# 132 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (6)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (6)

Blood, red blood flowed down.

It poured out with such force that it seemed like it would make a splattering sound.

Flowing over Emil's white hand, the blood trickled down, painting it anew.

The blood that flowed down had already pooled into a small puddle on the floor.

— Splash…

Liam stepped into that puddle of blood.

As if trying to steady his swaying body, Liam tightened his grip and embraced Emil once more.

As if he couldn't let go, as if he would lose everything if he did.

“Liam!”

Ivan's shout echoed.

As if he were about to rush to Liam, Ivan struggled, but Emil's hand, gripping his throat, remained immovable, as if it were a boulder.

“Emil…”

Liam managed to speak.

But Emil did not respond to Liam's voice; instead, she quietly stared at the hand that had pierced his side, slowly withdrawing it.

With vacant eyes, she gazed at her blood-stained hand and murmured softly.

“Order… execution, complete… Liam, foreign substance… Liam… order, complete…”

Her small lips moved as Emil muttered.

Did she realize that Liam's name was mixed in with the repeatedly spoken words?

Perhaps she did not, but her eyes, which had burned red, were now flickering dimly.

As if she did not understand what she had done.

“Look, isn’t it perfect!”

Dremalo's voice echoed through the laboratory.

His maniacal laughter reverberated, and Emil glanced at him for a moment.

“Ivan, Ivan Contadino! Though you took a long detour, it doesn’t matter now! In the end, we’ve arrived at our destination properly! This is how it should be for you, this is right! Hahaha!”

Dremalo continued to laugh.

Venere approached Ivan with a scoff and a click of her heels.

“All that endless magical power is ultimately useless, you relic of an era. While you were dead, the Mages weren’t just playing around. You must understand what I said back then now, right?

Ivan glared at Venere while gripping Emil's hand.

Though he felt frustrated, he had never heard of absorbing another's magical power like this.

To engage in such a bizarre act, where had the pride of a Mage gone?

“Was Emil… planning to do this from the start?”

Venere looked at Emil with a mocking smile.

Emil, still clinging to Liam, turned her bloodied hand this way and that, repeatedly muttering about completing the order and Liam's name.

“Yeah. Once that fool absorbs Cascata, it’ll all be over. I’m already sick of this empire that only knows how to wage war with magic. Magic itself is enough to embody the dignity of a ruler.”

“You're insane.”

“It doesn’t matter, Ivan. Now your only friend has also taken a long journey, right? You’re the only one left. After I finish you off, I’ll send Carla along the same way, so don’t worry. Ah, I can’t guarantee she’ll be in one piece, though. I have some grudges against the Cascata family.”

Ivan gritted his teeth and glared at Venere.

Would he really just take this? Even if he summoned the remaining magical power, it would be so weak that Ivan would only be able to scoff at it.

“What do you plan to do with that? Are you trying to sweet-talk before you die?”

Despite Venere's mockery, Ivan could not retort.

It truly seemed that way.

“You don’t need to hurry now, Venere. Our experiment has succeeded. Now we just need to swallow up Cascata and…”

At that moment.

— Bang!

With a loud explosion, the ceiling collapsed.

Though Aufstieg's mansion was not originally tall, it shouldn’t have collapsed from above like this. Amidst the rising cloud of dust, someone rushed out and struck Venere.

— Pzzzt…

A fierce Lightning Bolt, a violet Lightning Bolt, erupted. As the lightning scattered in all directions, Ivan widened his eyes at the figure charging toward Venere.

“Take care of Liam, you fool!”

Carla shouted as she struck Venere. But her left arm was still empty, flapping and swaying with every movement. She still had no arm— but Ivan quickly realized the reason.

A series of strikes followed. Not just single, hard hits but continuous movements… anyway.

“Now, I will arrest all suspects here on charges of treason against the imperial family. Do not move.”

In one hand, Albina held a Magic Stone that glimmered with a blue light.

She threw the Magic Stone forcefully toward the hole in the ceiling, and it exploded in mid-air, beginning to unfold a barrier of azure magical power.

“Venere! Emil…!”

Dremalo shouted, but it was too late.

Carla, gripping the Lightning Bolt, struck Venere and then slammed into her shoulder.

“Cough…!”

Venere staggered back a few steps with a muffled sound, then glared at Carla with a gulp.

“…Is losing one arm not enough?”

Venere's sneer.

But Carla instead smiled, curling her lips.

“It feels good to be lighter. And this will be enough. To rip your neck off.”

Venere's eyes twisted with rage.

With a sharp sound, Venere lunged at Carla, but Carla easily sidestepped and evaded.

“Carla, well done!”

While Venere's attention was on Carla, Lorenzo placed a piece of paper with a strange symbol on Emil's forehead. At that moment, Emil closed her eyes as if her strings had been cut, collapsing, and Lorenzo caught her in his arms.

“Liam!”

As soon as Emil's hand fell, Ivan rushed to Liam to support him.

He had already lost too much blood… Liam was keeping his eyes closed, but his body was so cold that Ivan flinched in surprise.

“Emil's magical circuit is in overload. The magical field around here is all unstable.”

Lorenzo quickly scanned the structure of the hidden room while carrying Emil.

Even his crow was flitting around the hidden room, inspecting the layout.

“Those bastards! How dare they invade the Aufstieg mansion…!”

Dremalo glared at them with eyes filled with rage.

Black magical power surged from his fingertips… but the Emil he pointed at was already incapacitated, and no matter how much he called, Emil could not open her eyes.

“Sorry, but traitors do not receive noble treatment, Dremalo. I have even brought the royal permit.”

Albina said this while showing a document stamped with the royal seal.

“Then I’ll just kill you all here! Hand over Emil!”

Dremalo's magical power surged with an unusual vibration.

The black magic that burst forth scattered into pieces, spreading out like black lines throughout the hidden room.

“Do you think I’ll let you escape like this!”

“If you can’t, what will you do, Dremalo? The royal family is already aware of your treasonous acts, and an arrest order has been issued. If you resist, you can be killed without consequence.”

At some point, Lorenzo, who had stuck numerous pieces of paper on Emil, mocked Dremalo.

“Carla, enough already!”

As Albina shouted, Carla kicked Venere in the side. Without an arm, she often lost her balance right after such a move, but instead, she stomped down with the opposite foot, striking Venere directly on the head.

“Cough… you, you filthy bitch…!”

However, Carla did not continue from there. She knew well that what mattered was not how to kill Venere here. Already a few steps back, retreating near Lorenzo, Carla was grinning.

“It would be best for you to surrender quietly, Dremalo!”

Albina raised the Magic Stone in her hand high.

Without hesitation, she threw the Magic Stone to the ground, and it exploded with a loud noise, releasing a brilliant light.

A flash filled the hidden room.

As the flash faded, Dremalo's eyes widened in shock.

Astonishment, and then fear.

The emotions swirling in Dremalo's gaze.

“It’s a magical barrier. Give up; it would be better for you to be arrested quietly. The royal guard has been dispatched for your arrest. They will arrive soon.”

“Venere, open the door!”

Dremalo shouted.

As soon as he heard that voice, Venere raised her hand and grabbed her neck, and the blood that burst from the severed neck swirled as if controlled by something, drawing an oval shape before soaking the floor.

“Contadino! You too, hurry!”

Dremalo shouted at Contadino just before Venere dashed toward the dimensional door she had opened.

Despite being present, Contadino did nothing.

He said nothing, did not attack, and offered no excuses.

“Dremalo.”

“Hurry over here! We need to plan our next move!”

“No, I’m done.”

Contadino sighed and raised his hands.

“I will quit, Dremalo. This is enough.”

“What, what did you say!”

“It’s already over. Treason, treason… I will have to sell you out. I need to sell you out to save my family.”

Upon hearing that, Dremalo's face twisted with rage.

“You… you traitorous bastard…!”

But no further words were exchanged.

As the barrier's light began to fade, Dremalo realized he no longer had time to waste. He gritted his teeth and quickly slipped through the gap Venere had created. And as he fled, the dimensional door Venere had opened vanished without a trace.

Silence descended in an instant.

Lorenzo approached Contadino in place of Albina, who was tending to Liam.

“Schyskeil's head, Contadino. I am arresting you on charges of treason. Do you have any objections?”

Contadino shook his head with a sigh.

“No objections. I didn’t expect my misjudgment to lead to this… but it’s my crime for being involved. I will take responsibility.”

Lorenzo nodded.

Then he took out handcuffs and placed them on Contadino's wrists.

“…The royal guard will arrive soon. When they do, it would be best for you to stop thinking about resisting.”

“I know… I will.”

Contadino closed his eyes.

His expression was one of resignation.

A word from the author (author's note)

You have been arrested!

For my cuteness!

# 133 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (7)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (7)

The morning sun quietly shone into the academy's infirmary.

The medical officers moved busily, perhaps without a moment to catch their breath.

Occasional mechanical noises mixed with the sounds of hurried footsteps echoing down the long corridor.

The tension that hung thick in the air was different from the ruckus that had burst into the infirmary at dawn. Now, a considerably calmer silence dominated the space.

Ivan sat on the bed, quietly staring at his fingers. For some reason, his magical power did not rise again... The power that had been drained by Emil seemed to have reduced the total amount of magic he possessed, as if it could not recover beyond a certain point.

The amount of magical power he had was barely a fraction of what it used to be. Looking at that meager amount of magic, he could only sigh, feeling utterly helpless about what to say.

Moreover, there was a tingling pain in his fingertips that occasionally made them tremble. According to the medical officer, it was due to some disruption in the circuits, causing a conflict, but for now, they said to wait a little longer. That was the diagnosis for the time being.

The medical officers told him not to worry, but Ivan could not shake off the heavy feelings as he looked at his trembling fingertips. The moment Emil's gaze had flashed, and the moment Liam had collapsed, the moment Liam's blood pooled on the floor. Another jolt of pain shot through his fingertips.

"Are your fingertips still trembling?"

Carla quietly pulled back the curtain and entered. A bandage was wrapped around her left shoulder, and dark shadows lay heavily under her eyes. Yet, despite everything, Carla's gaze was sharp and clear. It felt as if she had become even stronger despite losing one arm.

"...You look amazing, Carla."

"What nonsense are you talking about?"

Carla sat beside Ivan and took his hand in hers.

As she gently massaged his trembling fingertips with one hand, she looked into his face.

"You really do look amazing, Carla."

"What useless things you say. If you keep talking like that, I might just hit you. You can't beat me right now."

Ivan chuckled.

He had already told Carla about the strange change in his magical power. She had reassured him not to worry, saying he would recover soon, but that was something uncertain...

"I'm feeling this down about my reduced magical power, and yet you..."

When she lost her arm.

When she first lost it, Carla had been filled with pain as if the world had collapsed around her.

But now, it seemed she was acting as if that pain was nothing, as if she had become bolder.

"It's just an arm. Once you lose it, losing it a second time doesn't seem so bad. Once you get used to it, it should be bearable. Besides, I think I can manage to get a prosthetic arm somehow."

While a prosthetic arm wouldn't just appear out of nowhere, Ivan didn't feel the need to say that.

It was a pointless thing to discuss.

"What about Liam?"

"He's unconscious. Right now, he's connected to life support..."

Ivan's expression darkened.

A faint wave of magical energy flickered around him and then faded away.

His unstable magical output... his current condition was not good.

"Still, if it's Liam, he'll pull through."

Carla added, and her words somehow made it seem like it would indeed be true.

"What about Emil?"

"About Emil..."

Carla clicked her tongue and paused for a moment.

"She's in a special barrier. She can't escape or anything. And there's a possibility of self-harm... Anyway, her mind is unstable, but her body is recovering."

As she said this, Carla looked out the window.

"I'm actually on my way back from visiting Emil. She didn't recognize me... By the way, did you know Emil was a girl?"

"Who doesn't know that? Everyone knows."

"Right... right..."

Carla awkwardly laughed and averted her gaze.

Ivan, who was about to say, "You don't mean, do you?" burst into laughter.

"Anyway, her mind is unstable, but her body is fine. You said she didn't recognize you? But it seems Liam remembers her. He kept murmuring Liam's name."

A silence fell between the two.

Murmurs could be heard from the corridor.

It seemed the medical officers were passing by, and faint voices reached them.

The academy infirmary was always filled with someone's pain.

But at least today, that weight of pain felt much heavier than before.

— Knock, knock.

A knock sounded.

Before Carla or Ivan could respond, the door swung open, and upon seeing the man who appeared, Carla jumped up in surprise.

"Uncle!"

"Carla. Sit down; you must be tired."

Lord Cascata, dressed in the uniform of a court mage, entered the infirmary.

Waving his hand at Carla, who had stood up abruptly, Lord Cascata approached Ivan and Carla and suddenly handed them something.

"This is a letter from His Majesty."

Ivan and Carla simultaneously got off the bed and knelt on the floor. Bowing their heads deeply, they raised their hands above their heads. A letter envelope was placed in Ivan's hands.

"Read it."

"Yes, I will."

"And Carla."

"Yes, Uncle."

"The letter Ivan received is a message from His Majesty summoning him to the palace. And you, Carla, are to accompany him as well."

"What?"

Carla's eyes widened in surprise. After all, wasn't it unusual to meet the Emperor... Being a noble of the Cascata family, it wasn't that she had never met him, but it was true that she hadn't since growing up. So suddenly being summoned was somewhat shocking.

"It's treason... You were there too, weren't you? It's not that you are implicated, but His Majesty wishes to commend your contributions."

"I see."

"It's treason involving two of the four pillars. This matter cannot be overlooked. One is captured, one has fled... and another has also fled. The situation is grave."

"I understand."

Contred von Schyskeil had surrendered. Although he hadn't expected things to turn out this way, it was true that he was implicated in treason, so capture was unavoidable.

"The documentation for the confiscation of the Aufstieg and Schyskeil family assets and the treason charges is already underway. This matter does not concern you, but nonetheless, His Majesty wishes to meet you."

"Understood. I will prepare immediately."

"Good. Then..."

"I have one question."

As Lord Cascata turned to leave the infirmary, he looked back at Ivan.

"What is it?" Lord Cascata asked with his eyes.

"...Can't you handle Venere yourself?"

Lord Cascata paused for a moment before answering.

Whether Ivan had discovered that Lord Cascata held Venere's weaknesses through some incident, Lord Cascata thought for a moment but soon dismissed that thought. Venere was known for being loose-lipped—and moreover, she often didn't follow orders, so perhaps she had just babbled something that slipped out.

"Venere is..."

"Yes."

"...a subordinate under my command. A person dedicated to the protection and peace of the Empire. Although she often rebels against my orders, that is also my fault for not being able to keep her in check. I apologize to you, Carla."

Lord Cascata looked at Carla.

Shock and disbelief.

Carla, with wide eyes, stared at Lord Cascata.

"Carla. I also feel sorry about what happened to your arm. I certainly made a mistake by not preventing Venere's rampage in advance. I hold Venere's weaknesses, and I could kill her even now."

"Uncle. Do you really think that makes sense?"

At Carla's sharp voice, Lord Cascata squeezed his eyes shut.

It was something that would eventually come to light, but having it revealed here like this was not a pleasant situation.

"It doesn't make sense. I will take responsibility for that. I will incapacitate Venere, and Carla, I will provide you with an artificial body. I will ensure that you can use that arm naturally."

"Even if it's an artificial body, Uncle. That... ha."

Carla brushed her hair back and squeezed her eyes shut.

In any case, it was a difficult situation to make a judgment on right now, and since the Emperor had summoned them, it would be unreasonable to delay.

"...Let's talk about it later. You need to settle things with me first."

"Alright. I will do that. Be prepared."

In the afternoon, Ivan and Carla dressed formally and boarded the imperial carriage at the academy's main gate.

The carriage, adorned with splendid gold decorations, already revealed itself to be an extraordinary vehicle.

On either side stood the imperial guard, and students gathered around, their gazes fixed on them.

As Ivan and Carla climbed into the carriage, it began to move forward smoothly shortly after.

As the carriage set off, the academy's tall spires began to recede behind them.

The scenery visible through the window gradually changed, and passing through the well-kept streets surrounding the academy, they finally began to see the imperial palace in the distance.

"The roads are really well made. It wasn't like this in our time."

"Don't talk nonsense like an old man."

Carla tightly held Ivan's hand.

A warm sensation spread out.

As they passed through the streets where the midday sun began to scatter, the carriage moved toward the distant imperial palace.

The inside of the carriage was quiet, but Carla and Ivan were lost in their own thoughts.

Now, how should they sort out what lay ahead?

That was the only common concern they shared.

# 134 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (8)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (8)

Time has a way of revealing itself in unexpected places.

It seemed that moment was now—Ivan thought as he gazed at the golden gates of the imperial palace.

The carriage that had entered the palace grounds came to a stop.

Following Lord Cascata's instruction that they must proceed on foot from here, Ivan and Carla disembarked and made their way toward the main palace behind Lord Cascata. As Ivan looked around, such thoughts crossed his mind.

It felt like an eternity since the previous Ivan had died.

In his memories, the imperial palace had been vast and splendid… and while that memory remained vivid, the current royal palace far surpassed it. In scale, in expanse, in grandeur, the palace was so magnificent that it rendered Ivan's recollections almost pitiful by comparison.

‘How futile life is.’

He was a man who had lived consumed by magical engineering. Though he had ultimately met his death, looking back now, it all seemed meaningless. Human life has an end, but even if one person’s life ends, humanity does not cease to exist. After his death, time for humanity must have continued to flow, so in that sense, Venere’s words were not entirely wrong.

Ivan tried to maintain a calm expression, but he could not completely ignore the pressure exerted by this immense structure. The Academy was grand, but the palace was beyond comparison.

“Ivan Contadino, Lady Carla. This way, please.”

A man who appeared to be in charge of protocol approached them, bowing deeply in greeting.

Ivan briefly contemplated the title “Sir” that followed his name. There was no real reason to attach significance to the title, yet it felt strange when it was actually used.

Separated from Lord Cascata, the two followed the protocol officer down the corridor.

Numerous gazes were directed at them.

Amidst the mixed looks of curiosity and suspicion, Ivan and Carla easily discerned the reason.

‘It must be because of the rebellion.’

“Don’t freeze up. There’s no need to go that far.”

Carla whispered in a small voice, as if she appeared sufficiently frozen on the outside. Ivan awkwardly smiled, and perhaps that was not reassuring enough.

Carla briefly took Ivan’s hand before letting it go.

“From now on, it’s the real deal.”

As Carla whispered in a low voice, Ivan nodded.

Soon, they stood before a massive door adorned with splendid golden sculptures.

He didn’t know what purpose this place served, but the large, open windows around it were positioned at a considerable height, allowing a view of the capital below.

The protocol officer announced their arrival.

As a response to the invitation to enter, the door slowly opened.

Directly opposite them was a gigantic window.

The sun was setting, and the lights of the city began to flicker on one by one.

In the midst of that scene stood a man with his hands clasped behind his back, gazing down at the view.

He must be the Emperor.

As Ivan and Carla entered, the man slowly turned around.

At first glance, he appeared aged, but his eyes were sharp and clear, as vivid as those of a young man.

“Welcome, Ivan Contadino. And Carla Della Cascata.”

Ivan and Carla simultaneously knelt and bowed their heads deeply.

“We greet Your Majesty.”

“Rise. There’s no need to be so formal.”

The Emperor’s voice was relaxed.

He walked over to a small table by the window.

On the table, refreshments had been prepared, and the teacups still emitted steam, indicating they had been set out not long ago.

“Carla. Your uncle has reported everything that has transpired. It’s unfortunate about your arm.”

“Thank you for your concern, Your Majesty. I believe I will adapt.”

Carla’s voice was relatively calm.

As if to confirm that, she responded sincerely.

“I see. In any case, the reason I summoned Sir Contadino today… is likely related to you, Carla.”

A hint of undeniable fatigue seeped into his voice.

The Emperor gestured for them to come closer to the table.

“Please, sit. Let’s talk while seated.”

As Ivan and Carla took their seats, the Emperor continued as if he had been waiting for them to do so.

“Sir Contadino. I’ve heard you played a significant role in this matter. Of course, the same goes for you, Carla. In fact, it was primarily you, Carla, who saved Sir Contadino. His solo actions were risky and could be seen as reckless, but… you must have believed that Carla could fulfill her role.”

That wasn’t the case…

In reality, Ivan hadn’t even considered Carla.

He had acted on the belief that he and Liam could manage somehow, but even so, without Carla, everything would have been in vain, and Ivan might have already lost his life.

“Ultimately, it’s true that the two of you played a significant role in uncovering the rebellion of Aufstieg and Schaiske. And it’s also true that this incident has created a tremendous rift in the noble structure of the Empire.”

The status of the Empire's four great families was substantial.

Cascata, Schaiske, Aufstieg, Bricone.

Bricone was barely worthy of being called one of the four great families, but it still held a position of influence.

And if two of those families were implicated in rebellion, it was something that could not be overlooked.

“It would be unreasonable not to reward such contributions. So, Sir Contadino, if you’re agreeable, how about becoming a disciple of Lord Cascata?”

“…Pardon?”

“Just as I said. Originally, I was going to propose that you become the adopted son of Lord Cascata, but I’ve heard that you and Carla have already promised a future together, correct? Therefore, if you were to become Lord Cascata’s adopted son, it could lead to issues regarding consanguinity. While you may not share blood, there are still familial ties to consider. So, adoption is out of the question, but how about becoming a disciple instead?”

“A disciple, you say…”

Adoption was out of the question.

Even though they didn’t share blood, Lord Cascata was a brother to Enrico Della Cascata, so if Ivan were to become Lord Cascata’s adopted son, it would create complications in his marriage to Carla.

“Just like a student. This way, you can formally learn about politics and the workings of the imperial court.”

“About the workings of the imperial court… you mean?”

“Yes. Lord Cascata has already agreed. He believes you would be a worthy student. While your magical abilities are commendable, you must also learn to govern the nation.”

Ivan fell into thought for a moment.

Various thoughts tangled in his mind.

What would it mean to enter the imperial court and engage in politics… He still couldn’t discern the Emperor’s intentions, but at the very least, this would bring significant changes to what he had done so far and what he would do in the future.

Ivan looked at Carla.

Carla seemed flustered, her large eyes darting around.

She surely hadn’t anticipated this situation at all.

“…Your Majesty.”

Finally, Ivan spoke up.

A female student was entering the Academy.

Having been released from a lengthy period of self-imposed confinement, she adjusted her flowing black hair in the breeze as she gazed at the Academy building.

“I never expected the elder would do such a thing.”

Kiara was astonished to hear the news that Schaiske had instigated a rebellion.

Ever since the young master she served had died, Kiara had been confined for self-reflection, and ironically, it was because of that that she regained her freedom.

However, her expression was not bright.

Her dark eyes, burdened with a heavy weight, reflected the setting sun that was just beginning to fade.

“What will happen to our family?”

The Servitore family was under the thumb of Schaiske.

Without Schaiske, their downfall was all but certain…

Now, with the rebellion of Aufstieg and Schaiske, a new power structure was bound to be established, and somehow, the Servitore family needed to either rise on their own or find a new refuge.

But the option of rising on their own was practically nonexistent.

Kiara’s father was not capable of such feats; he was a man who would rather cling to his wealth and hide away than stand on his own.

‘…What should I do?’

Should she place all the blame on Contred von Schaiske and choose self-preservation?

Or is it right to perish alongside Schaiske out of loyalty?

At this difficult crossroads, Kiara walked toward the Academy dormitory.

Her steps were heavy, and her shadow stretched long, turned away from the setting sun.

A word from the author (Author's Note)

It's been a while!

For now, one success...!

# 135 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (9)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (9)

Liam regained consciousness on a day when the sound of raindrops hitting the window filled the hospital room.

As soon as he opened his eyes with great effort, Liam's first words escaped his lips.

“Emil…?”

Only after hearing that Emil was okay, that she had been rescued, did Liam let out a long sigh of relief.

Observing Liam's condition, Ivan sat beside the bed and took on the role of his conversational partner.

The thick bandages wrapped around his side no longer oozed blood.

“How are you feeling today?” Ivan asked, and Liam smiled faintly.

“I’m managing. No need for you to worry.”

“You look that way. Still, you’re a bear like you, so don’t move and just stay still.”

After returning from the palace, Ivan had been visiting Liam and Emil's hospital room twice a day to check on their conditions.

With all the medical staff attending to the two, and especially since mages from the Magical Engineering Corps had been dispatched to look after Emil, he thought she would improve soon—

“How is Emil?”

Liam asked this every time.

He didn’t even ask about his own condition.

Every time, every time, he only asked about Emil.

“Still… the same.”

Emil's condition had not improved.

As if her soul had completely left her, she sat curled up in a barrier that completely blocked the magical power flowing in from outside, staring blankly at the ceiling with dull eyes all day long.

“I see.”

“Yeah. But no one has given up. We will definitely bring Emil back to her senses.”

Liam turned his head to look out the window.

Ivan didn’t miss the way that fleeting gaze had clouded over.

“Maybe Emil will recover faster than you. So you need to get better quickly too.”

Ivan said.

But he also knew that he lacked conviction in his own voice.

Liam turned his head back to look at Ivan.

“…Yeah, it would be nice if that happens.”

“It will happen.”

“I still remember the moment Emil stabbed me, Ivan. That wasn’t Emil. She didn’t intend to do that.”

“I know. That wasn’t Emil’s will. Not just you, but I, who was there, know it too. So even if Emil regains her senses, I won’t hold her accountable. I will stop that from happening.”

“…I trust you, Ivan. Emil was just used.”

“Right. Trust me. I will protect Emil too.”

Ivan left the hospital room and headed quietly down the corridor toward Emil's room.

The garden of the academy visible beyond the window was drenched in a chilling rain.

The trees swayed violently in the rough and fierce rain and wind, as if even the weather understood Ivan's mood quite well.

As he entered Emil's room, Albina was standing by the window.

Inside the barrier, Emil was still sitting with her knees drawn up, staring blankly at the ceiling.

“Is there any change?”

Ivan asked, and Albina shook her head weakly.

“Not yet.”

Then, after a moment of silence, Albina spoke.

“But there are some reactions. Occasionally, her fingers move, and her eyelids flutter… especially when we say Liam’s name.”

Ivan stood beyond the barrier, looking at Emil.

The Emil who had lost her spirit…

Was Dremalo’s claim that she had emptied herself to become a vessel true?

How could a parent treat their child like this…?

Perhaps there are parents like that, for Ivan’s father was one.

But Ivan had freed himself from that curse by directly killing his father.

Emil had not been able to muster that courage, and that was the only difference.

“Emil…”

Ivan whispered as he looked at Emil from outside the barrier.

“Can you hear me? Everyone is waiting for you. We’re waiting for you to come back. Liam is waiting for you too.”

Emil’s eyelids fluttered.

Whether it was a conscious reaction or not, he couldn’t tell.

Carla struck the scarecrow with a strong punch.

With a loud thud, the scarecrow shook violently.

Instead of trying to regain her balance, which she almost lost, she naturally shifted her feet, using the collapsing balance to kick the scarecrow in the opposite direction—

“…Hmm.”

Looking down at the broken scarecrow, Carla wore a somewhat unsatisfied expression.

To be honest, this emphasis on fluidity in her series of strikes lacked the power compared to a strong strike.

With one arm missing, she couldn’t rely solely on quick jabs, so she practiced this series of strikes, but she wasn’t entirely pleased with it.

“I need to get used to living without an arm.”

When she first lost one arm, it felt as if she had lost the meaning of life.

But this time, when she asked Ivan to willingly cut off her arm, she had a resolve to get used to living without it.

As if to support that thought, when she opened her eyes, Ivan was not there—and from that point, Carla had already assumed that Ivan had headed to the Aufstieg mansion. So she immediately informed Albina and Lorenzo of that fact, which allowed her to arrive at the scene in time.

“Let’s get used to it. We need to get used to it first.”

Calling forth another scarecrow, Carla clenched her fist but hesitated.

She felt a strangely odd sensation.

A subtle and small wave of magical power that a sensitive Carla could perceive.

‘…This wave is Regina’s?’

A chilling feeling ran down her spine.

With that sensation, Carla burst out of the training room and ran.

The strange dissonance mixed with Regina’s wave felt familiar to her.

In the deep night, the barrier protecting Emil had become somewhat lax.

As the guards dispatched from the Magical Engineering Corps began to doze off while guarding the barrier, the corridor was dimly lit by faint luminescent stones, making it hard to tell the time.

At that moment, a faint shadow appeared at the end of the corridor.

Slowly, with a floating-like movement, the shadow approached the room where Emil was.

The face revealed in the dim light of the luminescent stone was Regina.

Her gaze was still hollow, and her face was expressionless, devoid of any emotion.

Approaching with mechanical movements as if she were a doll, she brushed past the dozing guards.

The door to the hospital room slid open silently.

Regina entered without hesitation, moving toward the barrier where Emil sat, and at the same time, the guard posts surrounding the barrier began to emit a loud noise and red light.

“Who, who is it?!”

The guards rushed into the hospital room.

Seeing Regina approaching the barrier, the guards all rushed at her, but instead, they were bounced back by the barrier and tumbled against the walls of the room.

“Re, Regina…?!”

Feeling something strange, Carla rushed in, bursting through the hospital room door.

Regina, standing in front of the barrier, turned her head mechanically to look at Carla as if she might make a sound.

“Regina! What are you doing right now?!”

Carla charged at Regina.

The barrier began to push her away mercilessly, but Carla did not back down.

Instead, she twisted the barrier with one arm and took steps closer to Regina.

Regina showed no reaction.

Instead, a sinister black smoke was rising from the hand she had raised toward the barrier.

“…Aether Vessel. Open your eyes. Your master calls you.”

As soon as Regina’s words fell, Emil opened her eyes.

Upon opening them, a red light began to swirl in her pupils.

“Reginaaaaaaa!”

Carla charged at Regina once more.

Just before her hand reached Regina, Emil snatched it away.

At that very moment when Emil’s red-glowing eyes seemed to be looking at Carla—

An explosion occurred.

“It seems to have succeeded.”

“I can’t use it anymore. It’s on the verge of complete mental collapse.”

Ignoring Venere’s grumbling, Dremalo laughed heartily.

How much trouble had he gone through because of that blocking barrier, making manipulation of the Aether Vessel impossible?

“I can’t express how fortunate it is that we didn’t release that girl.”

“I didn’t intend to use it this way, but anyway, it has caused damage to the academy, and Regina will bring Emil here.”

“Good. Then we can start in earnest. The Aether Vessel still retains that power. I can feel it, I can feel it. With that power, we will open a new era.”

“…Do as you wish.”

Venere replied in a disinterested tone.

Dremalo didn’t care what Venere said.

In an era where magic had become a tool of war.

No mage would desire such an era.

The place where mages shine is the battlefield.

But he does not want magic to function merely as a tool of war.

Magic must be the ruler of war and the rules of this world.

Dremalo firmly believed that he would finally achieve the world that had eluded him despite having such power.

Emil, who contained Ivan’s power—now a weapon named the Aether Vessel.

With that, it can be done.

To regulate this world with magic, and to dominate war with the power of magic.

Dremalo believed that this was the true essence of magic.

# 136 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (10)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (10)

A headache began to throb.

To be precise, it wasn't just the head; it was both sides... in other words, her ears were hurting, and Carla slowly opened her eyes.

After blinking a few times, her blurry vision seemed to come into focus little by little. However, the ringing in her ears continued to persist, a constant buzzing that wouldn't stop.

“Carla! Are you okay?!”

Carla frowned at Albina, who was mouthing words in front of her. It seemed like she was saying something, but no sound reached Carla's ears. Instead, the ringing persisted, causing her head to throb painfully.

Nodding her head was all she could manage.

Using that as a response, Carla looked around.

Thanks to Albina, who had helped her sit up, the traces of the destroyed hospital room surrounding Carla were devastating.

Amidst the chaos, the academy's medical team was running around in a frenzy, and while they seemed to be shouting, Carla couldn't hear a thing.

‘My ears...’

In the midst of this, Ivan rushed over to Carla. He was also mouthing words, but with no sound reaching her, Carla pointed to her ears and shook her head.

Only then did Ivan seem to understand her condition. He picked up a crumpled and dirty piece of paper, scribbled something on it, and held it up in front of her.

[Emil is missing. He saw Regina just before that.]

That was probably true. Carla had seen it too. Regina, moving as if to free Emil. And the look in her eyes as she watched Carla rush to stop her. The subsequent explosion.

‘Surviving is quite something.’

The real problem was that she couldn't hear anything. It was likely that the explosion had temporarily damaged her hearing.

“I know. I was there. I saw Regina freeing Emil. The explosion happened at the same time.”

It was quite strange that she couldn't hear her own voice.

“Venere must have been involved.”

Carla muttered.

Since she couldn't hear, she couldn't control the volume of her own voice well, which made everyone around her turn to look at her.

[You need treatment. Carla, you can't hear, right?]

Carla nodded after reading the note Ivan handed her. She would need treatment, but it was probably temporary. The pain in both ears was starting to subside, along with the ringing. It seemed to be a temporary issue.

Then, she couldn't afford to waste time on this.

Emil was in danger—if she had to be specific, her irritation and anger towards Venere, who might do something using Emil, were greater than her concern for Emil himself.

“I can get treatment later. I'm fine. But we need to move right now.”

[Where to? I can't find any traces right now.]

“We can find them.”

It was Lorenzo.

Although Carla still couldn't hear, Albina's face lit up at his words.

Lorenzo was examining the completely destroyed barrier maintenance device.

As he looked over the device that had been protecting Emil, blocking external interference, he clicked his tongue and said.

“We need to remember what Dremalo said. He connected the Magical Engineering, so he could control Emil. Then there should be a trace left. If we track that trace, it might be possible.”

“Oh!”

Albina clapped her hands and stood up. The excitement on her face suggested she was truly convinced it could work.

“Emil's Magical Circuit is different from others. Dremalo must have directly interfered. Then the wavelength would be different, and he could have controlled Regina to break Emil's barrier and reconnected the Magical Engineering... He would have taken him to wherever he is. If we interpret it that way, reverse tracking should be possible.”

“That's right. That method could work. And Lorenzo, you...”

“I didn't eat military rations for nothing.”

Lorenzo shrugged.

“First, let's organize things. We can track it; there are traces left. But just because we can track it, does that mean it will definitely lead us to the answer?”

“What do you mean by that?”

Ivan, who had been diligently writing on paper and showing it to Carla, asked back.

If tracking was possible, shouldn't they track it?

But he couldn't understand what Lorenzo meant by questioning whether it would lead to an answer.

“I mean, wouldn't it be better to know what those bastards want before we move? That's what I'm saying.”

Lorenzo's words weren't entirely wrong.

In fact, it wouldn't be wise to blindly charge in and fall into their trap without knowing what they were planning.

“Those bastards tried to kill Emil, Instructor.”

Carla interjected, her face scrunched up in frustration.

“Moreover, they toyed with Regina as well, not just Emil. Are you suggesting we just sit back and watch?”

It wasn't surprising that Carla's voice was filled with irritation. Regarding Emil, she wasn't particularly close to him, so it was understandable to be somewhat indifferent. However, Regina was involved. Carla still felt a lot of guilt towards Regina, so she wasn't pleased with Lorenzo's words.

“Calm down, Carla. What I'm saying is not to rush in blindly. We don't know what they might be preparing. Remember what state Ivan is in right now.”

Seeing the words transferred onto paper, Carla fell silent. Ivan still hadn't recovered his Magical Power. After charging in with Liam, almost all of his Magical Power had been transferred to Emil. Hearing that, Carla had nothing more to say.

“Let's go see Liam first. He has a special bond with Emil, so he might have some insights.”

Everyone agreed with Ivan's suggestion.

There was no need to hide it; now that Emil's secret was revealed, and it was an open secret that Liam had special feelings for Emil.

“Are you saying Emil is like that now?”

Liam still looked unwell. The fact that he was alive was surprising in itself, and the fact that he had regained consciousness and was concerned about Emil was quite remarkable.

“Yeah. Just as I explained... everything.”

Lorenzo trailed off. With the academy's prestige literally in the dirt, having lost even the student they were supposed to protect, it was a disgrace.

“Do you know where he went?”

Lorenzo nodded. It was true they could find him. The problem was what to do afterward.

“We can find him. But we need to decide whether to go right away or wait a bit longer to confirm their plans before moving... I want to hear your opinion. You were closest to Emil.”

“We need to go immediately.”

Liam got out of bed, pulling the covers off. Ivan, taken aback by his action, stopped him.

“You're not in a condition to move, Liam. You know that. You're injured.”

“I know, Ivan. But you know too.”

Liam looked directly at Ivan.

The intensity of his gaze made Ivan unconsciously close his mouth.

“Can you just sit back and wait while your beloved woman is in danger?”

Ivan turned his head to look at Carla.

She was standing there, still unable to hear well, with a frustrated expression as if she wanted someone to show her what was written on paper.

“…No. I can't do that.”

“That's it... So we need to move right now.”

Ivan sighed.

It was stubbornness, but he couldn't help but understand Liam's feelings.

“Alright, I got it. Liam, but let's promise not to overdo it.”

Liam nodded.

With a sigh, Ivan stood up and picked up the paper. He briefly informed them of the current situation and that Liam would be accompanying them.

“Are you crazy?”

Ivan empathized with Carla's words.

As Ivan supported Liam back to the hospital room where Emil had been, Lorenzo immediately began investigating the traces of Magical Power. He brought military equipment to search for traces, and with each pass of the equipment, the faint traces left behind were analyzed, revealing strange symbols.

“It was quite an explosion. It's a relief that Carla wasn't hurt. And at the epicenter... right.”

Lorenzo picked up a small bead from the corner of the hospital room. It was a tiny black crystal, about the size of a finger joint, that was hardly noticeable.

“What is this?”

Now that her hearing had somewhat recovered, Carla asked Lorenzo. He turned the bead over in his fingers as he answered.

“It’s a conversion stone. It temporarily altered the wavelength of the Magical Power that Regina possessed. Using Regina's body as a medium, it forcibly changed the wavelength of Venere or Dremalo's Magical Power... and then directly broke the barrier.”

“…Is that possible?”

“If you disregard the life of the medium, yes.”

“Are you saying they disregarded Regina's life?”

“That's how it turned out.”

Those crazy bastards.

“I'll have to use this for reverse tracking. Albina, can the amplifier in the central tower be used right now?”

Albina hesitated for a moment at Lorenzo's words.

“…I need to check. I'm not sure yet.”

“Get permission to use it. If it doesn't work, contact Lord Cascata. I think we need to look more closely through the amplifier.”

Albina nodded in response to Lorenzo's words.

# 137 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (11)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (11)

The academy's central tower houses an amplifier. Its existence was barely known, and it was mostly a facility prepared for the academy's defense.

"I never thought we'd use it like this... Albina, maximum output."

As Lorenzo spoke to Albina, she nodded and pulled the amplifier's power lever down. Blue light flickered from the amplifier, and a start-up sound slowly began to be heard.

"Looks like they were doing proper maintenance. It's working properly."

Lorenzo lit a Magic Herb.

Seeing his seemingly relaxed demeanor, Carla asked Lorenzo,

"Aren't we starting right away? This is an urgent situation, Instructor."

"Everything has its time, Carla. It needs to warm up."

Lorenzo remained calm.

While the others were burning with impatience, Lorenzo was just smoking his Magic Herb.

Eventually, Carla, unable to contain her temper, was about to urge Lorenzo again when he threw the Magic Herb on the floor, crushed it with his shoe, and said,

"Alright, that's enough."

Lorenzo carefully placed the black crystal he was holding into the central slot of the amplifier.

As soon as the crystal settled into the slot, the blue light flashed even more intensely.

Soon, a pillar of blue light soared from the amplifier.

The pillar of light, which seemed to pierce the sky, bent its trajectory after rising to a certain height, pointing towards somewhere on the horizon, and a red dot, seemingly indicating a location, appeared on the amplifier screen along with a map.

"Here it is. The location is... surprisingly not far. Huh, this is something."

Lorenzo chuckled in disbelief.

Hearing his absurd laughter, Ivan asked him,

"Where is it?"

"It's close. Inside this academy."

Lorenzo turned to Carla.

More precisely, he looked at her left shoulder, where her sleeve was fluttering.

"...Carla, it's not a place with good memories for you. The place where your arm was blown off. The place where you first met Venere. That's the place."

Carla's face hardened.

"I don't care about that. Let's go right now."

"The distance isn't far, so it would be good to go with the Royal Guard if they deploy. I'll call for support right now, so you guys..."

"No, we have to handle it first. If the Royal Guard goes first, Emil will..."

They wouldn't leave Emil alive.

Emil was, after all, part of the rebel faction.

To the Royal Guard, Emil was just another target to be eliminated.

"Please, save Emil, Instructor. Just Emil..."

Liam said in a hoarse voice.

Lorenzo, who had been quietly watching Liam, let out a long sigh.

"...Alright. But you must follow my instructions. Reckless actions are forbidden."

Everyone nodded.

\*

That place didn't remain a good memory for Carla.

When she was at her most arrogant with overflowing power, she met Venere, and as a result...

'No. It's different from then.'

Carla shook her head to clear her thoughts.

Even though she had lost her power, Ivan was there, and Liam, Lorenzo, and Albina were there too.

There were five of them in total, so such a thing wouldn't happen again.

Lorenzo called out to Carla.

Instead, he stepped forward himself and said,

"I'll go ahead from here. There might be traps."

Passing through the forest, they saw a small cave they hadn't seen before.

A cave that could fit about two people.

"Was there always a place like this?"

"Who would know every detail of the terrain? This isn't a military area. It's easier to think they made it."

Ivan fell silent at Lorenzo's words.

Even though his tone was rough, the words themselves weren't wrong.

"I'll go in first, then Albina. Carla, support Liam."

In reality, the only ones who could fight were Lorenzo, Albina, and Carla.

Ivan, who hadn't recovered his Magical Power, and Liam, who was severely injured.

It would be right to say that these two were out of combat strength.

They didn't have much to say as they passed through the cave.

They instinctively felt that the current situation wasn't good, and they weren't even sure about what would happen from now on, which made it even worse.

"There's no doubt that these guys made this cave."

Lorenzo said with a hollow laugh.

The cave itself wasn't very long, but the descending stairs that followed were hard to believe were naturally formed.

"Seeing stairs like this... sigh."

The deeper they went down the stairs, the denser the Magical Power became.

Carla, who was sensitive to Magical Power waves, frowned the whole time.

This Magical Power wave was definitely Ivan's.

Ivan was right here, but the deeper they went, the more Ivan's Magical Power wave was felt from the depths.

"Carla, you feel it too, don't you?"

"Yes. I can feel Ivan's Magical Power."

Ivan's chuckle was heard.

"My Magical Power. Then there's no doubt."

"Yes. Your Magical Power was transferred to Emil. It's certain that Emil is here."

They walked along a long corridor even after descending the stairs.

Finally, a huge door appeared—a door made of red metal, with complex Magical Engineering formulas engraved in gold on its surface.

"He must be inside here. Albina, I'm counting on you."

Albina nodded and stepped forward.

She summoned a ghost and had it seep into the patterns of the Magical Engineering formula, blocking and disrupting its flow, while Lorenzo lit a Magic Herb.

"...The Emil inside might not be the Emil you knew. It's more than likely, it's certain. Be prepared for that."

No one answered.

"It's done. Let's open it right away."

As Albina touched the door, the golden formulas glowed red.

Then the door slowly began to open.

In an instant, everyone shielded their eyes from the light pouring out from within.

Their eyes gradually adjusted... and the scene that unfolded before them.

In the center of the room was a huge circular altar.

Emil was floating above it.

But that Emil, as Lorenzo had said, was not the Emil they knew.

The naked Emil was glowing with a translucent blue light.

Complex Magical Engineering formulas were engraved all over his body, and Magical Power materialized above them, swirling in clear streaks of light. Dremalo and Venere were standing next to the altar.

"You're later than I expected."

Dremalo smiled as he looked at them.

"Or should I say, you arrived at the exact right time."

"Release Emil, you old monster."

Liam said.

His voice was completely hoarse, but it still carried strength.

"I can't do that. Even if I released him, you know that Emil is no longer the Emil you knew. Aether Vessel, yes. He's an Aether Vessel."

"Stop talking nonsense, you madman."

Carla shouted.

"Aether Vessel or whatever, give Emil back. What did you do to Regina?!"

Her cry was filled with unconcealable anger.

To be honest, Carla was a little more concerned about Regina than Emil.

"Ah, Regina, you mean? Regina Parla. Well, she's doing well. Her role was crucial in completing the Aether Vessel. Anyway, I can't return Emil to you. And even if I did, it wouldn't matter."

"The old man has just become more talkative as he's gotten older."

Liam said, baring his teeth.

"Aether Vessel and whatnot, are you senile or something?"

"Does no one know what an Aether Vessel is? This is the current Magical Engineering of the Empire. Not even knowing what an Aether Vessel is... I can't believe it."

"Stop talking nonsense!"

Ivan shouted.

Aether Vessel, Aether Vessel... I've heard it somewhere before.

I just can't remember.

"I raised Emil for a long time for a special purpose. Yes, Ivan. Ivan Contadino, from the moment I knew you existed. The moment I saw you, the one who killed his father, I realized. He had returned. So I manipulated Emil's Magical Power circuit. So that it could accept anyone's power without conflict. In other words, a vessel, a perfect vessel."

"She's your daughter...! How could you, how could you do that to your daughter!"

As Carla shouted, Dremalo laughed with an absurd expression this time.

"Daughter? Yes, she's a daughter. If she were a son, I wouldn't have done this. But a daughter doesn't matter. You can just think of her as being married off somewhere."

"You're crazy..."

"It seems no one knows why I'm explaining this in such detail. Now, Emil. Open your eyes."

Emil, who had been floating above the central altar, slowly opened his eyes.

His red, flickering eyes scanned the space.

He showed no emotion.

"Emil! It's me, Liam! I've come to get you!"

Liam shouted—but Emil showed no interest in Liam.

"I told you it's useless. Emil no longer has an ego. A pure vessel without emotions, memories, or even consciousness... he's the Aether Vessel itself."

Dremalo turned to Venere.

Venere nodded and forcefully pressed down on the lever next to her.

— Fiiiiiiiiing…

The Magical Power swirling around Emil began to surge.

The two red flickering eyes stopped flickering and shone with a brilliant red light.

"This is where it begins. A nation for Magical Engineering, an empire for Magical Engineering. Let your lives decorate the first step!"

Dremalo shouted.

"Strike, Aether Vessel!"

Surging Magical Power.

Emil, wrapped in it like armor, rushed towards them.

The author's words (Author's Afterword)

Now it's really a period where I can legally do nothing and laze around without anyone saying anything.

Rather, it's a period where I get scolded more if I'm doing something.

...Am I becoming that hopeless person?

# 138 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (12)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (12)

Magic is what humans created to wield Magical Engineering.

Magic is a trickery created from Magical Engineering.

Magical Engineering that doesn't require tricks.

Like a blade cutting through, Magical Engineering itself, the wielded Magical Power formed layers and flew.

Every place the wave swept through collapsed.

The crashing and scattering walls and the roar.

The dust rising there billowed like a storm.

With a single blow, the floor shattered and the walls crumbled.

Seeing the space surrounding them collapse like paper was unbelievable.

"Evade!"

Lorenzo shouted, pulling Carla towards him.

As she, with only one arm, lost her balance and staggered, Lorenzo hugged her and they tumbled.

"Ivan! Liam! Albina!"

Despite Lorenzo's urgent cries, there was no response from the three.

The sudden attack caught them so off guard that they couldn't even respond properly.

"Cough!"

Ivan, barely deflecting the flying debris, knelt down.

His Magical Power, not fully recovered, barely managed to create a shield in the urgent situation, but even that was weak.

Another piece of debris, heated up, flew towards Ivan, revealing a sharp edge, and this time there wasn't even enough time to create a shield.

Just as Ivan squeezed his eyes shut—

"Ivan!"

A translucent, faint blue light cut through the debris.

Albina's summoned creature, a ghost, disappeared with a chilling scream.

"Are, are you okay…Ivan!"

Albina barely opened her eyes and asked.

She was opening dimensions and summoning creatures indiscriminately, but the consumption of Magical Power was equally rapid.

Albina's stamina was also rapidly decreasing as quickly as her Magical Power was being depleted.

"It's dangerous, this…this is dangerous…!"

Before Albina could finish speaking, Emil—now referred to as the Aether Vessel—charged at them again. The hand, imbued with Magical Engineering itself rather than Magic, created traces of rupture as if space was being cut wherever it was swung or touched.

"Carla, get out of the way!"

After pushing Carla away with all his might, Lorenzo reached out his hand.

Magical Power burst from his fingertips and soon took shape, two swords.

The jet-black blades slowly began to glow with a red aura, and Lorenzo gripped the swords in both hands and charged at Emil.

"Stop, Emil! Stop it! Come to your senses!"

Liam's shout accompanied Lorenzo's charge.

Albina, who had been protecting Ivan, turned around to see Liam staggering with a pale face, barely managing to stand up.

"Liam! No! You're…"

Even Albina's worried cry was drowned out as Liam dragged his legs towards Emil.

"Emil! It's me, Liam! Come to your senses!"

But Emil, the Aether Vessel, didn't recognize Liam.

Emil easily caught the sword swung by Lorenzo with his palm, and then struck Lorenzo's chest with his other hand.

"Kuh…!"

Red blood gushed from Lorenzo's mouth as he flew backward and crashed into the wall.

The sound of the wall collapsing, the rising cloud of dust.

"Instructor!"

Carla shouted.

Lorenzo, who had crashed through the wall and remained unresponsive, made Carla grit her teeth.

'I have to somehow knock Emil unconscious…!'

She only has one arm.

Only one arm left.

Carla, her eyes wide open, charged at Emil.

"Emil! Don't blame me!"

If she could detonate a Lightning Bolt right up close.

With that shock, somehow—

But the moment she made eye contact with Emil, Carla involuntarily flinched.

Red glowing eyes.

Eyes that seemed to be spitting blood from the pupils themselves.

Eyes so bloodshot that it was impossible to recognize them as human.

Only animosity and hatred remained, burning within.

Only then could Carla understand.

She could understand Dremalo's words that all ego and consciousness had been lost.

A living weapon.

A living, moving weapon.

An existence that seemed to have had someone's brain and spinal cord removed, and replaced with pure murderous intent and impulse.

"Emil…!"

Lightning Bolt crackled from Carla's fist.

The Lightning Bolt crackled, creating a purple wave.

"Lightning…!"

The last shot.

Just before that last shot, Emil reached out his hand.

Emil's hand covered Carla's fist as it was.

With his other hand, he grabbed Carla's neck.

Then, as if by magic, the Lightning Bolt subsided.

Even Carla's Magical Power, which was being rapidly sucked away—

"Ugh…!"

The feeling of being suffocated.

Only then did Carla realize why Ivan hadn't been able to resist.

This was impossible to resist.

The feeling of the body's Magical Power being forcibly sucked away.

The feeling of being endlessly, endlessly sucked into Emil.

"Emil! Let go!"

Ivan charged at Emil.

However, Emil didn't even glance at Ivan.

Instead, he gripped Carla even tighter with his other hand and swatted Ivan away as if he were swatting a fly.

—Thwack!

Ivan tumbled.

However, the vision, already blurred, began to steal even consciousness from Carla.

Lorenzo, who was struggling to regain consciousness and get up,

Albina, who had collapsed after being unable to summon any more creatures.

Now, no one could save Carla.

Everyone had now been defeated.

All those who had rushed here with high spirits had been defeated by the Aether Vessel.

"Heu, heuheu, heuheuhahahahahaha!"

Dremalo's arrogant laughter echoed.

Venere, standing next to him, was also smiling contentedly.

"What a pity. All the guys here had talent. But it ended up like this."

"That's how it is. It would have been better if Lord Cascata was here."

"It doesn't matter. You cooperate with me, and I give you a way to overcome your weakness."

Venere's weakness was that her heart belonged to Lord Cascata.

But the reason Venere was cooperating with Dremalo was because he was creating a talisman to replace that heart for her.

Even as Dremalo and Venere continued their conversation, no resistance could be felt from Carla anymore. Half-conscious, now, if Emil twisted his grip, Carla's neck would also be broken.

"Emil…! Stop…!"

Liam's desperate voice flowed out.

It was as if he had squeezed out his voice with all his strength, a voice that even smelled strongly of blood.

Liam was barely, crawling, approaching Emil.

"Emil, please…please, look at us…no, look at me…!"

Emil, who had stood firmly in place even as the space collapsed and shook, wavered slightly.

Liam reached out his hand towards Emil.

"Emil…I, I said I'd be your backer…have you forgotten…? I'll, I'll take care of this…come to your, senses…!"

Liam's fingers touched Emil's wrist.

A hand gripping the wrist tightly.

That hand slowly, slowly moved upwards.

Liam, using Emil as a support, barely stood up.

Liam slowly…slowly hugged Emil.

"Please, please…Emil…!"

Carla slumped powerlessly.

Carla slumped powerlessly in Emil's grip.

Emil's hand, which had been gripping her neck, loosened.

Liam's hand stroked Emil's face.

Liam's blood-soaked hand drew bloodstains on Emil's white face.

"Emil…I, came to save you…"

He couldn't even speak properly anymore.

Emil was staring blankly at Liam's face, tears streaming down.

"Sorry for, coming late…Emil…"

Emil was just staring blankly.

Emil was just looking at Liam.

Liam caressed Emil's face.

"I love you…Emil…come back, cough…come back to the kind, Emil…"

The red light flashing in Emil's eyes began to flicker.

"Come back to the kind…shy, Emil…come, back…"

Liam continued.

Emil's eyes began to blink rapidly.

Looking at those eyes—

"I love you…Emil…no, no…Emilia…"

The red light disappeared from Emil's eyes.

The blue flash that had been enveloping her body shook violently, and then the Magical Engineering formulas running across her skin began to crackle and break.

The force of the grip on Carla's neck loosened.

Thanks to that, Carla sat down, gasping for breath with violent coughs.

Emil's pupils were returning to their original color.

Liam stroked Emil's face and hugged her tightly.

"Sorry for, coming too late…too late…"

Emil's pupils trembled at Liam's whisper.

As if awakened from a dream by a familiar voice heard somewhere.

Focus returned to Emil's eyes.

"L…Liam…?"

The voice that flowed from Emil's mouth.

It was definitely Emil's own voice.

"Yes, it's me. Liam…it's Liam."

"Wh, why, why is this…why am I in this state…?!"

"It's…cough, it's okay. If you're…okay, then it's…okay…"

Liam closed his eyes slowly with rough breaths.

The Aether that had been enveloping Emil's body receded as if the tide was ebbing.

Finally, Emil's figure, hugged by Liam, was fully revealed.

"What, what have you done! My Aether Vessel!"

Dremalo's expression changed from shock to anger.

Bursting with anger at Liam and Emil, Dremalo gathered the scattered Magical Power around him into a blade and threw it at them.

"You, you ungrateful little girl…! You don't even know who you owe your good life to!"

But that was the moment.

A fist that flew towards Dremalo violently struck his face.

With a short scream, Dremalo tumbled, and Carla took back her fist, gasping for breath.

"You should keep your bullshit to a minimum, what do you mean by good life."

"Y, you Cascata bitch! Fine, if it's come to this…!"

Dremalo raised his hand.

The Magical Power that had scattered as Emil regained her senses swirled violently and gathered towards Dremalo.

The Magical Power that Emil originally possessed.

In addition, the Magical Power extracted from Ivan.

And the Magical Power extracted from Carla.

The Magical Power of the three people swirled all at once and gathered towards Dremalo.

"To make this old man move directly…! All of you, all at once…cough?!"

That was the moment.

Dremalo vomited blood.

What had pierced through his chest.

It was Venere's hand.

Author's Note

I went to get my blood drawn last Saturday and went to the hospital this morning.

I can't see the baby house yet, but I think it's probably...about 4 weeks old...they told me to come again next week...that's how it went...

# 139 - Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (13)

1. Emil, Emilia von Aufstieg (13)

“Cough…!”

Dremalo spat out black blood.

In the sudden upheaval, everyone froze in place. Only Liam, solely Liam, was struggling to support Emil while everyone else was fixated on Dremalo and Venere.

“What is this, what is this… is this a trick… cough!”

“What trick? I always intended to do this.”

Venere whispered into Dremalo's ear with a smile. In her whisper, Dremalo's gaze transformed into a mix of horror and disbelief, pure confusion.

The magical power that Dremalo had been absorbing began to flow through Venere's hand and into her. Her skin gradually became translucent, and soon a blue light began to emanate from where her heart should have been.

“Ve, Venere… you… you betrayed…!”

“Betrayal? You should call it a wise choice instead. Isn’t it a better option than clinging to such greed of wanting to build the Magic Empire at your old age?”

Venere's hand wriggled as it burrowed into Dremalo's chest. Each time she did, blood gushed out, and finally, her hand reached Dremalo's heart and grasped it tightly.

“You… without me… without the talisman…!”

Dremalo screamed, or rather, it was closer to barely squeezing out a voice.

“That's no longer necessary. This overflowing Aether will replace my heart.”

The light in Dremalo's eyes faded away. His skin, already wrinkled with age, shriveled up, becoming a deep brown mass of wrinkles as if all his life force had been absorbed.

In contrast, a blue aura surged from Venere's body. The intense energy that she could not fully contain billowed like a mirage, overflowing from her entire being. Her hair swayed like waves of light, soaring and fluttering towards the sky.

“I’ll need some time to digest this.”

Venere said with a smile. Then the space around her began to ripple. The azure magical power surged, and the very space seemed to dance in accordance.

“This time, I should say you were lucky. I should thank you for helping my plan succeed beautifully. But there won't be a next time.”

Venere's gaze turned towards Carla and Ivan.

“Fools who couldn’t even utilize this much power properly. The next time you meet me, I will be a complete and perfect god. Until then, it would be wise for you to enjoy a moment of peace.”

The space warped dramatically.

Then, in an instant, Venere's figure vanished.

But her disappearance did not mark the end. As the space warped and returned, the surrounding structures began to crack and then collapsed all at once.

“Everyone, everyone, move quickly! We need to get out of here!”

Lorenzo shouted.

Carla supported Ivan, while Lorenzo took Liam and Emil and started rushing towards the exit. Albina followed behind them, using the restored magical power to clear away falling debris above their heads.

The academy's infirmary was busier than ever. Those who had gone out to hunt returned with serious injuries, creating chaos like never before.

“How is the condition?”

“Liam's condition is very critical! We need intensive treatment…!”

The voices of the medical staff echoed.

Carla leaned against the wall, stroking her neck. She still felt Emil's grip lingering.

“Carla, are you okay?”

Ivan approached and asked. Carla looked at him quietly and couldn’t help but smile slightly.

“Worry about yourself first, you fool. You’re the one who’s weak.”

Carla chuckled. Although she still felt Emil's touch on her neck, seeing Ivan like this made her think it was remarkable that they had survived without dying amidst the chaos.

“Still, you’ve become stronger than me now, Carla.”

Upon hearing that, she realized it was true.

This was the moment she had longed for since the time she was Carlo Della Cascata.

To become stronger than Ivan.

To become strong enough to surpass Ivan.

Now that she thought about it, that was indeed the case.

Now, Carla was stronger than Ivan.

“…But I don’t feel much about it.”

Carla sighed deeply.

That was the truth.

She wasn’t particularly happy about it—she thought she would be.

“It’s probably because I didn’t become stronger through my own efforts.”

The power gained through effort holds more value.

Power obtained without effort leaves only emptiness when lost.

“…That’s true. I thought it was my power, but now that it’s been taken away, it wasn’t mine.”

“What you lost was only magical power, you fool. You can just get it back.”

Carla smiled.

Now that she knew how to comfort Ivan, it could be said that Carla had found some stability.

“At least you have hope of getting it back. What about me?”

Carla shrugged her shoulders.

The tightly bound sleeves.

As Carla shook, the sleeves flapped helplessly, and below her shoulders was an empty space.

Where her arm should have been, there was nothing.

“…I’ll figure something out. That’s…”

“What can you do? This is what happened because I was messing around.”

Carla quietly looked down at her shoulder.

It was an empty garment, devoid of presence.

At that moment, the infirmary door opened, and Albina entered with a flushed face.

After glancing around, she quickly approached Carla and Ivan.

“Do you want to step outside for a moment?”

Carla and Ivan exchanged glances and stood up.

As the two followed Albina outside the infirmary, she spoke in a small voice.

“…Regina has awakened. I thought I should let you two know first. It seems she has returned to her senses for a moment, would you like to meet her?”

Regina.

Regina Parla.

At the news of her awakening, Carla and Ivan nodded simultaneously.

In the underground isolation room, not the academy infirmary.

A space that is not used during normal times but certainly exists.

In that place, which is practically a prison, Regina was present.

“I can’t stay long. The fact that Regina has awakened is still a secret.”

At Albina's words, the two nodded.

Since Regina is also involved in this commotion, once it is confirmed that she is sane after awakening, she will have to be taken to the interrogation room. It’s hard to imagine she would be released without any charges, given that there are witnesses who saw her freeing Emil, which caused significant damage to the academy.

In the deepest part of the isolation room, boasting the strictest security. Albina slowly opened the stone door of that place. Regina, who had been confined here because she needed no treatment, having lost her mind rather than being injured.

As Carla and Ivan entered, they saw Regina sitting on the bed with her head bowed.

“Regina.”

Regina slowly lifted her head. Her large eyes were filled with tears, ready to spill over, and she looked back and forth between Carla and Ivan.

“…Carla.”

Carla rushed over and crouched in front of her. Reaching out, she took Regina's hand, but couldn’t continue her words.

“Carla… what have I done?”

Tears streamed down her face. Regret filled her eyes, questioning what she had done. Carla looked at her and unconsciously reached out to stroke Regina's head.

“It’s not your fault, Regina. Venere brainwashed you. Yes, that’s it.”

“Brainwashed...? But, but…”

“It wasn’t your will.”

At Carla's words, Regina's shoulders shook.

She seemed to be trying to hold back her tears, but ultimately couldn’t, and began to sob.

“But I remember everything… I freed Emil, and in the end, Emil did that… and Liam too…”

Carla wrapped her arms around Regina's shoulders.

“The important thing is that you didn’t do it of your own will. It wasn’t something you wanted to do.”

“But it was me who did it. Even if it wasn’t my will, the fact that I did it doesn’t change…”

“…Do you remember what Venere did to you?”

Regina slowly shook her head.

“I don’t remember exactly… but someone kept whispering in my head. To do as they say, and if I do…”

Regina's gaze turned towards Ivan.

Ivan was also looking at Regina.

“…That I would get Ivan back.”

Love is such a flawed emotion.

It is so vast and profound that if you bury other emotions beneath it, they cannot surface.

“So, so… but it was all me who did it, I… my fault…”

Regina's words trailed off.

Suddenly, Regina's face contorted in pain.

“Regina!”

“My head, my head… it hurts so much…!”

“Albina!”

As Ivan called for Albina, Carla held Regina tightly and patted her back.

Albina rushed in and activated the magic stones she had previously placed around them, while Carla continued to hold Regina, repeatedly patting her back.

‘Venere… you will never let her die easily.’

Gritting her teeth, Carla thought.

She would make sure to kill them in pain.

Regina, Emil, Liam, Ivan.

And even the pain that Carla herself had endured.

She vowed to return it all, multiplied over.

In the darkness, Venere let out a long sigh.

Her physical form had changed significantly compared to before.

Her skin, glowing with a translucent light, sparkled like starlight.

Especially where her heart should have been, a blue orb of light shone brightly.

“Still incomplete…”

She raised her hand to look at it.

A swirling blue Aether danced in her palm.

“Dremalo, you never understood the true value of this power.”

To think she wanted to create mere Aether vessels with it.

If consumed directly, it would become this magnificent power.

Venere slowly walked deeper into the cave.

There was an ancient altar there, and on that altar floated a bead inscribed with strange patterns.

“Now, I need to digest this power… until it all becomes wholly mine.”

Venere sat on the altar and closed her eyes.

With each breath she took, the blue magical power throbbed like a heartbeat.

“…It’s soon. Before long… a true god will descend upon the world…”

In the darkness, Venere's laughter softly echoed.

# 140 - Under the Shadow of the Gods (1)

1. Under the Shadow of the Gods (1)

In the depths of the cave, not a single ray of light penetrated.

Yet, within this cave, a faint blue light pulsed and flickered as if it had a heartbeat, illuminating the surroundings.

Venere stood in the middle of a spacious clearing deep within the cave.

With her eyes closed, where her heart should have been, Aether pulsed and emitted light instead. The pale blue light coursing through her veins created the illusion that her entire body was a luminescent entity of blue.

“…Hoo…”

She let out a long sigh, tinged with what seemed like pain. As she exhaled, Aether circulated once more, and strange, grotesque patterns emerged beneath her skin, etched like tattoos.

The patterns that surfaced on her skin glimmered with a dark hue, flowing through her body like oil on water. The black patterns, glistening in the light of the Aether coursing through her, resembled the scales of a serpent, grotesque in their appearance.

“Almost there…”

As she raised her palm, the patterns writhed as if alive, twisting and curling in response to her gaze. With every movement of her hand, the patterns rippled like waves on a lake. Soon, they flowed down her fingers, becoming writhing strands that scattered into the air.

“It feels like my body… is no longer mine.”

The body she had inhabited until now felt foreign. An unimaginable power dominated her physical form.

“Good, very good… This could be called the essence of Magical Engineering…”

Satisfaction lingered in Venere's voice. As her gaze turned toward one side of the cave, a small distortion appeared in the empty space, spreading like a ripple.

At first, it was merely the cave walls undulating like waves. But the ripples gradually spread throughout the entire cave, as if the air itself were boiling like water, resonating with the rhythm of her heartbeat.

“A power that could be called divine…”

But this could not be called the power of a god. Venere knew well. This was not the power of a god. It was the very essence of Magical Engineering that the last emperor of the ancient empire had once grasped.

A being that was hardly human, a mad emperor who had abandoned governance to study Magical Engineering. The power he possessed was only this much. Then how foolish must that rookie Ivan be, who could only achieve this level of power?

“Very good, indeed…”

Venere raised her hand. From the tips of her fingers, a deep blue Magical Power—now hardly even called Magical Power, but Aether itself—swirled and rose. The Aether began to part the space like a horizon.

As if a sharp scissor had sliced through a large cloth, the space split open, revealing a familiar sight.

“Amazing.”

She merely thought it. If there were those she needed to kill first, it would be at the Academy, she thought. But as if the Aether had read her thoughts, it tore through the space and opened a door directly to the Academy.

“Right, I had debts to repay to them first.”

Venere walked toward the opening. Her body had changed to an extent that could hardly be compared to before. While it still maintained a human form, her skin was translucent and emitted a blue glow. At times flowing like water, at times burning like fire, her body was no longer human in form, yet could not be called anything else.

As she passed through the torn space, a bizarre realm unfolded behind her, no longer a cave but a completely different dimension. A blue expanse with infinite depth, as if a part of the universe had been cut away and brought forth. Stars sparkled with patterns within that space.

Through the rift, Venere finally stepped into the Academy's garden.

The sun hung high in the Academy's garden, which was suddenly engulfed in darkness. With an illusion as if the sky were splitting, dark blue light poured forth through the rift. That light gathered in the center of the garden and finally took the form of Venere.

“W-What is that?!”

A student who first spotted Venere screamed in horror. At that sound, other students turned their gazes, and soon the screams spread.

Ignoring the students' cries, Venere slowly moved forward. Everywhere her feet touched, the grass and soil dried up, and the ground was etched with the patterns of blue Magical Engineering.

“Run, run away! Quickly!”

At someone's shout, the students began to flee in unison. Watching their retreating figures, Venere smiled.

“Look at them run, like little rats. Yes, run away. You should hurry. But it’s too late.”

With a flick of her hand, she sliced through the air. A tiny gesture, and a dark blue beam shot forth, racing toward the fleeing students. The beam flew faster than the students could run, ensnaring them, and they collapsed, looking as if all their bodily fluids had been drained.

“Is she… absorbing their Magical Power…?”

Several instructors rushed out to surround Venere. Some cast defensive barriers for the students, while others unleashed attack and capture spells at her. But those spells disintegrated and vanished before they could even reach Venere.

“It’s all in vain, isn’t it?”

With every wave of her hand, screams echoed. A powerful shockwave erupted, shaking the ground, and both Carla and Ivan barely managed to maintain their balance with short groans.

“Ivan. Go quickly. Get Liam and Emil… and Regina out. Hurry, it’s urgent!”

The Academy's protective system was activating.

From each building, pre-placed barriers sprang forth, launching projectiles at Venere with the power that had been pre-charged.

But that was all.

With just a glance from Venere, the protective barriers were pierced like paper, and the turrets exploded.

The Academy was descending into chaos.

Amidst it all, Venere laughed.

“Run away, everyone. It’s fine to flee, do as you wish. But there will be nowhere in this world for you to stand.”

Dark blue patterns spread beneath Venere's feet. Everything that touched those patterns was absorbed of its Magical Power, losing its strength and fading away. Buildings warped, and space distorted. Watching this, Venere whispered with a satisfied smile.

“Everyone will be beneath my shadow. Under the shadow of the gods.”

The collapse began in one part of the Academy.

The collapse grew larger.

“…I can’t go alone. Carla, you have to run too.”

Ivan hurriedly embraced Carla and began to run.

Right now, escaping was the priority above all else.

# 141 - Under the Shadow of the Gods (2)

1. Under the Shadow of God (2)

The sound of people fleeing the academy echoed like a reverberation. Carla, practically dragged along by Ivan, saw the ominous 'pattern' that was beginning to engulf the academy—or perhaps it should be called a domain—and bit her lip, starting to run on her own.

Behind them, the completely transformed academy was visible. The dark blue pattern shimmered like a mirage, as if it had become another space entirely.

"Run!"

Carla's voice trembled as she shouted at those lagging behind. She didn't know what it was, but its mere appearance inspired fear. That, that appearance, was surely the source of the alarm bells ringing in Carla's intuition.

The domain began to swallow the academy. Those consumed by it swayed and shimmered as if they had entered smoke or a mirage. Seeing a building shimmer was an exceedingly strange sensation, and it was clear that being swallowed by it would not end well.

And the domain was growing, consuming the academy more and more. What had started in the garden was now large enough to be seen from anywhere in the academy.

"What, what on earth is that?!"

"...I don't know. I don't know either. I've never...seen anything like that before."

Just then, a sudden roar echoed from the direction they were fleeing—the main gate of the academy. It was followed by the sound of disciplined footsteps shaking the ground. A neatly aligned formation slowly came into view.

"---!""

Along with shouts that were indistinct due to the distance, a heavy mechanical sound reverberated. Red Magical Power bullets soared into the sky towards the dark blue domain, as if to cover it, and began to strike the domain all at once.

"It's the Magical Engineering Corps!"

The formation consisted of Mages at first glance. Some were directly using striking Magic, others were extending barriers to protect them, and still others were extending blockades as if to overwrite Venere's domain.

"Fire—!"

As they got closer, the shouts became clearer. A man in a black uniform, standing straight—Lord Cascata. Red Magic circles were constantly burning Magical Power in his hands as well.

"Protect the students, continue firing!"

Following Lord Cascata's shout, Magical Power bullets continued to soar into the sky, covering it. As if hail was pouring down, they hammered Venere's domain, and the Magical Engineering Corps systematically took turns, continuing the orderly bombardment.

"Venere..."

Lord Cascata extended both hands forward. Then, the red light from his hands intensified. The Mages of the corps also unleashed their respective Magic at his command, preventing Venere's domain from expanding.

"Long time no see, Lord Cascata."

Venere's voice flowed out from within the domain. Her figure was not visible, only her voice could be heard. Each time her voice flowed out, the entire domain shook like a mirage, as if the domain itself was representing her will.

"I've missed you so much, Lord Cascata. You played with me so well, didn't you?"

Lord Cascata did not answer.

Instead, he took out a small box from the bag at his waist.

"Your heart is still with me, Venere. Immediately cease hostile actions. Cease them and face the judgment of the Imperial law."

"How amusing."

The domain shook greatly. Venere's laughter flowed out.

"You have no idea how much I struggled to break free from the binding of that heart. Actually, that was the goal, but thanks to that foolish Dremalo, I gained an even greater opportunity."

"How foolish, Venere."

"Now, I don't care what happens to that heart. I am Aether itself. Free from life, consciousness, emotion...everything. God is a word that refers to me."

"Surrender, Venere. The power you possess is a dangerous power. A power that only its master can wield. A power that doesn't fit will come at a price."

"From now on, I am the master, Cascata. The price? You are the ones who will pay the price."

"How foolish. You don't understand what the heart means at all. Do you think I only took your life as a hostage?"

Venere's laughter shook the entire domain. Expanding and contracting repeatedly, the space fluctuated as if representing Venere's will.

"Lord Cascata. I'll say it again now, but I hated your arrogance so much. My heart...it doesn't mean much anymore. Now, look at this."

A strong wave arose from the center of the domain. Venere's figure was faintly visible in the blue and black mirage. From her chest, shining Aether swirled. In the place where her heart should have been, there was a more viciously glittering blue crystal.

"That foolish one couldn't even handle the power properly. Emil? Thanks to that foolish woman refining it, it became an even higher purity Magical Power itself. I am now Aether itself. Even without a heart, I can be eternal and immortal."

Lord Cascata's eyes narrowed. Then, he smiled.

"How foolish, Venere. It is said that as the years of life accumulate, wisdom deepens, but you have not even accepted that truth. I pity you for being buried in the eternity of the flesh. As long as your heart is with me, your will cannot be entirely your own."

Lord Cascata opened the box. Inside the box, a red heart was beating. As that heart pulsed towards the domain, the domain also began to tremble similarly, strangely.

"Wh, what are you trying to do!"

Venere's urgent voice flowed out. Lord Cascata gripped the heart with his reddened hand. As he gripped the heart, pain was mixed into Venere's voice.

"Step back, Carla."

The person gripping Carla's shoulder was Lorenzo. Carla looked at Lorenzo and asked.

"Uncle...no, what is Lord Cascata trying to do?!"

"He's controlling Venere."

"Then, if we crush that heart right now, will Venere also fall...?!"

Carla's question was valid. The heart was gripped in Lord Cascata's hand. If Venere was in so much pain just from that, shouldn't they just crush it?

"It's not that easy."

Lorenzo shook his head.

"If Venere didn't have a heart, we could kill her that way, but that's not the case. Rather, if we give her pain and then she becomes completely free from the binding of that heart, the problem will become even bigger. For now, he's just trying to prevent Venere's domain from growing further in this state."

So this was the end of it. At that moment, Venere's scream echoed.

"I'll kill you, I'll kill you, Cascata! I will never let you die peacefully!"

With Venere's scream filled with pain, the domain momentarily burst out. Several Mages of the adjacent Magical Engineering Corps were instantly swallowed by the domain, and with a short death cry, they were seen collapsing into emaciated corpses as their Magical Power was sucked out in an instant.

"Everyone, retreat! Second unit forward! Strengthen the barrier!"

Lord Cascata also retreated and shouted.

"As expected, with just the heart..."

"First, you guys go outside the main gate. Regina, Emil, and Liam are there. Join those kids."

Following Lorenzo's words, Carla and Ivan turned to retreat for now. Behind them, Lord Cascata's voice could be heard.

"Yes, that's right. Unless your heart is attached to your body, there will be advantages for you. But, how about this."

Lord Cascata waved his finger at Venere's heart. Following his finger, the strokes of a seal were drawn and began to seep into the heart. A pattern that was difficult to recognize was engraved on the heart, and Lord Cascata's finger placed the final dot on top of it.

"Venere, Mage of Alchemy. I overlay my will on your heart, stop. Your will cannot precede my will."

A roar echoed along with Lord Cascata's voice. At the same time, a flash of light also extended. As the flash subsided, the domain noticeably shrank and began to become smaller, limited to the center of the academy.

"I, is it over...? Did we get rid of her...?"

Carla said, catching her breath.

"No, it can't be. Venere is still there."

Ivan pointed his finger. Venere's figure was clearly visible within the shrinking domain. She was standing still, but she didn't look dead or injured.

"It won't end like this..."

Ivan muttered.

Looking at the academy, which had become nearly destroyed, Carla finally realized.

Venere had only stopped for a moment, but either way, they still had to kill her.

Venere, Emil, Regina, and even Ivan's Magical Power.

Carla could vaguely sense that a battle was unavoidable in order to restore all of these things to their original state.

Author's Note

I wrote this and didn't upload it