# 82 - That Weekend

1. That Weekend

Emil couldn't concentrate at all during class.

The storm that had engulfed him since last night hadn't subsided in the slightest, and this morning, Lorenzo had joined in, shaking him up even more.

—I'm always on your side.

—I can be your support too.

—We're friends, aren't we?

'How unlike you to say such sentimental things.'

Emil grumbled inwardly, picturing Liam's face.

He wasn't quite handsome enough.

He was so tall that Emil had to look up, and his build was so big that Emil fit perfectly in his arms…

'Ah.'

Yes, that's right, that's what happened.

Emil recalled what had happened around dawn that day.

When he had bumped into him in the hallway, Emil hadn't realized it, but he had been held tightly in Liam's arms as they tumbled down the hallway.

Liam, with his broad arms as big as his frame, had held Emil tightly, rolling down the hallway, even though he could have been hurt himself.

'...He was really big.'

Big enough to fit perfectly in his arms…

Thinking about it made Emil's face feel hot.

The time she had lived as Emilia, and the time she had lived as Emil.

Even adding all those times together, it was the first time she had been so close to a man.

She didn't remember any ticklish smells or anything like that…

"Emil, what are you thinking about during class?"

Lorenzo's voice startled Emil out of his reverie.

He wasn't looking at the textbook, but was continuing his explanation while writing on the board, so it must have been obvious that Emil was daydreaming, since he was the only one looking at the textbook.

"Ah, no. It's nothing. I'm sorry."

Unaware that Liam was looking at him with a strange expression, Emil hurriedly shook his head and looked at the blackboard.

After the lecture, Emil let out a long sigh and closed his textbook.

He had listened to the lecture, but he didn't remember any of it… This was a big problem, a really big problem.

'Bathroom…'

Emil got up from his seat and left the lecture hall.

As she headed to the bathroom a little further away from the lecture hall, she turned the corner of the hallway and ran into an unwelcome figure.

"...Instructor?"

"Ah, Emil."

"Isn't the instructor's office in the other direction?"

Even as Emil spoke, he felt that his voice was prickly.

Lorenzo, Lorenzo… a threatening person to him.

And… a person whose thoughts he couldn't fathom.

The person who was closest to the secret she was hiding, yet didn't bother to hide the fact that he knew it.

"Wherever I am is my business, Emil. Aren't you just uncomfortable seeing me?"

Lorenzo retorted leisurely, not at all flustered.

Emil couldn't find anything to say to such a Lorenzo.

What he said was true, what did it matter if Lorenzo was here or in the instructor's office?

Wherever a two-legged beast goes is their business, not something others should interfere with.

"You look like you're going to the bathroom. You can go without worrying about me."

"...Excuse me."

"Emil."

Emil, who was about to pass by Lorenzo, stopped at Lorenzo's voice.

"...The more you try to hide it, the more impatient you'll become. Being found out by someone other than me could be the worst thing that could happen. The more you try to hide it, the more you'll be found out. Remember that."

Emil struggled to compose his expression, which was about to distort, and kept it expressionless.

However, with his lips pressed tightly together, he headed to the bathroom without saying a word.

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After class, during the gap before dinner.

During that gap, Carla and Ivan usually spent time in their room.

Today, too, Carla was sitting on the sofa in the room, letting out a long sigh.

"Ivan."

"Yeah?"

Carla, who was leaning back against the sofa, only raised her head to look at him when Ivan answered.

"...You know. The original Ivan, and that… well, for convenience's sake, Black Ivan in your head. You know about Black Ivan's existence, too, right?"

"How could I not?"

Ivan shrugged and answered.

How could he not know—of course he knew.

A secret he hadn't told Carla, or Albina.

In fact, there was no such thing as a split personality, and to put it simply, Black Ivan was Ivan, and Ivan was Black Ivan.

But Ivan had no intention of revealing that.

Carla, who had ignored and looked down on him, in front of Ivan who had revealed his true colors, at Ivan's words that he would return her arm, without the slightest hesitation, kneeling down and saying that she would become his, that proud and self-respecting Carla throwing everything away and kneeling in front of the commoner Ivan and begging—

Just recalling that scene made excitement surge within him.

"When did you find out?"

"I found out after that necklace broke."

Ivan answered casually to Carla's question.

He had thought about it in advance, and thankfully, Carla didn't seem to suspect him, which was a relief.

'I've already realized it a long time ago, though.'

When he was a child, when he thought it was Carlo—when that Carla had attacked Ivan a little too much.

At that time, Ivan was able to remember his past life.

Even if that wasn't the only trigger, sooner or later, Ivan would have remembered his past life.

For over 10 years since then…

Waiting for the Empire to reach out to him first and coming to the Academy.

He had quite a hard time revealing his talent in front of Albina to overcome his power as a commoner, and receiving her support to come to this Academy.

"Ha… really."

Carla ruffled her hair in annoyance.

It was understandable that she was confused, as Ivan deliberately alternated between showing her the kind, naive, and pure Ivan and the evil, malicious, and cunning Black Ivan.

Perhaps because his acting was so good, Carla hadn't noticed, but she was still being careful.

It couldn't be helped, as Carla was so quick-witted and intelligent.

"I'm sorry, Carla, that I'm so strange that you're confused."

"No, no… the person involved must be the most confused. Anyway, it's okay. Anyway, you know there's a banquet at Aufstieg this weekend, right?"

"Yeah, I know."

Carla's face was full of undisguised annoyance.

Her father, Enrico, had contacted her to return to the mansion, and Fabio had contacted her saying he wanted his sister to return, and anyway, she had to go to the mansion once to prepare for the banquet.

She didn't really want to, but she had to go.

Besides, Enrico had also told her to bring Ivan, so everywhere it was Ivan, Ivan, Ivan!

"Putting aside the banquet preparations. Ivan, what do you think about Aufstieg suddenly showing so much interest in you?"

Ivan shrugged at Carla's question.

"Isn't it because I'm so great? It's as good as being publicly acknowledged as an excellent Mage."

"Hmm."

Carla narrowed her eyes and glared at Ivan.

Ivan thought that look was born of jealousy, but in reality, it wasn't.

"You seem a little different."

Carla asked Ivan, narrowing her eyes.

Ivan's change in attitude—it might not be strange.

He had realized that there was another personality within him, so it was possible.

But wasn't he accepting it too quickly?

Besides, he was freely saying things that the old Ivan wouldn't have said.

The current Ivan didn't seem to care about anyone's gaze.

Rather, he acted as if Ivan himself was superior to anyone, no matter who came—

And those things felt so natural.

"What?"

"You weren't originally the type to brag so much."

At those words, Ivan realized he had messed up.

He had become a little lax because he had relaxed a bit after Carla had recognized his split personality to some extent, and the boundaries between the two personalities had become very blurred.

"I thought I should change a little now. Shouldn't I do some, you know, development?"

"Hmm…"

Fortunately, Carla didn't seem to care much, which was a relief.

"Well, you should. You can't stay naive forever…"

It was fortunate that it seemed to have worked well.

"Even so, the way they're treating you is strange, Aufstieg."

"Why?"

"I'm a noble too, but nobles don't try to win anyone over. Unless the other person isn't a noble. Aufstieg is a great noble, and great nobles are the kind who keep ordinary nobles under their feet."

"You're a great noble too."

"Consider me an exception. I can't help it."

"Why?"

Carla, who was asking with suspicion, instead frowned and looked at him.

A look full of meaning, asking if he really didn't know.

"Remember what you said when you gave me back my arm."

"Ah… right, that. It wasn't what I said, though."

Carla let out a long sigh.

It was the freedom of her limbs that she had felt so keenly after getting them back.

If something went wrong again, and he said he would take her arm away…

He had made her arm, so he might be able to take it back.

Even so, this, well.

She didn't want to say with her own mouth that she had agreed to become his.

"You're laughing when I talk about it?"

"...Laugh all you want!"

Carla threw a cushion that was on the sofa at Ivan in a fit of annoyance.

"I really like that fiery temper of yours, Carla."

"How ridiculous. Who wants to be liked by you?!"

Ivan laughed loudly, deflecting the cushion.

Carla had a very annoyed expression.

Then, the area around her eyebrows twitched slightly—and then returned.

"But are you really going to the banquet this weekend?"

As if nothing had happened.

As if nothing was wrong.

Carla looked at Ivan and asked.

"Well… I have to go. I was invited."

"Aren't you taking it too lightly?"

Leaning deeply against the back of the sofa, Carla crossed her arms and asked again.

"It's clear that Aufstieg is interested in your Mage skills. But, it might not just be because of your skills that they invited you."

"Then what for?"

Ivan's face didn't seem to care much.

Carla didn't like that attitude.

"I wish you would be a little more wary."

"It's okay."

Ivan smiled calmly.

"Don't worry too much, Carla."

"...Ha."

Carla sighed and shook her head.

"Anyway, be careful. I'll be by your side, though."

"Okay."

Ivan looked at Carla and smiled.

That smile was ordinary.

But Carla felt an unknown anxiety.

Because it was too ordinary.

Because it was too perfect.

"...Be a little more nervous."

She said that.

Even after hearing those words, Ivan still smiled calmly.

# 83 - What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (1)

1. What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (1)

A banquet is to be held in Aufstieg.

The scheduled date is fast approaching.

"There's no way I can avoid it."

Carla slammed the closet door shut.

The bedside table attached to it wobbled.

"What can't you avoid?"

Ivan quietly approached Carla and asked.

She had been rummaging through the closet for a while, and after closing it, she started searching through the drawers again. Then, she made a low humming sound and headed back to the closet.

Ivan couldn't understand what she was doing, why she was doing this, as she rummaged through the closet again and slammed the door shut with a frustrated expression.

"I tried to figure something out here without going back to the mansion. But I don't think I can."

The closet was filled with uniforms for academy life and spare casual clothes to change into.

In other words, she couldn't prepare an outfit suitable for the banquet with just these.

No matter how well she tried to dress up, going to the banquet in these clothes would be unsightly, and she would probably be ridiculed by the other nobles in attendance.

As Carla, the daughter of the great noble family of Cascata, she couldn't tolerate such ridicule.

It wasn't just a matter of a woman's pride, as they often say.

For a great noble family like Cascata to have someone come in such shabby attire would directly affect the honor of the Cascata family.

In the end, she concluded that she had to return to the mansion at least once.

"You had to go anyway, didn't you? The head of the family told you to come back at least once."

Carla, displeased with Ivan's nonchalant remark, glared at him fiercely.

"That's why I'm doing this, because I don't want to go. Besides, he told me to bring you along. What kind of harsh words am I going to hear there? Ugh, I hate it."

Carla closed her eyes and shuddered.

Seeing her cringe like that, Ivan awkwardly smiled, wondering if she really hated going home that much.

"Then, can't you just prepare an outfit here? I saw a lot of clothing stores when we went to buy uniforms."

"That's why I'm doing this, because this isn't a place where those clothes will do. I can't possibly wear clothes sold at those cheap dress shops."

Ivan knew why Carla was so obsessed with clothes.

Even though he hadn't experienced it directly, he remembered from his past life that noblewomen were always like this.

At balls and social gatherings, they were always, always, always busy comparing who was more luxurious, who was better dressed, and so on.

Seeing this, Ivan realized that Carla was undoubtedly a noblewoman.

'Quite different from her fiery temper. Should I play a little prank?'

Ivan moved closer to Carla and reached out.

He wrapped his arms around her slender waist and gently breathed into her ear.

"Eek!"

Carla startled and trembled.

Amused by her reaction, Ivan suppressed his laughter and said,

"My lady. You have a beauty that cannot be hidden by such rags. What is the problem?"

"W-What? Why did you suddenly pop up?"

Carla turned to Ivan with a strange expression.

Her face was full of rising annoyance, but she couldn't express it, so her distorted expression was almost comical.

"Does it matter what you wear?"

"...It does matter. I don't know what era you're from, but judging by the way you talk, you must be a high-ranking person... but why don't you understand?"Judging by his tone, Carla thought he might be from around the time of the former emperor."

And probably not the emperor of this empire.

She wanted to investigate him, but Ivan was clinging to her and wouldn't leave her side, so she couldn't even do that.

"A noble's attire is already a battle in itself. Going there wearing just anything is like going with flimsy armor. In the battlefield, inadequate equipment means death. Don't you understand?"

"Hmm."

Ivan tilted his head.

Looking back at his memories from his past life, he always wore clothes that were determined by the imperial family, or if necessary, his maids would prepare luxurious outfits for him.

Besides, he was power itself, so he didn't need to be mindful of anyone.

But now he had to play the role of a 'commoner.'

'Interesting.'

Ivan smiled silently and stroked Carla's back, which was full of annoyance, and said,

"Well, let's say that's the case. Then, isn't it unavoidable? We have no choice but to go back to the mansion."

"Can you not touch me so much?"

Carla sighed at Ivan's words.

It's not like she didn't know that.

But the problem was that she didn't want to go.

"I was wondering if you really had to come with me. You, I mean."

Yes, that was also a problem.

"Didn't your father tell me to come? Is it a problem that I'm going?"

Ivan shrugged and replied.

"That's the problem, that's it. You don't know because you're... even though the black Ivan is dwelling within you, your shell is still a commoner. You don't know how commoners are treated."

"It doesn't matter, Carla."

"...Are you the original Ivan? Why don't you give me a sign when you switch?"

Carla scolded Ivan in a tone that was deliberately laced with annoyance.

He switched so often that she had no choice but to guess based on his tone.

'...But considering that, his expression and gestures don't change.'

Shrugging his shoulders, or that awkward expression of forcing a smile when it wasn't funny.

Neither Ivan nor the black Ivan changed those movements at all.

'He told me to suspect that he might be acting...But imitating that tone was probably difficult.

Where would Ivan, who had little education, have learned that tone from?

But Carla felt a slight sense of unease about Ivan.

"Enrico, my father won't think highly of you. He'll probably show it in his attitude."

"It doesn't matter. I'm a commoner now anyway. I have to accept that. About the invitation to Aufstieg, too, I'm willing to accept it."

'I'm a commoner now... huh? As if you weren't before.'

Carla's senses were picking up on the awkwardness that was subtly emanating from Ivan, one by one. There was nothing decisive, but there were subtle awkwardnesses here and there.

"Okay. Then there's no helping it. We should go back to the mansion right away."

Ivan also nodded at Carla's words.

That awkward smile was still on Ivan's face.

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Unlike the surrounding darkness, the Cascata mansion, adorned with light stones, was as bright as if it were still late afternoon.

A carriage cut through the orange light and stopped at the entrance of the mansion.

The servants, who had been lined up in advance, bowed in unison to show their respect, while the butler, Vasilov, opened the door of the carriage.

"Lady, it has been a while."

Carla, dressed in her academy uniform, still had a displeased expression.

Her twisted feelings, that she wouldn't have come if she could have avoided it, were written all over her face.

"Sister."

Fabio Della Cascata.

Her younger brother and the next head of the Cascata family.

Fabio, who had been waiting near the entrance, quickly approached her.

He seemed to want to run to her right away, but he couldn't because of the noble's face, and his awkward gait was the result of hurrying his steps. Without any of that, Fabio rushed to Carla as if he were running.

"Yes, Fabio. It's been a while."

"It hasn't been that long. We met recently, didn't we?His tone had become very mature.

It seemed that they were now educating him well as the successor, and it showed.

"Really? When?"

"That time, that Inter-house Competition or something."

"Ah... that time. Come to think of it, I saw you then too. You haven't changed much."

"It hasn't been that long."

"I guess so. By the way, Enr... where's Father?"

There were many eyes watching.

Ivan's presence was felt as he got out of the carriage, but none of the servants greeted Ivan.

"He was in the study, but he should be in the drawing room by now. You can go right in."

"Really? I see. Let's go in."

Carla naturally moved her feet, and after taking a few steps, she remembered Ivan and turned around.

"Iva..."

But Ivan was already following her.

Ivan was following Carla, keeping a distance of about one and a half steps behind her.

"To step into a noble's mansion without being called, don't do that next time, Ivan."

"Yeah, okay. I understand."

"...And from now on, call me Lady Cascata."

"As you wish, Lady Cascata."

Something felt strange.

Carla felt a strange sense of unease and slowly followed Fabio, who was walking ahead.

The Cascata family was the second most powerful family in the empire after the imperial family, and the family's prestige was evident in the size of the mansion.

The Cascata mansion, which boasted an overwhelming scale even from the outside, was the same inside, and they had to walk down the hallway for a long time to get to the drawing room even after entering through the lobby.

"That guy behind you, the one following you, is Ivan Contadino, right?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"He was quite strong. It was surprising that he could even use Lightning Magic."It's because that guy is a genius—the words almost came out."

But for some reason, Carla didn't think she needed to say that here, so she just nodded.

Fabio, who was walking ahead, asked one of the doormen standing on either side of the drawing room door.

"Has the head of the family arrived?"

"Yes. He just finished. Shall I tell him that the young master has arrived?"

"Please do."

Fabio had become much more mature.

Carla thought that he was more than qualified to be called the young master, and the doorman announced the visit of Fabio, Carla, and Ivan into the drawing room.

Let them in.

With Enrico's answer, the door of the drawing room slowly opened.

The door made of antique wood slowly opened, and the interior of the extravagant drawing room began to be revealed.

In the center of it, a middle-aged man was sitting on the upper seat of the sofa.

Enrico Della Cascata was there.

# 84 - What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (2)

1. What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (2)

Those born as nobles, raised as nobles, and growing old as nobles have something in common.

Occasionally, a fool like Lucas might pop up, but in most cases, they possess a face befitting a noble. They skillfully hide their emotions, skillfully display their gravitas, and skillfully handle their inferiors. That is the common trait of nobles.

Enrico Della Cascata was a figure who had reached the pinnacle in that regard.

The only nobles higher than him are the imperial family.

In other words, except for the imperial family, no one in this empire is above the Cascata family.

As he leads such a family, Enrico Della Cascata's face remained expressionless.

Sitting on the sofa, Enrico watched Carla and Ivan enter the drawing room with the face of a noble.

His expression was cold, and his eyes were heavy.

His tightly closed lips held an unspoken weight of dignity as he looked at his deficient daughter and the commoner entering with her.

As soon as Carla saw Enrico's expression, she took a small breath.

They could never be said to have a good relationship—now a father-daughter relationship. Carla was always butting heads with Enrico, so there was no need to be afraid, but his presence was still overwhelming.

Carla involuntarily looked back at Ivan, who was following behind.

Ivan met Carla's gaze with a small smile at the corner of his lips.

—Why?

His expression seemed to ask, and Carla shook her head, answering that it was nothing, and looked back at Enrico.

'He's too calm. Has Ivan always been like this?'

The Ivan she knew was not like this.

Ivan, who seemed so calm in front of the great noble Enrico Della Cascata.

Greeting like a noble, speaking as naturally as if he had always known the etiquette.

Ivan knew nothing about aristocratic society, let alone Magical Engineering.

Even when facing Aufstieg, he had shown some awkwardness, but now he spoke and acted as if he had been a noble for a long time.

'It's not the atmosphere for Black Ivan to have emerged.'

In fact, it didn't really matter.

Only a tiny seed of doubt planted in her had grown a little more.

Anyway, they had entered, but now Enrico had to tell them to sit down or come closer for the next action to follow—but Enrico sat without a word, just looking at them.

"Enr... Father."

Finally, Carla spoke first.

At her words, Enrico's eyebrows twitched slightly, and he nodded.

"...Fabio, step back. I will call you again."

Fabio bowed his head and stepped out of the drawing room.

Despite the reunion with his daughter, Enrico showed no change in emotion, still indifferent and expressionless, just sitting there.

"It is my first time seeing you since becoming an adult. Lord, have you been well?"

Carla was startled.

It was a very formal greeting for Ivan to make.

Carla was surprised, and Enrico frowned slightly.

That must be an unpleasant expression.

"Did you open your mouth without my permission?"

Enrico's frost seemed to strike the drawing room.

Feeling as if a cold wave was sweeping through, Carla bit her lip.

It wasn't that she hadn't expected this to happen.

That's why she didn't want to return to the mansion.

"A commoner dares to mention me, and on top of that, opens his mouth without my permission?"

Carla tried to step in front of Ivan.

He had to do it in moderation. What was he going to do if he embarrassed him like this after calling him?

However, Ivan stepped forward ahead of her.

"If I have offended you, I apologize. Due to a past connection, my delight preceded me."

Ivan's soft voice rang out.

Carla listened to the voice quietly.

It was a very smooth way of handling things for Ivan.

Her father, Enrico, naturally looked down on others.

So, for a commoner to speak first, and even offer a meaningful apology as if imitating a noble, saying he was happy to see him. If he punished him for saying he was happy to see him, he would become a petty person.

"...An interesting fellow. Do you dare to claim to have a connection with me, given your station?"

Contrary to Carla's expectations, Enrico slowly stood up and gestured towards them.

It wasn't to tell them to sit down, just to come closer.

As Carla and Ivan approached the sofa in the center of the drawing room, Enrico approached Ivan, not Carla.

His cold and serious gaze was directed at Ivan, not Carla, and he scanned him up and down as if examining him. Then, he turned to Carla.

"Carla."

"Uh... Yes."

"I heard you've been taking care of this commoner at the academy. Even sharing a room."

"......"

"Is that true? Why is there no answer?"

Carla paused to catch her breath.

It would be a bit difficult if she answered incorrectly.

"That's not true. It's not the kind of meaning you're thinking of."

"Then what kind of meaning is it? My daughter, who has some power, is taking this guy, who is only a commoner, around with her."

It was in that gap when Carla was taking her time to choose her words.

Ivan's soft voice cut in.

"Lord, it is true that it is not the kind of meaning you are thinking of."

—Pazit!

In an instant, a Lightning Bolt erupted.

The swirling Lightning Bolt was directed at Ivan—and at the same time, the Lightning Bolt could not advance due to the rising barrier of wind, and it rotated violently with a fierce frictional sound.

"The Cascata heiress is more benevolent and intelligent than anyone else, and she is a person who wants to give opportunities even to a commoner like me. I am a humble commoner with excessive power, and she is only protecting and helping me first so that I do not cause trouble to other nobles."

Enrico stared at Ivan.

Then, the violently rotating Lightning Bolt slowly disappeared.

At the same time, the barrier of wind also disappeared in an instant.

"Under this sky, there is the imperial family of the empire, and below that imperial family is our Cascata. Carla is the eldest daughter of that Cascata. Do you think that Carla Della Cascata protecting you is just a simple opportunity?"

Only then did Carla grasp Enrico's intentions.

Her father, Enrico, was trying to test Ivan.

"Of course not. The Cascata heiress, the heiress of the Cascata family who protects, gilds, and cultivates the imperial family of the empire that everyone looks up to, must be looking even further ahead. Wouldn't it be because she thinks I can be of help until she reaches that place?"

"Do you believe you have that much capacity? Do you believe you have the capacity to cover up the scandal surrounding Carla, the scandal that you are involved in, in the name of this Cascata?"

"Isn't the question not whether I believe it or not?"

Ivan smiled slightly.

"If the Cascata heiress wants to do so, then of course I have the capacity to make it so."

"......"

Enrico did not react immediately.

However, seeing that his stiff expression had softened a little, it seemed that his test was at least worthy of a passing grade.

'Why is he so good at talking... Did Black Ivan come out?'

Carla, who was sitting on the sofa at Enrico's command, glanced at Ivan from time to time.

If Black Ivan had come out, it would be understandable that he was spouting words so fluently, but then it would be a bit strange that he was answering so docilely.

'Or am I the only one he treats like trash?'

That was also a possibility.

There was a possibility, but if that was really the case, she would be angry.

"We've shown our faces, so that's enough, right? Now we'll pack our clothes and leave."

Anyway, Carla didn't want to stay in this mansion for long.

She didn't want to look at Enrico's face either.

"Since you're here, have dinner before you go. You don't have anything urgent, do you?"

"No... We're not the kind of people who can sit face to face and eat together amicably..."

To Carla, Enrico was just a hateful person.

The person who caused her mother's death.

She knew that the family was important, but in the end, her mother died because of that family.

If Enrico had been a little stronger, if he had been, her mother wouldn't have died.

"Carla, you're misunderstanding. I don't want to keep you here."

At Enrico's words, Carla narrowed her eyes and glared at him.

What on earth was he trying to say?

"I want to talk to Ivan a little more. You can go back first. I'll have the servants send you whatever you need separately."

"Wh-what...?"

Carla widened her eyes and clenched her fists tightly.

The aura rising from her trembling fists was full of the desire to shout at him to stop and drag Ivan back to the academy.

But she couldn't do that because she couldn't pack her clothes and things and return to the academy.

If it wasn't for the mansion's servants, especially the maids, she wouldn't know how to dress herself up. From hair accessories to other details—especially the accessories that were essential to social gatherings that didn't end with just dresses—she had to be fully armed, but she had no eye for choosing such things.

"I'm fine, Cascata heiress. Since the lord wants to talk to me, shouldn't I be happy to comply?"

Ivan said with a soft smile.

She didn't like that smile—it was too natural and too calm.

But she was too proud to say she would stay, so she turned around and shouted.

"Do whatever you want, you two!"

She shouted bravely and left the drawing room.

Now that it had come to this, she would have to eat dinner at the mansion, and there was virtually no choice.

'This is so annoying, really.'

Carla, who had rushed out, blowing her bangs with her breath.

There was a voice calling out to her.

"Sister. Is the conversation with Father over?"

Fabio.

Fabio Della Cascata.

He was her younger brother.

Author's Note

But if you're going to reorganize the UI, shouldn't you at least announce where you put which menu?

I was so frustrated after searching for the work management page for a long time.

Anyway, D-5!

Since there's no weekend update, is it D-7...?

# 85 - What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (3)

1. What Happened at the Cascata Estate (3)

"He grew up without a mother. He didn't see much growing up, so please understand."

Understand—not even "please understand," but "understand."

A nobleman is not one to apologize.

The more apologetic the situation, the more brazen one must be to be considered a nobleman.

It might be said that understanding is also a form of apology, but Enrico would certainly not think so.

"No, I know that he lost his mother early."

"I see. Since he was Carla's friend since childhood."

"Yes. At that time, I thought she was a young master, not a young lady."

Enrico's eyebrows twitched at those words.

Carla Della Cascata's original name, Carlo Della Cascata.

Foolishly, foolishly, so foolishly, he made a wish to the waterfall god and had his gender stolen away, that foolish and ignorant son.

Enrico felt a mix of relief and dismay that the secret had been so well kept until now.

But the feeling was fleeting, and Enrico quickly shook off the thought and offered Ivan a seat.

"Sit down. The story will be short, but too long to stand."

"Yes, thank you."

Enrico naturally sat in the seat of honor, and Ivan sat on the sofa, keeping a slight distance from him.

With a knock, a servant silently entered, placed teacups, and poured tea.

Steam rose from the freshly warmed teacups, full of tea.

Enrico watched the steam dissipate into the air without a trace for a moment, then casually spoke.

"I hear you're a commoner. I know you've been friends with Carla since childhood. I see you haven't received any special education."

"Yes, that's correct. It's as you say."

Enrico's gaze, which had been on the teacup, turned to Ivan.

Ivan was staring straight at Enrico, not even at the teacup, and there was not a hint of wavering in his eyes.

"A humble commoner... yes, a commoner. You certainly haven't learned anything, haven't heard anything, and don't know anything. Isn't that right?"

"Yes. That's also as you say."

"Then, I'll ask you."

"Please do."

Enrico's gaze was fixed on Ivan.

His deeply sunken eyes made it impossible to read his emotions, and it was impossible to guess what he was thinking.

"Where did you learn your manners?"

That was what Enrico wondered.

He knew that Ivan was the commoner Carla had been playing with since childhood. He knew it well because he had even investigated him out of anxiety, not knowing what kind of guy he was or what he was doing.

One younger half-sister.

His mother remarried but died of postpartum fever after giving birth to his sister.

His father was a near-human trash who beat his family whenever he drank, but he died of an unknown cause.

There was no way such an Ivan could have learned manners.

But Ivan answered Enrico's question without the slightest embarrassment.

"I studied alone in the academy's library."

"Alone?"

"Yes. To avoid tarnishing the reputation of the Cascata's young lady."

Self-taught.

And the reason was to avoid tarnishing the name of Cascata.

He couldn't believe all of it.

But it wasn't entirely nonsensical, so Enrico nodded.

"Are you aware of the rumors circulating?"

"I will listen if you tell me."

"It is said that the Cascata's young lady is under a commoner every night, moaning and crying. Is this rumor true?"

For the first time, Ivan was speechless.

Wasn't it an unimaginably vulgar rumor?

Perhaps that was why Ivan couldn't figure out how to respond.

"That's absurd."

"Then, is Carla still a virgin?"

Ivan felt cornered.

His memories of his previous life as an emperor were of no help at this moment.

Such vocabulary was not used in the imperial palace when he was alive, which was only natural.

"...That's not true."

"I see. Rumors are bound to be distorted anyway. Then it would be natural for you to become my son-in-law. The eldest son-in-law of Cascata being a commoner, the empire is doomed."

He closed his mouth.

In fact, at this moment, Ivan felt like he knew where Carla's reckless, impulsive temper came from.

"Why do you think Carla is so interested in you?"

Now he felt like he could live.

Finally, a question he could answer came.

"The Cascata's young lady is as compassionate and generous to her subordinates as she is beautiful."

"That girl who worked so hard to beat you, now showing you generosity? Don't you think that's inconsistent?"

"...The young lady is wise."

"What does that have to do with wisdom?"

Ivan took a small breath.

"People don't have to be good at everything, do they? Of course, it's good to be good, and it's even better to be better, but as humans, we're bound to have shortcomings. I think it's admirable to try to fill those shortcomings, and it's wise to try to fill those shortcomings while finding someone who's good at it and keeping them under your control."

"So, Carla gave up trying to beat you and instead acknowledged her defeat and put you in her grasp, is that the story?"

"...That's about it."

Ivan was actually satisfied as he answered.

It was a very good answer for him, and he was sure that most people would be satisfied with it.

But contrary to his thoughts, Enrico's wariness of Ivan was greatly increased by that answer.

'It's an answer that's as organized as if it were prepared. Either he expected it in advance, or...'

He's received a lot of these questions.

Or he's asked a lot of these questions.

It would be one of the three.

Enrico knew more than Ivan thought.

How Carlo treated Ivan.

Wasn't it a feast of abuse and violence, hardly worthy of being called a friendship?

The fact that he could say this despite being treated like that meant that it was definitely not his true feelings.

That guy is almost certainly dangerous. If we let him live, our empire will be in danger. He's more than capable of acting as the trigger for destruction. We must kill him. If he fully awakens his power, the empire will fall.

'My brother might be right.'

Ivan, who had been watching Enrico lost in thought for a moment, smiled awkwardly.

"But the head of the family might just see me as a nuisance."

"What do you mean?"

Enrico, awakened from his thoughts, looked at Ivan, who smiled and said to Enrico.

"She's the Cascata's young lady, isn't she? I clung to such a person, and I defiled her pure body. If the head of the family thought my future was bleak, my head would already be separated from my body and rolling on the floor."

"Impudent."

"I'm sorry."

"What are you sorry for?"

"My words were a bit excessive."

It wasn't a sorry face.

Enrico noticed that Ivan didn't feel sorry at all as he looked at Ivan's expression, and that was the correct answer.

'I lost my temper and blurted it out, but it seems like he's letting it go. Is that a relief?'

If the rumors have already spread widely in the streets, then Carla's marriage prospects are as good as blocked. It wasn't Ivan who spread the rumors, but almost everyone at the academy knows about their relationship anyway.

"...It's already happened, so there's nothing we can do about it. It's good that you're aware that you did wrong. There are so many guys in the world who don't even have that."

Ivan listened to Enrico's answer and thought that he was definitely a master.

He had lost his temper and blurted it out, but Ivan was also testing Enrico.

He wanted to scratch his temper a little and see how Enrico would react.

If he couldn't control his temper and went wild, that would be enough, and if not, he wouldn't know.

But Enrico didn't fall for it, and instead, he just brushed it off as if nothing had happened, even adding that Ivan might be a little better compared to others.

"I'll let you off the hook for trying to test me. But there won't be a next time, Ivan. Think of it as me letting you go until now because you're the one who took my daughter's purity. But I can't keep doing that. Do you understand?"

"Yes, thank you for your grace, head of the family."

"That's all I need to know."

He's not an ordinary, simple commoner.

He could be sure of that much.

But he didn't feel the need to subdue Ivan right now.

Rather, he needed to watch him a little more—

Thinking so, Enrico tapped the sofa armrest several times with his fingers, making a sound. When the habitual movement was over, Enrico slowly stood up and said to Ivan.

"I'll keep an eye on you. I believe you'll understand what this means."

"I will keep that in mind. I will try to meet your expectations."

Ivan also smiled and answered.

A word from the author (Author's Note)

Another chapter will be uploaded at 7 o'clock

# 86 - What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (4)

1. What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (4)

"Is the story all done?"

"Mostly."

Carla, still not entirely calmed down, replied to Fabio while catching her breath.

Anyway, he was her brother, and Fabio seemed to have changed a bit since she had become like this, so she didn't want to be as sharp with him as before.

"But, why are you out here alone?"

Fabio's tone had changed.

Carla didn't answer Fabio's question, but stared at him for a moment.

She wondered what on earth had happened after she left the house that had made Fabio, who used to be like a reckless thunderbolt, so docile.

"...He's still inside. He says he has something to talk about with Ivan. I was told I could leave, so I'm on my way out."

"Father is still the same."

"He just hates to pay attention. I understand him doing that because he's a commoner, but does he have to disapprove of everything I do with Ivan?"

Carla suddenly thought she was talking too much.

Fabio didn't seem to find it strange, but more than anything, Carla herself felt strange.

"Uh… Sister, calm down first. Anyway, it'll take a little longer to prepare dinner, so why don't we wait in my room while we talk?"

"...Okay."

Standing in the hallway like this wasn't a good idea either.

Carla accepted Fabio's suggestion and walked down the hallway with him.

Back in his room, Fabio tried to talk to Carla, who now seemed calmer, step by step.

Wasn't she his sister, whom he hadn't seen for a while?

To be honest, Fabio was seeing his mother in Carla right now.

He had heard that his mother had passed away when Fabio was a baby.

So he could only see traces of his mother in faded photos, but now, it was as if the mother in those photos was right in front of him; Carla resembled her that much.

He didn't want to see his mother angry.

The mother in the photos was always smiling, with a benevolent smile.

So he wanted Carla to smile like that too.

"I don't think you need to be so emotional. If Mother were alive, she would have calmed you down, but that's not possible now."

"You little brat, are you trying to lecture me now?"

"Little brat… I'm an adult now. It's time to be careful with my actions. Anyway, it's not like that. You know that Father isn't someone who acts without a reason."

"……."

Carla's strength was that she was quick to assess situations and listened to what was right. As far as she could hear, what Fabio was saying wasn't wrong.

Enrico Della Cascata wasn't someone who spoke or acted carelessly.

He was someone who always had a valid reason for everything he did.

There was a reason why he was known as the most aristocratic of the nobles.

"So, I don't know what Father did, but… judging from your anger, it seems like Father tested that Ivan Contadino. Am I right?"

"Right."

"I agree with that. Ivan Contadino needs to be judged more objectively."

"What are you talking about?"

Carla frowned and asked Fabio.

What did he want to say? Was it simply because Ivan was a commoner? He should just say what he wanted to say.

Just before Carla, who was suddenly annoyed, was about to press Fabio, he said firmly.

"In short, Ivan Contadino could be a very dangerous person."

At those words, Carla frowned again.

"Sister, you may not know, but Father and I watched him fight in the Inter-house Competition. He used our Cascata Family Magic, Lightning Magic, without hesitation."

"That's…"

That couldn't be seen as strange.

Lightning Magic was Family Magic, but it was also widely known outside, and there were many practitioners. It would be unreasonable to consider him a dangerous person simply because he used Lightning Magic.

"I know that too. He uses Lightning Magic, that's possible. But, that guy is dangerous. Even so, beating that idiot to the point of almost killing him isn't something anyone can do. Besides, he's a commoner. Even if there's the Academy, a commoner beating a noble to the point of almost killing him is something you can't do without a lot of guts."

At those words, Carla was silent.

Her brilliant mind was quite clearly understanding what Fabio's words meant.

Lightning Magic, Poison Magic, and even Dust Storm Magic… Of course, if the black Ivan inside Ivan came out, it wouldn't be impossible, but to others, he could be seen as a very dangerous being.

"...I understand what you're saying, Fabio."

"That's a relief."

Fabio smiled with a long sigh.

"But the more that happens, the more I should bring Ivan into Cascata, right? If Ivan falls into the hands of another family…"

"Father and I are thinking the opposite."

"What?"

"...Sister, you've become a woman, and your thoughts have become shallow."

"Shut up, you idiot."

Carla frowned and growled.

She didn't want to hear those stories anymore—what could she do about the past that she could no longer return to?

"It's natural for women to have short thoughts and lack insight, so I'm not blaming you. Let's think the other way around. What if Ivan Contadino is putting on an act to approach Carla Della Cascata?"

"Using that much Magic in an act? That doesn't make sense…"

"His Magical Power is probably real. And his skills are probably real too. But what if he has ambitions to swallow Cascata and even this empire… what if he has such ambitions?"

At those words, Carla was silent.

She hadn't thought about that possibility.

It was true that Ivan had ambitions—that black Ivan, that guy was someone in a high position.

To put it simply, he was the emperor of the destroyed old empire… After he died for some reason, he was possessed by Ivan. And he was talking about reclaiming his empire or something…

'...It's not an impossible story.'

No matter how strong Ivan was, he was an individual.

It was common sense that an individual couldn't beat a country, and in the end, he needed power.

Among the four pillars of the empire, the most versatile and powerful family was undoubtedly Cascata.

It was a family that could face a large army in any battlefield with Lightning Magic.

Schaiske, whose single-shot power was significantly lower,

Aufstieg, which required a very long preparation time,

Bricone, which dealt with gravity but was only a supporting role.

There was a reason why Cascata became the first pillar.

'If he just needed the power of Cascata…'

Then, Ivan was using Carla right now.

Because of that, Carla had ruined her body.

"...That's, not… going to happen. Probably."

There was no confidence in Carla's voice.

Her voice trailed off, and only baseless conviction remained, failing to convince even herself.

"Sister. That guy is ominous. You have to be careful."

At Fabio's words, Carla slowly nodded.

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"This is the room you'll be using."

"Thank you."

Ivan, guided by the servant to the room he would be staying in tonight, whistled as soon as the door closed.

Inside the room, along with the prepared clothes, there were supplies for his stay, even though it was only for one day.

Ignoring those things, Ivan went to the bed and sat down with a thud.

The soft mattress was of a high quality that couldn't even be compared to the beds at the Academy.

"Heh."

Ivan smiled slightly.

"So they said they'd be watching me. I don't really like being an object of observation."

Stretching to his full extent, Ivan stood up and headed for the window.

The huge window, as if to show off Cascata's wealth, was filled with transparent glass without a single speck of dust.

Standing by the window, which overlooked the Cascata territory covered in darkness, Ivan looked outside.

"Nice view."

At the same time, Magical Power emanated from Ivan with all its might.

The colorless and odorless transparent Magical Power, which had no color or energy, spread out like a storm and covered the mansion.

The barriers that completely covered this Cascata mansion.

The surveillance Magic, woven so densely that it could track every single intruder.

And even the circuits that supplied Magical Power to the barriers and Magic.

'It's not an ordinary mansion after all.'

This was comparable to the security of the imperial palace where he had resided in his previous life.

'I can't possibly see them as ordinary nobles. Such power, so this is what it means to be the first pillar of the empire. The imperial palace must be even more so.'

That's why he liked it.

A faint smile appeared on Ivan's face reflected in the window.

"In some way, I will eventually take this place into my hands. And I will reclaim my empire."

War is not something you can do alone.

To regain the empire, his empire, he needed an army.

The soldiers of Cascata, with the power of Lightning Magic, would later become his loyal army.

"Carla."

The smile on his face deepened.

"Become mine, become my stepping stone."

There was no choice, Carla Della Cascata.

You were the woman who had to become my stepping stone.

Author's Note

D-2

There will be no updates on weekends

So D-4

# 87 - What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (5)

1. What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (5)

It was too large to be called a simple dinner and too small to be called a banquet.

Thus, the dinner was held in a small banquet hall rather than the grand dining room, and surprisingly, the attendees were mostly those whom Carla knew well—high-ranking vassals of Cascata.

The main figures included the head of the family, Enrico, the second head, Fabio, and the eldest daughter, Carla, along with Ivan.

In addition, around seven vassals were seated around the table, and the atmosphere was rather unpleasant, having grown cold and tense.

In the center of the banquet hall stood a large dining table.

The vassals gathered around that table, while a larger table was set slightly higher nearby for the direct family members: Enrico, Fabio, and Carla.

And Ivan was assigned a seat at the very end of the table, the most undesirable spot among the vassals.

Seeing Ivan's position, Carla sat with a stiffened expression. No matter how one looked at it, such treatment seemed unjust, but she figured Enrico must have some ulterior motive, so she kept her mouth shut for now.

At Enrico's implicit signal, the meals that had already been prepared were brought into the banquet hall one by one on serving carts.

Naturally, the meals were placed in front of each attendee, starting with appetizers to whet their appetites, but the vassals were consciously avoiding looking at Ivan.

"Though this banquet was arranged suddenly, I thank you all for attending. The wings of Cascata will grow larger and thicker alongside you, so I believe it will be a wonderful evening."

Those who understood the underlying meaning of Enrico's words brightened up.

More support, more prestige… The wings of Cascata meant such things, and for those who could be considered collateral relatives or political connections, it was a welcome statement.

"Everyone, listen. Personally, I had a rather good day today, so I instructed them to prepare the meal with care, and I hope it suits your tastes."

At those words, the vassals glanced at Ivan, stealing furtive looks.

Seated at the very end of the table, Ivan was preparing his meal with an air of nonchalance, his gestures and movements suggesting he was not of common stock but rather someone educated, perhaps from a noble background.

However, despite his relaxed appearance, Ivan was calculating meticulously in his mind.

‘How far should I act?…’

It shouldn’t be too archaic.

He had already claimed to have self-studied the etiquette of the nobility, so some clumsiness should remain.

That man, Enrico, who had a hundred cunning snakes coiled within him, would catch even the slightest gap and exploit it, so he must avoid giving him any reason to pounce.

Perhaps because of this, Ivan occasionally made sounds by scraping his fork against the plate or flipped his knife over, glancing around to gauge the reactions before turning it back, committing simple mistakes without overdoing it as he continued preparing his meal.

But contrary to his thoughts, there was someone observing him more closely—Fabio.

As the main course was about to begin, Fabio set down his utensils and spoke to Ivan.

"I believe you are Ivan Contadino."

The room fell silent, as if frozen.

It had never been a particularly noisy atmosphere, but the already chilly mood turned even colder.

"Yes, Lord Fabio."

Looking at the smiling Ivan, Fabio lifted his napkin to dab at his mouth and then set it down, saying, "I hear you are a commoner."

"Yes, that is correct."

"And, my sister, Carla Della Cascata, is here… Hmm. In any case, you seem quite skilled in dining etiquette. Has my sister guided you well?"

"Indeed. As you mentioned, Lady Cascata has graciously taken me in, recognizing not just me but the potential I possess as a commoner. Thus, she has taught and enlightened me, transforming me from a mere ignorant worm."

Ivan's smiling gaze turned toward Carla.

When did I—? Carla, with a frown, faced Ivan, but the meaning behind his gaze was something no one could decipher.

Moreover, no one knew that Carla had declared her submission to Ivan—only Carla and Ivan were aware of this.

Furthermore, the fact that the eldest daughter of a great noble family, Carla, had declared her submission to a commoner, Ivan Contadino, whom she had looked down upon and bullied with verbal and physical abuse since childhood, was something even Carla herself might not realize.

"However, I have also studied the nobility through the library on my own. The Academy is truly a place the Empire can be proud of, isn't it?"

This response left no room for rebuttal.

To argue against it would be to insult Carla Della Cascata and, furthermore, to belittle the level of the library at the Academy, which the Empire prides itself on.

"...Is that so? I see."

"Fabio, enough."

The one who interrupted Fabio, who seemed poised to ask another question, was Enrico.

Enrico also couldn't shake off a feeling of unease regarding Ivan, but it wouldn't be good to appear as if he were nitpicking for no reason.

"Ivan Contadino. You have no particular insistence on a surname, do you?"

"No, I do not."

"Good, good. Then, can I assume that you have no objections to changing your surname when you become part of the Cascata family?"

In reality, there was no choice.

If he intended not to give Carla to Ivan, he should have killed Ivan long ago. That way, there would have been no rumors about Ivan taking Carla's virginity.

But now that rumors were rampant in the marketplace, he couldn't kill Ivan here, and moreover, he must not kill Ivan now.

—It is necessary to confirm whether he has fully awakened.

—We must draw out that power.

—He must be killed only after he has fully awakened and that power has been drawn out, to avoid future troubles.

—...I will apologize to Martina.

—With my life.

Carlo Della Cascata, now referred to as Lord Cascata, Enrico's brother.

After the conversation with Ivan ended, if he were to summarize what he heard in their communication, it was clear that Ivan must not be killed now.

"Yes. Of course, I have no objections."

The expressions of the vassals shifted rapidly.

From the flow of the conversation, it was evident that they were clearly trying to give the position of the eldest son-in-law of Cascata to this commoner.

However, since it was not a situation where they could voice their dissatisfaction, the vassals were each watching carefully and keeping their mouths shut.

"...Let them graduate from the Academy safely. Both of you are of the right age, so after your military service and once your noble duties are over, let’s hold the wedding. Carla, you have no objections, do you?"

Carla nodded with a stiff face.

It was no longer a matter of willingness or unwillingness—the problem had already been set in motion, and any instinctual aversion Carla felt had long been crushed.

"During that time, Carla, make sure to teach Ivan well. So he can function as a member of noble society."

"...Yes."

"Before that, ensure that no disgraceful incidents occur. Do not tarnish your father's face any further."

Carla nodded once again, her face still rigid.

After the meal, Carla returned to her room.

In the room she hadn't been in for quite a while, she flopped onto the bed and stared at the ceiling.

—Make sure to teach him. So he can function as a member of noble society.

‘That guy is really good at acting…’

Is he not the Emperor? The Emperor.

And yet, etiquette as a noble?

Don’t make me laugh.

He must know better than anyone, and seeing him deceive like that, one must say Ivan is impressive.

‘Teach him? What a joke.’

Staring blankly at the ceiling, she struck the innocent bed in frustration.

Carla then suddenly sat up.

She had instructed her attendants to prepare for the Aufstieg banquet, but she hadn’t checked in on them.

With the intention of taking a look around, Carla approached the door and flung it open, only to freeze in fear at the sight before her.

"Hello, Carla. My wife."

"...What is it?"

"Let’s go inside for now."

Carla took a step back.

Ivan strode confidently into her room.

Once inside, Ivan looked around Carla's room.

"What a magnificent room. It doesn’t even compare to mine. Now I understand why I felt cramped in my room at the Academy."

Carla frowned and glared at Ivan.

What on earth was he trying to do by appearing so suddenly?

"What are you here for?"

"Well, it’s nothing much."

"...Just one thing, just one. Call me Ivan or Black Ivan, just one. I’m confused."

"Is that so? Then let’s go with this."

Ivan grinned.

Seeing that smile, Carla recognized it was Black Ivan.

"So why are you here?"

"It’s nothing much, my dear. I just felt a lot of pressure today. I think I need to vent some pent-up frustration."

"What do you—"

Carla's words were cut short.

Pushed by Ivan, she fell onto the bed, and looking up at Ivan who was looming over her, she spoke fiercely.

"...This is the mansion. If I scream, it will cause a commotion."

"Ah, right. That would be the case."

Ivan showed no sign of tension.

Instead, he looked down at her with a sly smile.

That smile felt predatory, sending chills down Carla's spine.

"But Carla, you won’t be able to do that."

"...On what grounds? I can scream as much as I want. I can hit you and chase you away."

"You’re cute, like an angry cat. But you remember what you said, don’t you?"

—C-Carla Della Cascata will… become yours…

As he said this, Ivan lightly tapped Carla's left shoulder.

"I hope you remember whose arm this is thanks to."

Carla bit her lip.

"...You sneaky bastard."

"Thank you for the compliment."

With that, Ivan suddenly grasped Carla's breast in his hand.

Feeling the softness and warmth filling his palm, Ivan smiled.

# 88 - What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (6)

1. What Happened at the Cascata Mansion (6)

"If you aspire to be the queen of a nation, shouldn't you learn these bedroom arts as a basic requirement, Bi?"

As Carla glared up at Ivan, who was sneering down at her, he even reached out and began to stroke her hair.

Carla roughly shook off Ivan's touch, glaring at him with eyes blazing with blue fury.

"Not even a street whore would do this. You're planning to make me do this?"

"Well, I don't know about nowadays. But when I was alive, I remember this being close to a basic skill."

"What do you mean, 'remember'..."

Ivan felt a pang of regret the moment he uttered those words.

'Remember'? Depending on how you heard it, you could pick at the fact that Ivan was acting.

But Carla didn't seem to notice, so Ivan let out a sigh of relief and continued to stroke her hair.

The room was filled with a strange heat.

Everywhere Ivan's eyes landed, there were all sorts of precious ornaments, like symbols of nobility, in Carla's room.

In that room, on her bed, Ivan was sitting with his pants down.

His already stiff erection gleamed with a dark red vitality, exuding an angry force as if it would pierce a woman's flesh at any moment.

And in front of him, Carla was kneeling.

Carla, Carla—yes, that Carla.

Ivan felt like he was going crazy in the best way possible.

Carla, who was she?

The eldest daughter of the Cascata family, one of the four pillars of this empire and the largest pillar.

That she was kneeling between his legs, her breasts exposed by his touch, her face a whirlwind of anger and shame. That fact aroused him as if it would paralyze his mind.

"The first time is always the hardest, Carla. You'll get used to it."

"Where is it that you get used to something and it's okay?"

Carla glared at Ivan with displeasure—even that gaze was directed upwards, so Ivan felt even that was paralyzing his five senses with excitement.

"Are you saying you won't do it? Or are you saying you can't do it?"

"...What's the difference?"

Ivan chuckled silently at Carla's sullen reply.

"It wouldn't change much. It would just mean your oath was only worth that much."

"...Tch."

Carla clicked her tongue and turned her gaze back to his member.

An oath was solemn—at least, a promise was.

Especially a noble's promise, a noble's oath.

She had knelt before Ivan and sworn to be his, and in return, she had received her arm back. So, Carla had to do whatever Ivan told her to do, at least, at least for now.

"Fine. I'll do it. I'll just do it."

Carla took a shallow breath and held it.

Already, a slightly salty, fishy smell mixed with sweat was seeping into her nose.

Carla, who had already mixed bodies with Ivan several times, knew what this smell was.

She knew it too well—which was why she felt even more resistance to what Ivan wanted her to do.

Her past aside, wasn't this an organ for urinating?

That—

"Hurry up."

"...Don't rush me."

Carla finally opened her small mouth.

She didn't worry about whether it would all fit, whether it would all fit in her mouth.

The human body was incredibly elastic.

She was about to take the throbbing glans into her mouth.

Ivan stopped her for a moment, touching her forehead.

"Why?"

She was holding the hot, throbbing shaft in her hand and was just about to take the glans into her mouth. He stopped her again, so she had a slight expectation that he might tell her not to do it, but Ivan was looking down at her and smiling.

"Kiss it first."

"What?"

Carla frowned in disbelief.

Kissing the glans? Wasn't that crossing the line?

"Kiss it first, then put it in your mouth. That's the empress's bedroom art."

"What is that..."

Of course, she didn't know anything like that.

Right now, Ivan was making it up on the spot, so she didn't know if such a thing actually existed.

Ivan stared intently at Carla.

Carla, who was staring back with a look that could devour him, sighed softly.

"...Okay."

Then, after a moment of hesitation—

— Mwah.

At that moment, it felt like lightning struck Ivan's head.

Carla's red, small, and dainty lips touched the glans, which was only a thin mucous membrane, the place where urine came out.

He had conquered her.

He had finally conquered her.

He had already conquered the deepest, most secret place, and he had repeatedly ejaculated his seed into her womb, but now he felt like he had psychologically subdued her as well.

The dirty place, the place where urine came out—that place, the lips of that arrogant and fierce Carla, had touched it.

"Haa..."

A warm and soft, yet sticky warmth enveloped Ivan's glans.

Ivan unknowingly straightened his back and savored the inside of Carla's mouth.

The moist feeling and warmth were no different from her vagina, but the moisture was a little less.

But the squirming feeling, her clumsy tongue movements that seemed to tickle the tip of his glans.

Those things brought about an incredibly huge stimulation, and a wave of pleasure that was both ticklish and electrifying washed over him.

"Th-that's right. You're doing well..."

Ivan felt like his strength was leaving his waist for a moment, and he unknowingly put his arms behind him to support himself. Otherwise, he felt like he would fall backwards in an instant.

Carla's hands wrapped around Ivan's thighs.

It was a subconscious action because it was difficult to maintain her balance, but even that was a tremendous visual stimulus for Ivan.

"D-don't touch it. Don't touch it. It hurts."

"Eoo oh ababa."

Her lips were already wide open and she couldn't answer properly because she was holding Ivan's member in her mouth, but it didn't really matter. He could feel her white teeth occasionally brushing against his glans or shaft, being careful not to touch it.

No one could have taught her, but Carla was sucking Ivan's cock using her tongue. She would lick the tip of his glans, and she would run her tongue over the bulging veins on the underside of his shaft.

Ivan quietly looked down at Carla.

Saliva that she couldn't swallow was dripping from the corners of her lips, and her gaze was fixed on his cock, as if she was half in a trance.

At the same time, her large breasts were swaying below...and the clear pink nipples, swaying in circles at the tips, were bulging out in anger.

"W-what are you doing!"

Carla unknowingly took his cock out of her mouth and shouted at Ivan.

She knew that he had already cast a silence spell, but she was surprised by her own voice and closed her mouth with a gasp.

Ivan's handprints were already red on the breasts he was fondling.

It would be more accurate to say that Ivan's handprints were left on her already reddened breasts.

Ivan fondled her breasts as if he were kneading flour dough, pinching and pulling up her bulging, angry nipples—

"...Could you not lift my breasts with my nipples?"

"You're not pushing my hand away, though. More importantly, your mouth is resting?"

Carla bit her lip.

Ivan's cock was throbbing in front of her eyes.

That dark red, heated iron rod.

It nodded every time she breathed, and every time Ivan unconsciously tensed his muscles.

Moreover, Ivan's touch was fondling her breasts, and the constant stimulation of her nipples was gradually heating up her body.

Carla unknowingly gasped roughly and opened her mouth.

Then she took Ivan's cock into her mouth once more.

"Hoo..."

Ivan let out a long sigh and leaned back again.

Carla's mouth was a masterpiece...it really was.

He wouldn't be able to find a woman like this easily.

In his past life, he hadn't even married.

He was so obsessed with Magical Engineering that he didn't even take care of state affairs properly, so he had never held a woman until the moment he died.

So, even based on his experience, he couldn't know for sure, but there was no doubt that he couldn't have both Carla's beauty and her body.

'I'll never give you to anyone, Carla.'

You must be mine...

Carla, who was burying her face in Ivan's crotch and making squelching sounds as she sucked his cock.

"A little faster, a little faster..."

A throbbing sensation was rising from his lower body.

Ivan unknowingly grabbed the back of Carla's head.

He wasn't satisfied with Carla sucking his cock and moving back and forth.

And those red lips, her face flushed with excitement...

He had a desire to see that face smeared with his cloudy ejaculate.

'I'll have to do it twice today...I can't help it.'

Ivan grabbed the back of Carla's head and began to shove his cock into her mouth.

He was feeling the urge to ejaculate, and now, if he just thrust a little more, a little more, he would be able to cum—

"Oop! Oop! Oop!"

Carla was hitting Ivan's thigh with a thud, as if she was suffocating.

But Ivan had no intention of considering Carla's situation, and he did not reject the rising urge to ejaculate from his lower body at all—

"Uuuuup!"

He ejaculated a gush of semen into Carla's mouth.

Carla hit his thigh several times and tried to take his cock out of her mouth, but Ivan grabbed the back of Carla's head and didn't let her go.

At the end of the long ejaculation, Ivan released the back of Carla's head.

"Keheuk! Kehk, cough...! Cough cough!"

Every time Carla coughed, Ivan's semen, its fragments, splattered out in her saliva.

A cloudy semen dripped and gathered at the corners of Carla's lips as she glared at Ivan with resentful eyes.

"Y-you made me swallow it, you crazy bastard...!"

"You have to swallow it. That's what I told you to do."

"Are you out of your mind!?"

"Open your mouth."

"...What!?"

"I said open your mouth."

At Ivan's words, Carla unknowingly opened her mouth wide.

Some of the cloudy semen was stuck to her palate or the walls of her mouth, but judging from the amount of semen he had ejaculated, most of it must have gone down her throat.

"Good, Carla. You swallowed it well."

"...You made me eat that stuff, you crazy bastard."

No matter how much she wiped it off, the cloudy semen kept coming out.

Carla frowned without realizing it, as if she could still smell the fishy smell of the semen.

It was then.

"Burp."

Ivan also looked at Carla with a surprised expression.

"Did you like the taste so much that you burped?"

Carla's face turned red in an instant.

Even so, she had never dreamed that she would burp because her stomach was full of semen.

"...D-don't say such nonsense. This is just..."

"Just what?"

Carla couldn't say anything even as Ivan grinned and looked at her.

The taste was fishy, and the smell was disgusting, but why was this happening?

"Anyway, it doesn't matter, Bi. All that matters is that I'm not satisfied yet."

Ivan slowly stood up.

His member, which had already regained its strength and was showing off its dark red vigor, was throbbing and had the remnants of cloudy semen dangling at its tip, and Carla took a step back in surprise as she looked at it.

"Again, again...?! This is our mansion! Are you out of your mind?!"

"The night is long. And the silence Magic is still in effect."

Ivan smiled.

Ivan pounced on Carla in an instant.

The night is long.

Author's Note

Don't say bad things like, "Did you write this after trying it out?"

# 89 - A Displeasing Banquet (1)

1. An Unpleasant Banquet (1)

Among the four pillars supporting the Empire, the Aufstieg family is the most peculiar.

Based on testimonies from people who have visited the mansions of the pillars, there is no disagreement that the Aufstieg family's customs are the most unconventional.

"Even their mansion is quite unique, isn't it?"

"Indeed."

Ivan nodded at Carla's words.

Certainly, the atmosphere of the mansion is quite strange when you look at it this way.

Noble families usually prefer high ceilings for their mansions.

Of course, they can't be higher than the Imperial Palace, and even among nobles, there are ranks, so there's a limit to how high they can go. But most strive for mansions that are just shy of that limit.

However, the Aufstieg family was the opposite. Buildings exceeding two stories were extremely rare. Most were one-story, with occasional two-story structures, and with vertical roofs, the mansion almost resembled a cluster of houses in a village.

If it weren't for the pure white stone wall that encompassed all the buildings, it would truly look like a village.

Moreover, with colorful flags hanging from each building and fluttering in the wind, it even evoked a bleak feeling.

"We have to get off here. Let's get out and walk in."

Following Carla's words, Ivan got out of the carriage first and stepped onto the road. Then, he extended his hand to Carla as she got out.

"I must escort you."

"How thoughtful."

Carla didn't refuse his gesture.

She took his hand and stepped down lightly. A fairly wide path painted in pure white was visible a few steps away. Gray stone floors were laid on either side of the path.

Ivan unhesitatingly stepped onto the white paint.

Carla quickly grabbed Ivan's sleeve and pulled him back.

"You can't walk in the middle."

"Why? Isn't it painted white for people to walk on?"

"No. Step back for now."

As Carla pulled him, Ivan tilted his head but followed her lead. Sure enough, looking around, people who appeared to be Aufstieg servants had uncomfortable expressions, but their faces relaxed only when Ivan stepped off the painted path.

"The Aufstieg people say the middle path is for the gods. They re-paint it every morning and consider it sacred, so no human footprints are allowed. We have to go on the sides."

"How complicated..."

Carla whispered to Ivan that this was why the Aufstieg family was considered eccentric, and then she walked ahead on the gray stone floor at the edge.

They hadn't walked far when three servants dressed in pristine white uniforms appeared and walked with Carla and Ivan, surrounding them. Their steps were light as ghosts, silent and soundless as walking on clouds.

"They're guides, so just walk quietly."

At Carla's words, Ivan also closed his mouth and quietly moved his feet.

They hadn't walked long—although it felt like they had gone around in circles on the gray stone floor—when a huge building with thick wooden pillars came into view.

The dark green roof tiles were very different from the Empire's style. There were quite a few figures, indicating that guests had already arrived, and guards surrounded the area, making it seem like this was where the banquet was being held.

"This is the place. Please come this way."

One of the servants, who had been walking in front of Carla and Ivan, turned around and bowed deeply. Ivan was taken aback by the androgynous voice, unsure if it was male or female, but Carla grabbed Ivan's sleeve and whispered not to show his surprise.

"Let's go in."

A small navy desk was placed at the entrance.

A white muslin cloth was unfurled like a scroll, with people's names written on it in black ink.

Carla unhesitatingly took a pen and wrote her name vertically on the muslin cloth.

Carla Della Cascata.

Ivan Contadino.

Only after writing their names did the guide politely gesture for them to enter. Carla nodded slightly and stepped into the banquet hall.

"Oh, oh!"

As soon as Carla and Ivan entered, a shrill male voice greeted them.

The mustache, which always gave the impression of a goat or a rat, wiggled as he walked, which was quite amusing, but if the owner of that mustache was Dremalo, it was impossible to laugh.

As soon as Dremalo saw Ivan, he rushed over and grabbed his hand.

"Finally, you've arrived, Ivan! Do you know how long I've been waiting for you?"

Carla was dumbfounded.

Even so, wasn't the Cascata heiress here? To ignore her completely and greet Ivan like this, what was he trying to do?

As if reading her thoughts, Dremalo greeted Carla as well.

"Carla, you've come too. Is your father well?"

'Suddenly?'

He asked about Enrico's well-being, which he hadn't done last time.

Carla found it strange but bowed her head and replied.

"Thanks to your concern, he is healthy and well. It's only been a few days since I last saw the elder, but he seemed to be in good health, so I'm relieved."

"I'm healthy, of course, I'm healthy. Yes, I have to be. Now, let's not stand here like this and go inside."

Come to think of it, they had been making this commotion near the entrance. Dremalo grabbed Ivan's hand and led him into the banquet hall, heading not to a podium or stage but to the center of the hall, where he cleared his throat loudly.

Then, a servant who had been waiting in the center struck a large, round disc with a round-headed mallet.

— Deeng!

A loud sound spread through the surroundings.

Those who were talking or looking at Ivan, whom Dremalo was enthusiastically greeting, with curious eyes, instantly looked at Dremalo. He cleared his throat a couple more times and patted Ivan's back with his other hand while holding his hand.

"Let me introduce you! This friend here is Ivan Contadino, a Magical Engineering genius who will brighten the future of this Empire! He is a commoner now, but he will soon become a noble! I, Dremalo of Aufstieg, will make it so!"

The banquet hall buzzed instantly.

Many people didn't know about Ivan, in fact, most didn't know him at all.

They didn't know who he was or what kind of person he was, but suddenly he was declared a commoner who would soon become a noble, and Dremalo would personally make it happen, which was bewildering to those invited to this banquet.

Moreover, Ivan was now embarrassed.

Because of this absurd situation that he had never experienced before, Ivan glanced at Carla.

Carla, who was watching with her arms crossed and a displeased look, thought that there was no room for her to intervene in this situation. Just wait and see, let it flow as it goes—she nodded a couple of times with that intention, and Ivan nodded slightly as well.

"Oh, isn't that Ivan!"

In the midst of all this, a familiar voice was heard.

A voice familiar to both Ivan and Carla.

"Liam…?!"

Liam Fuco was there.

Liam, dressed in a suit that seemed about to burst, pushed through the crowd.

Those who were pushed by Liam cried out briefly, but Liam didn't even glance at them as he came forward.

"That's right, that's right. Liam, you're an academy student, aren't you?"

"Yes, Elder. We are classmates."

"What a coincidence! Liam Fuco here, his Fuco family has deep ties with our Aufstieg! I invited Liam to the banquet, and I'm glad I did!"

"Is that so."

Ivan replied in an awkward voice.

He's a really bizarre person… That was Ivan's honest impression.

He seemed like someone wearing a mask, but he couldn't see through it.

He couldn't even tell if it was a mask that was thicker than the one Ivan was wearing, or if it was an extremely elaborate mask.

"Well, well, now that it's come to this, let's all enjoy the meal comfortably. Especially Ivan."

Dremalo laughed loudly and patted Ivan's shoulder.

It was a kind of unspoken pressure, a formality to show how much he cared about this friend.

The meal was a buffet, not a formal sit-down dinner.

It was a surprisingly comfortable meal where you could freely walk around and grab drinks, food, and desserts.

However, Ivan wasn't entirely comfortable, mainly because of the Aufstieg banquet guests who were looking at him.

They were also nobles, and they didn't see Ivan in a favorable light.

Even if he was talented, he was just a Magical Engineer, which meant he was a soldier.

Even though the war was still raging, it wasn't a story that resonated with the nobles who lived comfortably in the capital, far behind the front lines.

Although the Empire had a strong reverence for military power, there were exceptions, and it was even harder to feel for the Aufstieg faction, which hadn't been directly involved in the war for quite some time.

A commoner daring to set his dirty, muddy feet in their society, the noble society, meant that their gazes could never be kind.

"Ivan Contadino, was it?"

Eventually, a middle-aged man cleared his throat and approached Ivan.

"Ah, yes. I'm Ivan Contadino."

"I'm Georg. I use the Via Consta name, but is what Elder Dremalo said true?"

"If you mean…"

Georg Via Consta lowered his voice and asked Ivan.

"That you will soon become a noble."

"Ah, that. I don't know about that."

"Hmm. Is that so? But even if such an offer comes, you wouldn't accept it so readily, would you?"

Adding another noble family is more troublesome than one might think.

Moreover, if precedents of commoners becoming nobles continue to be added, they will not be welcome either.

"Elder Dremalo must have said that as a compliment. So there's no need to take it seriously and accept it, don't you think?"

Carla, who had been listening to the conversation, subtly poked her head in.

There was no particular reason.

She just didn't like the way they were trying to put Ivan down.

And she was just annoyed—

There was no other reason.

"Via Consta. Was it?"

Georg looked at Carla, who had suddenly appeared.

His eyes glazed over for a moment, then he quickly regained his composure.

"Y-yes, that's right. Who are you, young lady?"

"You're late on the news. I'm Carla Della Cascata."

"A d-daughter of Cascata…"

Carla frowned and said.

"You're really late on the news. Haven't you heard that Carlo Della Cascata was actually Carla Della Cascata?"

"Carlo Della Cascata, you mean…"

A violent temperament.

Outstanding talent.

Exceptional Magical Engineering power.

A twisted personality.

Good skills but a bit of a problem with character.

Carlo Della Cascata, who was quite famous for both good praise and bad rumors.

"A-anyway. W-why is the Cascata heiress suddenly…?"

Why are you taking the side of this commoner?

Georg's words carried that meaning.

"The Empire is a place where you are treated according to your skills. Even if you are a commoner, if you have outstanding skills, you will soon become a noble. It's not like there's no precedent. I can vouch for Ivan Contadino's skills more than anyone else."

Georg Via Consta was flustered.

The heiress named Carla Della Cascata had suddenly appeared, and so had Dremalo. What was so special about this commoner that they were protecting him so much—

"—is what you're thinking, right?"

At Carla's words, Georg closed his mouth.

And conversely, Carla said with a deep smile.

"I guarantee it. Ivan is stronger than anyone here. Whoever comes, Ivan is stronger than anyone in this place right now."

The banquet hall buzzed instantly.

As she said, the Empire was also a place of meritocracy, so Cascata's guarantee that Ivan was stronger than anyone else had that much power—perhaps even more than Dremalo's words.

"...How can you be so sure…"

"Then why don't we just have a match? Anyone, come out. This Ivan here will take on anyone."

Carla had her own convictions.

She knew how great the power dwelling within Ivan was. In other words, only Carla knew.

Therefore, her outrageous statement was enough to shake this banquet hall, and it was more than enough to ignite someone's competitive spirit.

A twisted personality.

That's not me, I'm nice.

# 90 - A Dinner Party That Doesn't Sit Well (2)

1. An Unpleasant Banquet (2)

The history of the Empire is essentially the history of war, built upon days of relentless invasion, conquest, and annexation, culminating in the present day on the fields established by such events.

As nobles who have established their families in such a place, it can be said that their underlying pride is closely tied to a fundamental desire.

In this gathering, in the very heart of Aufstieg, one of the four pillars of the Empire, Carla's audacious declaration was enough to ignite the pride that lay within the hearts of those present.

“…Lady Cascata, what you say is something we cannot easily accept. Are you sure you can take responsibility for it?”

The one who appeared with a chilling aura was a tall man with a gaunt face. His white robe was spotless, and the five layers of blue ribbons wrapped around his sleeves gave off an unusual feeling.

Carla stared at the man and nodded. She wasn't sure what the blue ribbons signified, but he must be someone of considerable skill.

“Of course. If Ivan can prove how strong he is, I’m sure no one will have any objections, right?”

Carla raised her eyes and glanced around. Her naturally sharp gaze made her look fierce even when she was still, and now, with her eyes wide, she appeared even more intimidating.

As no one responded, Carla subtly moved closer to Ivan and whispered to him.

“…Elder Dremalo won’t let this slide easily. A challenge will surely arise, but don’t kill anyone.”

Ivan looked at Carla, who was whispering to him, and twisted his lips into a smirk. It was a moment when his true nature was revealed.

“Sure, I’ll do my best. If the rain is trying to set me up, I should gladly comply.”

“Could you not refer to it as rain…?”

Just as Carla frowned at his words, a booming voice erupted, shaking the banquet hall.

“Well, this is quite the spectacle! Yes, our Empire is a meritocracy! This could be a chance to prove that Ivan is more than worthy of being a noble!”

It was Dremalo.

He seemed to have no intention of stopping, and from the sound of his shout, it was clear he was eager to encourage the situation.

As the crowd parted, Dremalo emerged, his face full of a smile that was almost obnoxious.

“Then, here in this place, Ivan, if you can prove your strength, it will be a simple matter, won’t it?”

“Indeed, you’re right.”

Ivan smiled leisurely.

“Now, what shall we do? Carmen, would you like to be the first opponent?”

‘First opponent?’

At those words, Carla's eyebrows twitched. If there was a first opponent, then there must be a second.

Could it be that they were going to have a tournament? That seemed likely.

“I shall do so, Elder. Though I am lacking, I will strive to restore the honor of Aufstieg here.”

“Good, good. Now then, Ivan, this is Carmen Aufstieg. He is also a practitioner of the Five Elements, so he should be a worthy opponent for you. What do you say, will you face him?”

Carla didn’t know what it meant to be a practitioner of the Five Elements.

So she glanced at Ivan, but he maintained his relaxed smile as he nodded at the man called Carmen.

‘He’s not a direct descendant. He uses the Aufstieg name, but since there’s no intermediary, he must be a collateral branch.’

Carla tried to analyze the man named Carmen but soon gave up.

In fact, judging by his demeanor, she felt that he wouldn’t be a match for Ivan.

“Well then, it’s settled. Now, let’s move to the arena!”

The arena was indeed vast.

Not only was it spacious, but the wooden floor was polished to a shine, leaving footprints behind.

As if incense had been burned, a faint smoke wafted through the arena, where Carmen and Ivan stood facing each other about ten paces apart.

“I’ve heard you are a challenger and that you wield magic that requires preparation. You may begin your incantation first.”

Carmen’s face hardened.

It wasn’t strange that Ivan knew he could use Descent Magic, but the mention of “challenger” was quite bothersome.

“…Then, I shall begin my incantation.”

Though he said incantation, strangely, Carmen raised his hand, forming a hand seal and drawing a pentagram. Each time he touched a vertex of the pentagram, an inexplicable, strange seal hovered in the air.

‘So that’s Descent Magic…’

Carla thought as she watched the scene unfold.

It was her first time seeing Descent Magic in action.

She had no idea how it was executed, and since Emil couldn’t use Family Magic either…

‘Wait, how can a collateral branch use magic that Emil can’t?’

Something felt off.

Wasn’t it strange? The man named Carmen, who was a collateral branch, could use Descent Magic because he was a practitioner of the Five Elements, yet Emil couldn’t?

‘The magical circuits must be strangely twisted…’

Emil’s magical circuits seemed to be oddly tangled, as if someone had interfered and cut them. Perhaps that was why he couldn’t use Family Magic; reflecting on it now, such doubts arose.

While Carla was lost in thought, Carmen’s incantation reached its conclusion.

The pentagram he had drawn was connected by thick lines that sparkled with a blue light at each vertex, and at the moment the sparkle peaked, a fierce-looking warrior wielding a long spear appeared behind Carmen.

“The incantation is complete. You should prepare as well.”

At Carmen’s words, Ivan shook his head with a smile.

“My main magic is Dust Storm, so I don’t need extra time to prepare.”

“Then you’ll use Dust Storm…?”

“No. While that is my main magic, right now…”

Pazjjt.

A deep purple Lightning Bolt crackled from both of Ivan’s fists, creating a sharp sound.

‘Huh.’

Seeing that, Carla stifled a laugh.

His main magic is Dust Storm, but he can also use Lightning Magic—however, just from a glance, the level of his Lightning Magic seemed to be on par with or even surpassing Carla’s.

“I will face you with Lightning Magic. You may come at me directly.”

“…Underestimating your opponent is also a skill.”

Carmen’s face grew even more rigid.

The mention of “challenger” and the blatant disregard for him as a practitioner of the Five Elements—saying he would face him with a different type of magic that wasn’t even his main magic was tantamount to insulting him.

Carmen’s hands crossed rapidly, and he pointed at Ivan.

The fierce-looking warrior behind him let out a loud roar and charged at Ivan, who slowly raised his fists and glared at the warrior.

“Though it lacks substance, it possesses physical force… Descent Magic is impressive.”

The warrior charged.

With a massive spear in hand, it was poised to strike down from above, yet it also seemed to swing at an angle to slice.

Lightning began to swirl around Ivan, enveloping him in a protective barrier.

A total of eleven bolts.

As Carla muttered, “What a madman—” without realizing it, Ivan leaped forward to meet the charging warrior.

—Kwahh!

Though he wasn’t a god, he was a being stronger than a human.

The recklessness of a human facing such a being was obscured for a moment by the tremendous explosion.

“Cough…!”

Carmen staggered, letting out a groan.

Though the smoke that rose obscured the outcome, those watching from the arena could already predict the result based on Carmen’s reaction.

As the smoke cleared, Ivan’s figure emerged.

The eleven bolts had now reduced to nine.

The two missing bolts circled around Ivan, rotating as if to guard him, while Ivan stood there, seemingly unfazed.

“Wow… Even a low-level warrior could easily face a dozen soldiers.”

Dremalo muttered, stroking his beard.

Carla, standing beside him, was once again astonished by Ivan’s extraordinary strength.

“It was a good match.”

Ivan relaxed his fists and waved his hands.

Then he approached the pale-faced Carmen, extending his hand with a smile.

“Can you acknowledge me now?”

“…Who are you, really…”

Carmen looked at Ivan with a bewildered expression.

He couldn’t even think to grasp the outstretched hand, staring at Ivan instead.

“Do you admit defeat?”

Ivan withdrew the hand he had offered to Carmen and asked again.

It seemed a meaningless question, as Carmen appeared to have lost all will to fight, but still, one could never be sure.

“…I have lost.”

Carmen had summoned the strongest spirit he could call forth in an instant, intending to settle the match quickly.

However, against Ivan’s power, which had burned that spirit to ashes in a single blow, the notion of a rematch was meaningless.

“Thank you.”

Ivan politely bowed his head and casually walked over to Carla.

“You did well.”

“Carla.”

“Yeah?”

As Carla, who had been congratulating him, paused to ask Ivan, he leaned closer to her ear and whispered with a serious expression.

“Magical power isn’t flowing properly.”

“What?”

“The waves of magical power are unstable.”

“Unstable waves…?”

Carla’s eyes discreetly scanned the surroundings.

She didn’t feel anything particularly strange, and when she tried to circulate her magical power, nothing seemed off.

“Isn’t it just your imagination?”

“No, it’s clear.”

—

In that fleeting moment, while facing Carmen’s summoned spirit, Ivan had already realized that this was exceedingly trivial.

The warrior approaching with the spear.

As he punched towards the spear held by that warrior, the explosion that erupted at the moment of impact.

The spear twisted its trajectory, and Ivan thought he could easily dodge it, attempting to twist his body away—

—Whoosh!

At that moment, his body hesitated.

The Lightning Magic that should have assisted his movements faltered for an instant, causing Ivan to hesitate as well.

In that moment of pause, the twisted spear aimed for his side.

‘Huh.’

Ivan’s brow furrowed slightly.

Was it just his imagination, or was there another issue at play?

Regardless, he had to deflect the spear aimed at his side, so Ivan spun the Lightning around, but it was at that moment.

—Pfft!

With a sharp, brief sound, the Lightning vanished.

‘What…?!’

The Lightning disappeared, and though he had to twist his body to evade, Ivan narrowed his eyes even in that brief moment.

‘Something is interfering with my magical power.’

If that’s the case, he had no choice but to strike with a single blow.

With that thought, Ivan summoned a Lightning Bolt and wrapped it around his fist, thrusting it into the spirit’s chest.

—Paziziziz!

With the sound of the Lightning exploding, the spirit began to ignite.

The outcome was decided.

However, considering the twisted magical power that had controlled the Lightning earlier, he couldn’t shake the feeling that something was amiss.

‘Is there something else at play?’

As the spirit burned and faded, Ivan looked around through the smoke it had created.

Yet, amidst the thick smoke, nothing was visible.

—

While the two were whispering to each other, Dremalo glanced at Ivan and stepped forward to shout.

“Now, is there anyone who wishes to challenge Ivan again?!”

Having witnessed Ivan’s strength, no one dared to step forward, merely exchanging glances.

“Seems there’s no one. Then it appears Ivan has sufficiently proven his strength…”

“Wait a moment, please!”

A deep voice interrupted Dremalo’s words.

“Oh? Is that you?”

“Yes. I’ve always wanted to test my skills against you.”

It was Liam.

With a grin, Liam stepped forward and pointed at Ivan.

“Ivan, I’ve wanted to face you… no, I wanted to fight you. Like a man.”

The pride of a man is always like that.

# 91 - A Displeasing Banquet (3)

1. An Unpleasant Banquet (3)

Ivan, standing face to face with Liam, looked like a child confronting an adult.

The difference in size was a factor, but so was the difference in presence.

Liam revealed his fighting spirit without any intention of hiding it, while Ivan simply smiled and looked at Liam, without saying anything in particular.

"Ivan, I just seized a good opportunity that came my way."

"It's okay."

"Yeah, right. I wanted to have a proper match with you someday."

Liam twisted his lips into a smile.

But his eyes weren't smiling.

What surged in his eyes was a competitive spirit, a desire to fight against Ivan's power.

"It must be difficult without a weapon, Liam."

At Ivan's words, Liam shrugged.

"This is a formal occasion, after all. I couldn't possibly bring a weapon to such a place. But a man should always have two weapons, shouldn't he?"

"The weapon in his hand, and his body. Right?"

"Correct, Ivan. There's no guarantee you'll always have a weapon on the battlefield."

Liam replied, rotating his shoulders.

Each time, his shoulder joints made ominous cracking sounds.

"Elder Dremalo. Would it be alright if I spar with Ivan?"

At Liam's question, Dremalo widened his eyes, slightly surprised.

Considering Liam's aggressiveness, he had expected a fight to break out without a word.

"Of course, Liam. Spar as much as you like."

"Thank you. Ivan, are you ready?"

At Liam's question, Ivan tilted his head slightly.

What he didn't quite understand was that Liam was suggesting a hand-to-hand fight.

If Ivan used Magical Engineering, even if he won, it wouldn't feel clean.

"You're going to fight hand-to-hand. Then I suppose it's only fair that I face you in hand-to-hand combat as well."

"Heh, heh heh."

Liam burst into hearty laughter.

And for good reason, Ivan was practically half Liam's size.

Moreover, unlike Liam, who was packed with muscles, Ivan—in Liam's eyes—looked like he would collapse with a single punch. So, the suggestion to fight hand-to-hand was simply laughable.

"It's not time to laugh, Liam. As you said, there's no guarantee you'll only face enemies of similar size on the battlefield."

"Ha—this, this is something."

Liam smacked his forehead and said.

As Liam lowered his hand, his eyes turned cold.

"—So, I've been quite underestimated. You're saying we should fight hand-to-hand without using Magic, right?"

"That's about right. If you only use body-enhancing Magic like Flame magic, and I use Lightning Magic, it would be a pretty fair fight, don't you think?"

Ivan was full of confidence.

Why wouldn't he be?

Unlike Flame magic, which simply increases firepower, Lightning Magic is a Magical Engineering that evenly boosts all of the body's abilities.

Carla had applied it well, and Ivan intended to follow suit.

"Alright, good. I'm curious to see what will happen when Lightning Magic and my Flame magic clash in hand-to-hand combat."

Liam curled his lips into a smile.

His eyes still weren't smiling.

"Then, considering the conditions agreed upon, start whenever you're ready."

Dremalo's words, filled with laughter, served as the starting signal.

No sooner had he finished speaking than Liam rushed towards Ivan.

The distance closed in an instant.

A hook swung up from below, aiming for Ivan's chin.

'Fast.'

It even carried heat.

The sweltering heat could be felt from the fist that brushed past his face.

Ivan gathered Lightning Bolt in his hand and punched towards Liam's waist.

"Hand-to-hand combat is not your forte!"

As if he had expected that, Liam deflected Ivan's incoming fist and instead landed a punch in his abdomen.

"Keuk!"

Ivan groaned and staggered backward.

'Liam, this guy… his strength is something else…'

And again, Magical Power wasn't gathering properly.

There was definitely something here interfering, but he still couldn't figure out what it was.

Seizing the momentum, Liam rushed at Ivan.

He threw another punch at Ivan, who seemed to have lost his balance, but Ivan wrapped his arm around Liam's and thrust his fist towards his armpit.

'Keuk!?'

Liam bit back a groan that almost escaped his lips.

The tingling pain was felt everywhere Ivan's hand touched.

"Lightning Magic… you learned it from Carla, I see."

"Let's just say that, Liam. It's quite electrifying."

"It is electrifying indeed. Then you should taste some heat too."

Liam swung his still-tingling arm around to shake off the pain and grinned.

Ivan also slightly stroked his still-throbbing abdomen and stood with his legs apart again.

"Hah!"

"Heop!"

As if by mutual agreement, Liam and Ivan simultaneously shouted and charged at each other.

Despite the difference in size and height, Ivan unleashed a flurry of quick attacks on Liam, crackling with Lightning Bolt. Although he was smaller, Ivan was much faster, and he poured a series of sincere blows on the relatively slower Liam.

Liam wasn't just taking the hits.

There was a difference in speed as much as there was a difference in size, and while Ivan was much faster, Liam had a resilience that Ivan didn't have.

Liam grabbed Ivan's waist as he unleashed a flurry of attacks, slammed Ivan to the ground, and with a crash! The rising smoke split apart. Ivan, who had performed a breakfall just before hitting the ground, bounced back to create distance again, then charged at Liam again.

— Thwack!

Liam's fist struck Ivan's shoulder.

And Ivan's fist slammed hard into Liam's cheek.

Both groaned and staggered back several steps.

"Ivan!"

Carla, who was watching, tried to run to him.

Blood was trickling down from Ivan's lips, as if he had bitten them.

Ivan wiped it away with the back of his hand, raised his hand to stop Carla, and said to Liam.

"You're pretty good, Liam."

Liam wasn't in much better shape.

The area around his cheekbone was already bruised and swollen, and Liam touched his cheek and grinned.

"You're pretty good yourself, Ivan. I thought all the men in the Empire were effeminate pretty boys. But you're not."

"That's a problematic statement, Liam."

Ivan relaxed his stance and smiled.

He no longer had any intention of fighting.

After all, they were classmates in the same class and would continue to see each other.

He had exchanged a few punches to satisfy Liam's competitive spirit, but Ivan had given Liam enough face, so that should be enough.

Liam seemed to be thinking the same thing, as he dusted off his clothes and relaxed his stance.

"You're pretty good, Ivan. I thought you were just a sly pretty boy, but you have a tough side too."

"Thanks for the compliment, Liam. You're strong too."

"Flattery…"

Liam clicked his tongue, but he was smiling.

This time, his eyes were smiling too.

"Elder Dremalo. I think that's enough. It would be a good ending before any bad feelings arise."

Dremalo, who had been watching from afar, laughed loudly and approached them.

His steps were so frivolous that he seemed to lack the dignity of a nobleman.

"It was a good match, both of you. To think that young friends already have this much ability, the future of the Empire is bright!"

"I'm not from the Empire. You know that, don't you?"

At Liam's words, Dremalo laughed even louder and patted Liam's arm.

"Yes, yes! That's right, of course! Anyway, what does it matter where you're from? The future is bright in any case!"

Carla, without listening to what Dremalo was saying, approached Ivan.

She had been watching him fight all along, and every time Ivan was hit by Liam's fist, which was as big as a pot lid, Carla had flinched.

Even if it was the old body that she could never return to, it would have hurt quite a bit to be hit by such a fist. Ivan must be in so much pain, having been hit by such a fist several times.

"Ivan, are you okay?"

"Oh."

Ivan looked at Carla and widened his eyes.

Then, his expression softened and a smile appeared.

"Are you worried about me now?"

"...What, worried? I'm just checking on your condition. You're even joking after being hit like that, so you seem fine."

Seeing Carla quickly become sulky, Ivan chuckled and shrugged.

Liam's fist was indeed painful—really, it hurt so much that his bones ached when he was hit.

And what about his abdomen? He felt as if he could still feel the tingling pain.

"Now, then, everyone, let's go back to the banquet hall for dessert!"

With Dremalo's shout, the vassals who had been watching rushed away.

While Carla was wiping the blood that had flowed from Ivan's lips, Ivan, after confirming that there was no one around, said to Carla in a small voice.

"My Magical Power was being interfered with. I'm sure of it."

"I don't notice anything strange. Is it just you?"

"Yeah. Just me. It's as if someone who knows my Magical Power signature well is subtly interfering with only me…"

"Someone who knows your signature and is interfering?"

Carla frowned.

So did Ivan.

The image that the two of them simultaneously thought of.

Could it really be…?

"...Wait, Carla."

Ivan grabbed Carla's wrist, which was wiping away the blood, and raised his eyes.

Carla's gaze followed his.

The woman standing there.

The woman who had appeared silently in a corner of this dojo, that woman.

The woman with white hair and red eyes, flashing eerily, was smiling at them.

"—Venere."

Carla reacted.

Ivan grabbed Carla's wrist as she tried to rush towards Venere.

"Ivan, let go."

"Shh."

Ivan looked around and raised his finger to Carla, telling her to calm down.

Whether Dremalo had intended it or not, he had led all the vassals, including Liam, to the dojo.

As if she had been waiting for it, Venere appeared in this dojo where only Ivan and Carla were left.

"You must have some ulterior motive, right?"

Ivan said to Venere.

Venere, who received the question, only wore a relaxed smile and approached them.

"Stop. I'll kill you if you come any closer."

Ivan said, putting Carla behind him.

Carla was in a furious rage, ready to tear Venere to pieces, but Ivan knew instinctively.

This Venere was the real one, not the Artificial body that Ivan had killed.

And Carla couldn't beat this woman.

"Long time no see, Ivan Contadino. And Carla Della Cascata."

"The fact that you dared to appear before me…!"

Carla's threatening voice was low.

"Shh. Brat. If you want revenge, get stronger first. What can you do against me when you couldn't even beat my Artificial body?"

She spat out the words with a cold sneer.

But Carla couldn't refute, with her lips tightly pressed together.

What she said wasn't entirely wrong—no, it was true.

"I'm just here as a spectator today. Ivan Contadino. I enjoyed your fight. Carla Della Cascata. How was it?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The Magical Power signature of Ivan that you sensed. It was the same this time, wasn't it?"

Only then did Carla realize why she hadn't sensed anything strange.

"That's right. That smoke, and the Magical Power signature of Ivan that I imitated. Carla, what you sensed wasn't Ivan's Magical Power signature. It was the Magical Power signature of Ivan that I imitated. It was perfect this time, wasn't it?"

"To be imitating things, what kind of Mage are you?"

"Shh, shh. Brat. You've become too arrogant after killing Lucas or whatever. I'd like to crush you a little, but now is not the time."

Ivan and Carla frowned and glared at Venere.

However, Venere maintained a relaxed attitude even as she received such fierce gazes.

"We'll see each other again soon. Survive until then, Ivan Contadino. …Or should I say."

But the words were not finished.

With a soft laugh, Venere's figure was fading.

"Something interesting will happen."

Fading, and finally disappearing.

Only that voice remained and lingered in the dojo.

Author's words (Author's note)

Venereee