# 72 - Regina, Regina, Regina Parla (1)

1. Regina, Regina, Regina Parla (1)

After the hearing, there was considerable debate about whether Carla should be released without restraint.

The Cascata side argued that it didn't matter, while the Schyskeil side insisted that she should be detained until the Imperial Palace made a ruling, considering the social mores—that is, the rather significant tragedy of a fiancée murdering her fiancé. The arguments were quite evenly matched, but the result was surprisingly anticlimactic.

After all, wasn't she the eldest daughter of the Cascata? This simple fact alone ensured Carla's immediate release without detention, and in truth, Carla hadn't expected to be detained in the first place.

Lorenzo greeted her as she left the Central Bureau building.

Lorenzo, still smoking a Magic Herb, looked weary, but his eyes shone brightly. He looked at Carla and said,

"Go to the dormitory, to the student cafeteria. I heard your classmates are having a celebratory dinner there."

"Aren't you coming, Instructor?"

At Carla's question, Lorenzo chuckled and took out a portable ashtray, stubbing out the Magic Herb in it as he replied,

"What would an old fogey like me do there? No one wants me around. Enjoy yourselves. Well, I've delivered my message, so I'll be going."

Carla didn't reply.

She wasn't one to insist, and more importantly, she wasn't that close to Lorenzo.

"Ah, right. Carla."

"Yes."

"About Ivan. Ivan Contadino."

"Yes."

Carla looked at Lorenzo and replied.

Lorenzo's gaze was strangely subdued as he looked at her. His eyes, which had been so clear just moments ago, were now deeply sunken, making it difficult to discern what he was thinking.

"...Don't you think that guy's personality changes too often... I mean, drastically?"

"I don't know what you mean."

Carla felt a twinge of nervousness.

How could Lorenzo suspect something that no one else knew, something they hadn't even noticed? Was he only guessing that his personality changed, or did he suspect that Ivan had a split personality?

"I'm an instructor, after all. You guys might not know it, but I'm watching."

"...I don't know what you mean. But I have felt that his personality changes drastically."

She had no intention of saying he had a split personality.

Because it involved Ivan.

At Carla's words, Lorenzo smirked, curling up the corners of his lips.

"Ivan is suspicious."

"......"

Carla didn't reply.

Now that her lost arm had returned, along with the confidence she had lost, she was almost ready to say harsh words to Lorenzo, but her patience had grown considerably in the meantime.

"There's something off about Ivan. Those kinds of guys usually wear a mask."

"...Excuse me?"

Carla's eyes widened, and she asked back with a foolish voice without realizing it.

She shut her mouth, realizing her mistake, but Lorenzo didn't erase his bitter smile, as if he had already noticed.

"You're a typical noble lady. You don't know how to suspect people. You probably never suspected that Ivan was originally like that. There are all sorts of strange people in the world. Guys who wear masks are actually quite common."

"......"

Carla stood still, glaring at Lorenzo.

Lorenzo, as if her gaze was nothing more than a tickle, lit another Magic Herb and blew the smoke into the air.

"Get into the habit of suspecting everything, young lady. You'll need to."

When Carla entered the banquet hall, the atmosphere was quite lively.

Large beer steins were placed in front of the four students, and none of them had a normal complexion, indicating that they had all had a fair amount to drink.

Then, Ivan saw Carla entering the dining hall and was about to stand up with a bright expression when Liam's voice cut across the dining hall.

"Isn't that the Avenger! The Avenger Lady! Carla Della Cascata! You're just arriving now!"

Avenger? What was that?

Carla frowned at the incomprehensible title.

Liam seemed amused by her expression, and he stood up, picking up his beer stein.

Then, he dipped the beer stein into the large oak barrel next to him, pulled it out, and approached Carla with it.

"Come on, come on, don't be like that. Carla, you're really amazing! I never thought you'd kill Lucas yourself! Isn't that a wonderful thing, even if you were born a woman!"

'He's drunk.'

Carla accepted the beer stein that Liam offered.

It was good that she accepted it, but she was still standing in an awkward position near the entrance of the dining hall.

Fortunately, no one was coming in or out, so she wasn't obstructing anyone, but she felt uncomfortable.

"Li, Liam. Come here... Carla is embarrassed..."

It was Emil.

Emil's pale complexion was flushed red, so he must have been quite drunk as well.

Emil, who had approached in that manner, grabbed Liam's arm and pulled him away, while Ivan quickly approached Carla and spoke to her.

"Did the trial go well?"

"Trial? How did you know I went to trial?"

"How could I not know?"

"...Well, it went well. It looks like it will be considered self-defense."

Carla didn't argue with Ivan's words any further.

The moment she saw his strangely gleaming eyes, Lorenzo's words flashed through her mind.

"Co, come here... Carla, sit down and eat something. It's not good to drink on an empty stomach."

Regina approached from the opposite side of Ivan, grabbed Carla's arm, and pulled her along.

Carla, who had been subtly wondering how to get out of this situation, reluctantly went to her seat, and Liam came and sat down next to her with a thud, as if he had been waiting for her.

"That was awesome, Carla. I heard about it from Ivan! You totally wrecked Lucas!"

With that, Liam slapped Carla's left shoulder loudly.

Carla frowned because of it, and Emil, who had been watching, poked Liam in the side.

"Stop it, Liam... Carla says it hurts."

Carla looked at Emil because of that.

Emil, who had inadvertently made eye contact with Carla, flinched and shrank his neck like a turtle, and Carla thought that Emil was excessively timid.

"Isn't it possible to die when you're fighting? Even if you're a noble, you die the same way if you get a hole in your chest. Carla won, and the loser could die!"

Liam then raised his beer stein high.

"Come on, let's have a drink!"

"Again, again?!"

Regina said with a frown.

It must be because the drinks had already gone around several times before Carla arrived—Carla thought as she drank her beer. The lukewarm beer didn't taste very good, but Carla still emptied the glass and raised her left arm.

"Speaking of which, what happened to your left arm?"

"It's a long story. And you probably wouldn't believe me even if I explained it. I just got lucky."

"Doesn't it make sense that an arm can't just grow back by luck?"

"It's lucky because things like that happen."

Regina pouted as if she didn't like Carla's answer, but Carla ignored Regina and picked up a sausage. She didn't know it would be so nice to be able to hold a plate and use a fork comfortably.

After the drinks had gone around several times, Carla was starting to feel tipsy.

Liam was still holding his own, and Ivan's eyes were glazed over, and he was swaying, not in his right mind.

—Haven't you ever thought that Ivan is acting?

Carla looked at Ivan with eyes that were flushed with alcohol.

Ivan was acting... In fact, it was something she found hard to believe.

The fear that had dominated her childhood, and still did.

That terrible, chilling voice that sounded like it was coming from hell, heard in the storm of Magical Engineering.

It was hard to believe that it was the voice of Ivan, who was not even a few years old at the time.

"What are you thinking about, Carla...?"

Carla snapped out of her thoughts and turned to look at Emil.

Emil was smiling brightly, and considering that he couldn't even make eye contact with Carla earlier, the power of alcohol must be great.

"Just thinking that it's really nice to have my left arm back."

"Hehe... I see..."

Emil picked up his spoon and moved to the seat next to Carla.

Then he looked at his spoon and made a strange noise, "Oh."

"Why has the glass gotten so small...?"

"...That's a spoon, Emil."

Carla reached out and took the glass.

She wondered if it was right to give Emil any more alcohol than he already had, but today was a good day after all.

"Carla is really amazing..."

Emil held the glass with both hands and took small sips, as if he were drinking hot tea.

Emil's cheeks were flushed red.

"Yeah. I'm pretty amazing."

Carla nodded in agreement.

It was true—she was amazing. She was a bit pathetic when she was missing an arm, but that was in the past.

Now that she had both arms, she was invincible—well, it was a bit difficult to compare to Ivan, though.

"Still... you're strong... I'm jealous..."

"You can do it if you try."

"I caaan't... I can't be like you..."

Emil started to nod off.

Carla stared at Emil for a moment, then tilted the glass of beer she was holding, emptying it to the bottom.

'I'm getting a little tipsy...'

The sight that was reflected in Carla's eyes as she blinked and tried to shake off the intoxication.

"Ivan, I'll take you home. Let's go..."

"Uh, uh... I'm not druunk..."

It was Ivan.

And Regina's back as she supported Ivan and tried to leave the dining hall.

Seeing that sight, Carla unconsciously jumped to her feet.

"Ah, ouch!"

Emil, who had been dozing off, woke up with a start, but Carla was already ignoring him.

Author's Note

There are no updates on weekends...ㅠㅠ

# 73 - Regina, Regina, Regina Parla (2)

1. Regina, Regina, Regina Parla (2)

Carla shot to her feet, but she didn't know what to do next.

She'd jumped up the moment she saw Regina leading Ivan away, but why?

'No. I do have a reason.'

For the women of the Empire, the greatest virtue was undoubtedly chastity.

A woman was expected to follow one husband for life, and while remarriage wasn't unheard of, remarried women were often looked down upon in the Empire's social climate.

Carla, who had grown up in such an environment, even though she herself had originally been a man—

'That bastard slept with me...!'

Ivan was the one who had taken Carla's chastity.

A commoner, no less—though Carla herself had willingly offered her body—he had taken her chastity, so he should take responsibility.

"Carla... where are you going..."

"Hey, Liam. Emil's drunk. Take care of him."

"Huh, uh?!"

Pushing away Emil, who was trying to cling to her, Carla shouted at Liam.

Liam, who was tilting the empty beer keg to squeeze out the last drop, raised a hand to Carla. Carla practically shoved Emil at Liam and strode forward.

Her steps gradually lengthened, and finally, she began to run.

Regina and Ivan had already left the restaurant. How far had they gone? The thought made Carla anxious.

Could she even understand herself? In truth, Carla wasn't thinking about that. She wasn't the type to assign meaning to every action. Carla realized that her chasing after Ivan, or perhaps chasing after Regina, meant giving Ivan, who had taken her body, to Regina—

'I don't like it.'

They had spent nearly a whole day intertwined. Carla believed that if the body went, the heart should follow.

Her pace quickened.

Her running cut through the oncoming wind with even greater force, and finally, she saw Regina supporting Ivan.

"Regina!"

Carla shouted without realizing it.

She couldn't help it—Regina was leading Ivan not towards his dormitory, but towards a different entrance altogether. Seeing that, Carla felt the alcohol evaporate from her head.

Regina, who had been heading towards the entrance to her room, turned sharply.

The moment their eyes met, Regina knew.

Carla saw the fleeting panic, the embarrassment, and the dismay in Regina's eyes.

"...Ivan's room isn't that way. You know that, right? Why are you going there?"

Carla slowly approached Regina.

She was a little out of breath from running, but she didn't care.

"Uh... Carla?"

"I'd like you to answer my question first. Ivan's room isn't that way, is it?"

Regina hesitated, unable to answer readily.

Her plan was practically on the verge of success.

The plan Liam had mentioned was perfect, provided Regina was willing to overcome her embarrassment.

Regina was a noble's daughter, but from a minor noble family, and marriage to a commoner wasn't entirely impossible. If Ivan and Regina were to sleep together and have a child, everything would fall into place.

Regina would marry Ivan, finally ending her long, one-sided love.

But just as her plan was about to succeed, Carla had chased after her.

Regina hesitated for a long time, unable to answer.

Ivan was still unconscious, but Regina didn't find it difficult to support him.

"...Carla, can't you just pretend you didn't see anything?"

"That's why I'm asking. What are you planning to do with Ivan?"

Regina realized that Carla's mood was strange.

Something was going wrong, quite significantly, from what she had expected.

"You know I like Ivan, Carla, right?"

Carla inhaled.

She knew it all too well.

"...Yeah, I know. So?"

"Ivan is a fool and an idiot, so if I just wait, he'll never notice. So..."

"...So?"

"I'm going to take the initiative. I'm going to make it a fait accompli. If Ivan takes my chastity, if I happen to have Ivan's child, then Ivan will be by my side. That's how I'll keep him."

"Have you ever thought that might be unhappy for Ivan?"

Carla's voice trembled.

Despite knowing the truth, she might have been ignoring it. As the excitement subsided and her mind cooled, Carla realized that she would be causing even Regina irreparable pain.

"I, I! I... I'll be good to Ivan. I'll treat him well. I'll make him the happiest man in the world...!"

Regina said, almost sobbing.

She wanted Carla to pretend she didn't see anything, to look the other way.

"So... Carla, please ignore me. Pretend you didn't see anything. Then it'll all be over. It'll all be over without anyone knowing."

Carla licked her lips and pondered.

She knew of Regina's affections.

But she couldn't pretend not to see it here.

If Regina were just confessing to Ivan, maybe.

But to sleep with him while he was drunk was something Carla couldn't condone.

"...Sorry, Regina. I can't do that."

"Why, why...? Why can't you?!"

Regina bit her lip tightly and waited for Carla's answer.

Three childhood friends.

One man, two women.

Originally, one woman, two men.

The relationship that should have been was turning into the worst possible form between a man and women.

Carla squeezed her eyes shut and opened them.

She didn't have much affection for Regina—in the first place, even when she was a he, she hadn't been very interested in the opposite sex. She cared more about Magical Engineering than sexual values or anything like that! In Carla's eyes, Regina's value as a Mage was close to zero, so she was simply out of her interest.

If it had been the usual Carla, she would have blurted out the truth and been done with it, but this time, it wasn't so easy.

"...Ivan, well. Ivan..."

"...Ivan?"

Regina seemed to sense something unusual in Carla.

She wasn't usually one to hesitate like this, and even if she did, she wouldn't have such a hard time saying it unless Carla also liked Ivan.

"...Ivan took my chastity."

"What?"

Regina stared at Carla with a blank expression, as if she had been struck hard on the back of the head. As if witnessing something impossible, she stared blankly, and then her expression began to distort.

"Wha, what... Carla, what did you say...?"

"I, I slept with him... Ivan..."

Carla felt her face burning.

She had never felt so embarrassed or found it so difficult to say something. Even declaring that she would give up her position as heir to the Cascata family had been easy, but she hadn't known it would be so hard to say that Ivan had slept with her.

"Sle, slept, slept... Sle, slept..."

Regina repeated the same words, her lips creaking like a broken wind-up doll.

Her already pale face turned even whiter, then blue.

"He, he took me... that bastard...!"

Carla was worried that Regina hadn't understood properly, so she ended up blurting out even those embarrassing words. To be precise, Ivan had violated Carla for hours. As if she were his, as if she were a toy, he had fondled, rubbed, caressed, sucked, and licked every inch of Carla's body!

"Tha, that's a lie... right? Carla... huh?"

Regina managed to say, trembling.

A shocking reality that was too difficult for her to accept.

Regina couldn't believe Carla's words, which she was delivering so calmly—at least, from Regina's perspective.

"E, even if you don't want me to be with Ivan, Ca, Carla. You shouldn't tell such lies... You, you're the noble lady of Cascata, right? Ivan is a co, commoner... right?"

Regina trembled.

Carla's gaze was directed at Ivan, not Regina, worried that he might fall over. He was weak to alcohol, how much had he drunk? He would definitely get hurt if he fell like that.

"...That commoner took my chastity. Throughout the Exploration Game. My arm came back in the process."

"Don't talk nonsense!"

Regina screamed.

The noise was so loud near the dormitory entrance that lights began to turn on in the windows of each room.

"Regina, let's move..."

"It's impossible for a Cascata to sleep with Ivan! You're lying! Carla, you're definitely... ly, lying, right?! Huh?! You slept with Ivan, that's impossible...! Ivan, Ivan is a commoner! Sleeping with a commoner, Carla, you're lying, right?! Huh?! You're lying!"

Regina shook her head violently and shouted.

Now, students were even opening their windows and looking out, wondering what the noise was.

Carla wanted to cover Regina's mouth somehow, but it wasn't easy.

"It can't be... Why, why would you tell such a lie... why..."

"...Le, let's go inside and talk, Regina. Okay?"

"Get away!"

Carla approached Regina, trying to get her into her dormitory room somehow.

The fact that she was shouting so loudly was also a problem.

"Get away, Carla... Don't come near me, liar, liar...!"

Regina glared at Carla with eyes burning with jealousy.

The anger blazing in her eyes was so fierce that even Carla flinched.

"Even if you don't want me to be with Ivan, you'd tell such a lie...? The young lady of Cascata slept with Ivan...? You're telling me to believe that now!?"

"It's, it's not a lie..."

Carla was the one who wanted to cry.

Regina was crying.

Author's Note

Current stockpile: Up to chapter 85

Complete recovery successful!

# 74 - Regina, Regina, Regina Parla (3)

1. Regina, Regina, Regina Parla (3)

It was a good thing she had both arms; otherwise, she would have been in quite a predicament.

Carla thought as she dragged both Ivan and Regina into Ivan's room.

It was quite a spectacle outside, but more importantly, unnecessary misunderstandings—though they were technically true, it wasn't pleasant to have such things spread, so it was best to avoid the situation.

"He's sleeping soundly even in this mess."

Carla finally sighed in relief after laying Ivan on the bed.

She didn't know how much he had drunk.

She had been so busy dealing with Liam and Emil that she hadn't even seen Ivan, but he must have drunk a lot in the meantime.

"...I made him drink a lot."

"Did you?"

Carla poured a glass of water and handed it to Regina.

Regina, now a little calmer, sipped the water with a flushed face. She looked so demure that Carla thought if she were a man, she might have fallen for Regina as she was now.

"I was trying to make it a fait accompli. So I made him drink a lot. Probably more than Liam..."

"Oh dear..."

Carla sighed and sat on the edge of the bed.

She ended up facing Regina, who was sitting at the table, and Regina had been staring at Carla for some time.

"Is it true?"

"It's true."

She didn't need to ask what was true; she knew.

It was about the commotion before they came back to the room.

"...Explain it to me. Carla, you clearly said you weren't interested in Ivan."

"I wasn't interested. I'm still not interested. There's no reason for me to be interested in Ivan."

"But it doesn't make sense to sleep with someone you don't love."

At that point, Carla fell silent.

She thought so too.

Sex without love was no different from prostitution in her eyes.

It meant selling her body.

The oldest profession in human history,

And also the most disrespected.

But there was a reason, wasn't there?

Carla had a good reason, and therefore, she didn't deserve to hear such words from Regina.

"There was a reason."

"What reason?"

"It's because of Lucas, that bastard."

"Why Lucas?"

Carla explained to Regina what had happened, starting with Lucas.

She omitted the things that needed to be hidden, didn't mention Ivan's secret, and only told the truth about the Aphrodisiac and the aftermath.

Regina's expression after hearing the explanation was, to put it simply, blank.

It was a story that she wanted to believe, but it was hard to believe, and so she didn't know what kind of expression to make.

"That kind of thing happened...?"

"Yes. It's hard to believe, but it's all true. Everyone knows that Lucas is a piece of trash... So, that's how it happened."

Regina was a typical woman of the Empire, born and raised in the Empire with a perfectly normal social education.

So it was hard to believe that such forbidden drugs were so easily available, but even so, knowing what kind of person Lucas was, it was hard to say that it didn't make sense.

Regina couldn't believe Carla's words completely, but she couldn't think that far right now. Regina's personality was not one to doubt others, and Carla was her childhood friend, so it was hard to be suspicious.

"...I'm sorry, I don't know what to say."

Carla had saved Ivan from almost being in danger.

Carla had saved Ivan by giving up her own purity.

If Carla hadn't done that, Ivan's circuits would have been contaminated and reversed, and Ivan's life as a Mage would have ended there.

Regina felt it keenly as she looked at Carla.

What kind of future a Mage who could no longer use Magical Engineering would face.

If such a future were to befall Ivan...

It was a terrifying, chilling thought.

"I know you're confused, Regina. But I hope you understand. Just as Ivan saved me, I tried to save Ivan. That's..."

Even if there was no love—Carla stopped, unable to say the words.

If she said those words, it would be too much to ask of Regina.

"...I'll go first, Carla. I'll leave Ivan... here."

Regina stood up, staggering.

She looked as forlorn as a dandelion seed swaying in the breeze, and Carla tried to get up to support Regina.

"It's okay... Carla, I'm okay..."

But Regina shook her head.

She didn't want Carla's hand to touch her misery.

If she did, the tears she was holding back would burst out again, so Regina refused Carla's help.

\*

Regina didn't go straight back to her room.

Instead, she turned down the hallway leading outside and went out to the flower garden through the side door of the dormitory.

Today is such a long day.

Victory in the Inter-house Competition, the dinner, and... and.

It felt like her place was missing from a day that should have been full of good things.

The night breeze was cold.

On that night, which should have been brightly lit, the night sky that Regina looked up at was full of dark clouds.

'Ivan...'

It had been a long time.

More than 10 years.

Regina had cultivated her love for Ivan for that long.

But if she had known that it would end so miserably, she would have given up on such love a long time ago.

Being kind-hearted, she couldn't resent Ivan or be angry with Carla.

Resenting and being angry were things that only those who had done it—those who knew how to do it—could do.

She had never done such things before, so Regina couldn't do it because she didn't know how.

That's why she was even more frustrated.

If she could have been angry with someone, if she could have said words of resentment, it might have been better.

If she could have vented the unknown emotions that filled her heart, it might have been more refreshing.

Since she couldn't do that, Regina was just frustrated.

Her time had ended here.

Carla had a good reason, and Ivan had a good reason.

She couldn't ask Carla to cover it up, she couldn't pretend it didn't happen, and no matter what she did, Regina had no choice but to give up on Ivan.

What else could she do?

She could only sit here like this, there was nothing else she could do.

She couldn't do anything.

"Oh my, a pretty young lady."

Regina looked up with a start at the sudden voice.

She hadn't even noticed that someone had come so close, right next to her.

"You don't have to be so wary, young lady."

A woman whose appearance was not clearly visible, hidden in the shadows of the moonlight.

"I work at this academy."

"A, are you an instructor?"

Regina asked in a cautious voice.

It was a figure she had never seen before...

She tried to see who it was, but the moon was behind her at a perfect angle, so she couldn't even see her face properly.

"You could say something similar. But why are you crying here alone, young lady?"

At the woman's words, Regina wiped her eyes.

A faint, shimmering liquid was on the back of her hand—when had it started? Regina realized then that she had been crying.

"I, it's nothing..."

"It doesn't seem like nothing. Crying alone at this hour... I couldn't just pass by without being concerned. If you don't mind, would it be okay if I sat next to you for a while?"

"Ah, yes, yes..."

Regina moved slightly to the side, making room next to her on the bench.

As she came to sit beside her, she finally emerged from the shadows of the moonlight, and Regina thought it was amazing as she looked at her white hair.

'White hair, that's a rare hair color...'

It was the first time she had seen white hair.

"Did you have a heartbreak?"

Regina was startled by her words.

Then, she was surprised at herself and quickly changed her expression.

"N, no, it's not that."

"Yes, it is. Usually, when girls your age are crying, it's mostly because of heartbreak. It's not a shameful thing to cry because of heartbreak. It's bound to happen in life. I've had it too, you know?"

Regina was listening to her voice before she knew it.

Anyway, it was a pleasant sound.

"You can fail in unrequited love, or even if it's not unrequited love, a love that was going well can collapse. But most people just cry there. Time is the cure, you can forget everything as time passes..."

Regina nodded at her words.

She had thought so too.

As time goes by, as time passes, the wounds of heartbreak will fade, the pain of now is the hardest time, as time passes, then...

"But why should you?"

Regina was startled and looked at her.

Under the shadows of the moonlight, her face was full of smiles.

"Why should you endure and persevere when you've been taken away? Shouldn't you just take it back? It's absurd that the victim has to endure."

That smile was so captivating.

"Just because that girl took him away, does that mean you have to step back? The world is held by the strong. If you really want him, maybe I can help."

"Y, yes...?!"

Regina was startled.

She almost fell off the bench.

"I'm saying that I can be your strength."

The woman smiled.

The woman smiled with her red eyes full of enthusiasm.

Author's Note

I applied for exclusivity!

I have to do what I have to do even if it's annoying...

(Actually, I'm just doing it because I can't move because I hurt my toe)

Thank you to the anonymous sponsor.:.

I fell twice while riding my bike, but it's not my fault, it's the bike's problem. I'm going to formally complain to Panaso\*nic. But it's okay because you made fun of me with the sponsorship. Thank you for using the paid service...?

# 75 - Ivan and Black Ivan

1. Ivan and the Black Ivan

Only after Regina had run out of the room and down the hallway, only after she was completely out of sight, did Carla turn around with a long sigh.

Today is really, a tiring day… Carla thought, unlike her usual self, and entered the room, where she was startled without realizing it.

Someone was sitting there, with the moonlight behind them, casting a long shadow on the floor.

The only people who had been in the room were Carla, Regina—and Ivan, who was passed out drunk on the bed.

Carla was here, and Regina had left, so the only one left was Ivan.

“Did you see Regina off well?”

“What? You weren’t asleep?”

Ivan was silently looking at Carla.

She couldn’t be sure, but he was probably smiling… His expression was obscured by the moonlight, but she had a feeling that was the case.

“That little bit of alcohol is nothing to me. It’s insignificant. Don’t you know that?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You were completely taken down by the Aphrodisiac.”

“I didn’t know such strange potions were in vogue. At least I… no, you wouldn’t be familiar with such gore. In my time, there were no such cowardly potions.”

“Either way, you were affected, that’s the truth.”

Carla grumbled as she came into the room and drank a glass of water.

After all, she had drunk quite a bit of alcohol too, and it had made her thirsty.

“Give me a glass too, Bi.”

“Bi, really…”

She couldn’t say no now, she didn’t want to.

Besides, she had gained her left arm thanks to him.

Carla was about to say something but eventually gave up.

If she said anything back, and Ivan, the wicked Ivan, changed his mind and asked for his left arm back, that would be a real disaster.

It was so hard when she lost her arm in a daze, but if she got it back and then lost it again, it would be like living hell.

“…Here, water.”

She never dreamed she would end up serving a commoner.

Carla suppressed the rising irritation and handed the glass of water to Ivan.

“…What are you doing? You asked for water, didn’t you?”

“You don’t even know the basics of offering water to your husband.”

Ivan looked up at Carla and chuckled.

Husband, husband!

What kind of ridiculous nonsense was he spouting?

“Hold the glass with both hands. From now on, always use both hands when offering me something. Understand?”

Carla’s temper flared right up to her throat.

This wasn’t a matter of noble versus commoner—at least not since she had come to her senses, since her mother had passed away, she had never shown any courtesy when handing something to anyone.

And now, she was supposed to show courtesy to this guy who looked like Ivan, it was—

“Is it that difficult? If so, I might need to remind you of the hierarchy.”

Ivan’s hand instantly wrapped around Carla’s waist.

Before Carla could even make a sound, Ivan pulled her in and threw her onto the bed.

“…What are you doing?”

“You see, women need to be pinned down like this to realize their place. You don’t seem to know that yet. I’m going to teach you that from now on.”

“What?”

Carla frowned and glared at Ivan.

She didn’t like the fact that Ivan was looking down at her while she was lying on the bed, and every word he said was hateful.

“Let go of me… Ugh.”

Carla couldn’t finish her sentence.

As soon as Ivan’s large hand went inside her blouse and roughly fondled her breasts, Carla had to shut her mouth to suppress the scream that was about to burst out.

“The night is long, Carla. And your body is one that I won’t easily tire of. So, for this long night, shall we enjoy it until your body is exhausted?”

Ivan smiled as he fondled Carla’s breasts, so much that the baby fat squeezed out between his fingers.

The expression on Carla’s face, as she bit her lip and forcibly suppressed her shame while glaring at Ivan, felt like a heavenly delicacy to him.

“…So what exactly are you? What are you trying to do?”

In the lingering darkness of the dawn after the Dust Storm had passed, Carla sat on the bed, tying up her hair, and asked. She could still feel the burning heat from the handprints all over her body, and her crotch was all sticky, making her want to wash up as soon as possible.

“My identity? You’ll know soon enough.”

“What, are you the emperor of a destroyed ancient empire or something?”

Carla hadn’t just said that without any basis.

She hadn’t neglected her Magical Engineering studies either, so she had heard a lot about the last emperor of the empire that had existed in ancient times.

He was said to have been a genius by birth and to have seen the end of Magical Engineering, but because of his violent nature, he engaged in tyranny, and as a result, the family that supported the empire rose up and, after a fierce 30-day battle, was defeated and met its end…

Ivan didn’t answer Carla’s question.

Instead, he just grinned at Carla, and Carla closed her mouth, about to burst out in annoyance, because the answer seemed to be a silent affirmation.

‘…No, is it real?’

Carla’s sharp brain rapidly spun, pulling out the past Ivan.

Ivan, who had shown outstanding talent in Magical Engineering since he was a child, Ivan, who had rapidly progressed after reading a single book on basic Dust Storm Magic, Ivan, who had burned Venere to death in an instant, and Lucas, and Kiara…

‘He subdued Kiara in that short amount of time in that downpour.’

As soon as the necklace broke, Ivan’s Magical Power wavered.

Kiara, not missing that wavering, counterattacked, and Ivan was thrown back, and Kiara immediately chased after him… and Lucas had tried to inject Carla with the Aphrodisiac.

That meant he had subdued Kiara in that short moment.

Kiara of the Water Lineage Magic, in that short amount of time.

If that was the case, then perhaps that necklace had actually acted as a suppressor, suppressing Ivan’s power.

Then, that idiot Lucas had really done something terrible.

“You’ve realized it, I see. You’re smart.”

Carla didn’t answer Ivan’s words.

Or perhaps she was closer to not being able to answer.

“I simply wish to reclaim my empire. This brat and I are two as one. Now that that damn necklace is broken, he must have already realized my existence.”

Two as one, what a joke.

Ivan had always been Ivan.

From around the time when Carla—who she thought was Carlo at the time—had awakened his past life.

But anyway, now was the time to hide everything.

Ivan turned his head and looked at Carla, who was looking at him.

Scanning Carla’s naked body, which was drawing a smooth curve—her back view—he said.

“If I were to take you as Bi, this brat wouldn’t object either. There’s no man who would reject a beautiful woman. Besides, this brat is unnecessarily responsible. He’s saying that he’ll definitely take responsibility for you since he took your purity.”

“Of, of course, he has to take responsibility. Why are you saying something so obvious as if it’s a big deal…”

Purity is a natural thing for the women of the empire.

If you give your purity to one man, that’s what happens.

Even the great Carla is no exception.

“Do you want to force a pure love on the emperor?”

It was truly an arrogant statement—Carla couldn’t decide how to respond. If he went around saying such things outside, he would instantly be considered an insult to the imperial family and his head would be chopped off.

But if it was Ivan, wouldn’t he only be subjugated after causing great damage to the empire?

Besides, everything he was saying was all stories that were hard to relate to.

Reclaiming the empire, becoming the emperor, the scale of the matter was so large that it was hard to even accept.

“…Before that, I need to do this first.”

“This… Eek?!”

Carla was dragged towards Ivan, scattering shrill screams.

“A pretty useful Magic. It was called Gravity, wasn’t it?”

“Wh, what are you doing?!”

For some reason, Carla was lying on the bed, spread out with her limbs wide open, and she couldn’t move a single finger or toe. She felt like something huge was pressing down on her, but it wasn’t particularly difficult to breathe or speak.

“I acquired the Magic because there was someone who could manipulate gravity. There was no such Magic when I was around… It’s a mysterious power. If I develop this Magic further with Magical Engineering, flying would be no problem.”

“Gr, Gravity Magic…”

Carla frowned and rolled her eyes to glare at Ivan.

If you were talking about someone who could manipulate gravity, there was that one guy from Seoban… she couldn’t quite remember his name, but anyway, there was that one guy from Seoban. Carla knew him well because she had personally beaten him down. It wasn’t a very powerful Magic, and the Magic wasn’t very strong either, he felt like a small fry, but the power varied so much depending on the caster.

“Anyway, I’m very satisfied for now. I like it.”

Ivan licked his lips as he scanned Carla, who was tied to the bed with her limbs stretched out.

“There’s still time before dawn. That means you and I have more time to enjoy ourselves.”

Carla glared at Ivan.

When she suddenly became quiet, Ivan stared at her, thinking that something was strange.

“…Forcing a woman with strength is something that even uneducated commoners don’t do. You know that, right?”

“Hmph.”

“Untie this.”

Ivan silently released the Gravity Magic that had been pressing down on Carla.

When the pressing force disappeared, Carla let out a small sigh and sat up on the bed.

“…Okay, fine.”

Carla brushed back her sweat-soaked hair and let out a hollow laugh.

"So, you're going to make me completely your woman now? ...Former Emperor?"

Ivan was still staring at her silently.

At the end, he let out a hollow laugh.

"Carla, are you trying to provoke me? I didn't know you were such a bold woman."

Instead of answering, Carla narrowed her eyes and glared at Ivan.

"Okay, let's talk honestly. I know you want to hold me. But tell me if you only want my body, or if you want something else too."

It was also a question that caught him off guard.

Ivan didn't answer easily.

Carla, Carla Della Cascata.

She knew the exploration of Magical Engineering well.

She was also strongly obsessed and had a strong competitive spirit.

He had never taken a Bi in his life, but if he were to take one… Carla would be qualified enough. Even though he had never felt affection.

After such thoughts, Ivan answered.

"I want all of you to be completely mine. But I don't like getting it by force."

'That's a relief.'

If they started mixing bodies, she wouldn't be able to make proper judgments.

So, thinking that it was fortunate to stop at this point, Carla tried to maintain a confident attitude, pretending that her spirit hadn't been broken.

"If it's like this, you won't be able to get all of me, even if you get my body. You know that, right?"

"I am destined to be the emperor, Carla. It doesn't matter what you want."

"It will matter. Because it will be more fun that way. A woman who doesn't fall for even an emperor."

To think that she would say such words herself—really, you never know what will happen in life.

"You must have had many women who easily fell for you. Wouldn't it be fun to directly seduce a woman who doesn't fall for you?"

Ivan's eyes flashed.

"You're using your head quite well. It wasn't bad for words thrown out carelessly to get out of this situation. ...But that might be pretty good too. A man who can't even seduce a woman, that would be a problem. Okay. Carla, I'll remember your words."

His hand brushed past Carla's face, and she felt a soft but intense pressure.

"From now on, you will know why I am qualified to be the emperor, Carla."

# 76 - Chiara di Servitore

1. Kiara di Servitore

Even if a death occurs, the vacancy will not be filled again.

Throughout the history of the academy, there have been instances where students have died, but even if a vacancy arises, they do not accept new students.

It is simply treated as a death during training, and the position remains vacant.

Kiara quietly watched the empty space left by Lucas.

An empty seat, lost without its owner.

Despite the absence of him, strangely, his voice seemed to echo clearly in her mind. The voice that always called her nervously and treated her like a possession.

— Kiara! Come and pack my clothes right now!

— You are mine. Just follow my orders. Don’t even think about running away!

— Kiara…! How dare you ignore me?!

Those once powerful voices were now echoes of the past.

Kiara closed her eyes and imagined.

What kind of end did Lucas meet?

In truth, her last memory was of Ivan’s chillingly demonic face. She had seen that face, that expression, and the horrifying smirk that arose within it. After seeing that face, Kiara lost consciousness, overwhelmed by a powerful shock.

When she opened her eyes again, she had already been taken away.

With all her limbs broken, she was transported, and it was only then that she learned of Lucas's death.

— Foolish girl, can’t you even protect yourself properly?! What will become of our family’s future!

These were the words of the head of the Servitore family, her father.

As soon as Kiara opened her eyes, a torrent of insults poured down on her, more ferocious than a torrential rain.

Kiara could not say a word.

The Servitore family was practically subservient to Schaiske, and as the eldest daughter of Servitore, Kiara was already destined to become Lucas's concubine.

Although she was supposed to assist Lucas, who was practically disqualified as a Mage, while also providing protection, now that she had effectively failed and Lucas had been killed, neither she nor the Servitore family could argue against being cast aside by Schaiske.

Thus, Kiara could not respond to her father.

She simply lowered her head, her limbs still unable to move freely, and imagined what Carla might have said.

‘…It was a power I could not defeat.’

Even so, that does not justify her failure.

Her duty was to protect Lucas, and while he was a person who was infinitely close to being trash in terms of humanity, she was supposed to devote her life to the elegantly packaged Lucas von Schaiske.

However, that failed.

So utterly failed that it could not be reversed.

Ironically, she felt no particular emotion towards Lucas.

If she were to say this, her father would fly into a rage, but what could she do about the truth?

After all, Lucas was someone with whom she had no emotional connection as a human being.

If Lucas did not regard Kiara as a person, it would be strange for Kiara to regard Lucas as one.

‘What will happen to me now?’

Kiara stared blankly out of the classroom window.

The sky, gathering dark clouds as if to reflect the ominous events occurring one after another at the academy, looked dreary enough to seem like it would rain at any moment.

“......”

She quietly stood up from her seat.

Though she had not yet sorted out what this feeling towards him and the remaining emotions were, she didn’t mind.

It could be called attachment.

It could be called relief.

It could be called emptiness.

Perhaps it could be all three.

In any case, there was no longer a need to worry.

Everything was already over, and the place where Lucas had been would remain forever empty.

After class, Kiara returned to the dormitory but stopped in front of Lucas's room instead of heading to her own.

A room now empty without its owner.

Her own room was right next door, and she would no longer hear the voice calling her, "Kiara!" But still, Kiara stood there for a long time, staring blankly at the door.

It was not that she felt regret over the vacancy.

The voice, face, expression, and gestures that had shackled her for a lifetime would no longer be seen, and thinking about that left her with a strange feeling.

‘…It’s already… too late, it’s too late.’

Kiara shook her head and headed to her room.

There was no point in holding onto regrets, and her head was already complicated enough with the preparations for the witness interrogation that would take place in a few days.

The atmosphere in the western class was already a mess, and while she didn’t know about the atmosphere in the accompanying class, the western class was close to disintegration. With a total defeat in the Inter-house Competition and Lucas’s death in the Exploration Game, it would be more surprising if any motivation remained.

“…Huh?”

Kiara’s face hardened rapidly as she grasped the doorknob.

A faint magical power was felt from inside the room.

The wave of this magical power was something she could not possibly ignore, and with her face stiffened, Kiara slowly opened the door.

“It’s late, Kiara.”

“Sir.”

A middle-aged man in a long coat stood straight, looking at her.

Though he was certainly middle-aged, the wrinkles on his face were layered with the traces of time, and he silently watched Kiara as she entered the room—his gaze held a depth that she could not comprehend.

“I greet you, sir.”

“Enough. There’s no need for formality between us. Come and sit.”

“However, sir. How can I…”

“Oh.”

He was Contred von Schyskeil, the head of Schaiske.

The look in Contred’s eyes as he gazed at Kiara held no particular emotion. It was even more benevolent than when he looked at Lucas.

“Sit down. You must be tired these days.”

“…No, it’s just that I was foolish.”

She realized it too late.

Contred was not making a suggestion to her.

He was giving an order.

“Don’t think that way.”

Only after Kiara carefully sat in the chair did he finally take a seat himself. It could be seen as a strange courtesy, but it also reflected Contred’s genuine care for Kiara.

“Lucas… yes. Lucas is gone. The funeral preparations are underway. Kiara, your father has been very angry with you.”

At Contred’s words, Kiara cautiously shook her head.

He was indeed very angry—but that was only natural given the circumstances, and from the perspective of the head of the Servitore family, Kiara had caused an enormous disaster, so it was understandable.

“Schaiske will not crumble that easily. And also, it will not cast aside Servitore that easily. I will meet with your father separately.”

Kiara jumped up and deeply bowed her head.

The reason her father had been so angry was, in fact, out of fear that Kiara would be abandoned by Schaiske for failing to protect Lucas, so if Contred spoke to him directly, that fear would be alleviated.

“Anyway, Kiara. I thought you might be troubled, so I came to see you.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Kiara’s voice trembled slightly but distinctly.

In every word from Contred, there was a glimpse of his determination not to abandon Servitore, and Kiara felt a sense of relief from that.

“…Kiara. I want to ask you something.”

“Yes, sir. Anything.”

“Did Lucas really intend to use an aphrodisiac on Carla Della Cascata?”

Kiara searched her memory upon hearing those words.

She had heard that he would use an aphrodisiac.

If that was the case, he must have had one.

But did she see him trying to use that aphrodisiac on Carla? No, she had not seen that.

The last thing Kiara had seen was Lucas destroying Ivan’s necklace, which caused Ivan’s magical power to waver, and as a result, Kiara had sent Ivan flying—that was all.

“I… I don’t know, sir. I’ve never seen it myself.”

“Speak the truth. Think of this as your witness stand.”

Kiara slowly lifted her head, which had been bowed.

Then she looked at Contred with her clear eyes.

A gaze that was impossible to read—like one who harbors poison, a man who could thoroughly conceal his emotions.

However, Kiara was quick-witted.

She could soon sense what Contred wanted.

“I’ll ask again. Kiara, Kiara di Servitore. You knew that my son, Lucas von Schyske, possessed an aphrodisiac for the purpose of using it on Carla Della Cascata, and you witnessed him intending to do so. Is that correct?”

Kiara’s throat went dry.

Until now, she and Servitore had existed for Schaiske.

For that, perjury was a small price to pay.

“…Yes, sir. The late young master undoubtedly possessed an aphrodisiac. And he intended to use that aphrodisiac on Lady Carla Della Cascata…”

“Correct.”

At Contred’s words, Kiara fell silent.

She tried to say more, but at Contred’s voice, she instinctively shut her mouth.

“Useless…”

Contred stopped speaking and let out a sigh.

The moment his gaze clouded, it vanished quickly, and his blue eyes blazed with intensity once more.

“…It seems that the son I thought was useless might be of some help on his final journey. Kiara, what you saw, testify to it as it is. Do you understand?”

Kiara suddenly felt a surge of fear.

This was not merely a harsh evaluation of a son who had already died.

It was not something she intended to voice.

Only, only fear pressed down on her.

An unknown fear, a fear whose source she could not identify, weighed heavily upon her.

“Do not forget my words, Kiara.”

Contred slowly approached Kiara.

Like a frog before a snake, Kiara could only stare at Contred, unable to move.

“You must not forget my words, Kiara. Do you understand?”

“Yes, yes… sir. Of course, of course I will…”

“Good. You are a wise child, so you must have understood. I trust that.”

Kiara did not respond.

Contred did not wait for a reply either.

“Well then, I shall take my leave. No need to see me off.”

As Contred naturally opened Kiara’s door and left, he spoke in a voice that was extremely cold.

# 77 - Funeral (1)

1. Funeral (1)

The funeral of Lucas von Schyskeil took place about a week after he was brought back dead.

Since it was a case of homicide involving a noble, there were many discussions about autopsies and other procedures, but no such processes were carried out for Lucas's death.

— He was a child who died doing something disgraceful. It would be awkward to go through such procedures. Let’s just have a quiet funeral.

With that statement, Contred, the head of the current Schyskeil family, wrapped up the entire situation.

There was a small protest from his wife, but a protest from the head of the family regarding family matters was practically meaningless, so it was dismissed, and they decided to proceed with a quiet funeral.

The day was clear, and the sky was blue.

White doves flew across the sky, and white clouds drifted between them.

On the ground, the guards of Schyskeil were dressed in formal attire, greeting the mourners with solemn expressions.

The mourners did not make a fuss.

It wasn’t a joyous occasion, and since it was the funeral of Lucas von Schyskeil, who was referred to as the next head of the family, there were no bold individuals who would dare to chatter.

Thanks to that, controlling the funeral was not too difficult; the guards stood silently in their assigned places, providing simple guidance to the mourners.

“…Look over there. Am I seeing things wrong?”

“Wow. It’s really her. Unbelievable.”

Even the guards’ expressions quickly crumbled in shock.

One by one, they pointed fingers and sighed in disbelief.

The figure that emerged was Carla Della Cascata, dressed in a simple black dress.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve been to the Schyskeil mansion.”

“It’s my first time.”

“Of course it is; you’re a commoner.”

At Carla’s retort, Ivan twisted the corners of his mouth.

He couldn’t bring himself to laugh and merely scratched his head, glancing around, easily sensing the hostile atmosphere surrounding them.

“This is truly an unwelcome visit.”

“That’s obvious. It’s not like you wouldn’t know that if I didn’t tell you. You were tempting me and whatnot, and now you’re here?”

“That wasn’t me who said that…”

Seeing Ivan frown, Carla snorted in amusement.

“You’re no different.”

With a haughty expression, Carla took a sweeping glance around.

Those who were whispering and pointing fingers at her gradually quieted down as she shot them a fierce glare—eventually, they turned their gazes elsewhere, pretending to be uninterested.

“It’s about time for them to come out.”

“Who?”

Carla sighed softly as she looked at Ivan, wondering where to even begin teaching this guy… he doesn’t even know such basic etiquette; this is what being a commoner means.

“There’s a hierarchy among mourners. If you come from Cascata, it’s not just about entering on your own; you should be greeted and invited in.”

“But…”

Ivan trailed off, unsure of how to finish his thought.

That might be the general etiquette, but it felt a bit off for Carla to insist on such general etiquette. After all, the host of this funeral was the one who died at her hands—though Ivan had a part in it too.

“You came from Cascata.”

With a low voice, the crowd that had been gathered like clouds dispersed swiftly as if blown away by the wind.

Amidst the crowd, a somewhat weary-looking man appeared, and upon seeing him, Carla deeply bowed.

“I pay my respects to Lord Schyskeil.”

“Ah. Your father visited yesterday. I thought you wouldn’t come, but I didn’t expect you to come separately.”

“Yes. I promised to attend the funeral of Lord Lucas.”

“Promised? To whom?”

“To Lord Lucas.”

At Carla’s words, Contred’s eyebrows twitched.

It didn’t seem like she was trying to provoke him, but it was a rather bold statement to make in front of the father of the deceased.

Contred, the father of the deceased, wore a meaningful smile.

Rather, he seemed to savor Carla’s boldness, gazing at her quietly before speaking.

“I almost witnessed something terrible, yet you made such a promise; you must have a deep bond. Come in. And you… um, you must be Ivan. Ivan Contadino, right?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

Ivan also bowed deeply to Contred in greeting.

For a commoner like him, it was a rare opportunity to meet a high noble—though he had met Carla’s father, Enrico, somewhat frequently.

“I wouldn’t fail to recognize the one who beat Lucas so badly. Besides, you’re renowned as a prodigy.”

“I-I’m embarrassed.”

Ivan shook his head in a fluster, keeping his gaze down.

His demeanor appeared somewhat foolish, and muffled laughter could be heard among the crowd.

“It’s not a good thing, yet I hear laughter.”

At Carla’s sharp remark, the laughter quickly died down.

In the thick silence that enveloped the venue, Contred, standing without any expression, spoke.

“Come in, both of you. Even though it ended in an unfortunate manner, there’s no reason to be disrespectful since you were once engaged. Lady Cascata, please see him off properly. Ivan, you too.”

“Yes.”

Without hesitation, Carla stepped inside.

Ivan followed closely behind her.

Hundreds of candles flickered in the funeral hall, their golden light shimmering.

In the center lay a coffin adorned with exquisite carvings, exuding an air of luxury.

Carla quietly and slowly approached the coffin.

As she got closer, she could finally see Lucas’s pale face lying inside, the lid of the coffin open at the upper half.

He had been neatly embalmed, and the large hole in his chest, the cause of death, was covered with cloth, so the grotesque appearance of Lucas was nowhere to be found.

‘In your next life, may you be born a good person, Lucas.’

Although they had a bad relationship in life, there was no need for him to meet a disgraceful end even in death.

Carla picked up a candle from the table beside the coffin.

Silently lighting the candle, she placed it in an empty spot around the coffin.

With her hands clasped together, she quietly prayed for his soul and turned to leave.

“Uh, C-Carla…?”

There was a familiar figure there.

“Emil?”

Emil was there.

“Did you come to pay your respects to Lucas?”

At Carla’s question, Emil awkwardly scratched his cheek.

It shouldn’t be something to be embarrassed about, but when she looked at him with a puzzled expression, Emil reluctantly replied.

“More than that… I came with my father.”

“Really? But why are you alone?”

“Ah, Emil! Hello.”

“Ah, Ivan… yeah, hello. My father is talking with Lord Schyskeil…”

In fact, from Carla’s perspective, as a member of Cascata, Schyskeil and Aufstieg were all the same; they were essentially the same.

Cascata was the strongest and most prosperous, so even though they were all pillars of the same empire, there was a clear difference in rank.

“Ivan and Carla seem to be getting along well…”

At Emil’s words, Carla was quite taken aback.

Did it show? Well, it must have shown…

“Ah, I should greet Lord Aufstieg as well. Do you know when he might come out?”

“I don’t know. He just went in, so I don’t think he’ll come out soon…”

“Really? Then there’s nothing we can do.”

Emil honestly hadn’t expected Carla to be here.

Beyond that, just the fact that she was here felt significant.

What if Carla was the one who killed Lucas—

Then, the murderer was here to pay respects to the victim.

Even now, the way people looked at Carla wasn’t particularly kind, even if they weren’t saying anything.

The middle-aged woman sitting at the main table, likely Lucas’s mother, was glaring at Carla as if she wanted to devour her whole.

“Then I’ll go pay my respects.”

As an awkward silence fell, with nothing more to say, Emil hurriedly left, using paying respects as an excuse.

Carla quietly watched Emil’s retreating figure.

It wasn’t particularly strange for Aufstieg to come to pay respects.

After all, one of the four pillars had lost its heir, so it was natural for others to come to pay their respects.

‘But there hasn’t been a separate meeting with Cascata, and now Aufstieg and Schyskeil are meeting…?’

There was something suspicious about it.

While she was lost in thought, Carla suddenly saw the inner door open.

And behind that door appeared Contred von Schyskeil, the head of Schyskeil, and Dremalo von Aufstieg, the head of Aufstieg.

“Ah, Carla, isn’t it?”

The man named Dremalo had a somewhat small stature.

He was small and had a scraggly beard sticking out like a rat’s whiskers—overall, he was a rather unlikable man.

Dremalo quickly approached Carla.

Then, upon seeing Ivan standing next to her, his eyes widened in surprise.

“Isn’t that Ivan? Ivan Contadino, right?”

“Uh, yes, yes… that’s correct.”

Carla looked back and forth between Dremalo and Ivan with a somewhat incredulous expression.

To be more welcoming to Ivan than to her was completely unexpected.

Dremalo seemed to express his joy at seeing Ivan as if he had known him for a long time, quickly grabbing Ivan’s hand and patting it repeatedly.

Even though Carla was right next to them, it was as if he had no interest in her at all.

“It’s my first time seeing your face, but I’ve heard a lot about you from my Emil. The genius from the heavens who descended to the world, right?”

“Ah, no… that’s not true…”

Yet, seeing Ivan’s beaming smile, it seemed he didn’t feel bad about it. Carla felt oddly displeased.

There was no need for Aufstieg to show such familiarity.

It was strangely irritating.

A word from the author (Author’s note)

Is it cold because the wind is blowing a lot?

Last night, I released my desires with my reserves, and I feel very refreshed.

# 78 - Funeral (2)

1. Funeral (2)

“To have Lord Schaiskeil accompany us, there could be no happier news.”

Around the time of Lucas’s funeral, Contred and Dremalo were quietly holding a private meeting in a separate room.

Contred pretended to savor the well-brewed tea, trying to appear nonchalant as he watched Dremalo’s reaction.

Can’t he trim that beard?

The beard made him look like a treacherous subject, but Dremalo insisted it was a symbol of Aufschtig and refused to trim it.

“Don’t mention it, Duke Aufschtig. Thinking of my dead son…”

The sentence was left unfinished.

Though unsaid, the regret was palpable.

No matter how terrible a son he was, he was still a son.

Losing a child his wife carried for ten months, how could he be at peace?

“…It was unavoidable. I told him not to touch forbidden substances, but really…”

“You suspect the drug, the Aphrodisiac, don’t you, Your Excellency?”

Contred fell silent at Dremalo’s words.

It was true.

Aphrodisiac was a euphemism; obtaining it was beyond Lucas’s capabilities alone.

Acquiring forbidden drugs in this quasi-military state…

And using it to harm the Cascata heiress.

It sounded simple, but Lucas could not easily access such things.

Contred knew this better than anyone, being Lucas’s father.

His son was lacking in ability as much as he was in character.

For such a son to obtain an Aphrodisiac and attempt to use it on Carla, someone must have been whispering in his ear.

To give forbidden drugs to the heir of the great noble Schaiskeil and whisper words of temptation…

‘…Lord Cascata.’

“Now, now… Duke. I don’t know what you’re thinking, but does this mean you’ve decided to join hands with us?”

Contred slowly swirled the teacup in his hand.

The tea sloshed inside, forming a slow, gentle whirlpool.

Even after he stopped swirling the cup, the tea continued to spin.

“…So be it. Cascata, Cascata…”

Clatter.

The teacup, placed on its saucer, made small noises from the spinning tea.

Lucas,

Lucas von Schaiskeil.

“A son who died committing a disgraceful act.”

Contred stared at the teacup with cold eyes.

If he had ever had any expectations for his son, it might have been different, but he felt little for the dead Lucas.

But the problem was the family.

“So… we must turn this into a victory for the family, somehow.”

“Well said.”

Dremalo grinned.

\*

After the short meeting, as they returned to the funeral hall, Dremalo spotted the rumored commoner.

Tall, with a sturdy build, and a seemingly cold face.

But Dremalo quickly saw through it.

That cold face was a mask, hiding a weak nature underneath.

‘That’s him. Doesn’t seem particularly special.’

But it was him.

Dremalo knew it for sure.

The one the Empire’s dogs were chasing, the last emperor of the ancient empire—the vessel containing that power.

Moreover, he was almost fully awakened, half-devoured, so it was almost here. Truly almost here.

The time was coming to break free from this empire that used Magical Engineering as mere tools of war, and to stand tall again as a nation ruled by true Magical Engineering—existing as Magical Engineering itself.

Dremalo quickly scanned Ivan’s surroundings.

The Cascata’s foolish girl was glaring at Dremalo with displeasure from beside Ivan, but he didn’t care about that.

And the Schaiskeil vassals were glaring at the Cascata girl with displeasure.

‘It might be good to test him a little more.’

Quickly sorting his thoughts, Dremalo hurried towards Ivan.

Ivan looked flustered at Dremalo’s approach, but that didn’t matter.

“Ivan, Ivan Contadino. You are Contadino, aren’t you?”

Dremalo grasped Ivan’s hand tightly, subtly releasing Magical Power.

It was a subtle disturbance that most people wouldn’t notice, but Ivan stiffened momentarily.

‘He reacted.’

Dremalo curled up the corners of his mouth.

He had confirmed it.

Ivan was no ordinary young man.

Something else definitely existed within him.

Dremalo thought it was truly perfect.

“I’ve heard a lot about you. Emil told me a lot. Said you were a genius from the heavens descended to the world.”

“N-No… not that much…”

Yet he seemed embarrassed, still functioning as a human—

“Lord Aufschtig. If you praise him too much, he’ll really think he’s a genius.”

“Ah, you must be Carla. Carla Della Cascata, am I right? Well, I’ve heard the rumors. I didn’t know you were such a beautiful heiress.”

Carla felt a strange sense of unease at Dremalo’s sudden change in expression.

The way he treated Ivan, and the way he treated Carla.

Wasn’t the difference between the two a bit too extreme—

“By the way, Contadino.”

“P-Please, call me Ivan. That much…”

“Since you’re comfortable with it, I’ll call you Ivan. Anyway, I really wanted to meet you.”

Carla was dumbfounded.

Even so, was it right to focus so much on Ivan?

It was as if Carla was there or not, it didn't matter.

“I’ve heard that you’re a talent who will change the future of the Empire. Seeing you like this, with your dignified presence and considerable Magical Power, it’s certainly true!”

“Um, Lord Aufschtig.”

“Carla.”

Carla flinched and recoiled at the look in Dremalo’s eyes as he turned to her.

Whether it was disgust or annoyance.

The irritation in his eyes was quite unexpected for Carla.

“Carla, you probably don’t know how much this Ivan is being talked about in our aristocratic society, do you?”

"Well, I've lived in aristocratic society and grew up in a great noble family, but I've never heard such a thing."

Dremalo’s face twisted slightly.

"Anyway, Ivan is a special talent. Not recognizing that means your eyes as a Mage are blind."

"That may be so, but Ivan is a commoner. If you treat him like this, he'll get too big for his boots."

Carla smiled equally and advised restraint.

“I, I mean… you’re too kind, Lord.”

Ivan was smiling awkwardly.

In fact, Ivan wasn’t entirely happy with the current situation either, and he knew that such attention often did more harm than good.

But he couldn’t refuse in front of them, so he could only smile.

“Yes, this isn’t the place. Ivan, would you like to have a separate conversation with me sometime?”

“A conversation… you mean?”

“That’s right. I’m planning to host a banquet at my mansion soon, and it would be great if Ivan could attend as well.”

Ivan was taken aback by Dremalo’s sudden words.

But even for him, even for someone who didn’t know much about aristocratic society, this banquet made him feel a sense of unease, as if it would be a trap.

“…Carla, no, would it be okay if the Cascata heiress attended with me? I don’t know much about such etiquette yet. Because I’m a commoner.”

Dremalo paused for a moment.

Not because Ivan was a commoner, but because Carla would be attending with him.

“…So be it. It would be a good opportunity to show the Cascata heiress our mansion as well. Carla, is that okay with you?”

Carla looked very displeased.

Dremalo’s sudden shift to informal speech since earlier, and there were some unsettling aspects.

But refusing the invitation in front of everyone would be like starting a fight, so Carla quietly accepted the invitation.

\*

As the funeral neared its end and only the entombment remained.

During the entombment, mourners would take turns to greet the bereaved family, but Carla did not participate in that part.

Her business was to offer incense for Lucas, and now that was over, there was no reason to cause further trouble.

So Carla and Ivan came out of the hall and sat on a bench.

“It’s just a simple banquet, but it won’t be that simple. Ivan, do you know?”

“I know. I thought it might be. That’s why I said I’d go with you, Carla.”

“You knew?”

Ivan nodded at Carla’s question.

“I only know a bit about Magical Engineering, I’m ignorant about everything else. Compared to that, you’re perfect in every way, Carla. It’s so reassuring to have you by my side.”

“W-Well, that’s true.”

What could she say to that?

Carla quietly crossed her arms and nodded.

“Okay, then. If I go with you, they won’t be able to ask strange questions or do strange things. Don’t answer rashly, leave everything to me. Got it?”

“Yeah.”

“You answer well, anyway.”

As Carla pouted, a very dejected voice came from behind Ivan.

“You were here.”

“Emil. Did you pay your respects well?”

“Yeah. But…”

Emil’s face was somehow dark.

Carla wondered if something bad had happened and looked at Emil, who hesitated for a long time before finally opening her mouth.

"My father… invited you to the banquet, right?"

"Yeah. How did you know?"

"That was my father's purpose from the beginning."

Emil’s hands trembled on her lap.

She hesitated, then finally took a breath and opened her mouth.

"Carla, you know too. My father isn't the kind of person who just invites someone over for a meal and ends it there."

"……"

"This banquet… isn't just an invitation. Something will definitely happen. My father never does anything that loses him money."

"So you know something too?"

"That's…"

Emil trailed off and avoided eye contact.

Carla glared at Emil.

“Emil.”

“I, I can’t tell you the details. But… but.”

Emil’s face grew even darker.

In a very subdued voice, she finally opened her mouth after hesitating.

“My father would never prepare a simple banquet. If you come… Carla, you and Ivan might be in danger.”

“Really?”

Carla’s voice was unexpectedly lacking in tension.

Emil widened her eyes slightly, looking surprised at those words.

“If that’s the case, we should go even more. He’s plotting something with Ivan… Oops, plotting. That’s a bit harsh.”

“N-No. It’s okay.”

“Anyway, I have to see it for myself. Besides, I’m Cascata, after all. Even if Aufschtig is plotting something, he can’t directly harm me.”

“…That’s true.”

“Anyway, I think I should go. Thanks for the information, Emil.”

Carla crossed her arms and looked proud.

Emil made an even more complicated expression as she looked at her.

Author's words (Author's afterword)

I took off my cast today and my foot was so swollen that it was about three times bigger than my original foot.

I took a picture of it, but it's also a gruesome picture, so I didn't upload it.

And as always, there will be no updates on weekends...

# 79 - Emil von Aufstieg (1)

1. Emil von Aufstieg (1)

The Schaiske residence is located even further away than the Cascata residence.

Although the direction isn't exactly the opposite, it's not on the way to the Cascata residence, and even if it were, Carla wouldn't particularly want to stop by.

Without even the slightest jolt of a carriage, in a carriage that clearly screams 'high-class,' Carla rested her chin on her hand propped on the window frame, blankly staring out the window.

* I'm hosting a banquet. I hope you'll attend, Ivan.

'That old geezer… he definitely looked displeased when I said I'd be there.'

For a brief moment, a fleeting instant, Carla clearly saw it.

A displeased look flashed across Dremalo's eyes, as if he were looking at a nuisance.

'He's definitely up to something.'

The nobles, to the point where Carla seems reasonable, are soaked in their pride of being nobles.

Vanity is a given, and they don't even see commoners as people.

That's what nobles are like, and the great nobles are even worse.

Carla is a bit better thanks to her association with Ivan since childhood.

And this is what 'better' looks like.

Anyway, Dremalo, such a great noble, directly inviting Ivan, a commoner, to a banquet, even though he's skilled in Magical Engineering… this is definitely suspicious.

"Carla."

Lost in thought, Carla snapped out of her reverie at Ivan's voice.

"What."

"Um… they're making a fuss about wanting to switch seats with me."

For a moment, Carla didn't understand what Ivan was talking about.

But she quickly understood what he meant, and frowned, shaking her head.

"No."

"Okay."

Ivan's face brightened.

"Carla, what are you thinking about so deeply?"

"Thinking about that old geezer from earlier."

"Old geezer as in…"

"Dremalo von Aufstieg. The head of the Aufstieg family."

"Oh. The one who invited us to the banquet? Why him?"

"I think he's definitely up to something."

"Probably?"

"Yeah. He seemed very cheerful. He's usually a frivolous, laughing type, but he seemed especially cheerful today. And he seemed particularly interested in you."

At Carla's words, Ivan slowly nodded.

Even Ivan thought it didn't really make sense.

No matter what, he's still a great noble.

For a great noble to directly invite Ivan, a commoner, to a banquet… Ivan could definitely sense that something was amiss, that it was strange.

"You were grinning from ear to ear too. Did you like it that much?"

"It's not like it's unpleasant to be praised for my talent."

Carla pouted.

As he said, well… there's nothing unpleasant about being praised.

Even if she knows the praise is just lip service, that's not a reason to feel bad.

"He called you a genius descended from the heavens, right? That old man seemed like he was going to collect you. But he wouldn't even be able to use you properly."

"Why?"

Well, Ivan wouldn't know.

Carla knows a lot about the Magical Engineering of each of the Four Pillars, but Ivan wouldn't have had the opportunity to learn such things.

"The Aufstiegs use Descent Magic. Like Albina, our former instructor. Think of it as a vastly superior version of that woman's Summoning Magic. Instead of summoning weak things like Dimensional Dragons or Slimes, they can summon things almost like gods. Since a god descends, it's not summoning, but Descent."

“…They descend a god? Is that even possible?"

"It's possible, that's why they're one of the Four Pillars. It takes a really long time to cast and requires a huge amount of offerings, but if they succeed…"

A battlefield where humans fight humans.

A battlefield where humans fight gods.

The sense of intimidation from the two battlefields would be completely different.

"I've never seen it myself. I heard they've only descended a god two or three times."

It's not easy to descend a god.

But they have clearly succeeded, and have even turned the tide of battle when things were going badly, so the Aufstieg family must be one of the Four Pillars.

"He didn't seem like the head of such a great family."

Even when Ivan thought back, he didn't seem like the head of such a famous family.

"He's a bit different from what he seems… or maybe not. He's a bit of a shady person. Anyway, you need to be careful."

"Yeah. He's probably trying to take advantage of me because I seem naive."

Carla didn't respond to Ivan's words.

Instead, she just stared at Ivan.

Does he seem naive?

He doesn't, though.

“…Carla? Your face is red. Are you sick?"

"No, it's nothing like that. Anyway, as you said, he's probably trying to take advantage of you. If you had gone alone, you would have been eaten alive without anyone knowing, so it's actually a good thing that I'm going with you."

"Is it…?"

"Yes."

Ivan is a genius.

But he doesn't know the ways of the world.

"Anyway, just stay still. I'll take care of everything."

"I'm not worried."

"Why don't you worry a little?"

"Why would I worry when Carla is protecting me?"

Carla didn't say anything back to Ivan, who was smiling brightly at her.

She could see why Regina had fallen for Ivan.

Without any particular reply, Carla stared out the window and sank deep into thought.

Since when has Ivan become so familiar?

In the past, he was just a genius of Magical Engineering, someone she always wanted to beat because of his talent that surpassed Carla's.

But now, maybe it's because they've intertwined so many times, it feels strange when Ivan smiles.

She doesn't want to admit it, but it's inevitable—the fact that they've intertwined is a reality that carries significant weight.

'It can't be helped…'

She was only pretending to be calm as she looked out the window, but she was immersed in self-rationalization, thinking that it couldn't be helped.

\*

'What on earth is Father trying to do?'

Emil couldn't sleep.

After the funeral, after Carla and Ivan had returned, Emil also returned to the dormitory.

The academy classes would start tomorrow, so she needed to get some sleep, but Emil tossed and turned, unable to fall asleep.

Her father is a devious person.

* Emilia, listen carefully. From now on, you must live as a boy named Emil. Do you understand?

Oh, why…?

If your father tells you to do something, just say yes and obey.

The girl named Emilia died that day.

She became a boy named Emil and lived on, and more than 10 years had already passed.

This was possible because the Aufstieg family itself had very little external activity.

Emil, who had lived that way, was sent to the academy by her father's orders, passed the entrance exam, and was even instructed to get close to Ivan for some reason.

She was diligently carrying out those orders.

'How happy would I be if I could live like Carla?'

The young lady, who is a woman but is confident and has her own stubbornness.

She had tried and struggled to keep her place even after suffering a major accident in which she lost her arm.

And after regaining her arm—she didn't give a detailed explanation, but after regaining her arm, she showed an even more confident appearance.

'I want to be like Carla too…'

Even when Carlo, who everyone thought was a man, revealed that he was actually Carla in disguise, she didn't lose heart.

Rather, she didn't care about what others thought and was so confident…

'How wonderful would it be if I could live like that too.'

Emil eventually got out of bed.

She was thirsty.

The night was already quite deep, and only silence surrounded her outside the window.

Only the sound of someone running hard, the sound of their feet hitting the ground, could be heard on this night.

"There's no water…"

Emil frowned as she tilted the pot.

Really, nothing was going right.

"I can't just go to sleep like this."

Above all, she was thirsty.

The more she was aware of it, the thirstier she became.

"I have to get some water…"

Emil picked up the pot with a long sigh.

The water supply room was at the very end of the hallway, so she had no choice but to leave her room.

"I need to fix this habit of talking to myself."

The habit of muttering to herself, talking to herself without realizing it, when she knew no one was around.

She needed to fix that habit… Emil, with lingering thoughts, stared at the chest wrap neatly arranged on the table next to the coat rack, clicked her tongue once, and just put on her gown.

She was only going to the water supply room for a moment, and it didn't seem like she would run into anyone at this hour.

Besides, it would take forever to put on the chest wrap, take it off, and put it away again, so it was honestly a bit of a hassle.

In fact, there was some anxiety.

The sound of footsteps running in the outer courtyard had stopped a while ago, and not only that, but some anxiety was telling her that it would be better not to go outside or to put on the chest wrap to hide the outline of her bulging breasts.

The problem was that her annoyance was suppressing those feelings.

In the end, her annoyance won over her anxiety.

'I'll be back soon. I just need to get some water.'

Emil opened the door and stepped out with the pot in her hand.

And with that—

"Oh, dangerous…!"

* Thud!

With a strong impact from the side, Emil tumbled down the hallway.

She heard the sound of the pot rolling away, and a voice calling her name in a hurry, and as she heard that voice, Emil had only one thought.

'This is bad…!'

The voice was Liam's.

Author's Note

Why does Novelpia only give one free episode every 20 chapters for non-R19 novels...

Please reduce it to about 10...

# 80 - Emil von Aufstieg (2)

1. Emil von Aufschtig (2)

The ideal male figure in the Empire is tall, preferably with a large build, but not excessively so. From that perspective, Liam's physique wasn't exactly popular in the Empire.

He was tall and bulky, giving the impression of a walking bear.

It was Liam who, while sprinting back to his room after night training, collided with Emil, sending them both tumbling down the hallway.

The pot rolled down the hallway with a clatter.

Liam, who instinctively embraced Emil and performed a rolling breakfall, first felt like he was holding something small and delicate.

He was holding Emil.

Liam knew that.

But this, this was a bit… strange.

"L, Liam!"

Emil, who was in Liam's arms, shouted and jumped up.

Emil's face was flushed red, so much so that it was clearly visible even in the dimly lit hallway.

"How can you run like that in the hallway!?"

"Uh… sorry. I didn't expect anyone to be out so late."

Liam scratched his head and stood up.

As Liam reached for the pot lying within easy reach, Emil snatched it up even faster.

"You need to be careful, you could have gotten seriously hurt."

“…Um, yeah. That's true.”

Liam stared intently at Emil.

Hearing him speak like that, his voice sounded somewhat feminine. Liam unconsciously traced the outline of Emil's shoulders with his hands, tilting his head.

"W, what are you doing?"

"No, it's just, Emil, why are your shoulders so narrow? And you're so skinny."

"That's none of your business!"

"Well, it is…"

Liam unconsciously hummed and looked at Emil.

Emil's face, which had been flushed red, had now returned to its normal color, but what was still unnatural was that Emil was clutching the front of his gown tighter than necessary.

“…Emil, aren't you too thin?”

"D, don't worry about it. Everyone in our family is just like that."

"Hmm."

It's not like there aren't people who are naturally thin.

But Liam felt a serious sense of unease from Emil's excuse.

"You're acting suspicious."

"S, suspicious? What's suspicious…! I'm going inside, so you, you go back too!"

Emil shouted and ran back to his room.

In the hallway where even the loud sound of the door slamming shut had faded away, Liam stood still, stroking his chin.

‘…There were breasts. Definitely.’

Clutching the front of the gown tightly also meant there was something they didn't want to show.

And because they clutched the front so tightly, the graceful curves of the body were revealed.

Those gentle curves were definitely those of a woman.

\*

‘Let's assume Emil is a cross-dressing woman.’

Liam thought as he stood under the showerhead.

Even after returning to his room, the sensation of holding Emil in his arms remained vivid in Liam's mind, and he couldn't shake the suspicion that Emil was really a woman.

‘Why would she do that? Is it like Carla's case?’

But if that were the case, she could just undergo Magic of Transformation.

There was no need to go through the trouble of cross-dressing.

‘What could she gain from being a cross-dressing woman…?’

A high position?

Like Liam's homeland, women in the Empire cannot rise to high positions.

Wise support for her husband.

A virtuous lady in front of outsiders.

Skills to satisfy her husband in bed.

These are the virtues that the Empire expects women to possess.

‘If it's to rise to a high position…’

However, if you think about it that way, the problem is Emil's Magical Engineering skills.

In Liam's eyes, Emil's Magical Engineering skills are only average at best.

Emil, who can only use Hidden Magic, has a considerable amount of Magical Power, and his rapid-fire Mana bullet is quite impressive.

But Mana bullet is an old Magic, and therefore, there are defenses against Mana bullet on the battlefield.

In other words, Mana bullet alone cannot make you an excellent Mage.

‘So, in the end, she's not aiming for a high position.’

I can't say for sure.

But I can say for sure that it's impossible even if she tries.

If a woman were to aim for a high position, she would have to be like Carla.

Carla, who appeared alone during the Exploration Game and overturned the situation with overwhelming power.

Only someone like her…

‘…To live a normal life?’

That's a bit plausible.

But is that such a desperate goal that she would go to such lengths? That's not quite right…

The questions only deepen.

Liam slowly, slowly recalled the image of Emil he had seen earlier.

Looking at that image, no matter how you look at it, no matter how you think about it, Emil was a woman.

‘It's not like women can't enter the Academy.’

There's Regina, and there's Carla.

There are also female students in the Western Division, not just as companions.

No matter how much Liam thought about it, there was no reason for Emil to enter the Academy by cross-dressing. There must be some complex circumstances, but Liam was strangely concerned about Emil.

"I thought I got along well with Emil, so that's why…"

That's how women in the Empire are.

Liam is not from the Empire, but his homeland is not much different.

From supporting men to providing domestic support.

They are raised with such education from a young age, so if Emil was a woman, it might be understandable why she supported Liam so well.

Liam, completely unconcerned, thought of things that would make Emil faint, washed his body, and left the bathroom.

Even after Liam finished showering, roughly dried his hair, and lay down, his mind was still full of thoughts about Emil.

He couldn't come up with an answer as to why Emil was living as a cross-dressing woman.

It wasn't even certain whether Emil was a cross-dressing woman, but Liam had already concluded that in his mind.

‘Should I investigate a little? Emil wouldn't like it…’

Emil wouldn't like it, definitely, but.

At least at this moment, Liam was very curious.

"By the way, she was really small."

She fit perfectly in his arms.

Fitting perfectly in Liam's bear-like arms… and Emil's crown reaching just around the tip of his nose.

Come to think of it, he thought he even smelled a faint water scent from her crown.

He wasn't sure, though.

"This womanizer has become quite a sight."

No one calls him that, but Liam still prides himself on being a womanizer.

\*

The next morning, Liam ran into Emil at the student cafeteria.

In fact, he had come down to the cafeteria early in the morning and waited for Emil to come down, and even when Carla and Ivan asked him curiously what he was doing here, he kept his mouth shut and waited for Emil.

"Ugh."

And when Emil finally appeared, Liam saw Emil's face harden as he looked at him, and he thought that he definitely didn't seem like a man.

‘If he doesn't seem like a man, then he must be a woman.’

"Why are you staring so intently?"

"Your face."

"Wh, what about my face!?"

Hearing the sharp voice, it was also a high-pitched voice.

It was somewhat difficult to see it as a man's voice, so it must be a woman's voice.

“…Liam, could you please stop following me around?”

"You can just pretend I'm not here, Emil."

"You should say that after seeing your size. You're going to follow me to the bathroom at this rate."

"It doesn't matter if I follow you to the bathroom. We use the same men's bathroom."

"No way."

Emil flatly refused.

It would be a bit difficult for Emil if he actually followed him to the bathroom.

Emil—Emilia, she let out a sigh of lament from deep inside.

She should have worn a chest binder when she felt that anxiety.

She should have…

She should have been careful from the moment the sound of running stopped outside.

Why was she so thirsty at that time?

Or she could have just endured that level of thirst.

"Liam, please stop following me."

"You don't have to worry about me, Emil."

"I can't help but worry…"

Just as Emil was about to burst out, a savior finally appeared for Emil.

"Emil."

A man with dark circles under his eyes, as if weighed down by deep fatigue.

A man whose beard, which seemed to be only partially trimmed, further amplified his fatigue.

"Emil, if you're done eating, can I see you for a moment?"

It was Lorenzo.

Author's words

Lorenzo!!! Lorenzo!!! Lorenzo!!!

# 81 - Emil von Aufstieg (3)

1. Emil von Aufstieg (3)

Since it was a restaurant bustling with breakfast, no one paid them any mind.

Liam was leaning against the wall of the restaurant.

Emil paused for a moment in front of him, then turned to look back.

And approaching her was Lorenzo.

It was not unusual for an instructor to call a student out, nor was it surprising.

Perhaps because of that, the students paid them little attention, and those who were chatting glanced over briefly before returning to their meals.

“Emil.”

Lorenzo's voice settled heavily in the air.

At the sound of her name, Emil instinctively shrank her shoulders.

“…Yes.”

A stiff voice emerged.

The heavy atmosphere felt like it was pressing down on her chest.

Lorenzo's face, obscured by the dark restaurant wall, was hard to see.

What kind of expression was he making?

Not knowing that made her even more anxious.

“Liam.”

Lorenzo turned his gaze to Liam.

“Could you let the students know that Emil and I might be a bit late?”

“Sure.”

Liam nodded in response, his face calm.

However, his eyes were anything but calm.

“Emil.”

Emil turned back once more.

Liam was looking at her.

This time, his face was also hidden in the shadow of the restaurant wall.

Perhaps that was why she couldn't see what kind of expression he was making.

Still, she didn’t feel anxious.

“…Don’t take too long. I’ll be waiting.”

Emil pondered what to say in response.

But there was nothing in particular she could say.

She simply nodded quietly.

The instructor's office was in the lecture building, so they had to leave the dormitory and move there.

As they walked along the paved path that crossed between the large playgrounds, Lorenzo said nothing.

Emil also said nothing to Lorenzo.

The uncomfortable atmosphere made even the noise from the playground feel distant, creating a cold and desolate mood.

“…How are you doing?”

It was Lorenzo's question that broke the silence.

Emil didn’t answer immediately.

She had to think about what his intention was—Lorenzo was certainly not someone she considered friendly.

“I’m doing well, thanks to your concern.”

“Is that so? It seems your family doesn’t think so.”

Lorenzo subtly rolled his eyes to survey the surroundings.

Those who were good at hiding their presence—while Emil's family might not be like this, their overprotectiveness was crossing a line.

There were even those watching them as they walked under the guidance of an instructor; Emil must be feeling quite stifled.

“Emil, it must be tough for you.”

Emil didn’t respond to that.

As she followed behind Lorenzo, who was walking briskly, he glanced back at her.

Then he slowed his pace a bit so that Emil could keep up without difficulty.

“I can’t tell if they’re your allies or just watching you. Emil, you don’t know either, do you?”

“They are those who are trying to protect me. The atmosphere at the academy is quite tense.”

“True. That’s a valid point.”

Even a three-year-old would know that the atmosphere at the academy had become tense lately.

Things that shouldn’t happen were happening continuously, and those incidents had even affected the children of high nobility, so the mood was certainly not good.

Moreover, Lucas von Schaiske had been murdered by his fiancée, Carla Della Cascata, which was no ordinary occurrence.

As they walked, the two arrived at the lecture building.

When Lorenzo opened the door to the instructor's office at the end of the first-floor hallway and gestured for her to enter, Emil quietly stepped inside and sat down in a visible chair.

“Alright, let’s have a smoke first.”

“Yes.”

Lorenzo lit a Magic Herb.

As flames flickered from his fingertips, a pale smoke rose from the Magic Herb.

“Now… Emil.”

“Yes.”

“I don’t think you believe that you can keep lying to me forever, do you?”

It was something she had heard many times.

Every time she had a meeting with Lorenzo, he had said the same thing.

But those eyes, those eyes…

Facing that gaze while hearing the question made Emil feel as if her heart was dropping uncontrollably.

“I know you’re hiding something.”

“There’s nothing like that. You’re misunderstanding.”

Lorenzo dragged the ashtray from the corner of the desk with a screech.

After tapping the ashes from the Magic Herb, he looked back at Emil.

“Aufstieg has all its facts shrouded in mystery, except for what Family Magic is. Since it deals with Descent Magic, it falls under state secrets, so such thorough secrecy is understandable… yes, I get that.”

Lorenzo picked up a pen.

As he pulled over a notebook that had been pushed aside, he saw the name Dremalo von Aufstieg written on it, followed by Emilia von Aufstieg and Emil von Aufstieg.

“…Since I’ve learned about these things, I found it rather strange and did some investigation. There is a name Emilia von Aufstieg among the children of Aufstieg. She’s a daughter. But…”

He marked an X over the name Emilia von Aufstieg, then circled the name Emil von Aufstieg and added a question mark next to it.

“At some point, Emilia disappeared from society. She completely vanished. And then Emil von Aufstieg appeared… claiming to have been reclusive due to illness. The Emil who appeared is you. And a few years later, you enrolled in this academy. And you’ve been studying here ever since.”

Emil almost took a deep breath without realizing it.

“…Do you think I am Emilia von Aufstieg and not the real Emil von Aufstieg?”

“To put it bluntly, yes. That’s correct.”

After extinguishing the burnt Magic Herb in the ashtray, Lorenzo brushed the ash off his collar.

“I had already noticed that your physique is quite different from that of an ordinary man. Moreover, your chest is disproportionately full for your build.”

Emil instinctively shrank her chest.

In reality, Emil had a rather ample chest, so to hide it, she had to wrap it with a fairly thick chest cloth.

To avoid revealing that thickness, she wore her uniform slightly larger than her physique, but Lorenzo had seen through that.

“…Emil. No, Emilia. Emilia von Aufstieg. You are seriously misunderstanding.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m not interrogating you to expel you from this academy or anything like that.”

Emil instinctively averted her gaze from Lorenzo's eyes.

He clearly said he would help her, but Emil couldn’t tell if he was sincere or not.

And in that empty space, her father Dremalo's stern warnings resurfaced.

“Emilia. I am already certain of your identity. Once I get your answer, I will help you. Think carefully.”

Lorenzo, looking frustrated, undid a button on his shirt.

After letting out a light sigh, he looked back at Emil.

“I’m not trying to harm you. I’m trying to find out what Aufstieg is plotting, what they intend to do. Sending their daughter disguised as a man to the academy is not something a normal parent would do, right?”

“…I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that, Instructor.”

Emil ultimately did not respond.

Lorenzo was, after all, an instructor and a stranger.

He was not as kind as her blood-related father, but he was still a stranger.

There was no point in considering which of these two people she should choose.

“I’ll go out first. Class is about to start.”

As Emil stood up, Lorenzo quietly looked up at her.

With eyes filled with longing, torment, worry, and anguish… Emil couldn’t bear to meet that gaze.

“Emil.”

Lorenzo's voice stopped her as she was about to leave.

“I’m not doubting you. I’m trying to help you.”

“…I’ll keep that in mind.”

Emil quietly closed the door to the instructor's office and turned around.

Amidst the turmoil swirling in her chest, she was filled with a desire to rest somewhere.

She knew her father's orders were strange.

But how could she, who had lived as a woman, be expected to form a friendship with Ivan while disguised as a man? What was she supposed to do about that?

In the end, she hadn’t done it properly, and because of that, hadn’t her father scolded her?

‘What am I supposed to do…’

“Is it over now?”

“Eek.”

Emil nearly jumped in surprise.

Liam's voice had come from nearby.

“It took quite a while. Isn’t the instructor keeping the student too long?”

“Uh, when did you arrive?”

“Just a moment ago. Ah, don’t worry. I didn’t eavesdrop. There’s soundproof magic in the instructor's office, so I couldn’t hear anything.”

“…Is that so? Then I’m relieved.”

At those words, Liam smiled slightly.

“Since you’re relieved, it seems like you talked about something that shouldn’t be known to outsiders.”

Realizing that too late, but it was already spilled water.

“No, it’s nothing. I’ll head to the classroom first.”

Emil quickly walked past Liam.

Since Liam was already suspicious of her, she shouldn’t engage in long conversations.

The fact that she was running out of people to confide in troubled Emil.

“Emil.”

“Yeah.”

“…I’m always on your side. Just like you supported me from behind, I can be your support too. We’re friends, right?”

Emil paused for a moment upon hearing those words.

Friends, friends—did she, no—did Emilia ever have such a thing?

The name of the family that had bound her since childhood.

Emilia had to endure harsh training under her father’s coercion.

She had heard various stories, but the word “friend” was something she had never heard before.

“So if you have any difficulties, tell me anytime, Emil. Got it?”

Emil did not look back.

She hesitated for a moment but then resumed her steps toward the classroom.

Two steps, three steps, four steps.

And then she stopped again.

“…Thank you, Liam.”

With that one word, Emil quickly disappeared back into the classroom.

Author's Note (Author's Afterword)

The decoration behind the Emil illustration is literally just decoration...

I should remove it, but I kind of like it, haha.