

“Yes.”

Time, time— it must be for the adjustment of the magical circuit.

Emil felt her fingers grow cold with tension.

“Follow me. Today, I have a special place prepared.”

Following her father’s lead, Emil walked slowly.

As Dremalo approached the stone wall behind the desk and inverted a book into the bookshelf, the previously solid stone wall slowly opened with a heavy sound, revealing a dark passage.

“Now, let’s go.”

Following Dremalo, Emil stepped into the passage.

She felt very uneasy, as if a foreboding sense was trying to stop her, but there was no real choice.

Thus, Emil walked reluctantly down the passage, following her father down the stairs into the stone chamber below.

“Ah…”

Finally reaching the bottom of the stone chamber, Emil unexpectedly encountered someone.

“Ah, it’s an honor to meet you, sir.”

“Indeed, it’s been a while. Emilia… no, are you using the name Emil now?”

Schyskeil.

Contred von Schyskeil was waiting for Emil at the bottom of the stone chamber.

He merely glanced at Emil as she arrived, not saying anything, but the unconscious aura of intimidation made her feel as if she were shrinking.

“Come here, Emil.”

Contred beckoned her with his hand.

In his hand was a small vial, and though she didn’t know what it contained, a transparent liquid sloshed inside.

“Drink this.”

Emil swallowed hard as the vial was thrust in front of her.

She wasn’t unaware of what it meant.

Schyskeil.

The Schyskeil family was known for their expertise in poison.

As much as they were skilled in poison, they were also adept in medicine, so it was generally known that way, but she also knew that the Schyskeil’s true profession was poison, not medicine. Given that, the unidentified potion being offered to her…

“Hurry and drink, Emil. It’s a medicine that will reduce pain during the circuit adjustment.”

She heard her father’s voice from behind.

With that insistence, Emil couldn’t refuse the potion, so reluctantly, she accepted the vial.

The sloshing transparent liquid—

What was this unsettling feeling?

Emil cautiously opened the vial’s cap.

There was no particular smell, but that didn’t mean the sense of foreboding disappeared.

‘Liam…’

Why was it?

As she prepared to drink the potion, Liam’s image came to mind.

Three days passed since then.

Saturday passed, Sunday passed, and Monday.

Monday, at the academy.

Only three people were present at the academy.

Carla,

Ivan,

Liam.

Regina was currently detained for a mental evaluation, and Emil was absent.

“Emil is absent? That’s strange. And Carla, how are you doing?”

Carla looked somewhat pale, but she appeared much better than before.

She awkwardly smiled at Albina, saying she was fine.

“By the way, Emil is absent… Liam, do you know anything?”

At Albina’s question, Liam shook his head.

“She left early on Saturday to go home. But she hasn’t returned yet. So I was about to ask the instructor if there had been any contact from Emil.”

“Really? I haven’t received any contact either.”

It was indeed strange.

Emil usually attended classes at the academy regularly, and she wouldn’t skip unless there was an unavoidable circumstance or an issue with the academy itself. But now she was absent—moreover, without even contacting Liam.

‘That’s odd. She said she was going home, so there shouldn’t be anything wrong.’

But that was where the problem lay.

Liam didn’t have a very good impression of Aufstieg, which had connections with his family.

To put it bluntly, it felt somewhat sinister or gloomy…

Because of such people, Liam also felt a bit uneasy about Aufstieg.

‘I can’t go check myself.’

“Liam.”

Liam turned at the sound of Ivan calling him from the side.

Ivan, wearing a rather serious expression, asked Liam.

“Did Emil say she was going home?”

“She did.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely. I even tried to persuade her not to go.”

“You tried to persuade her? Why?”

Ivan didn’t know that Emil was a girl.

Thus, thinking he couldn’t explain in detail, Liam came up with a suitable excuse.

“I just felt uneasy. I thought it wouldn’t be right to let her go like that.”

“I see…”

Ivan felt something strange as well.

Venere, and Aufstieg, along with Schyskeil.

These three individuals gathering together meant that Ivan was already aware of the possibility of some scheme.

Thus, the fact that Emil, who had returned to Aufstieg, hadn’t come back indicated that something might have happened.

“By the way, Ivan.”

“Yeah?”

“What happened to Carla’s arm?”

That was a fact.

This morning on the way to school, Carla had gathered quite a bit of attention from other students.

The daughter of Cascata, whose one arm had exploded.

Then, the daughter of Cascata, who had regained her arm.

And now, one of her arms had disappeared again.

It was impossible not to stand out, but—if there was any consolation, it was that Carla’s expression hadn’t changed much.

“You’re oddly calm.”

“It’s the second time, you idiot.”

As Carla, who had been listening, snapped back, Liam couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Seeing you still have that temper, it seems you’ve gotten used to being without an arm, Carla.”

“Stop joking around.”

As the conversation flowed back and forth between Carla and Liam, Ivan was engulfed in a strange feeling.

He couldn’t shake the feeling that those individuals were up to something again.

# 128 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (2)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (2)

The academy's early morning after a heavy downpour.

Ivan, having covered the soundly sleeping Carla with a blanket, quietly left the dormitory.

It was so early that even students exercising near the dormitory were hard to find.

Even so, Ivan moved as quietly as possible.

He was heading towards the entrance of the East Building.

There, he was scheduled to meet someone.

When Ivan reached the entrance of the East Building, he noticed that someone was already there.

But it was the person he was supposed to meet, and judging by the way they were sprawled out on the ground, they seemed to have stayed up all night.

"Liam."

"...You've come."

The large Liam was easily recognizable even from behind.

As Ivan approached, Liam got up, dusted the dirt off his backside, and sighed.

"He hasn't returned yet, I see."

"...Yeah. I even went to the carriage stop just in case. Emil didn't return even by the time the carriages stopped running."

"I see."

"What about you?"

"It seems like I haven't received any separate contact. I mean... like a message from Aufstieg, or something like that."

Silence fell.

The two were lost in their own thoughts.

Emil hasn't returned.

He hasn't returned since leaving on Saturday morning.

Liam had been waiting here and at the carriage stop all night, and Ivan had also been checking the faculty office and other places, hoping for any contact, but there was nothing.

"When Emil left on Saturday,"

At Ivan's words, Liam's eyes turned to him.

With a look urging him to speak, Ivan opened his mouth again.

"Can you tell me what it was like?"

"...He looked uneasy. Like he really didn't want to go. It seemed like he was being dragged against his will."

At those words, Ivan's eyes narrowed.

Uneasy, didn't want to go... then Emil might have known that something would happen if he returned to Aufstieg this time.

"Magical Circuit adjustment shouldn't take this long, and it's not like it's that much of a problem for Emil."

"That's true. That's why it's strange. It was like he was being forced to go. Even though it was his father's order, it was like he really didn't want to go but was being dragged along..."

"This is difficult. Hmm. Okay, I understand. Later this afternoon, let's think of some more ways and talk again."

"Ivan."

"Yeah?"

It was almost time for Carla to wake up.

Liam's heavy voice stopped Ivan, who was hurrying back to the dormitory.

"...Emil is going to be okay, right?"

Ivan stared at Liam.

It felt strange to Ivan to see Liam, who was always smiling and full of confidence, so shrunken now.

"Of course. Don't worry, Liam."

Ivan forced a smile and patted Liam's arm.

He must be very worried—Ivan could understand.

"Go inside and rest for now, Liam. Let's talk again later in the day."

"...I don't know if I can rest. I should have stopped Emil back then, or gone with him."

If what I'm thinking is right, even if you had gone with him, it wouldn't have made much of a difference... Ivan wanted to say that, but he didn't bother to say it out loud.

There was no need.

\*

"I'm going to talk to Liam for a bit."

"Is it about Emil?"

"Yeah."

"...I think it would be better if I went with you, but..."

Carla looked down at her left arm.

A stump, now only a trace of what it once was.

She wasn't as mentally broken as she had been at first, but the place where her arm, which had been perfectly fine, had disappeared was surprisingly large, and her confidence had been greatly diminished in unseen ways.

"...I'll be back soon. Rest a bit. Your physical recovery is the priority."

"Okay. Be careful."

Ivan left the dormitory, seeing Carla off.

It was the tail end of lunchtime.

Among the students who had finished their meals and were chatting, Ivan found the vacant lot behind the dormitory building and easily found Liam sitting there looking pale and dazed.

"Liam. Have you eaten?"

"...I can't get anything down. It feels like I'm chewing on a lump of sand."

"Tsk. Well..."

"Carla didn't come with you, I see."

"Yeah. Carla still needs rest."

There was determination in Ivan's voice.

It was also filled with affection for Carla.

"Considering what we're about to do, we should especially keep it a secret from Carla."

"That's true."

Liam let out a long sigh for a moment.

Then he blinked a few times, and then his eyes became sharp and fierce like a butcher's again.

"I know your plan to sneak into the mansion, Ivan. But the Aufstieg mansion is large."

"Because it's large, there are many loopholes."

"Every loophole will be guarded by cats."

"We have to save Emil."

"Cats, we can just beat those bastards to death."

Ivan chuckled.

What is it about Emil that makes Liam so desperately try to save him?

"So, do you know the infiltration route?"

"I know it. Roughly."

Ivan recalled the place where he had fought Venere.

It wasn't far from the Aufstieg mansion, and it was secluded and isolated.

Seeing Venere appear, it would be reasonable to assume that there was a passage somewhere there.

"I know a place. If we go there, there's definitely a way to sneak in."

"It'll be dangerous."

"We have to save Emil."

"A man doesn't care about danger."

"Yeah. We don't have any other options."

Conversely, Ivan didn't need to participate in this dangerous plan.

He had a bad relationship with Venere, and Aufstieg and Schyskeil were up to something dirty, but even so, that fact had already been reported to Lorenzo and Albina.

Since the report had been sent to the imperial family, all that was left was to wait for it to be resolved.

But Ivan couldn't just wait.

Carla was collapsing moment by moment.

She tried not to show it to Ivan, but Ivan could see Carla collapsing all too well.

The way she tried to endure the pain, that sight...

It was also approaching Ivan as pain.

"Yeah, we have no choice... I'll go with you, Ivan."

"Okay."

"I sent Emil. He didn't want to go so much... I should have just stopped him from going. If I had, Emil wouldn't have ended up like this..."

"Don't blame yourself, Liam. It's not your fault. There's no guarantee that Emil has been harmed."

"...Yeah."

Ivan looked at Liam's determined expression.

A man's eyes, a man's expression—

Something far removed from the will to simply save a colleague from the academy, something, something...

"...Is Emil a woman?"

Liam's face stiffened at Ivan's question.

"No."

"You're a really bad actor."

"No."

"Okay. Anyway, we're leaving at midnight tonight. Come out to the back gate of the academy. Pack as lightly as possible."

"Okay, I understand. I will."

\*

Ivan deliberately exhausted Carla before noon and put her to sleep. He changed into clothes that were comfortable for moving around and left the dormitory. Before leaving, he left a kiss on the sleeping Carla's forehead and said goodbye.

Could he return before she woke up? Probably not. Ivan left a note saying that he was going to save Emil and left the dormitory.

Emergency medicine, rope, and a few daggers and catalyst stones.

Ivan slung the luggage he had packed as lightly as possible and headed for the back gate of the academy, where he soon met Liam.

"You're here early, Liam."

"You're late."

"Whatever, let's go quickly."

The two opened the small door at the back gate and left the academy.

Unlike the inside of the academy, where there were lights on for night patrols, it was completely dark outside the back gate.

Only the moonlight shining through the clouds illuminated the path they were running on, and there was nothing else but darkness.

"I couldn't get a carriage. We have to move on foot."

"No problem."

In the darkness, they enhanced their bodies with Magical Power and ran like arrows.

They were already familiar with the road, and they had sharpened their eyesight as much as possible, so there was nothing to hinder them.

As they ran, they occasionally stopped to quench their thirst with water and continued to run.

"Ivan."

"Yeah?"

"Were you always this reckless?"

"Me?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I don't know. Let's just say it's because it doesn't feel like someone else's problem."

"It must be because of Carla. Is Carla involved in this?"

"Let's just say that's true too."

"What's involved?"

Ivan took another sip of water.

When he tried to speak, he couldn't organize his thoughts on how to say it.

"...There's nothing certain. Except that Aufstieg is doing something shady. And that Carla is involved in it... is also true. So, this isn't purely about saving Emil. It's also about saving Carla."

"I see."

Liam lowered his eyes at those words.

"We only have a little further to go. If we go further, we'll reach the vacant lot I mentioned. We have to find our way in from there."

"...Okay."

"From now on... it might be a matter of risking our lives. Liam, are you prepared enough?"

"If necessary."

Liam stroked the Flame Greatsword he was carrying on his back.

Stroking the greatsword, Liam moved his tightly closed lips.

"I'm ready to draw my sword. I won't treat those who try to harm Emil as human beings."

Ivan and Liam made eye contact and nodded.

The determination within them—it was flashing even in this deep darkness.

Author's Note

I've been under so much stress lately...

# 129 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (3)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (3)

The mud on their feet grew heavier and heavier.

As they approached the clearing, the thick fog persisted, gradually draining their stamina due to the limited visibility. The fog, so dense that it obscured their vision, forced them to rely on sound, and the combination of heavy humidity and damp wind further hindered their progress.

"It's around here."

Ivan whispered in a low voice.

His voice, already heavy, sank even deeper in the thick fog.

The two stopped and looked around.

Ivan tried to recall his memory, but with his vision so impaired, it was difficult to be sure if he had come to the right place. He had to rely solely on his senses—his keen intuition.

In his memory, it was definitely around here. Ivan stopped relying on his sight and inhaled deeply. He retracted his widely spread senses and focused them with maximum density.

He meticulously searched for any artificial traces that were even slightly distorted or flawed, rather than the Magical Power radiating naturally. If there was even a small gap, he had to start from there.

Finding a gap while conserving stamina was a grueling process. Ivan and Liam moved slowly, forcibly continuing their search, which felt as if it was being interfered with.

'…There.'

Ivan approached a broken, withered tree that he saw in front of him. He reached out to the base of the tree, which was covered in moss, thinking it might be one of the withered trees that had been broken during his desperate fight with Venere a few days ago.

At that moment, he felt a faint Magical Power connecting through his fingertips.

Click, a small reaction of Magical Power.

"Stop."

Liam stood behind him, remaining vigilant and scanning the surroundings as Ivan spoke while touching the base of the withered tree.

In this forest where even the sound of the wind had died, their breaths were heavy and sharp.

Above the tense atmosphere of the forest, only the shallow breaths of the two men could be heard.

— Creeeeak…

Ivan gestured.

Quietly, quietly…

As Liam watched, the ground heaved and cracked open as Ivan touched something.

A dark, shadowy slope appeared, and then a hidden stone staircase came into view.

The slope, camouflaged with vines, had traces of someone having passed through it, clearly showing signs of someone's passage.

"Is this it?"

"For now."

"Is this the rat hole the Aufstieg use to hide?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure. But… this is the most likely place."

Venere must have appeared through here…

Ivan couldn't help but think so.

"A cat might be waiting at the end of it."

"We have no other choice."

"Liam, are you ready?"

"I hate cats. I'll kill it in one blow."

With Liam's spirited reply, Ivan stepped onto the stairs first.

Liam, holding the Flame Greatsword, followed him down the stairs.

Ivan floated a Magic Sphere to push back the darkness.

The faint, dawn-like blue light cast strange shadows on the stone walls.

As they descended the steep stairs, the air grew colder and more sensitive.

The air, which had been full of moisture, became dry, and a burnt smell was mixed in it.

The long staircase led to a narrow stone chamber.

And inside, the lingering traces of ominous Magical Power flickered like water stains on the walls.

Along with traces of someone having collided with something.

"A armory…?"

Liam muttered as he looked around.

Fastening devices were densely hung on the wall, and rusted weapons were scattered below.

Traces of corrosion on what appeared to be steel chains, and old bloodstains painted on the walls.

These traces suggested that soldiers once lived here.

Fragments of spears, corroded scabbards…

And in the middle of it all, someone was lying collapsed.

"Calm down, Liam. It's not Emil."

It might be the first time Liam had seen something like this, but Ivan had seen it many times.

It had a human form but was not human, just like what he had seen in Abjeti Cave. It was an Artificial body.

Ivan approached it, knelt down, and examined the surface of the Artificial body.

He wondered if it might be a person, but when he saw the dust that had settled on the fallen body, it seemed that it had been lying here for quite some time. But if it hadn't rotted during that time, it couldn't be a corpse.

"What the hell is this?"

Liam asked Ivan.

Liam was probably a little flustered because it was his first time seeing something like this.

Humanoid arms and legs.

It looked like a human, but it was actually like a manufactured doll.

And even the faint mark imprinted on the chest of the doll.

“…It’s similar to what made Carla’s arm.”

"It looks just like a person."

"Anyway, this makes it certain."

"What?"

"That the Aufstieg are doing something shady."

Liam's eyes were full of questions, but Ivan didn't explain in detail.

There was no need to talk about Abjeti Cave or Artificial bodies now.

There was something more urgent.

Ivan groped along the wall, looking for a door that might be there.

There must be a door that someone had used to come and go in a place like this, and he had to find it.

"Let's go in this way."

Liam slowly pushed open a rusty iron door.

The door opened without much noise and greeted them with complete darkness. As they entered, glass cylinders that seemed to reach the ceiling were lined up along the walls.

"What the hell are these… Ivan, do you know what these are?"

Ivan nodded silently.

Those with human forms, submerged in translucent liquid and closing their eyes in a state of suspended animation.

The Artificial bodies he had seen in Abjeti Cave were sleeping here in droves.

They looked alive, yet they seemed dead.

On the large workbench in the middle, there were equipment and tools scattered around for adjusting something.

"I'd appreciate it if you could explain it to me in detail later, Ivan."

"I will. Don't worry, I'll do it even if you don't ask."

Ivan let out a long sigh as he talked to Liam.

He didn't know what was going on.

Ivan quietly walked towards the workbench.

There was a device about the size of a small teacup, and something similar to a metal plate was deeply inserted into it.

"Liam, look at this."

The name engraved on the metal plate.

Liam quickly ran over and looked at it, then pursed his lips and glared.

"Emil… Emilia, Emilia von Aufstieg…"

Liam gasped.

Emil's name was engraved on the terminal device.

Next to it, Magic Circuit Diagrams and various records were scattered in disarray.

Emil was not visible right now.

But the fact that there was a metal plate with Emil's name engraved on it meant that someone had done something to Emil here.

"Dremalo… what the hell is that bastard doing to his own daughter…"

Liam's eyes were burning with anger.

Liam was now revealing with his own mouth that Emil was not his son but his daughter, but Liam was so consumed by great anger that he was not even aware of that fact.

"Liam, don't…"

Ivan tried to stop Liam, who was reaching out to pick up the metal plate.

But his voice was too late, and Liam's hand pulled out the metal plate.

— Beeeeeeep…!

It wasn't a particularly loud sound.

But it was a sharp wave that anyone with Magical Power would not miss, and it echoed throughout the entire place.

Ivan immediately drew up his Magical Power and said to Liam.

"We've been discovered, Liam! Get ready!"

Liam took the metal plate he had pulled out and tucked it into his belt, then drew his Flame Greatsword again.

"I'm always ready, you non-human things. I'll kill you all."

The stone lamps on all sides lit up at the same time.

Then they turned off again and again, and unnatural, creaking sounds, as if stone joints were moving, echoed.

— Rumble…

The walls on all sides opened as if collapsing, and people appeared from within.

"They're not people, Liam. Those are called Artificial bodies."

"Would it change anything even if they were people?"

The Artificial bodies' eyes were glowing red.

Not only did they look like people, but their movements were also as natural as people, and the hands holding metal weapons were clearly aiming for Ivan and Liam.

Ivan drew up his Magical Power and stirred up Dust Storm.

A familiar and well-known battle would take place.

"For Carla and Emil, we have to go all the way."

"Of course."

With a shout, Liam charged towards one of the Artificial bodies.

It was large, but its movements were unusually fast, and the Greatsword, which drew a trail of flames and stirred up a whirlwind, flew towards one of the Artificial bodies.

— Whoosh!

The Greatsword drew a trajectory, and one of the Artificial body's arms soared into the sky.

"It doesn't seem like much."

Liam smiled.

Just as he was swinging his Greatsword again and rushing towards another Artificial body, Ivan was fighting two other Artificial bodies at the same time. While compressing the wind he had stirred up to make one a solid lump of flesh, he was tearing the other apart with a violently swirling vortex.

"Liam, behind you!"

Liam immediately rolled forward when Ivan shouted. A rusty greatsword that flew from behind grazed the spot where Liam's neck had been. He rolled and rolled several times to create distance, then jumped up and rekindled the flames on his Greatsword.

"You're persistent!"

Liam slammed the head of the Artificial body with the handle of the Greatsword. With a thud, like an apple bursting, the Artificial body that had lost its head staggered and collapsed.

"Was this a barracks, not a armory?"

As Ivan said, Artificial bodies were appearing one after another from beyond the collapsed stone wall. They all looked like Venere, which was creepy, but that wasn't really a problem.

There was no way to make up for the lack of practical experience. Seeing an Artificial body flying towards Ivan's back, Liam chose to throw himself rather than shout.

"Liam!"

Blood flowed down between the two daggers stuck in his left shoulder. There were still too many Artificial bodies to count surrounding them, but Liam did not back down, gripping his Greatsword.

“…Ivan, can you find the way?”

"Yes, it's that way."

The opposite side from where the Artificial bodies were gathering.

A place where they could break through those Artificial bodies.

“…I see. Ivan, close your eyes for a moment.”

Liam took a deep breath and then unleashed an explosive flash.

An explosive light that was so bright that even the Artificial bodies and Ivan lost their sight for a moment.

In that light, Liam grabbed Ivan and ran through the Artificial bodies.

Liam ran towards the place Ivan had said, the exit from here.

"Okay, Ivan, you go."

Liam put Ivan down in front of the door and gripped his Greatsword again.

"Liam, we have to go together!"

"No, I have to deal with those things. Otherwise, we'll be crushed from the front and back."

That was also true.

If they only ran away, they would inevitably be surrounded from the front and back someday.

"Leave it to me here, Ivan, you go first."

"Liam…!"

"Hoo…"

Liam pulled out the two daggers stuck in his shoulder and threw them away, smiling as if to say he was okay.

"Go, friend. Leave my back to me. Please find Emil. I'm counting on you."

"Liam…"

"The blindness effect is over now. Now, go!"

Liam shouted and turned around, gripping his Greatsword.

The Artificial bodies, who had now regained their sight, were rushing in like a tide.

"Go quickly, Ivan! Find Emil! I'll definitely go too!"

Liam shouted.

Author's Note

All the characters in this work are adults, yes...

# 130 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (4)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (4)

Ivan's steps were growing slower.

It wasn't a matter of stamina, but an indescribable discomfort caused by the dissonance of Magical Power, which was grabbing at his ankles and refusing to let go.

But he had no choice but to keep walking.

As he walked through the passage that cut across the basement of the von Aufstieg mansion, he knew very well that he had already lost the option of turning back. Liam had cleared the path, hadn't he? It wasn't as if he couldn't sweep everything away if he really wanted to, but right now, the matter concerning Emil was a higher priority.

The passage continued to narrow, little by little.

The flow of Magical Power along the walls was becoming increasingly unstable.

Opening several bulkheads and crossing the long, winding corridor, Ivan felt that he was gradually heading deeper underground.

And perhaps this was a trap to lure him in.

When he groped the wall with his palm, the vibration transmitted to his fingertips was stronger than he had expected.

The walls of the passage were densely covered with unknown diagrams, and countless mysterious codes and symbols of unknown formulas were embroidered on them, creating an ominous feeling.

A faint blue light seeping from the walls, without any lamps, illuminated his path.

In that unsettling, flickering light, Ivan was finally able to come to a conclusion.

'This is a trap.'

What had happened to Regina.

And what might be happening to Emil.

Ivan was able to conclude that these things were definitely related to the von Aufstieg family.

As he moved forward, the symbols drawn on the walls continued to become more complex.

However, the patterns of the symbols were pointing in one direction, and finally Ivan was able to reach the end of this long corridor.

A staircase spiraling downwards.

A staircase so dark that he couldn't tell where it ended.

A staircase that seemed to provoke him to come down, endlessly turning and turning.

"...I'll go."

Ivan didn't hesitate.

He stepped towards the stairs without hesitation, and went down, making a clear, staccato sound with his footsteps as if to show that he was moving.

Doggadoggak, Ivan went down, his footsteps echoing continuously.

After going down and down the seemingly endless stairs for a long time, Ivan was able to find the iron door standing before him.

'I think it's here.'

That was the feeling he had.

The Magical Power wavelength flowing from within was familiar.

Perhaps, maybe—

"...Emil, wait for me."

Having come this far, there was no turning back.

Ivan raised his hand, summoned a Lightning Bolt, and fired it at the iron door with all his might.

* Pazzzzzit!

With the sound of lightning, the iron door melted.

Leaving behind the molten iron flowing down like red-hot metal, the place that slowly revealed itself—

It was a wide-open space.

A wide-open space.

As Ivan squinted for a moment at the bright light that suddenly enveloped him, a voice flew in.

"You've come. A little later than I expected."

He heard a familiar voice.

It was familiar, but not a voice he particularly wanted to hear.

As his eyes adjusted to the light, Ivan immediately glared at the source of the voice.

There were three figures around a round table in the center.

"I thought I'd be waiting forever. But I'm glad you moved exactly as we expected."

It was Dremalo.

He was sitting comfortably, drinking whiskey, with Venere to his left, and Contrado to his left, drinking whiskey without saying a word.

None of them seemed surprised by Ivan's appearance.

"Welcome, Ivan. Or should I say, Ivan Contadino?"

Dremalo smiled and raised his hand, beckoning.

"It seems your friend couldn't make it. That's a shame."

Ivan glared at Dremalo without a word.

Lightning was already crackling in both of his hands, and he was fully prepared to rush in and unleash Magic at any moment.

"Calm down, Ivan. Violence isn't really necessary. We're Mages, not barbarians."

"Magic? That's a joke. What about them looks like Magic?"

Ivan gritted his teeth and barely managed to speak.

His words were sharp and cutting.

The Mages in his memory were not like this.

They were dignified under the sun, and steadfast even on the battlefield.

Those who annihilated the enemy and defended the country were Mages, and these guys who gathered in such a gloomy place to plot conspiracies could not be called Mages.

"Where's Emil?"

Dremalo scoffed and said.

"Emil, Emil... She can't use the name Emil anymore."

"What...?"

Ivan didn't understand what Dremalo was saying.

She can't use the name Emil anymore, what does that mean?

"To be precise, it means her name has changed now. It means she's not Emil anymore."

"What the hell..."

Suddenly, something caught Ivan's eye.

"It took some time to empty it out, but..."

Ivan's eyes widened.

It was only then that Ivan noticed the huge glass tube that was slowly appearing behind Dremalo.

Emil was there.

Emil, who wasn't wearing any clothes, was in that glass tube.

Submerged in a liquid of some kind, Emil had her hands together, her eyes closed—submerged in that liquid.

"...What have you done to Emil?"

"Just a little processing. The time has come for her to be used where she's needed."

As Ivan looked at the scene, he was reminded of the face of his father, who had died at his hands.

A father who didn't treat his children like children, and who beat his mother and sister like dogs every day.

The father who urged his sister, who was barely ten years old, to go out and sell her body if she didn't have money, and the day Ivan finally couldn't stand it and killed him himself.

"...She's your child, Dremalo. She's your daughter."

"Daughter? That's not why I had her. In the first place, Emil, no, Emilia was born for the revival of our von Aufstieg family."

"What... What nonsense."

A pale light enveloped her entire body.

Skin covered with unknown forms of engravings, hair that had turned grayish-white...

Emil, floating in the sphere, was no longer the Emil that Ivan knew.

"Isn't it strange, Ivan? Think about it."

Dremalo said as he approached Ivan.

"Magic is rare. To humans, Magic is an infinite power. Depending on how it's handled, it can become a powerful force, or a terrifying weapon that can overturn the world. But humans are just using Magic for petty wars. Just look at our empire now. Days of meaningless wars of conquest."

"What are you trying to say?"

"It's simple. We need the power of God. A power like God! If we had that, wouldn't it be more peaceful?"

The von Aufstieg family's Family Magic is Summoning Magic.

Magic that summons a god—Magic that takes a long time to prepare, as well as offerings.

"Even if we summon a god, there's no guarantee that they'll listen to our human petitions. That's why we decided to create a god. What do you think of our idea?"

"I can only say you're crazy."

Ivan's scoff cut off Dremalo's words.

"Create a god? That's not something humans can dare to do."

"Oh, do you think it's impossible? That's unexpected. Remember your past life. Wasn't Magic about making the impossible possible? Look, Emil was perfect. She was an ideal vessel."

A metal ring engraved on the side of the glass tube caught Ivan's eye.

The words 'Aether Vessel' were engraved on it.

"Emil's Magical Circuit had excellent flexibility and sensitivity, in every way. After all, she was designed for this Magic from the beginning."

"You did that to your own child..."

Lightning flared more violently in Ivan's hand.

Dremalo just smiled.

"The empire is old. It's senile. Ivan, just like your empire was destroyed, it's time for a nation ruled by Magic to be established."

Dremalo opened his mouth.

His voice was mixed with ridicule and mockery.

"It took some time to empty it out... But now it's clean. Now it's the end. The preparation is completely finished."

Ivan turned to Contrado.

He was still spinning his whiskey glass around and around without saying a word.

He didn't try to look at Ivan.

He would try to make eye contact, but then avoid Ivan's gaze.

"...Was the drug that made Regina like that also made by you?"

No answer came back.

That was clearly a silent affirmation.

Ivan clenched his fist tightly.

"Is what you've done to your child something a person should do!"

His cry echoed throughout the open space, but Dremalo just laughed.

"We needed power. You wouldn't know. What sacrifices are needed at the edge of this world. Sacrifices for creation are inevitable. Even if it's my own child. For the glory of the parents, wouldn't the child be happy to sacrifice themselves?"

He couldn't stand it anymore.

Ivan ran to the glass tube.

No one stopped him... Or perhaps, they didn't stop him.

When he placed his hand on the round glass tube, he felt a cold sensation.

Emil inside was so still.

It was as if she had fallen into an eternal sleep.

"Emil... Let's go, Liam is waiting for you."

Ivan shouted.

But Emil didn't budge.

As Ivan tried to release the seal on the glass tube with Magical Power, Dremalo shouted.

"You can't release the Magic!"

However, at the same time, cracks began to appear on the surface of the glass tube.

When Ivan's Magical Power touched it, the engravings on Emil's body began to glow red.

"Look, it's breaking."

Venere giggled and laughed.

"Destroy it, now."

Taking those words as mockery, Ivan pushed in even more Magical Power.

Pushing in, pushing in... Ivan continued to summon Magical Power.

As the cracks in the glass tube grew larger, the liquid inside began to leak out slightly.

At the same time, Emil's eyelids twitched slightly.

* Cheonggeurang!

The glass tube shattered completely, and the liquid inside poured out.

As Emil's body fell limply to the floor, Ivan tried to reach out and catch her.

However—Emil moved first.

Slowly, but with mechanical movements, Emil stood up.

And slowly opened her eyes.

A cold gaze.

That gaze was not the gaze of the Emil that Ivan knew.

Empty eyes that seemed truly empty, with almost no trace of self left.

Empty eyes, like a machine.

'Something, something's wrong...'

It was then that Ivan was about to let go of her hand.

Emil's mouth, which had been looking at Ivan, slowly opened—

"...Aether Vessel...Absorption, start..."

Emil's voice was hollow, like an echo.

A voice without emotion or intonation.

At the same time, Emil's hand grabbed Ivan's neck tightly.

With that hand, Ivan's Magical Power began to be sucked in endlessly.

The author's words (author's afterword)

My reserves are running low!

This is a disaster!

# 131 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (5)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (5)

Ivan felt the Magical Power being sucked out of his body like a waterfall.

It was so fierce that it felt like his life force, not just Magical Power, was being drained.

The more that happened, the redder Emil's eyes became, and the stronger her grip grew.

And in proportion to that, Ivan's body was losing strength.

"Emil, E...mil...!"

Barely managing to open his mouth, Ivan called Emil's name and grabbed her wrist with his still-free right hand.

But her strength continued to increase, and Ivan, conversely, was losing his.

"Finally, finally that power is coming to me...!"

The voice that came from Emil's mouth was not Emil's own.

It was filled with an awkwardness, as if someone was imitating Emil's voice.

"Good, the control is perfect. Success! The Vessel is properly containing the power!"

Dremalo shouted with a voice full of joy.

As if a child had gotten a new toy, Dremalo was looking at Emil.

Ivan's body was gradually losing strength.

As Magical Power was being sucked out, his physical strength, which had been corrected and enhanced, was also weakening.

'If I don't stop this here...!'

Liam,

and Carla.

This might happen to them too.

The mere thought of that made his anger surge.

If he didn't stop Emil here, if he didn't somehow bring her back to her senses.

"Emil, get a grip...! I came to take you away...!"

At Ivan's words, Emil's eyelids twitched for a moment.

Her red eyes wavered for an instant, and at that moment, the strength of her grip seemed to loosen slightly.

"What? Wasn't her ego supposed to be completely erased?"

Venere looked back at Dremalo with surprised eyes.

But Dremalo himself looked unconcerned.

"No need to worry. It's just that some residual memories remain. Soon it will be completely emptied and filled with new power."

Dremalo was carefree.

As if he was convinced that everything was going according to his plan, he had a smile on his face.

As if he was enjoying this spectacle.

"Emil, Emil...! It's Ivan, I'm Ivan...! Liam came to take you away too...!"

At those words, Emil's eyes wavered once more.

But that was only for a moment, and Emil's eyes cooled down and gleamed with a red light.

"Aether Vessel...detected. Foreign substance...elimination."

A voice as empty as an echo returning.

A hollow voice that felt like it had no will of its own.

"Damn it...!"

She definitely reacted to Liam's name.

One more time, Liam's name...!

It was then.

* Thump!

A loud noise rang out.

As if something was pounding from outside.

* Thump!

It echoed once more.

* Bang!

The laboratory door burst open with a deafening roar.

As dust billowed up, a bear-like, gigantic shadow appeared.

"Wh, who is it!"

Dremalo shouted and turned around.

As the swirling dust cloud subsided, the one who revealed himself there wasㅡ

"Li, Liam!""

It was Liam.

Liam's appearance was miserable.

The clothes, soaked in bright red blood and glistening, were probably his blood.

As if he had suffered many injuries, scars were exposed under the torn clothes in places.

"Liam!"

Liam was breathing heavily.

He was clearly not in a normal state, but his greatsword was still emitting a crimson flame.

"...Why is Emil there, Ivan? You have to save Emil. Huh?"

Liam coughed violently in the middle of speaking.

"Hah, that bear-like bastard. How did he survive? I deployed enough Artificial bodies."

Venere approached Liam.

But Liam was not looking at Venere.

Rather, he approached Venere, who was approaching him, grabbed her shoulder, and pushed her aside.

"I came to take Emil. I'm not interested in you...and, Elder Dremalo. I will still call you Elder for now. Please return Emil."

"Don't be ridiculous, Liam."

Dremalo had a sneering expression on his face.

Liam was barely able to stand, half a corpse.

"I commend you for your courage to come this far. So go back. Pretend you didn't see anything that happened here. Then, even if I look at you..."

"Didn't I say I came to take Emil?"

Liam let out a long sigh again.

He firmly gripped the greatsword with crimson flames flickering, and he shouted, "Hup!"

"Emil. The promise I made to you is still valid...I will be your backing. I will take you away. I will..."

Hoo...

After taking a long breath, Liam shook his head.

Then he glared.

His gaze was definitely directed at Emil.

"I, I will save you."

With a thud, Liam kicked off the ground and charged.

Crimson flames bloomed like flowers along the trajectory of his charge.

Emil was also directing her red gaze towards Liam.

"Liam! It's dangerous!"

Ivan shouted, with his neck grabbed by Emil's hand.

However, Liam was rushing straight towards Emil, and Dremalo also shouted.

"Aether Vessel! It's an order! Kill that bear-like bastard!"

Dremalo gestured.

Intense Magical Power, which was originally Ivan's, exploded from Emil's body.

Mana bullets rose powerfully from behind her.

If Emil just gestured, those Mana bullets would mercilessly fly and strike Liam.

"Emiiiiiil!"

Liam's massive body rushed towards Emil.

The number of Mana bullets was smaller than what Emil originally handled, but their size was several times larger, so each one would be much more powerful.

"Aether Vessel...intruder, eliminate..."

Emil's hollow voice echoed.

The warheads of the Mana bullets were aimed at Liam in turn, and now, if Emil's activation phrase was uttered, they would fly towards Liam.

"Emil! Stop it, it's Liam!"

Ivan shouted loudly.

Where on earth was this tremendous power coming from?

Or, conversely, was Ivan's power weakening?

It was impossible to know for sure.

But what was certain was that Emil's power was overwhelming compared to Ivan's now.

Ivan had weakened as much as the Magical Power that had already been sucked out, and Emil had become stronger.

* Clang!

The greatsword rolled on the floor.

Then Liam ran to Emil andㅡ

He hugged her with all his might.

"Emil. Get a grip...!"

Liam's massive arms embraced Emil.

From his rough breath came a strong smell of blood that even Ivan could feel.

It felt like his heart was beating so hard that it was transmitted to Emil's body.

A pounding heart.

Rough breathing.

A whole body embraced by his whole body.

"You are...not that name. You are, Emil...Emilia, you're Emilia...!"

Even with Liam's desperate voice, Emil's eyes were still shining red.

Her fingers, which had shrunk for a moment, began to spread out little by little.

Then, the Mana bullets, which had been scattered for a moment, straightened their heads again towards Liam.

"Aether Vessel! Stop it and kill that bastard..."

"Don't call her by that name!"

Liam shouted roughly.

As a result, blood flowed down the corner of his mouth.

"Emilia...this kid's name is Emilia...! Don't you even know your daughter's name!"

"Who's a daughter! She's just a Vessel! Aether Vessel, kill that bastard!"

At Dremalo's shout, Emil straightened her fingers again.

The Mana bullets wavered and then repeated the process of re-aiming at Liam, as if waiting for Emil's instructions.

"Intruder...eliminate..."

With Emil's low voice, her right hand was raised.

The Mana bullets, which had been full of anger and raising their momentum, disappeared all at once, and then they became Magical Power again and seeped into her right hand.

"Emilia...! Remember, who I am, who you are...! It wasn't those damn bastards who were by your side...! It's me, Liam...! Remember...!"

Liam barely managed to continue speaking.

At that desperate voice, Emil's eyelids twitched slightly.

The red glow that had been burning seemed to fade for a moment.

"Eiiit...! Damn it, Aether Vessel! Listen to me!"

At that moment, Dremalo's Magical Power flowed into Emil.

With his fingers stretched out towards Emil, Dremalo screamed.

Emil's body stiffened.

"A, Aether...Aether Vessel...intruder, eliminate...order..."

Liam was still hugging Emil.

He didn't try to escape.

Rather, he put more strength into the hand that was hugging Emil, and shouted even louder.

"I don't care what you look like...! Emil, no matter what you look like, no matter what you look like, even if you're not human...! If you're by my side! If you're just by my side, that's it!"- Puhook."

Liam's words stopped.

Emil's hand, full of Magical Power, dug into Liam's side.

Blood gushed out.

Author's Note

But there is a hole in Liam's side