# 62 - Exploration Battle (5)

1. Exploration Game (5)

"...So, I understand what role you play in my life."

Carla said, brushing back the bangs from which rainwater dripped.

A chill permeated her voice, and rage swirled in her eyes, mingled with resentment and annoyance, each in its place.

"You're an obstacle that I need to remove from my life, Lucas."

Carla glared at Lucas.

Thanks to Kiara, Lucas stood completely untouched by the rain, watching Carla and Ivan with a relaxed smile.

"Such foul language from my future wife. Perhaps it's because you didn't learn the manners of a mistress from your mother, as Elder Cascata would say."

"Cut the useless bullshit. If you shut up now, I might just let you both go. My purpose lies elsewhere."

"Hmph?"

Lucas curled up the corners of his lips in a smile.

Indeed, the secrecy was secure.

Even Carla didn't seem to know why Lucas was here, and neither did the commoner beside her, who was exuding a menacing aura.

"This is quite tiresome, having to associate with such dullards. Haven't you realized it yet, Carla, even with things as they are?"

"Stop spouting nonsense, Lucas. Carla and I have different goals. Why don't you just pretend you didn't see us and move on?"

Ivan stepped forward as if to protect Carla.

Obstacles should be removed, and the one who sees the obstacle first should be the one to remove it.

"A lowly commoner who doesn't know the fear of a great noble. Do you believe that woman behind you, Carla, will protect you? If you believe Carla will protect you, you'd better wake up from that dream."

"I don't think about things like that. I have no intention of clinging to power."

Ivan didn't like Lucas.

Probably, that was true for everyone in this place.

No one in this world could possibly like such a person—

"Wouldn't it be better to realize it by now? My purpose isn't some trivial Inter-house Competition. My purpose is you, right there."

Lucas extended his finger.

Arrogantly pointing with only his index finger, at Carla.

"Carla, you are my purpose."

"...Ha."

Carla let out a hollow laugh at that gesture.

A tiresome connection—truly.

She thought she had trampled and crushed the bug-like creature countless times, but perhaps it was in its nature, as it kept crawling back up like this.

"That won't do. I can't hand Carla over."

"Commoner. This is not your place."

"It is my place. At least, I can't hand Carla over to someone like you."

"Insolent, truly. Then I'll have to take her by force."

With those words, Lucas formed a hand seal.

A thick, dark green poisonous smoke flowed from his fingertips, creating a poisonous dance with a different intensity than during the Grand Melee.

"By force? How amusing."

Ivan smirked and drew up his Magical Power.

His Magical Power, which knew no bounds, to the point where saying the sea wouldn't run out of salt was no exaggeration, surged fiercely, forming Dust Storm Magic in one hand and Lightning Magic in the other.

"Dual Magic? Do you want to commit suicide?"

Lucas's voice trembled slightly.

He was doing as Venere had instructed, but Ivan's appearance, casting two Magic spells simultaneously, was truly beyond the norm. He couldn't understand why this commoner had been born with such talent, but Lucas pulled out a long needle from the thickly rising poisonous smoke.

—His necklace will be there, Young Master.

—Flick this long needle at it.

—There's only one, so you must hit it.

Recalling Venere's words, Lucas shouted at Kiara.

"Kiara! What are you doing! You stupid bitch, why aren't you helping?!"

Kiara didn't answer Lucas's shout but drew up her water power.

The pouring rain was extremely advantageous for Kiara, and thanks to that, the waterspout that surged up according to Kiara's Magic was comparable in power to Ivan's.

"...Ivan, I have no particular feelings for you. It's just that it has to be this way."

Kiara's waterspout collided with Ivan's Lightning Bolt tornado.

The clash between Ivan, who was wielding dual Magic, and Kiara, who was wielding only water Magic, should have basically ended in Ivan's overwhelming victory, but with the heavy rain pouring down, Kiara was also drawing out several times more power than her original strength, confronting Ivan's.

Now, poison was mixed in there.

Lucas wasn't one to just watch that scene, so he mixed the poisonous smoke into Kiara's waterspout, hid his figure in the poisonous fog, and approached Ivan.

"Lucas, you rat!"

Carla noticed Lucas's movement and rushed at him.

Even though she only had one arm, she was basically a martial artist.

If Ivan was blocking the vanguard like this, Carla thought she could somehow deal with Lucas.

"You'll have to wait a little longer, Carla!"

Lucas pushed Carla back by creating a barrier of poisonous fog.

Even with her body enhanced by Lightning Magic, Carla, who still had weaknesses in her body itself, began to be pushed back little by little due to the barrier, and Lucas rushed towards Ivan.

"Commoner, your end is today!"

Ivan noticed Lucas rushing at him, but the waterspout from Kiara was all he could do to push back with all his might, so his response was delayed.

The long needle flashed in Lucas's hand.

Before Ivan could even move, the long needle in Lucas's hand flew towards Ivan's chest, and that needle—the Unyielding Dagger—flew towards the necklace of suppression hanging around Ivan's neck.

— Psh!

With a strange sound like air leaking, the Unyielding Dagger accurately pierced the necklace of suppression.

Thin cracks gradually spread from the center of the necklace of suppression, and it finally filled the entire necklace with cracks.

— Clang!

Before Ivan could do anything, the necklace of suppression—which Ivan knew as a simple charm—shattered without fail. The fragments of the broken necklace, ringing with a sharp sound, were swept away by the waterspout summoned by Kiara, disappearing without a trace.

"Th, th…ugh…!"

The precious necklace received from Albina.

That necklace that he always held to calm his mind whenever he felt strange or angry.

The moment that necklace broke, Ivan felt something snap in his head. The memories of unconsciously touching the necklace and finding stability lined up and floated like fragments, and at the same time, a sense of emptiness as if something that had been holding him back had disappeared, and then an inexplicable anger pressed down on his chest.

'What…is this?'

In a situation where his head went blank and even his breathing became difficult, his Magical Power lost control and began to rampage.

As the Magical Power was shaken, the output weakened greatly, and no sooner had the Lightning Bolt tornado, which had been struggling with Kiara's waterspout, fluctuated greatly than the waterspout swallowed Ivan.

"Kiara! Get rid of him!"

At Lucas's shout, Kiara squeezed her eyes shut and whipped up the output of the waterspout even more fiercely.

The waterspout, wailing as it swallowed Ivan, finally roared and stretched out even more greatly, and Kiara chased after Ivan, who was pushed away by the waterspout, at a rapid pace.

"The commoner is gone now."

Lucas turned to Carla, his whole body wet.

Despite being soaked in water thanks to Kiara's barrier, which had disappeared at some point, Lucas's eyes gleamed as he glared at Carla.

"...You're insane."

"You can call me insane, Carla."

Lucas took a big step towards Carla.

Now that Ivan was gone—

'...I can't just keep being protected by Ivan.'

Carla slowly drew up her Magical Power.

Even if Ivan wasn't there, nothing would change.

Hadn't Carla almost defeated Lucas even during the Grand Melee?

Even though she eventually lost, it was by a narrow margin, so the result wouldn't be any different this time either.

"There's no use in resisting, Carla. That commoner will die at Kiara's hands. There's no one who can face Kiara on a day like this with such heavy rain."

Lucas grinned and grabbed Carla's neck.

As her Adam's apple was gripped by Lucas's hand, which was covered in poison, Carla choked out a groan and her breath caught in her throat. The Magical Power she had managed to draw up scattered and disappeared in an instant as she lost her concentration.

"You shouldn't have thought it would be the same as during the Grand Melee. How foolish."

Lucas sneered and laughed.

Over that face, the raindrops flowed down endlessly as the barrier disappeared.

"Hmm, is it because I'm away from Kiara? Tsk, how annoying."

Clicking his tongue a couple of times, Lucas brushed back his bangs and said.

"Venere, that bitch gave me something very useful."

"...Venere…?!"

Even in the midst of struggling to breathe, that name, Venere, pierced her ears accurately.

Even as Carla struggled to remove Lucas's hand, her gaze was glaring at Lucas.

"Just now, you said Venere…?"

"Yes, Venere. It was Venere who told me the commoner's weakness. And…"

Lucas took out a long needle and held it in front of Carla's eyes.

Waving the long needle he held up as if to boast, Lucas said.

"This is also something I received from Venere, that bitch. It will turn you into a bitch as well."

"Y, you crazy bastard…what are you trying to do…!"

"What else could it be? Such an outdoor setting is also very suitable for a girl like you's first experience. I also wanted to enjoy it in such an outdoor setting, so this is perfect."

The long needle in Lucas's hand gleamed.

The long needle, which was clearly visible and revealed its presence even in the midst of this pouring rain.

Watching the tip of it pointing towards her, Carla struggled.

"Whatever you want, it won't go your way…!"

Her breath was getting short.

Her fingertips were numb and her mind was flickering dimly, but Carla's gaze continued to glare at Lucas until the end.

"That's right, Carla. Keep resisting. Resist with all your might. That look isn't bad either, I like it very much. I'm very curious to see how that face will be ruined, what kind of voice you'll sob with."

Raising the long needle high.

Carla squeezed her eyes shut.

Author's Note

...I'm sorry, I uploaded it wrong...

I'll leave it like this for today and switch the contents tomorrow...ㅠㅠㅠㅠㅠㅠ

# 63 - Exploration Battle (6)

1. Exploration Game (6)

Lucas was confident that everything would go exactly as he had planned.

That commoner, who had always been an eyesore, couldn't possibly defeat Kiara.

On a rainy day like this, especially with the downpour, Kiara was practically unbeatable.

Even if that commoner was quite strong, he couldn't win against Kiara in this weather, so soon Kiara would be back with his head.

Moreover, the Aphrodisiac on this needle was said to be so potent that it could make even a Gigantis go wild, so there was no need to doubt that he would also obtain Carla.

'I can enjoy myself with that bitch Carla, and then add Kiara to the mix. The three of us can have some fun.'

Kiara wasn't as good as Carla, but she was still beautiful enough to hold her own anywhere.

The thought of enjoying himself with two of the Empire's finest flowers in his arms already made Lucas feel stiff down below.

"It's your destiny, Carla. You'd better accept it."

Lucas aimed the needle at Carla with a smile.

The needle was aimed at Carla's neck.

Injecting it there, where the blood flow was concentrated, would ensure the fastest effect.

"Stop right there, you vermin."

Lucas's head snapped up as soon as he heard the voice.

It was a familiar voice—one he knew well.

"Commoner…!"

Lucas couldn't even finish his sentence.

Something flew towards him in an instant, overwhelming him before he could even realize it.

— Thud!

Lucas tumbled into the mud, entangled with whatever had suddenly attacked him.

His uniform was a mess of mud and dirty water, but Lucas's eyes widened as he looked at what had crashed into him.

"Kiara!?"

It was Kiara.

She was limp, thrown at Lucas, her eyes closed.

"She had more grit than I expected, you mongrel. But she's just a servant following a mongrel. Grit alone can't accomplish much."

A long shadow fell over Lucas's face.

In the pouring rain, Lucas could barely glare at the person looking down at him.

A face with a relaxed smile.

A water barrier above his head kept his face smiling even in this downpour.

It was Ivan.

"C-Commoner…! How, how did you… Kiara!?"

Ivan didn't answer.

He simply looked down at Lucas with a cynical expression.

"At least your woman had some grit. What do you have?"

Ivan reached out and grabbed Lucas by the collar.

He effortlessly pulled Lucas up, and Kiara, who had been draped over him, fell limply into the mud.

"Cough…!"

Lucas, suddenly breathless, unknowingly stabbed the Aphrodisiac needle he was holding into Ivan's arm. He quickly regretted it, but he couldn't afford to worry about the Aphrodisiac in this situation—how could Lucas possibly face someone who had defeated even Kiara in this downpour!

"Trying to play games with a flimsy needle?"

Ivan pulled the needle out of his arm and tossed it away.

His eyes, sharp and gleaming even in the rain, were clearly visible.

Meeting those eyes, Lucas finally realized.

This guy intends to kill me.

Saving Kiara was just a whim; this guy intends to kill me here.

Lucas struggled with all his might.

His instincts screamed at him to escape from this grip.

"No one's watching here. It's the perfect place to stage an accident. But…it's become troublesome."

Ivan glanced back.

Carla, who had been coughing for a while, was finally regaining her senses.

Ivan glanced at Carla and then glared back at Lucas.

"Killing you would be a hassle in many ways. For the woman who will be my rain…"

"Y-You…commoner…! I am, I am Schyskeil…!"

Lucas began to spew poison at Ivan.

He repeatedly struck Ivan's arm with poison held in his fingertips, released poisonous smoke towards Ivan, and even created poison bullets to shower Ivan with, but Ivan didn't even flinch at Lucas's attacks.

"I don't know any Schyskeil. Why would I need to keep such a trivial name in my head?"

Ivan smiled, twisting the corner of his lips.

His eyes weren't smiling at all, and Lucas felt a chill run down his spine as he met those eyes.

"You, you're ignoring Schyskeil, you…!"

"Didn't I say I don't care? I'm not satisfied with just breaking your limbs, so what should I do?"

Ivan stroked his chin, pondering.

It would be easy to kill Lucas right now.

But the problem was that it would put Carla in a difficult position.

“…Kill him.”

A cold voice was heard.

Carla was visible in Ivan's sidelong glance.

Her lips were bitten, and her eyes were wide as she glared at Lucas, devoid of any smile.

"I'll kill him. If I kill him, I can somehow handle the aftermath."

"Oh? You've got guts."

"Ivan,…no. You're not Ivan. I don't know what you are other than Ivan, but I'll kill that bastard."

Carla slowly stood up and glared at Lucas.

She glared at Lucas, who was struggling in Ivan's grip, struggling pathetically like a worm.

There wasn't even a shred of memory.

If she had killed him when he was a man, things wouldn't have become so complicated.

Seizing the opportunity when it arises is the true Mage.

Regretting a missed opportunity is not like a Mage.

"Will you do it?"

"Yes."

Carla raised her Lightning Magic again and approached Lucas.

So as not to leave regrets,

So as not to leave any future troubles.

At this moment, it was right to deal with Lucas with all her might.

"Lucas. I hope you're born a good person in the next life. If you can be born as a human, that is."

Lightning crackled from Carla's fist, and purple flames bloomed.

Ignoring defense, the Magical Engineering focused solely on attack.

Lucas's face turned pale, and he struggled even more violently.

It was a struggle to escape from Ivan's grip, but Ivan's grip held his collar more firmly than an iron wall.

"Since you don't have arms, I'll help you. I'll hold him like this, so finish him, Carla."

Carla didn't answer.

She couldn't end it carelessly.

She had heard that if you were injured to the point of death, you would be transported out of this space—so, instead of being injured to the point of death, she had to kill him with one blow.

"C-Carla! Save me, save me…! Please! Carla!"

Lucas pleaded with Carla, tears and snot streaming down his face.

Knowing Carla's personality well, he desperately realized from Carla's voice that she intended to kill him.

"D-Don't kill me! Carla! Cascata Young Lady! Cascata Miss! I'll call off the engagement and everything! Please, pleeaaase!"

The purple light blooming from Carla's fist turned red, then blue.

Concentrating a significant portion of her Magical Power into her fist, it now burned intensely, as if it were about to explode.

Carla glared at Lucas.

It wasn't about forgiveness or anything like that—she just felt sorry for this idiot's life.

But feeling sorry was one thing, and retribution was another.

“…I’ll attend your funeral, Lucas.”

"C-Carlaaaaaaaa!"

Thud, she stepped on the ground.

Her fist, now burning with a deep purple light, soon pierced through the center of Lucas's chest.

\*

Lucas's corpse had a gaping hole in its chest.

And Kiara, with broken arms and legs, had fainted.

Both of their bodies disappeared from below with a strange sound.

They were probably returning to the academy outside this area.

Watching that, Carla had a complicated expression.

In fact, the aftermath could somehow be managed.

Although Schyskeil was a great noble family, Carla was also a great noble, and Cascata's power was far greater than Schyskeil's.

Killing someone was still difficult to get used to, so Carla watched Lucas's corpse until it completely disappeared, wearing an ambiguous expression.

"You're a bold woman."

Carla glanced at Ivan.

Now, all that remained was this guy.

This guy wearing Ivan's shell.

"Ivan…no, what are you? What the hell are you?"

Carla asked, trying to calm her trembling body.

The childhood fear that had dominated her youth.

Having witnessed it now, Carla had to do her best to calm her trembling body.

“…Hmm.”

Suddenly, Ivan's face contorted.

Come to think of it, Ivan's face was strangely red.

Not only was his face red, but his breathing was also extremely rough.

"Ivan?"

Ivan's condition was very strange.

Carla hesitated, wavered, and slowly approached Ivan.

“…Don’t come near me. Something dangerous seems to have entered my body. Why is this body so weak…Kugh.”

Ivan staggered, holding his head.

His body was shaking greatly; his condition was—

"Ivan, did you perhaps…take that Aphrodisiac…?"

"I told you not to come, near…"

Staggering, Ivan swayed as if he were about to fall.

Without realizing it, Carla approached Ivan and supported him.

And at that moment—

"I said, don't, don't come near me…!"

Carla gasped for breath, her face contorted.

Ivan, who had suddenly pounced on her, was now pinning her to the muddy ground, choking her.

Ivan looked down.

Carla looked up.

Carla met Ivan's eyes.

It was a look that Carla had seen several times before.

The look that Lucas used to give her.

The desire burning in those eyes was a longing called lust.

Author's Note

I had some things happen today, so my manuscripts suffered an unfortunate accident.

Well, it happened while they were trying to help me, and they're looking at me with sparkling eyes, asking if the PC is working now, so what can I do?

It's not like they had bad intentions, and they were just trying to help me do well, so I can't say anything bad.

People sometimes make mistakes, do wrong things, and face setbacks when they're trying to do well.

If the result isn't a complete mess, I try to see the intention behind it as much as possible.

It's a new year, so I can just think of it as dusting off old manuscripts and start building them up again.

People are more important than my manuscript bundles, right? Hehehe.

# 64 - Exploration Battle (7)

1. Exploration Game (7)

Carla's thoughts were cut short.

It was the moment when Ivan's hand, burning with desire and lust, seemed to move quickly.

Raising Carla's right hand high above her head and pinning her wrist down, Ivan rendered her unable to resist at all.

"...Ivan? Surely, surely not...right? Ivan?"

Ivan's eyes began to glow bright red. His pupils shone crimson, then even the whites of his eyes became bloodshot.

* It's an aphrodisiac that can drive even a Gigantos mad, Carla.
* I look forward to hearing what kind of voice you'll whimper with.

It was as if she could hear the voice of Lucas, now dead. Surely not, surely not. Surely.

"Ugh?!"

A small moan escaped from Carla. Ivan's hand roughly grabbed and squeezed her breast.

This full sensation, felt even through the academy uniform. Carla's breasts, boasting such massive volume that flesh spilled between his fingers. Carla frowned momentarily at the pain, but then glared up at Ivan and shouted:

"Move, Ivan...! What, what are you doing...!"

"Stay still, woman. Because of that idiot's aphrodisiac... Ugh."

Ivan couldn't speak at length. From his tone alone, it was clearly evident that this was not Ivan, but some other evil presence hiding within him.

Carla's heart began to pound even harder. At some point, both her legs had been pinned under Ivan's knees, and her right arm was also restrained by Ivan, leaving her completely immobilized.

Only Ivan's left hand was free, but it was now roaming freely under Carla's top as if it owned the place.

"Ivan, Ivaaan...! Get a hold, ngh, get a hold of yourself...!"

Carla cried out with a frown. But Ivan's gaze was no longer directed at Carla, instead fixed on her breast which was fully grasped in his hand.

"Sacrifice yourself for me...!"

"Don't say crazy things, Ivan...! Move, if you don't move right now...!"

"If I don't move, what can you do about it?!"

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At Ivan's sudden shout, Carla flinched and stopped resisting. If he doesn't move, yes... if he doesn't move, what can Carla do? Come to think of it, there's nothing she can do.

"But, I, I... Ivan, you, I thought you were a man...!"

"Shut up! Isn't this a woman's body now?! If you don't stay still, this body's magical circuit will backflow!"

Carla's body stiffened at those words. If the magical circuit backflows, damage inevitably follows. Damage to the magical circuit - that's essentially the end of life as a mage. Though Carla lost her left arm, her magical circuit itself is intact so she can still function as a mage to some extent, but if that circuit backflows, then Ivan would...

"Ca...Carla...!"

For a moment, the force pinning her down loosened. The voice that flowed from Ivan was his original voice, full of gentleness.

"Ivan, is that you?!"

Seizing that opportunity, Carla quickly broke free from Ivan and sprang up, asking. The heavy pain remaining in her breast. Trying hard to ignore it, Carla shouted.

"Get, get away from me, Carla... This, I, I... I think I've gone strange...!"

Ivan's voice was filled with desperation. Since the aphrodisiac affects the body anyway, perhaps both Ivan's original self dwelling in his body and the other personality lurking beneath are being affected.

"Ivan, Ivan..."

Carla slowly backed away. To neutralize the aphrodisiac, there's really only one method. Sexual intercourse between a man and woman, that's practically the only antidote for an aphrodisiac.

However, for her who still maintains her male self-identity, that's not an easy thing to do. Carla intended to move away from Ivan like this.

'...If Ivan's magical circuit backflows...'

Again, I, perhaps, if I recover my arm, again- Dark desires began to creep up Carla's ankles as she backed away.

If she regains her arm. If only that happens, wouldn't she once again sit in the glorious first place position, surpassing Ivan?

Even while backing away, Carla's gaze remained fixed on Ivan. Unable to tear her eyes away from Ivan who was writhing in agony, she slowly backed away step by step.

"Hurry, hurry and go... Carla...! I don't know what this is, but I feel like... my body, I'm about to lose control of my body again...! Quickly, quickly get away from me...!"

Slowly, it slows down. Is it right to move away while leaving Ivan struggling like this? Carla couldn't be sure.

The kindness Ivan had shown her. How she was barely able to get up and walk thanks to Ivan. How she would have been utterly broken if not for Ivan.

Such things held onto her ankles and wouldn't let go. Is that why, even though she should be backing away. Even though she should be moving away from Ivan. Her steps are so heavy.

Ivan raised his hand high. Water droplets drip from the sharp pebble clutched in that hand.

The pebble is aimed at Ivan's hand. The magical circuit revealed on that hand was shining brilliantly, visible even to Carla from this distance.

The perfect magical circuit with 31 buds, which made one wonder how such a flawless circuit could appear in a commoner.

"This measly magical circuit...!"

No, don't.

Carla unconsciously repeated in her mind. Ivan was clearly trying to destroy his own magical circuit. He was undoubtedly trying to destroy the magical circuit so that even if it backflows, there would be no problem.

"Aaaaargh!"

With Ivan's anguished cry, he brought down the pebble and-

"No, Ivaaan!"

Carla rushed in at the same time, causing Ivan and Carla to tumble together in a tangle.

"Don't do something stupid, you commoner!"

Carla, now on top of Ivan, glared down at him in full anger. Her fiery gaze, brimming with fury, was directed at Ivan.

"Carla, run away...! Quickly!"

Ivan's eyes, glowing red with lust, were full of pain. A burning sensation in his gut, as if his insides were on fire, and the strange, subtle desire in his constantly throbbing lower body were tormenting him. In his mind, an unknown voice demanding he give up his body, and the urge to ravish that woman, were tearing him apart.

"That damn aphrodisiac...!"

Carla bit her lip hard, cutting off her words. She roughly took off her academy uniform top and threw it far away. Then she started to violently tear off her blouse as well, but it clung to her skin due to the rain and wouldn't come off properly. Frustrated, Carla practically ripped the blouse off.

"Em...embrace me. Ivan, embrace me."

"Carla...!"

"The magical circuit, that, that's so... I can't allow you to destroy it like that...! Even if I become number one because your magical circuit is ruined, that kind of thing, I wouldn't be happy at all...!"

Carla's words were cut short. The moment Ivan's eyes beneath her flashed brightly, he suddenly flipped her over and pinned her down.

"You made a wise decision, Carla...!"

Carla squeezed her eyes shut.

The outdoors in the pouring rain was unexpectedly romantic. Carla, breathing heavily, suddenly had such a thought as she watched her breath dissipate into the downpour.

At some point, most of the clothes covering her body had been removed. Even what remained was just scraps of the blouse she had practically torn off herself.

"...Ivan. Give me back the Ivan I knew."

At Carla's words, Ivan's gaze shifted from her bare chest to her face.

"The first time... should be with Ivan. Even if it's because of the aphrodisiac, I don't like that it's someone like you for the first time."

"...How brazen."

Ivan said with a smirk. Whether that was a sign of agreement, Ivan's fierce and cold expression softened slightly.

"Carla..."

"...Looking at me like that, I don't have anything to teach you, Ivan. That..."

Carla glanced down briefly. In fact, being naked wasn't limited to just Carla. Ivan had also already stripped off all his clothes, and where Carla's gaze fell, Ivan's manhood stood erect like a hard stick, poking at Carla's private area.

"Just put it in."

"Carla... really, ugh. Are, are you sure...?"

It's quite remarkable to still have self-control even under the influence of an aphrodisiac. To still be thinking of Carla first in this situation, just how gentle of a guy is he?

"I decided this of my own will. So hurry up and do it."

Carla squeezed her eyes shut. That thing, pressing between her thighs, its heat clearly evident even in this rain. She really never thought a day like this would come, but there's nothing that can be done about what's already happened.

"Carla, Carlaaaa...!"

A hot thing. Something like a rod. That, finally began to penetrate Carla.

But- It hurts.

At some point, when something seemed to snap, Carla unconsciously frowned and let out a scream.

"Pull, pull out...! Pull out, you commoner!"

Author's Note (Afterword)

Ah, but there's no serialization this weekend! I need to build up a stockpile... By the way... should I mark this as 18+...

# 65 - Exploration Battle (8)

1. Exploration Game (8)

Carla's inside was not wet at all.

Although her body was thoroughly soaked with water from being rained on so much, that was that, and the actual deed was something else entirely.

She was used to pain and good at enduring it, but Carla couldn't help but scream at the pain that far exceeded anything she had ever experienced.

"Ah, it hurts, it hurts...!"

"Ca, Carla… are you okay?!"

Ivan's worried voice flew past her ears.

Carla instinctively pounded on Ivan's chest as she screamed at the pain of Ivan's thing digging into her, as if the entrance to her vagina was being torn apart.

He had just pushed it straight in without any lubrication, so it was impossible not to hurt.

"Ta, take it out…! Take it out, Ivan…! Take it out, quickly!"

Carla felt like she was losing her mind.

Not only did it feel like her flesh was being torn apart inside, but the pain of Ivan's thing pushing in and pulling the skin of her vaginal entrance along with it was excruciating. Tears welled up in Carla's eyes and streamed down her face from the pain, as if she was being slashed with a knife.

"Ca, Ca, Carla… I can't take it out… I can't take it out…"

Carla was in a lot of pain, but Ivan couldn't take it out.

That was because he wasn't the one in pain, and he didn't know why Carla was in pain, but he felt the wriggling of Carla's vaginal walls—he didn't even know the word for it, actually—warmly embracing his thing all over his body.

Carla's prickly personality, her every barbed word.

Her inner flesh was the complete opposite of her nature, so warm and soft.

Even though Carla was telling him to take it out, Ivan couldn't take it out.

That was because Carla's inside was so soft, warm, and addictive.

"It hurts, I said it hurts… I said it hurts…"

Carla was now sobbing out loud.

She had never felt such pain in her life.

Even when her left arm was blown off, it didn't hurt this much!

"Carla, I'm sorry… I'm sorry…!"

"If you're sorry, take it out quickly…!"

"I can't do that… Keuh…!"

Ivan pushed his entire root into Carla's inside.

He couldn't stop it.

Carla's flesh seemed to be tearing every time he went in.

It felt like her insides were wriggling and licking his root.

It was impossible to pull out after feeling this.

However, that wasn't all there was to it.

The Aphrodisiac already circulating in Ivan's body had numbed his reason, and now that it had finally found an outlet, it had completely taken over not only his reason but also his instincts.

Ivan suddenly looked down at Carla.

She covered her eyes with her arm, and hot breaths escaped from her slightly parted lips.

Tear tracks were clear on her cheeks, as if it had hurt a lot. Only then did Ivan realize that Carla's heavy breasts were slowly shaking.

Instinctively, his hand reached for them.

Her breasts were so large and soft that flesh spilled out between his fingers when he squeezed them as if to wring them out.

Her nipples, sharply asserting themselves, tickled his palm.

"Eung, euht."

As if even that moan wasn't her own will, Carla closed her mouth as soon as the small, frail moan escaped.

However, even that sight was a jolt to Ivan's head.

Carla was a noble—a great noble at that.

And yet, she was lying beneath Ivan, a commoner, unable to even make eye contact, giving him her body.

Even these breasts, which should be cherished as a woman, were defenselessly exposed, her vivid crimson nipples being teased by Ivan's fingers, and Carla could only cover her face and let out small moans, not knowing what to do.

Ivan realized that the thing that had penetrated Carla's flesh was getting wet.

In the silence that followed the rain, the sound of splashing water was quite loud.

"Carla… I'm going to move."

Her body flinched in surprise as he whispered in her ear.

Wasn't that fun?

Ivan slowly raised his upper body.

Looking down, there was no more beautiful sight.

Her crimson nipples were standing tall and trembling, and between her wide-open legs, her hairless crevice was slightly open, accepting Ivan's thing. The glistening was probably not rainwater.

Ivan instinctively moved his hips back slowly. His thing, which stood tall and hard like an iron club, slowly emerged from Carla's crevice. Ivan shuddered as he looked down at it for a moment, wet and glistening.

"Heuek?!"

Carla let out a small moan, as if she was choked, as he pushed it in all at once. Her breasts swayed, and even her nipples shook in circles.

Holding Carla's legs wide open with both hands, trying to close them somehow, Ivan slowly, but rhythmically, repeated entering and exiting Carla's flesh. Splish, splash, splish… the sound of water.

"Ah, eu, euheu… euht."

Carla was still covering her face with her arms. Every time Ivan thrust hard, moans burst from her half-open mouth, and her face was flushed red, as if she had heat rash. Carla thought that she must be making an unsightly face.

It was a strange experience for Carla. It felt like she was going to die from the pain—it definitely did, but considering that, the pain didn't last long as Ivan repeatedly thrust in and out.

Shame and regret took the place of the pain that had disappeared. She still had some regrets about how this had happened, but shame was the greatest. There would be no problem if she thought it was the same as when she was a man, but she couldn't even think that.

She never imagined that Ivan's glans would touch that place, which she had never touched since becoming a woman, before her own hands. She had never even imagined that such a thing would happen. Moreover, beyond that level, this was a reproductive act between a man and a woman.

Carla slowly lowered her arms. The subtle feeling rising from her lower abdomen gradually increased in size, and eventually, it grew to a tingling sensation.

After the shame and regret disappeared, what remained was a strange sensation.

The stimulation rising from her lower abdomen gradually began to fill her entire body, and Carla was simply feeling the unknown sensation that was washing over her, trembling.

Carla looked up at Ivan as she lay down. Judging from his expression, he seemed to be in a very good mood—and yet, when he made eye contact with Carla, he even smiled with his eyes, so very, very…

"Do, do you like it…? You damn bastard…"

"Carla… how about you?"

Carla didn't answer. Just as she was about to frown, Ivan thrust his hips deeply, and his thing stirred Carla's inside.

"Haeueuht!"

Carla felt Ivan's glans poking her deep inside. As soon as she felt it, Carla's toes curled up without her even realizing it. It felt like something was popping up, up… up.

"To, to trample on a noble… how presumptuous, eun, euht… Ah, why, why… why deeper… Aheung, eueung! Eungaat!"

Carla couldn't even finish her sentence and just kept moaning with her mouth open. As soon as she said something about a noble, Ivan's thing, which was already hard and erect, seemed to grow even bigger and swell up.

"Wh, what are you… Aheung! Eueung! Eung!"

Carla's eyes widened as Ivan thrust more violently. Ivan's momentum was so great that Carla's body shook as he thrust. Like a cotton doll in Ivan's hands, she was shaken haphazardly, and Carla could only let out screams like moans.

"Aang! Aang! Eung, eungeuht! Wh, what are you…!"

"Carla, Carlaaaat…!"

At the moment when Ivan's movements seemed to become more intense, Ivan suddenly hugged her tightly. Carla, who had been lying down, was suddenly lifted up, hugged deeply by Ivan, and now he was pounding her mindlessly as if he was driving her up and down.

"Aang! Aang! Eung, eung! Heueut! Aang…!"

Carla was about to lose her mind. It felt like being pounded up and down while sitting and being hugged was much deeper than being stabbed while lying down.

"I, Ivan…! Sl, slow… down…"

Carla's eyes rolled back, revealing the whites of her eyes.

Then, purple Magical Power began to rise from her entire body.

The Magical Power of Lightning Magic flowing through her body was flowing out on its own and strengthening her body as her condition became strange—along with her senses.

"Ah! Aheung! Eung, eueung…!"

A strand of saliva flowed down from her gaping lips.

The pleasure, amplified several times, shook her entire body and instantly burned her mind white.

Her palms were stretched out, and her toes were contracted and curled up with all their might.

"Carla…! I think I'm going to… come…!"

"Aheuht, eueung! Eung! Eung…!"

Carla couldn't answer.

Carla was already out of her mind because of Ivan's thing, which kept stabbing her as if it would split her body in half.

"I'm, I'm coming…!"

Ivan's glans swelled up in her vagina.

It was a sign that he was about to ejaculate, but nothing mattered.

"Carlaaaaat…!"

With Ivan's desperate scream, a cloudy liquid poured into Carla's vagina.

Ivan's thing, and Ivan's semen, were spewed out into the place that no one had ever touched, not even her fingers, and dyed her inside white.

# 66 - Exploration Battle (9)

1. Exploration Game (9)

The affair, which began somewhat early in the evening, lasted all night and ended only at dawn.

During that time, Carla cried a lot.

While she cried, Carla was pinned under Ivan the entire time.

Sometimes she sat, but she never climbed on top. Most of the time, she was pinned under Ivan, half out of her mind, half-drowned in pleasure, with a tiny corner of her mind worrying about what would happen if she got pregnant.

"So, what do you think of my skills?"

Carla glared at Ivan, trying to steady her violently shaking body and the swirling thoughts in her head.

The Ivan pinning down the naked Carla was not the Ivan she knew—at least, Ivan never looked at people with such cold eyes.

"You, you are… what are you…"

"You wouldn't know who I am even if I told you… Ugh."

Ivan shuddered. Carla felt him release his seed inside her once again, and she gave up trying to count how many times it had happened. She couldn't count them all, but it was certainly more than she could count on both hands.

"I've suffered greatly, trapped in this brat's body all this time. It's been a long time… do you understand?"

"How… would I know?"

Carla bit her lip and glared at Ivan. She didn't know what had taken over Ivan's body, but she knew it wasn't someone with good intentions.

The affair continued, and Carla, still pinned beneath Ivan, swayed with his movements, moaning like a musical instrument.

But her gaze, her face flushed red with ecstasy, never left Ivan for a moment.

"Now that the master of this continent has returned, rejoice, my dear. You shall be my queen."

"…I'm not happy about any of that. Give Ivan back, ugh, to me."

"Such a venomous look. A queen of a nation should have that much spirit. This whelp has an eye for choosing women."

"Regina would definitely disagree."

Carla still moaned softly as she glared at Ivan. The thing that had taken over Ivan's body—she knew that it was not a good thing.

As she was shaken relentlessly, receiving Ivan's seed, Carla tried her best to calm down and organize her thoughts. Ivan's necklace had broken—Lucas, that bastard, had broken it, and at the same time, Ivan's Magical Power had been shaken. Then he was swept away by the Dust Storm, and Kiara tracked him down, and when Ivan returned…

"Th-the, ugh, neck, ngh! Necklace… that, that…"

"Yes, that's right. You judged correctly. I commend you. That necklace was suppressing me. I don't know how this brat had such a treasure of the ancient gods… Haa."

Carla gritted her teeth and resisted the rising pleasure. It wasn't easy, but this was not the time to be lost in pleasure.

"Wh-what are you going to do… eugh! What's your purpose…"

"My purpose, you ask!"

Ivan laughed loudly and looked down at Carla. There was a strange light in his eyes. The chillingly cold gaze was so out of place with the affair that was taking place.

"To reclaim my empire. This empire that was originally mine. To take back this empire and seize it with my own hands once more."

\*

Luckily, the blouse still had a couple of buttons attached.

Even though the time of ecstasy seemed like it would never end, Carla and Ivan's affair ended around dawn.

After putting on the blouse that had been tossed aside, then the skirt, and finally the jacket, she looked somewhat presentable, but she couldn't ignore the foreign sensation in her groin and the dripping, whitish fluid… Carla wiped it off, shook it away, and glared at Ivan.

"What are you going to do?"

"What do you think? I'll watch the situation a bit longer until I completely dominate this body. It won't be long. Surely, you don't think you can stop me, do you?"

Carla didn't answer.

But in that brief silence, Carla thought quickly.

'…Can I stop that thing? No, I can't. It's impossible.'

Even if both her arms were intact, it would be impossible.

Hadn't Ivan always been stronger than Carla?

But now, this Ivan—the dark Ivan, as she decided to call him—was emitting an even stronger aura than the original Ivan. At first glance, it seemed the same as Ivan's, but Carla knew Ivan's aura better than anyone. It was a foreign aura.

"…Even if I tried to stop you, could I?"

"Impossible."

Carla felt a surge of annoyance at Ivan's blunt answer.

But even if she did, there was nothing she could do about it.

"And, Abjeti Cave, was it? I sense familiar Magical Engineering there. Wasn't that your destination?"

Ivan raised his hand and pointed to the mountainside.

The entrance to the cave, slowly revealed in the surrounding scenery as dawn broke.

"Yes. I was going to go there."

"Then go."

Ivan grinned, strode over, and wrapped his arms tightly around Carla's waist.

Without the slightest hesitation, Ivan, his arms wrapped around her waist, looked into Carla's face from a distance close enough for their noses to touch.

"Wh-what is it?"

"Seeing you like this, you're beautiful. Even in the empire's heyday, beauty like yours was rare… To be able to hold a woman like you as soon as I woke up is quite fortunate."

Kiss

Ivan lightly kissed Carla on the lips.

Carla, flustered by the kiss that came so suddenly and passed like the wind, pressed her lips tightly together.

"There's no need to be so shy, my dear. I thought you were most beautiful when you were suffering, but seeing you shy like this is quite beautiful as well."

"…D-don't say such nonsense."

"I'm serious. Now, shall we go? To our destination."

No sooner had he said those words than a whirlwind rose from Ivan's feet.

Dust Storm Magical Engineering raging without even chanting an incantation—this alone showed how strong Ivan was now.

Ivan, holding Carla in his arms, soared into the air in an instant.

Carla, startled by Ivan rising so high that she could see the entire mountain at a glance, burrowed into his arms with a small scream.

"You have a cute side, my dear. The scenery from my era has changed a lot. It looks better now."

Ivan grinned as he looked around.

Then he hugged Carla even tighter and kissed her forehead again without hesitation.

"To think that the day would come when I could look down on this scenery with rain, I couldn't be happier."

"Rain, what nonsense are you…!"

"That's how it will be anyway. It will naturally be that way. Hmm, we should hurry. This is no time to waste time."

No sooner had Ivan spoken than he disappeared.

In the Dust Storm Magical Engineering—the whirlwind Magic—Carla instinctively closed her eyes in the arms of Ivan, who was flying towards the cave in an instant. It was not common for humans to fly in the sky, and it was an experience that Carla, who had never learned Dust Storm Magic, had almost never had.

Entering the Abjeti Cave, Ivan said aloud.

"I sense familiar Magical Engineering. It seems someone who practiced forbidden arts was here. Whoever it is, they're quite unskilled. To leave traces of Magical Engineering scattered everywhere like this… Tsk tsk, their level is far behind."

Carla silently followed behind him.

She actually had something she wanted to say and something she was curious about, but she was so nervous that she couldn't bring herself to speak.

"There, be careful."

In an instant, Carla was pulled away by Ivan.

There was a puddle of water where she had been about to step, and it was quite dirty, with moss growing in places, so it was easy to slip if she stepped on it wrong.

"Your arm is unnatural, so watch your step. I said that suffering suits you, my dear, but not all suffering is like that."

"Who does suffering suit… Don't say such nonsense."

"To be able to say such things to me, you're more daring than you look."

Ivan laughed aloud.

His laughter echoed through the cave, and the sound of bats flapping their wings could be heard from deep inside.

"Hold on to me, my dear. Let me escort you. You're my woman, so you can't get hurt."

"I told you not to say things like that…"

The fear she felt made it difficult for her to resist the current Ivan.

Carla frowned as if she was dissatisfied, but she didn't know what else to say, so she just kept her mouth shut.

"Shall we go a little faster?"

Ivan wrapped his arms around her waist again.

Now, Carla, who didn't even make a sound, wrapped her arms around Ivan's waist, and Ivan kicked off the ground with a thud and ran forward.

“…Artificial body…”

There they were.

Humans who looked exactly like Venere were lined up in a row, standing in a line like dolls of the same size and shape as humans.

"You came all the way here to find something like this? Such low-level Artificial bodies?"

Ivan said from behind Carla, who was despondent.

But Carla couldn't even hear Ivan's voice properly.

The cave where Venere's Artificial body was said to be stored, the Abjeti Cave, was the place she had come to with a glimmer of hope, but perhaps because it had been stored for a long time, the Artificial bodies were all rotten or moldy, and none of them seemed to be usable.

“…I had hope here.”

Carla let out a long sigh.

That's right—it would be a lie to say she hadn't expected anything.

She had high expectations for this cave.

Venere was the one who had blown off her arm, and if it was Venere's Artificial body, perhaps it could be an opportunity for Carla to reattach her arm—she had a glimmer of hope like that.

But this cave, which she had found by chance after chance, had the Artificial body she had expected, but only those that could not be said to have properly formed.

“…You want an arm?”

"Of course!"

Carla shouted reflexively at Ivan's question.

How much she had expected from this place, how much she had been looking forward to it!

With all her expectations shattered before her eyes like this, Carla couldn't help but be agitated.

"Hmm. Such low-level Artificial bodies. But, as for my queen to be missing an arm, I cannot allow it. Very well, then I shall help you here."

Carla looked at Ivan.

Ivan also looked back at her.

Ivan's smile, as if it were only natural, felt quite unfamiliar to Carla.

Author's Note

I didn't think this was 19+, so I didn't mark it as such...

If I have to, I'll do it on Novelpia.

# 67 - Exploration (10) - Intermission

1. Exploration Game (10) - Intermission

It is difficult for the Academy to accurately detect what happens within the barrier.

After all, it is a vast area, and detecting the entirety of it is an impossible task. Moreover, if detection were possible, there would be concerns about unauthorized interference.

However, it is not acceptable to simply let them in without any precautions, so the only safety measure in place is that if a student is severely injured inside, they are automatically moved outside the area.

—There is also the thought of what would happen if someone dies, but considering this is a country that values strength above all, there are those who bizarrely think that if someone dies during the exam, they were bound to die anyway.

Lorenzo came to the lounge where the stone gate was clearly visible and lit a Magic Herb.

He had lost count of how many times he had lit a Magic Herb, and he quietly stared at the stone gate.

‘This time it’s taking quite a while.’

In fact, it is rare to have a cohort that is as discordant as this one.

The rivalry between the front and back groups has escalated to the point where Lucas and Carla snarl at each other whenever they meet, and since Carla is like that, Ivan has also developed a sharp opposition to Liam, making the tension quite palpable.

‘It’s about time someone should be carried out.’

They are a bunch of hot-blooded young ones.

When Lorenzo was young and attending this Academy, he had also participated in exams where more than half of the students from both the front and back groups would end up fighting and getting carried out.

And it had been like that every cohort, so he thought it would be the same this time, but seeing how late it was, it seemed they were either reaching a consensus or no disputes had occurred so far…

‘But they’re not the type to lack competitive spirit, so there must have been some conflict. Are they just reaching a consensus?’

A faint blue flame flickered at the end of the Magic Herb Lorenzo had lit.

He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled the smoke.

The smoke spread into the air like a deep blue mist, flowing toward the stone gate.

Now there are two days left.

If no conclusion is reached in that time, there will be no score for this exploration game.

‘I just hope no one gets seriously hurt…’

After taking one last deep drag, Lorenzo extinguished the remaining Magic Herb in the ashtray and tried to stand up. However, at that moment, he blankly looked up at the man standing in front of him, who had appeared without him noticing.

“It’s been a while, Lorenzo. How have you been?”

“Lord Cascata, is it not?”

It was Lord Cascata.

Without Lorenzo realizing when he had entered the lounge, Lord Cascata was now looking down at him.

“Sit down, sit down. Why are you being so formal? Just sit down; I understand everything.”

“…Yes, I suppose so.”

Lord Cascata smiled and took a seat next to Lorenzo.

He wasn’t particularly someone Lorenzo was glad to see, and since they had nothing to discuss, he wanted to leave this place. However, it wouldn’t be polite to vacate the seat first with someone of such high status sitting next to him, so Lorenzo lit another Magic Herb for no particular reason.

“Can I have one of those Magic Herbs as well?”

“I didn’t know you smoked. Here you go.”

Taking one from the box of Magic Herbs Lorenzo offered, Lord Cascata took a deep drag. Even without doing anything, flames burst from the end of the Magic Herb, turning into a red spark that settled down.

“How are the new students this year?”

“I’m in charge on behalf of Albina, so I don’t know well.”

“Right. I know. I’m aware that Lieutenant Albina… no, she has retired, so I know that Instructor Albina is detained. I also know you haven’t been in charge for long. That’s why I’m asking. How are the new students this year?”

“Aren’t you curious about your niece?”

Lord Cascata’s eyes rolled toward Lorenzo.

Lorenzo didn’t even glance at Lord Cascata—he simply looked into the distance, puffing out smoke from the Magic Herb as if it were a natural question.

“Would you believe me if I said no?”

“No.”

“You’re still the same. Yes, I’m curious about my niece and the entire cohort of new students. They are very valuable as potential commanders of the magical battalion in an empire still at war.”

“Your niece, that is, Carla, unfortunately seems to be a difficult case. While her magical power is immense, that’s all there is to it. The physical limitations of the martial arts faction are a weakness that is hard to overcome, aren’t they?”

“What if that were resolved?”

“If it were resolved… she has great intuition, after all. Wouldn’t she be an excellent talent? Just like her uncle.”

“Stop with the flattery. …Then what about the other one, Ivan Contadino? What about him?”

“He’s a genius. That one is.”

“Is that so?”

Lord Cascata took a deep drag from the Magic Herb and looked at Lorenzo.

Ivan Contadino.

A potential threat to the empire—highly likely.

A little more confirmation is needed, but perhaps it is almost certain at this point.

“The Magic Circuit Diagram is perfect. In my lifetime, I have never seen such a perfect diagram.”

In contrast, he had seen the worst diagrams.

Lorenzo chose not to mention that.

There was no need to.

“Moreover, his magical power… surpasses Carla’s. It’s as if there’s an ocean of magic from which he draws his power, it’s that impressive. If he continues to grow well, he will undoubtedly become a great pillar for the empire.”

“Is that so? How does he compare to Carla?”

“As I mentioned, he far surpasses Carla. In potential, application, and combination skills. He exceeds Carla in every aspect.”

Carla is by no means a talent that lags behind.

If her arms were intact, she would likely be able to expand the versatility of magic to the point of easily becoming a general for the empire.

But Ivan was beyond that.

In every aspect, Ivan was perfect.

The qualities a Mage should possess, creativity, application skills, and even physical strength—Ivan was perfect.

“Calling him a genius is an understatement. He might not even be human. Just looking at the Magic Circuit, it’s so perfect that it’s the first time I’ve ever seen anything like it in my life. If magic were to take human form, it would be just like him.”

“Is that so… I see.”

Among the few secrets passed down in the empire, there is one that only a select few know.

The great empire that existed before this one—the one that is said to have vanished, leaving only records behind.

The current imperial family is the one that destroyed that ancient empire.

Of course, it wasn’t destroyed in that era; it’s a story from a very long time ago, but it was certain that the ancestors of the current imperial family destroyed the ancient empire. That record remains and is passed down in the current imperial archives, and there is also a record stating that the last emperor of the ancient empire left a curse that he would return to destroy them.

The last emperor of the ancient empire was a being close to a god in terms of magic.

He is said to have transcended 31 buds and completed 33.

The curse he left before dying has tightened its grip on the imperial family until now—

If Ivan is his reincarnation, then the empire is undoubtedly in danger.

The emperor of the ancient empire cursed that he would return to destroy them, and regarding that curse…

“Would you like another one?”

Lorenzo offered the box of Magic Herbs.

Lord Cascata stared at the box, glanced at Lorenzo, and then looked back down at the box.

“…Thank you.”

“I thought you seemed deep in thought. Is it because of your niece?”

“Not at all.”

Lord Cascata’s duty is to protect this empire.

To safeguard the imperial family, to protect the empire, and to leave this empire as an everlasting name.

Venere, Mercurio, and all are such beings.

The imperial family, the great nobles, and countless citizens.

He has sacrificed everything for all of them.

However, the being named Ivan, who stands before him now, is a disaster that could shake the very foundation of the empire he has fought so hard to protect.

As long as Ivan is suspected of having the blood of the cursed ancient imperial family flowing through him… there is no other choice.

If that bloodline is confirmed, there is no choice but to kill Ivan.

“He will do well as long as he stays close to Ivan.”

“It seems you’re quite concerned about Emil.”

At those words, Lorenzo hesitated.

He couldn’t know what the followers of Aufstieg, who had infiltrated this academy, were plotting, but having seen Emil’s Magic Circuit, which had been tampered with in a chaotic manner, it was clear that their intentions were not good.

“…Yes, well.”

“The Aufstieg fellows have deep schemes. It’s hard to notice… Don’t worry about their threats and act freely. This is the academy. It’s not the playground of the Aufstieg fellows. So…”

At that moment.

An urgent signal rang out from the transport barrier.

In an instant, the rescue officers moved frantically, and Lorenzo extinguished the Magic Herb he had just lit and stood up.

“It seems someone has been carried out. I’ll go check it out first.”

“Indeed. Don’t hesitate to talk again.”

“Yes.”

Lorenzo bowed slightly and hurriedly walked away.

Don’t run when retreating in front of a superior; seeing him maintain that courtesy even in this situation shows he is a discerning person.

Lord Cascata extinguished the Magic Herb he had finished and slowly stood up.

He thought he should see who had been carried out, at least to see their face.

A word from the author (Author's Note)

...Since something happened yesterday, it’s okay to skip dinner tonight...

# 68 - Exploration Battle (11)

1. Exploration Game (11)

Carla's face hardened.

"Help me?"

"You say you'll help?"

"How?"

"What can you do?"

Carla thought that now, with her artificial body in this state, there was no way to do anything. The only idea that came to her was to capture Venere, beat her up, and create a new artificial body to attach to Carla, but nothing else came to mind.

In the meantime, Ivan, who said he would help, received Carla's fierce gaze but even managed to smile with ease.

"I thought you were not of ordinary temperament, but I didn't expect you to glare at me like that. Should I say you're bold... but I shall forgive you. Your body has given me great pleasure after a long time."

"Stop talking nonsense! What do you mean, how will you help me?!"

Carla was desperate.

Wasn't she the one who had no fear of the world when her limbs were intact?

But now, with one arm gone, she was just overflowing with magical power, reduced to a mage who was barely competent. For someone who had lived on the pride of being a mage, the past years had been filled with immense pain and disgrace.

"For example, yes, it would be something like this."

Ivan turned away from her and approached the artificial body.

He grabbed an artificial arm covered in mold and pulled it out without hesitation.

At the brutal sight, Carla flinched her left shoulder, but Ivan, as if it were nothing, looked around with the pulled-out arm and spoke.

"Looking at it this way, it really is a useless piece of flesh. It seems to be a mage of some sort... but I can't tell if it can't use preservation magic or if there's another reason. I wonder if it has even lost its heart..."

"W-what are you saying? Speak so I can understand...!"

Carla was burning with anxiety.

Wasn't she the one who had no fear of the world when her limbs were intact?

But now, with one arm gone, she was just overflowing with magical power, reduced to a mage who was barely competent. For someone who had lived on the pride of being a mage, the past years had been filled with immense pain and disgrace.

"Since it has this much mold, it can't be attached like this."

Ivan smiled at Carla.

At those words, Carla stood there dumbfounded, as if struck by lightning, staring at Ivan.

"You mean... you can attach it? You can attach it...?"

"That's right. Wasn't that what I was trying to do? Your arm has already disappeared without a trace. No matter how much I try, I can't create something from nothing."

"H-how... do you know about magical engineering?"

"This little one doesn't know, but I do. However, this little one hasn't learned magical engineering. But I have the necessary circuits... so I can at least mimic it."

"Then, then...!"

Carla rushed at Ivan.

With her one remaining right arm, she clung to him and shouted.

"Please, please give me back my arm...!"

Those who have never lost an arm or leg cannot understand.

The pain of loss is something that those who have not experienced it can never know.

At least for her, Ivan's words were nothing short of salvation.

She was overflowing with magical power.

In terms of magical power, she was confident that she was not inferior to any mage in this empire.

But even so, her body was one-armed, and battles between mages were not fought solely with magical power.

Moreover, for her, a lightning mage, the physical disability was a significant blow.

Struggling even against a bug like Lucas was a shameful thing for her—

"This is interesting. The fierce woman is rushing at me with tears in her eyes. It seems she desperately needs that arm."

"Of course!"

Carla shouted.

At some point, tears were streaming down her cheeks.

The pain that no one could understand, a pain she herself had never wanted to know, was something she could no longer bear, especially when she thought it might be a way to escape that pain.

"Even so... yes, that's right. There's an old saying: don't do what you're good at for free."

"...What do you want?"

Carla sensed that Ivan would not easily give up the arm.

His smile hinted at that, and the words he spoke carried that meaning as well.

"Kneel before me, my dear."

"My dear?"

Carla wanted to shout at him to stop with such nonsense, but this time, she didn't even have that thought.

As soon as Ivan's words fell, Carla knelt before him.

She didn't even think about the fact that Ivan was a commoner.

If he could give her back her arm, then kneeling was nothing.

"I've knelt... please, my arm..."

Carla looked up at Ivan, her eyes trembling uncontrollably.

Desperation, urgency, and impatience all mixed in her gaze.

"Swear to be mine. Swear that you will be my dear. If you do so, I can attach your arm for you. I can even make it stronger."

Carla's reason, which had been flushed with excitement, suddenly hit the brakes and cooled down for a moment.

As the heat slightly cooled, she began to question whether she could trust Ivan's words.

"Seeing that look in your eyes, you're still making a calm judgment even in this situation. Even while we were together earlier, you were constantly thinking about my identity. That's a very good attitude, my dear."

Ivan swung the arm he had pulled from the artificial body around while circling Carla, who was kneeling.

In a manner that seemed to mock her, Ivan smiled at Carla.

"Well, whether you believe it or not is up to you. I too have seen the end of magic. I am one who has formed 33 buds. I stood at the pinnacle of the empire... but, well. To be honest, all I want is to see the end of magic. The empire... hmm, yes. It's important, no doubt."

In that sense, Ivan, the dark Ivan, found Carla appealing.

For a woman, her exploration and desire for magic surpassed that of many men.

'The more I see her, the more I like her.'

Though he had already embraced her, she was too valuable to discard as a one-night stand.

Moreover, she would undoubtedly be a great help in fulfilling his ambitions.

"Swear to me, Carla. If you want to regain your arm, if you want to fulfill your ambitions, promise that you will be my dear."

Carla looked up at Ivan with a confused gaze.

His voice was low, but it carried an overwhelming power.

If one were to compare it, it felt like the voice of an emperor, a regal presence, even though she had never met him before.

"If you swear, I will also swear. If you promise to be mine, I will attach your arm for you. How does that sound?"

Carla's gaze wavered.

This was a promise that could be considered quite certain.

If they could... if she could have her arm back.

There was nothing she couldn't do.

In fact, she had already given herself to him several times.

There shouldn't be any more problems.

"...Alright. I won't call you Ivan."

"It would be troublesome if you called me Ivan. That's not my name."

"Then at least tell me your name."

Carla was frustrated that he hadn't even told her his name yet was dragging this out.

"Well, no. It might be better to call me Ivan for now. There are treacherous betrayers outside who are eager to do something about me."

"Betrayers...?"

"You don't need to know that much yet. Anyway, will you swear to be mine?"

Carla squeezed her eyes shut.

Still, yes—still, for her, who had memories of being a man, it was not an easy choice.

But in the end, those things were worth less than one arm.

She had originally given up her gender to become stronger.

Though it wasn't by choice, having given up her gender, and having been violated by men multiple times, what meaning did her gender even have now?

"...Fine, I will swear. As you wish. If you... return my arm."

Her voice trembled, but it did not sound weak.

Ivan smiled with satisfaction at her.

"...I swear. I, Carla Della Cascata, will become yours."

"Well said, Carla. You said Carla Della Cascata, right? Good. I will remember that. From now on, you are my woman. I will not give you to anyone else; you are my woman."

Ivan laughed loudly.

Carla shot him a disapproving glare, and Ivan, aware of her gaze, waved the artificial arm in front of her.

"Now it's my turn to keep my promise. Since this is unfamiliar magic... hmm, yes. Like this..."

Ivan closed his eyes.

With his eyes closed, he whispered the activation word, "[Creation]."

A large disc appeared behind Ivan, standing still.

The disc intertwined and twisted, with 31 buds gathering in a seemingly orderly manner, creating another circuit strand.

Red, blue, purple, light green, green... various colors flickered on the disc, and just then, a dark brown magical power surged up from Ivan.

The magical circuit that rose behind Ivan was on a different level than the circuits one would typically see.

It was complex and intricate, something that an ordinary mage could not handle—this was probably magical engineering.

Carla instinctively felt it upon seeing that sight.

Ivan was not just an ordinary mage.

"[Shaping]."

As Ivan cast the spell, the dark brown magical power gradually gathered and moved toward the artificial arm he was holding.

The arm, which had so much mold that even touching it seemed like it would spread, began to lose its traces of mold.

The arm, now reddened with blood like it had just been pulled from a person, finally sprouted dozens of dark brown tendrils from the severed end.

"Stay still."

As Ivan instructed, Carla merely watched as the tendrils approached her.

The wriggling tendrils were incredibly disgusting, and she felt an impulse to escape at any moment.

The tendrils crawled around her shoulder—near the shoulder joint of her empty left arm.

Then, they moved over to her right arm, intertwining as if measuring its length, and at that moment, Ivan brought the artificial arm to Carla's left shoulder joint.

The tendrils quickly gathered around her left shoulder joint.

The tendrils wrapped around the severed end as if they were threads, and from that area, a hot heat began to rise.

"Don't move. Stay still. I'm not trying to harm you."

Carla grimaced as she endured the heat.

Even for someone like her, who was unfamiliar with magical engineering, it was clear that this was—the process of her arm being restored.

# 69 - Exploration Battle (12)

1. Exploration Game (12)

With Ivan gone, the Exploration Game's momentum clearly favored the West.

In the beginning, when the Eastern students' Magical Power was abundant, the East had a clear advantage.

Regina was an Ice magic user with above-average attack and defense capabilities, Liam could serve as a vanguard and breakthrough with his Flame magic combined with overwhelming physical strength, and Emil was a mid-range firepower Mage supporting Liam, making for a well-organized composition.

However, as the Exploration Game passed its midpoint and the Eastern and Western members began to clash in earnest—from that point on, Regina's insufficient Magical Power and the Ice magic's absurd Magical Power consumption combined to drastically reduce Regina's contribution.

Emil and Liam had to fill that void, but it wasn't easy for just the two of them to break through the West's composition of two offensive Mages and one defensive Mage.

"I-I'll do something, somehow…!"

Regina scraped together her dwindling Magical Power to somehow conjure Ice flowers. The Ice flowers, which should have emitted a silver glow even in the darkness, only flickered dimly, proving Regina's emptying Magical Power reserves, and even that wasn't a proper glow.

The Ice flowers, which had to destroy the small Killer dolls rushing in from the darkness, couldn't display the power they had in the beginning, where each Ice flower crushed two or three Killer dolls in a row. At best, one, maybe two. That was all, so the rate at which the Ice flowers were depleted was significantly slower than the rate at which the Killer dolls were being destroyed.

"Why don't you just give up, Liam? No matter how well you do, the composition is already lacking."

"You talk too much. Do you Northern bastards fight with your mouths?"

Liam's Curved sword, brimming with flames, slammed down on a massive earth wall. The earth wall, which should have split and scattered amidst the rising flames, instead gripped his Curved sword tightly and wouldn't let go, and thanks to being soaked with heavy rain, even the flames couldn't properly ignite.

Mana bullets flew in succession behind Liam. Just as the Mana bullets fired by Emil, who was supporting Liam, were about to strike the earth wall repeatedly, the Mana bullets shook violently and plunged downwards instead of upwards, disappearing without a trace.

"Michele…"

Michele, a girl scratching her messy hair as if annoyed.

She reversed the gravity she had inverted and spoke to Wilhelm.

"I told you, let's just trap them all here and go up ourselves. Sophia has practically caught Regina already. There's no reason to be doing this."

"The Exploration Game isn't over yet, Michele. We need to finish it properly to avoid any complications later."

"You're so stubborn…"

Even so, Michele flipped her palm. The gravity that had returned to normal was reversed again, and this time, Liam hurriedly pulled his Curved sword out of the earth wall and retreated.

"Emil, are you alright?"

Emil was pale and gasping for breath. Mana bullets were a basic Magic that only refined Magical Power before firing, but the rate at which they consumed Magical Power was very fast due to their rapid-fire capability. Emil, whose Magical Power was in the upper ranks, was being drained quickly because he was using only Mana bullets without the aid of other techniques or Magic.

“…I’m afraid I’m not alright.”

"Ivan is taking too long. Did something happen to Carla?"

Liam glared at the rising earth wall again and muttered. Ironically, it was good to build a solid defense with the earth wall… but Michele made it even easier to erect with her gravity reversal, so Wilhelm and Michele's teamwork was working out perfectly.

"Without Ivan, it will be difficult for you to break through, Liam."

Wilhelm's voice came from beyond the earth wall.

And, unfortunately, that was true—with the current lack of firepower, it seemed impossible to break through Wilhelm's defense.

"Kyaaa!"

Regina's scream came from the edge of the forest. Liam had kept some distance from Regina, judging that it would be more dangerous to be together while Sophia's Killer dolls were swarming, but that had now become a self-inflicted wound that made it easier for them to be defeated individually.

"Tch… damn it."

Liam looked up at the sky. The downpour had stopped, but the sky was still heavily clouded, as if it would pour again at any moment. Although they had won the Captain's Battle and the Team Battle, the Exploration Game now seemed doomed to failure. At this rate…

"Liam!"

Regina's voice grew closer. That also meant that Sophia was approaching as well. Moreover, Wilhelm emerged from the barrier, and Michele was seen beside him, flipping her palm.

"Is this the end?"

Liam raised his Curved sword. His father's words, that war is not fought alone, came to mind. No matter how strong an individual is, war is not fought alone. Could there have been another moment where he felt that so keenly as he did now?

“…I won’t be toyed with.”

Liam forcefully enveloped his Curved sword in flames. Even if he had to lose, he wouldn't go down easily, Liam thought as he raised his Curved sword—it was at that very moment that he was about to charge towards Wilhelm.

— KWA-GWA-GWA-GWA-GWANG!

A bolt of purple Lightning Bolt split the dark sky and struck down.

The straight Lightning Bolt that split the sky and struck down was incredibly powerful, and the ground shook as soon as it hit, causing them all to stumble and barely regain their balance.

"KKYAAAAAA!"

A scream echoed. But it was neither Regina's, nor Emil's, nor even Liam's unsightly scream.

It was Sophia's.

Fragments of Killer dolls shattered into pieces floated around Sophia, who had risen into the air. The Killer dolls, with no part intact, from head to arms, legs, and torso, floated in the air, completely shattered.

"Lightning Magic, [Instant kill]!"

Black hair fluttered as if dancing. The beautifully extended legs kicked Sophia, who was floating in the air, again to lift her higher, and then kicked Sophia two or three more times as she repeatedly kicked off the air.

"[Lightning strike]!"

The fist that struck down like a Lightning Bolt across the sky was clearly the left hand. The fist that struck Sophia's solar plexus was lightning fast, and as soon as it struck, Sophia plummeted to the ground like the thunder a moment ago—and then there was no movement.

“…Carla, Carla…her arm…?”

Regina murmured as she blankly watched the scene.

It was Carla.

Carla's left arm had regrown, blending in so naturally with her sprinting figure.

"Carla is smiling…"

It was as Emil said.

Carla was smiling.

Carla, who ran like Lightning Bolt, scattering purple Magical Power, charged towards Michele and kicked her in the waist faster than the flustered Michele could flip her palm.

"KYAAAAAA!"

Michele screamed as she flew away.

Michele, who collided with the earth wall that even Liam's Curved sword couldn't break down, shattered even that earth wall into pieces and hung her head at the end.

"Aha, ahaha, ahahahaha!"

Carla, her eyes gleaming wildly, charged towards Wilhelm again. With two of them taken down in an instant, Wilhelm summoned a rock wall instead of an earth wall, trying to block Carla's charge.

"Something like this!"

Carla, leaping, slammed down on the rock wall from her heel. KOO-GWANG, a deafening roar echoed, and cracks spread across the rock wall, eventually collapsing with a crash.

Wilhelm, seeing this, chuckled in disbelief and put down the bastard sword and shield he was holding, raising both hands.

"I lost, I surrender."

Carla was about to punch Wilhelm's face.

Ivan appeared and grabbed her wrist as she shouted that there was no such thing as surrender.

"Stop it, Carla. He surrendered."

Carla glared at Ivan with a dissatisfied expression.

But Ivan smiled back at Carla as if it was nothing, and Carla, who had been glaring at Ivan for a long time, clicked her tongue and released her fist.

"You survived because you made a quick judgment, Wilhelm."

"Carla, your arm has recovered."

"Something like that happened."

Carla answered Wilhelm's words vaguely and turned around.

She approached Liam, Emil, and Regina, who were staring blankly at her, put her hand on her hip, and said.

"Get up. What are you doing? We have to go and finish this."

At the final point marked on the map, a stone statue stood.

There were no instructions on what to do with the statue, but Ivan quietly approached the statue and scanned it up and down.

"It's an extremely rudimentary Teleportation magic."

Ivan chuckled and punched the statue's head.

Then, the statue crumbled, scattering dust, and those who were watching were startled and tried to blame Ivan for what he was doing.

But that was only for a moment. When the statue crumbled, a small stone door appeared in its place.

A stone door large enough for one or two people to pass through—Ivan grinned as he pointed to it.

"Well, what are you all doing? Let's get out of here."

Author's Note

Carla's revival...?

# 70 - Exploration Battle (13)

Chapter 32 and Chapter 37 have been revised. It would be more helpful if you read them first!

1. Exploration Game (13)

Having completed the Exploration Game, it was time to welcome the victors—after all, the Empire was known for treating winners well, and even if it was just an Inter-house Competition, there would be a fitting welcome for the victors… or so the accompanying students thought.

As soon as they stepped out of the stone gate, the surrounding scenery changed dramatically, and only then did they realize they had returned to the familiar sights of the Academy.

And the Academy's staff welcoming them…

“…Why is the atmosphere like this?”

It was Liam’s muttering.

The atmosphere around them was far from welcoming.

It was bustling, and the figures bearing the family crests of the Cascata family and those of the Schaiske family seemed to have drawn a line, glaring at them with ominous intensity.

“…Congratulations on your victory, companions.”

It was Lorenzo.

At least Lorenzo came over to congratulate them, prompting Liam to ask him what was going on.

Lorenzo did not answer that question.

Instead, he let out a long sigh and looked at Carla.

“…It must be because of Lucas, right? No, strictly speaking, is it because of me?”

Carla replied with a slight smile.

Only then did Lorenzo’s eyes widen as he looked at Carla’s left arm.

“Carla, your arm…?”

“Yes. It has regenerated. And you must be more curious about something else… I killed Lucas.”

“What!?”

As soon as those words were spoken, the gazes of the three companions, excluding Ivan, turned toward Carla. It was a statement that made one doubt their ears—Carla had killed Lucas; it was so unexpected that one might even question if they had heard it correctly.

“I already know that you killed Lucas, Carla. I didn’t know your arm had regenerated, though.”

“There was a reason for that.”

Carla’s expression remained unchanged.

Still silent, she appeared cold and somewhat aloof, stating that she had killed Lucas as if it were as natural as breathing.

“First, I think we should move to another place. Carla, come over here, and the rest of you should head to the classroom for now.”

After exchanging glances with Ivan, Carla followed Lorenzo.

As they passed through the long corridor toward the central hall of the Academy, Lorenzo lit a Magic Herb and exhaled a long puff of smoke.

“…A trace of your magical power was detected from the hole in Lucas’s chest. Carla, there’s no doubt that you killed Lucas. I’m curious about how your arm regenerated, but right now, the bigger issue is that you killed Lucas.”

“That’s right. And it’s true that I killed Lucas.”

“Why did you kill him?”

“I told you earlier. Lucas tried to rape me.”

“Was that after your arm regenerated… or before?”

Carla pondered for a moment.

What would sound natural here—if she said before, anyone would know that one-armed Carla couldn’t defeat Lucas properly. But if she said after it had regenerated, then unless Lucas was a fool, there would be no reason for him to attack her… No, there might be a reason.

“It was after.”

“After? You defeated Lucas with one arm…?”

Lorenzo, who had been walking ahead, sat down on a bench by the roadside.

Carla stood a little apart, not wanting to sit right next to him.

“Lucas had lost his reason, Instructor.”

“He lost his reason?”

“There was an aphrodisiac. He tried to make me take it.”

“There was an aphrodisiac…?! Lucas had an aphrodisiac?”

“Yes.”

Carla was confident.

It was true that Lucas had possessed an aphrodisiac.

And it was also true that he had tried to inject it into Carla.

It was also true that Lucas met his death at Carla’s hands because of that.

There were a few omitted facts in between, but she hadn’t lied; she simply hadn’t mentioned them.

“Aphrodisiac… If that can be proven, your claim would gain credibility. But who…?”

“She said she got it from the woman who cut off my arm.”

Venere.

She had definitely said Venere.

“If you’re talking about the woman who cut off your arm, that must be the mage. Did she approach Lucas? Why?”

“That’s something I can’t know. Isn’t it the Academy’s job to find that out?”

Lorenzo was at a loss for words.

Carla’s statement wasn’t wrong, and with all the unpleasant events happening, the Academy’s reputation had fallen to the ground.

“Thanks to the principal, I’ve received great help, so I don’t plan to escalate the issue regarding the aphrodisiac. By the way, what happened to that maid of Lucas, Kiara? She must have had all her limbs broken.”

“A maid…?”

Now that her arm had returned, had her temper returned as well?

Lorenzo lit another Magic Herb and scratched his head.

“As you said, Kiara had all her limbs broken. It seems like that was your doing… For now, she’s hospitalized. Once she’s treated, we’ll need to hear her testimony. But why don’t you ask about Kiara?”

“Well, I’m sure of one thing: I didn’t take Kiara down.”

She hadn’t lied.

It was Ivan who had taken Kiara down.

What Carla had done was merely break the limbs of the unconscious Kiara.

Lorenzo’s gaze turned cold.

But even as she met his gaze, Carla remained composed.

She hadn’t lied.

“You killed Lucas and Kiara. Moreover, Lucas had an aphrodisiac… but there’s no evidence.”

“If you investigate Kiara, you won’t find anything. Kiara was fighting Ivan.”

Carla spoke firmly, clearing her throat.

“…So Ivan was there too. That makes sense. I understand now. I won’t be the one to investigate.”

Lorenzo said nothing more after that.

He simply inhaled the Magic Herb he had lit and stood up, heading toward the central hall. Carla silently followed behind him.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

Mercurio nodded while stroking the area around his eyes, which were embedded with the eyes of a demon.

What a chilling aura.

The chill emanating from Ivan was vastly different from the Ivan who had entered the territory for this Inter-house Competition.

While he still had the kind smile and was seen conversing with Regina, Mercurio could clearly sense the ominous energy radiating from him.

“Should we consider this as him awakening?”

“We should definitely consider it an awakening.”

“Then we need to report it, right? And another thing…”

Venere recalled the figure of Carla, who was moving away from Lorenzo.

The left arm that she had personally shattered had returned to her without any issue. The arm that had been completely torn apart to the point where it couldn’t even be treated had somehow come back to Carla.

‘…The artificial bodies in Abjeti Cave must have all rotted away. There’s no way she could have used them to reattach her arm.’

The places where she had stored the artificial bodies were scattered here and there.

Among them, the Abjeti Cave in the east had been the most usable, but it was far away, and it had been a long time since they had been stored there, so their condition must have been quite poor. However, since her arm had regenerated since then, it was something that weighed heavily on her mind.

“Hey, Mercurio.”

“Hmm?”

“That guy, the remnant of the old imperial family. Was he really a genius in magical engineering?”

“Hmm.”

Mercurio stroked his chin, falling into thought for a moment.

He had heard he was a genius, but to what extent?

“He reportedly opened up to 33 buds, so he must have been quite extraordinary. We may be called geniuses too, but we don’t have buds that many.”

“33 buds…”

Does that even make sense?

Just surpassing 20 buds is considered genius, and over 30 is said to be a divine talent.

That commoner named Ivan had reportedly reached 31, which was why he was hailed as an extraordinary genius.

But 33… Even with that, could he wield magical engineering?

However, seeing Carla’s arm return made Venere feel uneasy about that part.

“For now, let’s report to Lord Cascata. There’s no doubt he has awakened, so it’s time to prepare for the annihilation operation. If he has awakened, it means he’s beyond our control.”

“Does the Empire even know how much we’re struggling?”

“I’m not hoping they do. We need to take care of this quickly. If he awakens and time passes, it will become even more dangerous.”

Venere, who had been crouching, stood up with a groan.

She was concerned about the cracking sound from her knees, but after stretching, she felt quite refreshed.

‘Hmm?’

At that moment, Venere tilted her head at a strange feeling.

From this distance, she felt as if Ivan, who had been watching from afar, had made eye contact with her.

And not only that, but it also felt like Ivan, who had made eye contact, was smiling eerily.

‘It must be my imagination.’

Venere was left with an uneasy feeling but decided to ignore it.

Author's Note (Author's Afterword)

Some parts of Chapters 32 and 37 have been revised.

I usually dislike revising parts of the story that have already been serialized, so I tried to leave them as they were, but it didn’t work out well…

To make a bit of an excuse, up until around Chapter 40 of the current serialization, I had been writing based on the plot of the author Soyubang, but after that, I started writing the plot myself, which caused the story to get a bit tangled…

I tried to salvage it while preserving Soyubang’s plot, but ultimately it didn’t work out, so I had to revise the earlier parts. I’m really sorry!

# 71 - Exploration Battle (14)

1. Exploration Game (14)

As the entire empire was enveloped in a thoroughly hierarchical military atmosphere, the academy was no different.

Students were commanded by instructors, who were in turn overseen by the administration, and the administration was led by the vice-principal and the principal.

Thus, the individuals urgently summoned to this central chamber today were not students at all—only Carla, who was also in the status of a suspect.

When Carla entered the central chamber's meeting room, the atmosphere was solemn, reminiscent of a courtroom.

On either side, platforms had been erected with about a dozen individuals seated, while a few of the academy's top officials gathered in the center.

"How quickly they have gathered."

Carla glanced back and forth between the right and left sides and smirked.

Did they really think the final round of the Inter-house Competition, the Exploration Game, would end so soon? It seemed as if everyone had gathered the moment news broke that she had finished her exam.

Was it such a big deal that she had squashed a bug named Lucas?—Yes, it was indeed a big deal. A scion of a grand noble had died, and the murderer was said to be the daughter of a rival faction's grand noble, so it made sense.

"Today might turn out quite disadvantageously for me."

Carla was now the eldest daughter.

In truth, she had been the eldest son, but that fact could not be revealed.

Anyway, if she had killed the person she was supposed to be engaged to…

And if it was a woman who had killed a man.

If she had been a commoner, there would be no trial—just a death sentence.

The vassals of Schyskeil present here surely knew that there had been discussions of a marriage between Lucas and Carla.

Carla looked at the vassals of the Schyskeil family gathered on her right and thought. On the left, however, were the vassals of the Cascata family, so perhaps they would provide a decent defense.

"Carla, Carla Della Cascata. Is that you?"

As she sat in the designated suspect's seat, the principal asked, as if he had been waiting for her.

In response, Carla slowly nodded her head.

"Do you know Lucas von Schyskeil?"

"I do."

Carla answered readily.

"Lucas von Schyskeil was found dead during our academy's Inter-house Competition. Traces of Lightning Magic were discovered in his wounds..."

"I killed him. Lucas von Schyskeil."

At Carla's words, the room fell silent as if cold water had been poured over it.

She looked around with a faint smile and replied in a relaxed tone.

"Did you not already know? Lucas von Schyskeil died from a penetrating wound, and traces of Lightning Magic were found there. So the answer is clear. Yes, that's right. I killed him."

"W-why..."

"Lucas von Schyskeil attempted to assault me. I mean, he tried to rape me. At the point when my arm was like this, Lucas always treated me as if we were already married. During the sacred Exploration Game of the academy, he tried to rape me, and in the midst of my resistance, I accidentally killed him."

She had already thought this through.

This is why one must maintain their composure—everyone would think Lucas was the kind of person who deserved it.

"But, Carla Della Cascata. You... originally did not have one arm..."

It was a truly awkward question to ask a woman.

Thus, the principal coughed awkwardly, unable to finish his sentence, but Carla answered as if it were nothing.

"Lucas harbored resentment towards me. When I had both arms, Lucas was no match for me. After I became like this, everyone knew how he treated me carelessly. So he approached me and got close. Moreover, he tried to feed me an aphrodisiac."

"That makes no sense! There is no evidence! This is merely the claim of Lady Cascata!"

The counterargument from the Schyskeil side was valid.

The aphrodisiac Carla mentioned was a serious issue, as it was classified as an illegal substance even in an empire where women's status was not particularly high. If Lucas had possessed it, it would tarnish the honor of a grand noble.

"Prince Schyskeil is a noble grandee, the heir of Schyskeil! There is no reason for him to possess such a prohibited substance!"

"Is that really so?"

Carla smiled slyly and looked towards the Schyskeil side.

There was no way it wasn't true.

Lucas had not just one or two women in his embrace… Moreover, among them were daughters of lesser nobles, and being nobles, they had their own pride. Would Lucas have cared about the aphrodisiac when he had crushed their flowers?

"...There is no way he could have had it."

The Schyskeil side stumbled over their words.

Even so, they could not firmly assert that there was absolutely none.

"Even so, given the prince's death, to blindly believe the lady's claims would undermine the trust between our families!"

"I object! Lady Cascata was merely acting in self-defense! Most here must know of Prince Lucas's character!"

Even without Carla saying anything, the Cascata side was pouring out defenses.

She leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms—how long had it been since she crossed her arms?

She missed this sensation.

"There are dozens of testimonies from students that Prince Schyskeil harassed the lady! Should we prepare a petition to believe it?! Furthermore, there are testimonies that the lady shed tears due to the harassment in the student cafeteria!"

"I had done a lot of investigations in just a few days... but was it really necessary to investigate such things?"

That was true.

Such things had indeed happened.

But now that they were talking about crying and whatnot, it felt a bit embarrassing to think about it.

"You saw it during the team competition, didn't you? The lady narrowly lost to the prince! Blinded by lust, he must have approached the lady carelessly, so the lady would have been more than capable of defeating him!"

"W-what do you mean blinded by lust! Is there no respect for the family in Cascata?!"

It was a relief, more than she had expected.

The perception of "a woman who killed her fiancé" did not seem to arise in this place.

In fact, she had thought that would be the case.

If the eldest daughter of Cascata became a murderer in such a way, it would be quite a blow, and they would know well that they should not go in that direction. So they must be desperately defending her.

In any case, for Carla, she had passed one hurdle.

She had expected that the conversation would eventually turn into a matter of pride between families, but it seemed to have shifted more quickly than she had anticipated, which was fortunate.

"Moreover, that, Kiara... Lady Servitore too! Wasn't that also because of Lady Cascata?!"

"That is not true. I did not do it. Kiara was injured after losing in a fair fight against Ivan Contadino."

Let’s leave it at that.

Carla thought as she replied.

"If it weren't for Ivan Contadino, I would have been helplessly violated by Lucas. Fortunately, because Ivan was there, I was able to avoid a terrible fate."

"W-well then..."

"Isn't that unimportant? In the Exploration Game, Ivan and I formed a legitimate team, and as a result, Kiara lost to Ivan and was injured. Lucas tried to inject me with an aphrodisiac, failed, and was killed by me. That's all there is to it."

"E-evidence..."

"Since he failed, there is no evidence. But think about it. How would I, with one arm, kill Lucas? He would have to be completely unguarded against me. He would have to think I was completely powerless, right? And he would have to be right up close to me. Only then could I kill him in one blow. If there was distance? As those who saw the team competition know, I lost to Lucas with one arm. If Lucas had been even a little wary of me, could I have killed him?"

In short, the current issue was the aphrodisiac.

If there had been an aphrodisiac, then Carla would be acting in self-defense.

Lucas had attempted to rape Carla using a prohibited substance under imperial law, and thus, Carla's act of self-defense would be justified.

A murmur of disbelief spread among the Schyskeil side.

In fact, it was not an incorrect statement—at that time, Carla, who had one arm, had lost to Lucas, and regardless of whether it was a weakness or not, the perception that Lucas was stronger than Carla must have been ingrained in their minds.

"Ivan is a commoner, so it seems no one cares about him."

Ivan is strong.

Ivan is terrifyingly strong.

Not just like Lucas, but truly...

The fact that no one is paying attention to Ivan.

That left Carla feeling oddly uncomfortable.

At that moment, Carla suddenly looked at the principal.

Behind him, a partition obscured someone's figure, and Carla tried to see who it was, but it was hard to make out.

The principal was conversing with someone across the partition.

Though she couldn't hear what was being said, Carla strained to listen, hoping she might catch a word.

But again, she couldn't hear, and after a while of conversation, the principal cleared his throat several times and then shouted loudly.

"Since this matter occurred among the grand nobility, I believe it would be difficult for this academy to make a judgment. Although it is an unfortunate incident that took place during the Inter-house Competition, it is closer to an event than an accident... I would like to appeal to the imperial court for a judgment."

"That's it."

Carla was confident she would be acquitted.

While she hadn't expected it at all, she hadn't anticipated that it would be so easily appealed to the imperial court. Once it went to the imperial court, it would inevitably go through her uncle, and passing through her uncle would be immensely favorable for Carla.

"Th-that..."

A sigh came from the Schyskeil side.

"That is a reasonable statement!"

Cheers erupted from the Cascata side.

These were the reactions she had clearly anticipated.

"Isn't this too much? Even if it goes up to the imperial court, there will be a court mage..."

"Enough. What can we do now?"

Contred von Schyskeil.

The head of the Schyskeil family, who had been waiting for the interrogation rather than a trial to end, turned without any change in expression. He had no lingering feelings for his dead son—he had never had any expectations.

Now was a time to focus on damage control.

As he was thinking, someone approached him quietly.

"Sir."

"And you are...?"

"Yes, sir."

The man who approached Contred slightly raised his face and bowed.

With white eyes devoid of pupils or irises, he looked at Contred and smiled.

"...What brings you here from Aufstieg?"

"I would like to have a serious discussion. Could you spare some time?"

"...Very well."

Contred nodded.