# 92 - A Displeasing Banquet (4)

1. An Unpleasant Banquet (4)

How could she ever forget that sight?

Venere, who was a sworn enemy to Carla, to the point of appearing in her dreams even while she slept.

However, what tormented Carla even more was the fact that Venere's words were undeniably true.

— If you want revenge, then grow stronger and say it. What do you think you can do against me, someone who couldn't even defeat my artificial body?

Venere's words were not wrong.

Carla felt rage.

But at the same time, she was acutely aware of how shriveled she had become, to the point of being incomprehensible.

Her fingertips were cold.

Her body was clearly tense.

She should have been stomping her feet and charging in right at that moment.

But right now, she couldn't do that.

‘I am… afraid.’

A voice echoed from within her.

Carla instinctively tried to deny it. But.

The day her left arm was severed.

The moment she couldn't even feel what it meant to have her arm fall away.

No, to be precise, it was the day when, before she could even feel it, it was already no longer hers.

The sensation from that time surged up her body with startling clarity.

‘No, don’t remember. Don’t bring it up.’

That memory would only bind her, providing no help whatsoever.

She bit her lip.

Her youthful days, filled with fervor.

Fighting, smashing, and overpowering as her body moved and her emotions led her.

That was how she had lived.

‘Oh, oh… what a pathetic state I’m in…’

Even as she chastised herself, shaking off her fear was not easy.

Once fear is etched in, it lingers in the body, never fading away.

If someone were to sever an arm, it is only natural to instinctively shrink back.

“Carla, are you okay?”

Ivan grasped her hand.

Her hand trembled faintly.

So faintly, yet undeniably trembling.

The fact that it was noticed made Carla instinctively pull her hand away—more accurately, she tried to pull it away.

But Ivan did not let go.

Though his grip was not strong, it was not something she could easily shake off either.

“Your hand is shaking.”

“…I’m fine, just a little, a little…”

She didn’t want to say she was afraid.

She didn’t want to say it to Ivan of all people.

Now, she didn’t know why she was thinking that, but it was true.

At least to him.

“Venere, that woman is definitely up to something.”

Ivan no longer pried into her feelings.

Carla's breath quickened.

With a long exhale, she shook off her fear.

“I’ll go to the banquet hall first. Ivan, you should head back too. I have something to check.”

Carla did not realize that her hand no longer trembled as she spoke.

But Ivan could clearly feel it.

Until she stopped shaking, until she overcame her fear,

The reason he didn’t dig deeper was simply,

Merely,

Purely,

Curiosity towards Carla.

Hurrying back to the banquet hall, Carla realized that Dremalo was nowhere to be seen. She briefly searched for the absent Dremalo, but the absence felt somewhat unnatural, prompting her to change her plans.

“Excuse me, Lord Via Consta.”

The only man she had some acquaintance with, Georg Via Consta.

He was in the middle of a conversation with someone in the banquet hall when he abruptly cut off the dialogue and frowned at her intrusion. However, upon realizing it was Carla, he responded with a smile.

“Lady of Cascata, what brings you here?”

Carla was about to ask if he knew a woman named Venere, but she hesitated for a moment. Wasn’t she the woman who had been so discreetly revealed? There was a possibility he might not know, but there was also a chance he would deny knowing her even if he did. Moreover, if she directly asked if he knew her by name, it might raise his suspicions even more.

“…Do you know a woman with white hair and red eyes?”

“White hair and red eyes, you say?”

“Yes. She’s tall and like this…”

Georg was momentarily distracted by Carla's gesture, which showcased her voluptuous and alluring curves. However, if she had white hair and red eyes, she would certainly be a woman of striking presence, yet Georg had never seen such a woman in his memory.

“No, I don’t know her.”

Carla stared intently at Georg’s face. Was he lying, or did he genuinely not know? Although they had just met today, he didn’t seem to be the type skilled in this kind of deception, so he probably really didn’t know.

Carla turned away from Georg and scanned her surroundings.

In the process, she noticed individuals who appeared to be practitioners training in Magical Engineering, not guests of the banquet.

One figure, like Carmen, wore five layers of blue sashes on his sleeves.

That person stood near the entrance of the banquet hall, keeping a stern expression as they surveyed the area.

That’s the one.

Carla thought.

Given their stance, they seemed to be part of the banquet's security, so approaching them under the pretense of searching for someone would be a good strategy.

“Excuse me.”

“Yes, how can I help you?”

The man replied to Carla in a blunt tone.

His demeanor, focused on his duties, made Carla feel somewhat relieved.

“It seems the person I was supposed to meet hasn’t arrived yet. Could you check if they’re on the guest list?”

“May I ask for your name?”

“Carla Della Cascata.”

“Ah, Lady Cascata. Who is the person you were supposed to meet?”

The man picked up the guest list.

Good, having come this far, she had succeeded to some extent.

Carla internally cheered, maintaining a nonchalant expression as she answered the man.

“Venere.”

At that moment, Carla saw it.

The man’s hand, which had picked up the list, clearly flinched and trembled.

“…She’s not on the list. You might have mixed up the name, or she seems not to have come.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

The man closed the list as if to indicate he would no longer engage in conversation, crossing his arms and fixing his gaze straight ahead.

“Understood.”

Carla continued to search for others with blue sashes.

But one after another, they all coldly replied that there was no such name, that they didn’t know it.

‘They’re hiding something. This means she’s not just a simple intruder. It’s clear she’s connected to Magical Engineering.’

What on earth are they hiding?

What are Dremalo and, furthermore, Magical Engineering trying to do?

What kind of scheme are they concocting?

“Emil, have you filled your stomach?”

Liam plopped down loudly next to Emil, placing a plate on the table.

Emil glanced at the plate, filled only with meat and devoid of any greens, and looked up at Liam with a small sigh.

“I was just sitting quietly. I’m not in the mood to eat.”

“Really? You seem to be anxious about something. Look, Ivan and Carla are here too. You saw them fighting, right? That guy Ivan, his hands are so quick—”

“I didn’t see it.”

Emil shook his head in response.

I don’t want to fight, nor do I want to see it—he muttered quietly.

“Have you greeted Ivan and Carla?”

“No.”

“So you’ve just been sitting here?”

“Yeah.”

“The banquet is meant to be enjoyed. Why don’t you enjoy it a bit?”

Emil quietly watched Liam.

As Liam bit into a tomahawk steak with a crunch, Emil quietly stood up.

“Where are you going?”

“I just want to take a break. Enjoy yourself, Liam.”

“Sure, do that. You should rest well too.”

As soon as Emil turned away, Liam set down the tomahawk steak he had been holding.

Wiping his greasy hands on a cloth, Liam’s gaze remained fixed on Emil’s retreating figure.

‘…If he’s going to suffer alone like that, he might as well tell me. What on earth is he hiding, Emil?’

After wandering around for a while, turning suspicion into certainty, Carla found herself face to face with Dremalo, who was sitting alone and sipping from a wine glass.

Approaching Dremalo, who was casually sipping wine with a demeanor that didn’t quite match his goat-like beard, Carla bowed her head in greeting.

“You seem particularly busy today, Carla.”

Dremalo responded to her greeting while tilting his wine glass.

His tone seemed to imply that whatever she did was under his control, which irked Carla, but she slowly sat down in front of him and said.

“I thought I recognized someone among the guests you invited today.”

“Oh? You, the daughter of Cascata, know some of the performers from Magical Engineering?”

“Yes.”

“Who is it?”

“It’s Venere.”

Dremalo did not respond to Carla’s answer, which came without hesitation.

He twirled the wine glass in his hand, then finally tilted it, taking a sip of the golden wine.

“I don’t know of such a person. I haven’t invited any performers by that name.”

“Is that so? Then why do the guards of the banquet, the practitioners of Magical Engineering, pretend not to know when they hear that name?”

“Ah, is that so? It seems you’ve already checked. It appears my servants’ training has been lacking.”

“Then perhaps you could enlighten me, as someone who is lacking. I have a matter to resolve with that woman, Venere.”

It was a matter she could not resolve alone.

By force, though it was a bitter truth she didn’t want to acknowledge, she could not defeat Venere. Therefore, she needed to lure her into a place where she could not openly use force.

“Sounds like there’s some bad blood between you two? I heard you had a major incident at the academy. Is it related to that?”

‘Everyone seems to know. This must be something he orchestrated.’

“Yes.”

“Ah, I see… But, daughter of Cascata, not everything will go as you wish. You don’t need to know everything.”

The way he circled around the refusal to inform her was infuriating.

Carla gritted her teeth internally, but she couldn’t press Dremalo here.

That would never lead her to what she wanted.

Dremalo set down his empty wine glass on the table.

His gaze shifted to a point behind Carla.

Carla also turned to follow his gaze.

“Ah, here comes Ivan. Ivan, come over here.”

Ivan glanced at Dremalo’s call, then looked at Carla, who was sitting opposite him.

“Are you enjoying the banquet, Ivan? You’ve properly demonstrated your strength to us, and I couldn’t be happier.”

“Too kind.”

“Indeed, indeed… So, Ivan, would you care to join me for a cup of tea in my study for a moment?”

As soon as those words fell, Carla’s face hardened.

An inexplicable sense of unease and foreboding enveloped her.

‘I can’t let Ivan go alone.’

As that thought struck her, Carla spoke to Dremalo.

“May I join as well?”

“Is that really necessary? Ivan isn’t a child.”

“Since he came here under the name of Cascata, it wouldn’t be inappropriate for me to accompany him, would it?”

Dremalo stared at Carla quietly.

Carla met his gaze without backing down.

A moment of silence stretched on.

The long, intense gaze felt like an eternity.

“Very well. Then Carla, you should come along as well. It might be better that way.”

Now the main topic was about to begin.

Carla stood up and firmly grasped Ivan’s hand.

# 93 - A Dinner Party That Doesn't Sit Well

1. An Unpleasant Banquet (5)

A study is not a space that anyone can possess.

Bookshelves lining the walls, filled to the brim with books.

The master of this space, bearing the authority of those books on their back—only the head of the family can possess and use it, a symbol of authority that no one can enter without the head's permission.

Dremalo invited Ivan to that study.

And Carla as well.

Aufstieg's mansion boasts a scale comparable to that of the Cascata estate in terms of area.

The mansion, with its unique single-story structure, seemed to have its floors compressed vertically and spread out horizontally.

That was Carla's impression as she walked down the hallway leading to the study.

'He's definitely hiding something.'

Carla thought, glaring at Dremalo's back as he walked ahead.

What kind of wicked scheme is this rat-like bastard plotting?

Venere was spotted here, and the people of this Aufstieg estate are clearly hiding her. Among them, Dremalo didn't even seem to bother hiding it.

Carla was curious about what Dremalo was planning by calling Ivan to the study, and why he seemed so uncomfortable when Carla said she would accompany him.

Although with a slightly different focus, Ivan felt similarly.

As he followed Dremalo, Ivan diligently thought and pondered about what he would say, and considered near-perfect answers to Dremalo's words.

The hallway the three were walking through was bright thanks to the glowstones, but the shadows were also cast in deep darkness.

"Well, come in and make yourselves comfortable."

Dremalo, who had pushed open the stone door and entered, gestured for Ivan and Carla, who were following behind but had stopped near the entrance, to come in.

Although it was called a study, it was not as large as it seemed from the outside.

Candles flickered in the study instead of glowstones, and the bookshelves were not very large.

"Come on in. What are you standing there for?"

Dremalo maintained an air of complete composure.

He picked up a bottle of whiskey from a drinks cart next to the desk in the study, twirled the bottle, and looked back as he spoke.

"How about a drink? It's Cascata whiskey."

"I'll pass."

Carla shook her head.

They were not close enough to be drinking whiskey together after coming all this way.

"Hoh-ho, is that so."

Dremalo put the raised whiskey back down and sat on the sofa.

He raised his hand and beckoned.

The gesture was undoubtedly meant to call Ivan and Carla.

He was, after all, an elder—

Even if the gesture was somewhat unpleasant, it had meaning.

Carla and Ivan silently went to the sofa, sat down, and looked at him.

"Don't be so tense. Anyone would think I was going to eat you alive. I didn't call you here to have a stiff conversation. I just wanted to reduce the number of prying eyes."

"Then why don't you just tell us what you want to say?"

"Carla, you're as impatient as ever."

Dremalo reached out again and picked up the whiskey.

He extended his fingers again, and a glass floated over, and as he poured whiskey into the glass suspended in the air, Dremalo looked at Carla.

"Even though you hid your appearance, you couldn't hide your temperament. That's why you're so impatient. You're nothing like your father."

Carla closed her mouth.

Only after confirming that her momentum had waned did Dremalo look at Ivan.

"I'm sure you're wondering why I asked to see you?"

"To be honest, I am."

"Yes, yes… Well then, I'll get straight to the point. The reason I asked to see you is because I find you very interesting. Your skills and strength are outstanding, but there are other things I'm curious about besides those."

"If there's anything I can answer, I'll be happy to tell you."

Glug.

The amber whiskey flowed down Dremalo's throat.

But his gaze remained fixed on Ivan.

"You're a commoner, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you think there are no talented people among the commoners in this empire?"

"That's not true."

"The probability of a talented person appearing among the commoners versus the probability of a talented person appearing among the nobles—the former is naturally higher, isn't it?"

The difference starts with the numbers.

There are many times more commoners than nobles.

Even looking at the probabilities within the numbers, that is the case.

"But the reason why talented people among the commoners wither away without seeing the light is due to the lack of education. The nobles, including myself, don't want the commoners to become smart. They need to be stupid and lack educational opportunities. That's how it's easier for us."

Ivan couldn't understand what he was trying to say.

Ivan didn't know what to say to Dremalo, who was spouting nonsense.

"So I'm curious. You're a commoner, so how were you able to grow so quickly? Your mother died a long time ago, and your father… yes, that's right."

Glug.

Once again, the amber whiskey flowed down Dremalo's throat.

Even so, his gaze towards Ivan remained unchanged.

"You killed your father, didn't you?"

"Muu-"

Carla gasped and blurted out a loud noise.

It was the first time she had heard that—in fact, it was inevitable.

Carla had never been interested in Ivan's family affairs, so she was hearing for the first time here that Ivan had killed his father.

"The empire has many eyes and ears. You can assume there are no secrets. In that sense, your situation is the worst. So what is the reason that you, with Albina's help, were able to grow so quickly?"

Carla's eyes were trembling.

Parricide, that is something that can never be forgiven.

If Ivan had killed his father, Ivan would not have survived.

"...I didn't know that the head of the family had such a great interest in me."

"It's not that I became interested after finding out. It's that I found out because I became interested."

"In that case, I think you know even better."

Ivan gave a faint smile.

"The reason I was able to become strong, the reason I became strong. I don't know either. But in terms of the motivation, the help of the Cascata heiress here was significant."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"I see. So that's why you two are always together."

An expression that a secret had been solved.

Conversely, the fact that he was satisfied with this level of answer meant that the importance of this question was not high in the first place.

"So you can become a noble even without my help."

"But even if I suddenly become a noble, I don't think the other nobles would easily accept me, would they? I have no choice but to prove it with my skills."

Carla was in a complicated mood.

About Ivan, it felt like if she learned one thing, another thing would burst out.

If this was resolved, that would burst out, and if that was resolved, this would burst out.

If one thing was taken care of, another thing would, and if that was taken care of, yet another thing would.

What on earth is Ivan?

Even though she had known him for so long, there were still so many things she didn't know about Ivan.

"The order of the empire. What do you think is the reason it is maintained?"

"It is because His Majesty the Great Emperor realizes justice."

"You speak well, you know. I almost doubt you're a commoner."

"It's thanks to the Cascata heiress."

"A good excuse. Anyway, the order of the empire is maintained because those with strong power lead it. Yes, for example, powerful Mages. The Mage corps. But what if that balance is shaken?"

Around that point, Ivan and Carla realized at the same time.

Dremalo is testing Ivan.

Whether he will become a potential threat to the empire,

Or whether he will join the order led by this power.

"Isn't maintaining that balance the role of the nobles? I am just doing my best in the position given to me."

No sooner had Ivan finished speaking than Dremalo snorted.

He emptied the whiskey glass he was holding in one gulp and threw the glass away carelessly.

The glass, which should have flown backwards and tumbled, hovered in the air and returned to its place as if nothing had happened.

"Then I'll make you an offer. Our Aufstieg will support you."

At those words, Carla's body stiffened.

She actually trusts Ivan—no, she wants to trust him.

According to her extremely imperialistic notions, Ivan should become her spouse. From a common-sense perspective, she never thought she would be involved with a man around the time her gender changed, but now that things have come to this, she has no other choice but to have her Virginity defiled.

Dremalo couldn't possibly know that—although he was the kind of person who would have made the offer even if he did know.

Then the choice was passed to Ivan.

"A talent like you can certainly become the wings of this Aufstieg. It's good to receive a noble title from Cascata, but think carefully. Cascata, already on a solid foundation. Aufstieg, which can look towards higher places. Which one is better for you?"

Carla couldn't stand it any longer.

If Ivan were to waver, something big would happen.

"Elder, your words are too much! No matter what, I, the eldest daughter of Cascata, am here, so what are you saying?!"

Carla burst into anger.

But Dremalo only gave a relaxed smile even when he saw her like that.

"Does it matter? Did I insult Cascata? The words 'on a solid foundation' wouldn't be an insult. Then Carla, does your getting so angry mean that Cascata has not yet reached a solid foundation?"

"That's…!"

That's not it… but.

"I, Ivan, as a member of Cascata, wi, wi, wi, will marry me and become a member of the nobility! I understand that you covet Ivan, Elder, but you cannot change a path that has already been decided!"

Dremalo chuckled.

A more intense reaction than he had expected.

"As expected, like father, like daughter. So passionate and hot-tempered, just the same. Do you really think it's best for Ivan to live as a noble… a petty noble?"

"...Did you just say petty noble?"

Carla was speechless.

What on earth is this old man saying?

It was then.

Behind Dremalo, the bookshelf.

The bookshelf split in half, revealing a fairly large door.

When the surprised Carla turned her gaze there, the door opened—

"—You!"

Carla couldn't help but shout in rage, forgetting even Dremalo.

White hair, and red eyes.

The woman with a mocking smile approached with a coquettish gait and stood next to Dremalo.

"Oh, you came at a good time. Venere, would you explain?"

"Shall I?"

Ivan's expression didn't change much.

As if he already knew she was there.

Venere looked back and forth between Carla and Ivan.

Then, with a smile in her red eyes, she said.

"Didn't I tell you? That something interesting would happen. Giving you the choice is a very big consideration. Such an opportunity will never come again. So think carefully and choose. This is the last hand I'm offering you."

Ssae-aek—A smile reappeared at the corner of her lips.

"Ivan Contadino… and Carla Della Cascata."

Author's Note

There are no updates on weekends...

I have a cold...

My nose is running even when I'm just breathing

# 94 - A Dinner Party That Doesn't Sit Well

1. An Unpleasant Banquet (6)

The atmosphere began to freeze rapidly.

In the study, a silence hung thick, as if a cold chill had settled, and no one dared to speak.

Venere's words, carelessly thrown out, no longer reached Carla's ears.

Carla struggled to suppress the urge to lunge at her, while Ivan glared at Venere, pondering the intentions of those present.

“How dare you, how dare you...”

Carla's monologue escaped her lips, unable to be contained any longer.

Her tightly clenched fist trembled, revealing that her patience and self-control were nearing their breaking point.

However, Venere, facing that fury, looked down at Carla with an air of calm.

“Carla, calm down.”

Ivan's large hand covered Carla's fist.

The warmth of that hand somewhat quelled Carla's boiling anger.

“Indeed. Your patience is better than I expected, Ivan. Exceeding my expectations.”

Dremalo shook his glass, looking at Ivan.

The amber whiskey swirled and rippled in the glass.

“Do you understand now, Ivan? Why I took an interest in you?”

Ivan and Carla's gazes naturally shifted from Venere to Dremalo.

What was he about to say? An unspoken look urged Dremalo to continue.

“There are commoners aplenty, enough to be trampled underfoot. If I were to compare, they are as numerous as pebbles by the roadside. But someone like you, capable of rational judgment and endowed with strength and talent, is rare even among the nobility—”

“Oh my, my lord. It’s not such a simple matter, is it?”

Venere moved behind Dremalo.

Placing her hand on his shoulder, she whispered with a smile.

“You shouldn’t say that Ivan is ordinary—after all, it’s not the commoners that matter.”

“Right, right. Then let’s hear from you, Venere. An old man like me will step back.”

“Shall I?”

Dremalo took a sip of whiskey, signaling his consent.

“Now… Ivan. Ivan Contadino. You are mistaken. You know it yourself. You are not ordinary.”

Venere's gaze turned to Ivan.

Ivan merely met her gaze without speaking.

What standard should define what is not ordinary?

Is it the memory of a past life that Ivan possesses?

Is it the extraordinary strength that Ivan has?

Is it the uncommon talent that Ivan holds?

“I’m merely giving you an opportunity, Ivan Contadino. The radiance of Cascata is undoubtedly powerful, but that doesn’t guarantee it’s the best path for you. The girl beside you? Of course, she’s a good woman. I know that too.”

Carla flinched.

Venere's gaze felt like a snake, slithering over her, leaving a chilling sensation.

“But you will have the chance to embrace even better women in the future. Perhaps it’s not just a chance, but a certain future.”

Lord Cascata will try to stop you.

He will fulfill his duty to protect this empire.

But I don’t want that—one dagger against the one who holds my heart hostage is acceptable, isn’t it?

Swallowing that unspeakable monologue, Venere spoke.

“Ivan Contadino. You have already stepped onto this path. No matter how much you struggle, you cannot change its course. This Aufstieg will clear the way for you as you run down that path. Come to us.”

— Bang!

The table shook violently.

Carla, who had been listening with her mouth tightly shut, could no longer contain herself and slammed her hand down on the table.

“Don’t be ridiculous! You can’t decide who Ivan will be with…!”

Her eyes blazed with fury.

Carla's anger was directed squarely at Venere.

“I don’t know what schemes you’re plotting…! But I won’t deny that it’s clearly treason against our empire!”

“Oh my, oh my… what a foolish girl.”

Venere laughed, her eyes narrowing.

Each word dripped with contempt and hatred directed at Carla.

“I meant to say that I’m opening a path for Ivan to serve our empire. Instead of a place that is nearly in decline, wouldn’t it be better to establish a pillar called Contadino?”

“That’s!”

It must refer to Bricone.

Bricone has become the smallest house in recent times.

So small that it’s somewhat ambiguous to even call it a great noble house.

“Now, now, this isn’t the time for emotional disputes. And Carla, this isn’t a place for a woman to intervene. You’re not even married yet, are you? Hmm?”

At Dremalo’s words, Carla stared at him blankly.

Does he think that marriage or anything like that is a valid reason?

“Even if you were to marry, it wouldn’t look good for you to try to control your husband rather than offer him advice, Carla.”

“What…”

“Ivan.”

Dremalo was no longer looking at Carla.

Instead of the furious Carla, he turned to Ivan and spoke.

“Ivan. What choice will you make? Have you firmly decided to become a part of Cascata? Or will you walk the path that should have been yours, one that is greater, freer, and filled with glory?”

Ivan did not answer.

Dremalo and Venere.

The words they uttered were laden with ambiguous meanings.

Would you be satisfied with merely being a part of Cascata,

Or would you walk the path already laid out for you, ultimately becoming one of the pillars of the empire?

If not—will you take Aufstieg’s hand and claim the throne that was originally yours?

‘In the latter case… it’s not something he would say knowingly.’

Ivan already knew his identity.

On the day he recalled that memory, he killed his self as a commoner.

He no longer needed the self that had no value, like a pebble by the roadside or a bug on a leaf.

The emperor of a vast empire.

The last emperor.

This empire that was meant to be rightfully his—

He knows he can do nothing alone.

Knowing this, he simply waited.

“Ivan.”

Carla tightly grasped Ivan’s hand, lost in thought.

When he turned his head slightly, he found Carla looking at him.

In her violet eyes was a desperate plea.

There was no faith directed at Ivan.

She knew that faith could not exist without a basis.

“Ivan, Ivan… you are a person of Cascata. Right…?”

“Carla.”

“By my side, next to me. We must choose the path we will walk. You cannot waver here… never, never…!”

The moment Ivan chooses Aufstieg, Carla’s life becomes entangled.

If she follows him to Aufstieg, Carla must also go to Aufstieg.

If not, she must remain in Cascata, having lost her purity.

Ivan’s choice will profoundly affect the rest of Carla’s life—this situation, which is desperate for Carla.

“Don’t waver here, Ivan… never, never do that…!”

It was the first time Ivan saw such a desperate expression on Carla’s face.

Surprised by her expression, Ivan found himself at a loss for words.

“Oh, look at this. Emotions are running high, aren’t they?”

Venere’s voice flowed between the two.

It was a voice filled with mockery and derision.

“Carla Della Cascata. How amusing it is to see that arrogant girl clinging to a man.”

Carla did not respond to the mockery.

She merely gazed at Ivan with a desperate look.

Venere sighed softly, then clapped her hands together twice.

“Alright, Ivan Contadino. You don’t need to answer right now. We are very merciful. We’ll give you time. But that time won’t be long. The door to Aufstieg won’t remain open for long.”

Dremalo also set his whiskey glass down and returned to his original position.

Taking a small breath, Dremalo spoke.

“This is where the story ends. If you want to hear more details, feel free to come by anytime. Aufstieg will be open for you.”

With those final words, Dremalo stood up.

Venere also looked at Ivan, then turned back to Carla.

“You should think carefully too, Carla Della Cascata. If you get swept away by emotions, you’ll end up missing what’s truly important.”

With a clenched fist, Carla glared at Venere as Dremalo and Venere slowly turned to leave.

It was Ivan’s voice that stopped them.

“How interesting, this proposal.”

“Have you made your decision?”

Dremalo turned back, and Venere merely glanced at Ivan.

“I have made my decision.”

“Is that so? Then I’ll prepare the documents right away…”

“There’s no need for that.”

“Ivan!… Huh?!”

Carla’s voice was filled with joy.

Yet that joy was also tinged with confusion.

Ivan’s hand wrapped around Carla’s waist, pulling her close.

“It’s amusing to say that the path Aufstieg can pave is one that Cascata cannot, and that I can embrace a better woman than Carla.”

Ivan was smiling.

But his eyes were not smiling.

“Both are wrong. Cascata has already paved the main road, and there is no better woman than Carla in this empire. If you wish to make a proposal, you should bring a princess. But the current royal family doesn’t even have an heir, do they? So it doesn’t hold.”

Is he mad? Dremalo thought, but he refrained from voicing it.

“I will choose my own path. I don’t need the road you pave for me.”

Dremalo was taken aback by such an audacious response, but soon returned to a smiling face.

“Good, good. I understand your choice well. Just don’t regret it later.”

“Regret is something that always happens. There’s no one who doesn’t regret. Elder, and Venere. You will also regret it.”

Ivan smiled brightly.

His eyes were also smiling.

# 95 - A Displeasing Banquet (7)

1. An Unpleasant Banquet (7)

If his steps were tense when heading to the study, they were now filled with contemplation as he returned from it.

Carla felt a heavy weariness pressing down on her.

Mental fatigue, as opposed to physical exhaustion, was a considerable burden for her, as she had little resistance in that area.

"Carla, are you alright?"

"...I'm alright."

Carla could only reply in a weak voice to Ivan's question.

Even as she walked down the hallway leading out of the study, Carla was lost in thought.

She couldn't figure out what was going on.

Dremalo, who tried to win her over with straightforwardness rather than the roundabout way of speaking typical of nobles, and Venere's nonsensical babbling that suddenly appeared there.

And even herself, who tried to prevent Ivan from going to Aufstieg, even though her life depended on it.

The hallway, which had seemed so long, was quickly traversed.

As they left the building where the study was located, a gust of wind, now imbued with the chill of the night, caressed their faces.

"I don't really feel like going straight back to the banquet hall. Let's sit for a while. I'm tired too."

"...Okay."

There was no reason to refuse.

Too much had happened today, Carla was tired, and she needed to sort out the jumbled mess in her head right now.

Ivan and Carla sat side by side on a garden path with a few small wooden chairs.

"A lot happened today, Carla."

"Yeah."

"You've had a lot on your mind."

"You're the one who did the fighting."

Ivan was the one who had suffered the most.

Because of Dremalo's sudden spite, Ivan had to fight twice.

And he was injured.

"...Ivan."

"Yeah."

Carla looked up at Ivan.

Ivan was also looking at her, and the cold silver moonlight shone on his face.

His face was so radiant.

Perhaps it was the moonlight, but his face looked so clear.

"Do you... regret it?"

She hesitated a lot about whether to ask.

She had brought him into Cascata, but in fact, Dremalo's words were not entirely wrong.

The power structure in Cascata was already firmly established.

Carla had given up her position as the heir, and declared her abandonment of the succession.

Her younger brother, Fabio, would be the next head of the family, so Ivan, who would be with Carla, could not play a central role in Cascata.

In some ways, Aufstieg might be a better choice.

Emil would be the next head of Aufstieg, but Emil was not even able to properly use Family Magic yet.

Dremalo had directly expressed his desire for Ivan, so if Ivan continued to grow at his current pace, he would become so strong that Emil could not even be compared to him.

Even if he was not connected by blood and could not become a central figure in Aufstieg, it would be a much larger, more important, and heavier position than he could hold in Cascata... Perhaps Aufstieg could really push out the Bricone and allow the Contadino to become a new pillar...

'No, no. Cascata can do that too.'

But no.

What Dremalo of Aufstieg was directly promoting was different from what Carla was promoting.

And her father, Enrico, didn't seem like he would help with that.

"Regret? Regret what?"

Ivan looked at Carla and asked back.

He already knew what she was talking about.

"...Rejecting Aufstieg's offer."

"Ah, that."

Ivan sighed deeply instead of answering.

"I don't... regret it."

"Why?"

"It's no fun just walking on a path that someone else has paved. A man paves his own way. Isn't that right?"

"What's with that? You're saying something Liam would say."

Carla chuckled at that, and Ivan smiled back.

He thought it was something Liam would say too.

"I'm going to walk on my own two feet. Following a path that someone else has paved isn't my style."

"Yeah... If that's the case, then I'm relieved."

What was she relieved about?

Carla didn't understand the meaning of her own words.

And—

One more thing.

Carla had something else she wanted to ask Ivan.

Dremalo and Venere's words that he had killed his own father.

Carla wanted to ask Ivan if it was true.

But she couldn't bring herself to say it.

If it was really true, what should Carla say?

To Ivan, what had his father done to make him do such a thing?

"That I killed my father. That's what you want to ask, right?"

Carla was startled by Ivan's words, as if he had seen through her inner thoughts.

Since she had already been caught, and he wouldn't believe her even if she denied it, she slowly nodded.

"That's true. I killed my father. Because if I didn't, I would have died."

"That's..."

"I'll tell you about it later. It's not a memory I want to recall right now. More than that, Carla, are you alright?"

Carla just stared at Ivan, who was asking her back.

She didn't immediately understand what he meant by "alright."

"Venere. That woman must be a big wound for you."

Carla bit her lip tightly.

Her right hand was caressing her left shoulder.

The left arm she had lost to Venere.

The left arm she had gotten back from Ivan.

When she remembered that time, Carla would tremble again.

More than the pain, it was because of the frustration and helplessness that remained after her left arm disappeared.

"...I'll never forget it. Even if it's difficult now, I'll get my revenge."

There was a subtle tremor in Carla's voice as she said that.

Ivan noticed it, of course, but he didn't bother to add anything.

He didn't think it was necessary to do so.

The banquet hall, which they had returned to, had a much more relaxed atmosphere than when Ivan and Carla had left.

The tense confrontation was over, and Dremalo, the most stressful presence in this place, was now gone.

The visitors who had come were indulging in alcohol and food in a relaxed atmosphere, each with a comfortable expression as they chatted.

"Liam is still here."

"Liam was invited too. He'll probably stay until the end of the event."

Perhaps because of Dremalo's absence, even the expressions of the people were relaxed.

Just as there would be no tension in a prairie without a lion, the banquet hall with moderate drinking was peaceful and tranquil.

"Yo! Ivan!"

Liam, who saw Ivan and Carla entering the banquet hall, shouted loudly and waved his hand.

Some of the nobles were surprised and looked at them, but their gazes soon turned elsewhere.

"It's a little embarrassing when you shout so loudly, Liam."

Ivan, who quietly moved and sat next to Liam, chided him.

It was a scolding, but Liam didn't seem to care at all, laughing loudly and thumping Ivan on the back.

"Is that so? I'm sorry about that. Anyway, I'm having so much fun today. The Empire guys, maybe because they're from the rear, are all so delicate that I wasn't having any fun."

"Then you must have had fun today."

"That's right, it was so much fun. I'll definitely win next time!"

"Then you'll have to train harder."

Ivan said to Liam as he accepted the plate of cookies that Carla handed him.

Liam took a cookie from the plate, crunched it loudly, and said to Ivan.

In a very small voice, just loud enough for Ivan to hear.

"So, did you refuse?"

A sudden remark.

But even without context, it was easy to understand.

Ivan narrowed his eyes and turned to look at Liam.

He already knew that Liam was friendly with Dremalo.

That meant he might also be connected to Venere.

"What?"

"Aufstieg's recruitment offer. Did you refuse?"

"How did you know that?"

Ivan silently raised his Magical Power.

He had already learned that Liam was friendly with Dremalo.

That meant he might also be connected to Venere.

"There's no need to react so fiercely, friend. If you think about it, it's a simple matter."

Liam pointed to his head with his finger and said.

"Your talent, your strength, and your skill. It was a place to show that off to the fullest. If Dremalo called you out separately after that, the story is a natural conclusion. Aufstieg would become your backing, and that offer would follow."

Ivan didn't answer.

He could think that far.

What he was curious about was how he knew that Ivan had refused.

"And you came back alone. If Dremalo acted according to his personality, he would have come back with you and bragged about it all over town. Wouldn't he? So you refused."

Ivan quietly nodded.

Liam crunched another cookie and pointed his chin at Carla.

"Besides, if you had accepted, there's no way that Carla would be so quiet. One of the Aufstieg buildings would have collapsed."

Carla, who was busy diligently refilling Ivan's plate with cookies so that they wouldn't run out, didn't even hear what Liam and Ivan were talking about.

"So you refused, that's my conclusion. Am I right?"

"...Yeah, you're right."

Ivan nodded in agreement.

"Well, Cascata is better than Aufstieg anyway. Your choice is a good choice, Ivan."

That was it.

Liam didn't say anything more about it.

Ivan was actually curious about Liam.

On the surface, he was just a big bear, but now he saw that he was quick-witted and had good judgment.

A strange curiosity and wariness towards Liam was revealed in Ivan's eyes.

Author's Note

The contest announcement is out

I'm thinking of participating, but I haven't decided on a topic yet

These days, "farming" is popular, so I was wondering if I should write another "farming" story

Isn't the age gap of twelve years just right? They say you don't even need to check the compatibility for a twelve-year age gap (just saying)

An innocent young groom

Goes through puberty and becomes a bit prickly

Reveals his jealousy towards other men approaching the beautiful older woman

Realizes that the older woman is all grown up (actually for another reason) and is relieved that he's the only one for her

Thinks that she waited for him to become an adult (at this point, it's no longer a delusion but a fact) and proposes to her in a cool way...

This is it, really

# 96 - A Dinner Party That Doesn't Sit Well

1. An Unpleasant Banquet (8)

Though it wasn't exactly an enjoyable banquet, at least for Carla and Ivan, as time passed, those who left the banquet hall one by one wore bright smiles.

Those who had enjoyed themselves enough left the banquet hall with formal greetings and headed home, and after about half of the people had left, Carla and Ivan also stood up to return.

"Staying the night would be fine, but are you thinking of returning as you are?"

"Yes, Elder."

It was Dremalo's suggestion, as he had returned to the banquet hall in the meantime, but Carla shook her head, rejecting the offer.

There was no reason to stay, and even if there were, she would refuse with all sorts of excuses, so it was only natural.

"Ivan, are you going back already?"

"Yes, there's no need to stay any longer."

Ivan nodded at Liam's question.

"Quite the early return. Do you need some time alone?"

A word that pierced Carla's ear as she returned to Ivan, away from Dremalo.

Before Ivan could answer, Carla interjected.

"Don't talk nonsense, Liam."

Carla's expression, with her eyes wide open, was fierce.

Moreover, her tone had risen slightly, so Liam involuntarily raised both hands and took a step back.

"Isn't it so? You get along so well at the academy, it's easy to misunderstand."

"You're being too obvious, Liam. It sounds like you're jealous."

Liam shrugged with an exaggerated gesture at Ivan's retort with a smirk.

"Me? Jealous? That's nonsense, Ivan. I hate headstrong girls like Carla. I like demure girls. Like Emil, for example."

"...Emil?"

Carla, who had been narrowing her eyes and openly expressing her displeasure at the words "headstrong girl," widened her eyes at the mention of Emil.

"Why Emil all of a sudden?"

"Ah, it's just an example. I mean, if we're just talking about personality, someone like Emil. Gentle, discreet, and demure."

...Is Emil like that?

When Carla thought about it, it was certainly true.

Emil was so quiet and docile that it was strange for a male student.

If he had been a young lady with that kind of personality, he would have been quite popular.

"Anyway, be careful on your way back. I don't know if you're going back to Cascata from here, or back to the academy."

"Yeah, you be careful too, and see you later."

"Get going."

The two got into the carriage, seeing Liam off.

Closing the carriage door, Carla tapped on the inner window, and the carriage quietly began to move.

She thought she had glimpsed Emil for a moment, but she must have been mistaken.

\*

There had been quite a few things happening, and they were all noisy and chaotic.

Leaning deeply into the carriage seat, Carla closed her eyes and replayed the events of the day, while Ivan sat next to her, looking straight ahead.

There is no woman better than Carla in this empire. If you want to make me an offer, bring me a princess. But you don't even have an heir, do you? So it won't work.

Carla's memory, replaying the past with her eyes closed, finally reached that point.

'...That guy is ridiculous, really.'

It's absurd.

There is no woman better than Carla in the empire.

If you want to make an offer, bring me a princess.

But the imperial family doesn't even have a princess, let alone an heir, so it can't be established...

In other words, Carla is to Ivan as much as a princess, so, so...

'So, so, so precious...'

That's what it means.

In fact, she was too flustered at the time to pay attention to it, but now that she thought about it, it was a really embarrassing thing to say.

Isn't it saying that she's a woman so good that she can't be compared to anyone but a princess!

To say such a thing so casually in front of those two people, without even changing his expression, how shameless...

'Sha, um, sha, it's not exactly shameless... It's not like he said anything wrong.'

No, isn't that so?

In fact, he didn't say anything wrong.

It was embarrassing to say it herself now, but Carla was aware of herself. In terms of appearance alone, she was truly overwhelming—a beauty who would catch the eye wherever she went, and that was not limited to her face, but included her overall figure, in all aspects of her appearance.

So Ivan didn't say anything wrong. Besides, Ivan had even been intimate with her. It could be said that her body was what had tied that crazy guy down, so she could be a little more proud of herself...

'...What am I thinking?'

Even so, to be thinking about this, she must be tired. Since it was still quite a long way to go, Carla closed her eyes, thinking that she should first return to the Cascata mansion for a night and then return to the academy.

Meanwhile, Ivan was looking at Carla's profile.

He didn't know what she was thinking, but it was quite amusing to watch her face turn red and then back to normal, then bright red again and then back to normal.

'Is she sleeping?'

But her face was changing so quickly, so it didn't seem like it.

However, in the meantime, Carla's breathing gradually became even.

'She's asleep.'

Carla's breathing was quite even, so it wasn't difficult to tell if she was sleeping. Moreover, her head, leaning against the seat, was shaking slightly with her breathing.

Ivan thought as he looked at Carla's sleeping face.

Carla, who had dissuaded him when he was worried about the Aufstieg's recruitment offer.

'She had a very desperate look on her face.'

Carla, clinging to Ivan as if the world was ending.

She probably doesn't knowㅡ if she did, she would have reacted by now.

'She's always so overbearing, but she doesn't hate being with me, does she?'

Ivan had a strange feeling.

For him, being with someone was quite an unfamiliar sensation.

In his previous life, he was in the high position of emperor, so it was natural that he had no one to open his heart to, and until he was caught up in a coup and died, he was called a mad emperor and was evaluated as a foolish and tyrannical ruler.

And as for Ivan himself, he was nothing more than a commoner, so it was even more so.

'There is no woman better than Carla... huh.'

Carla is nothing more than a target for him to exploit.

A woman who is merely a stepping stone to get closer to a higher place, literally the imperial family of the current empire.

But the fact that such a woman showed such desperation to Ivan, and that he, too, said that there was no woman better than Carla, and cut it off so decisively, believing it to be true at that moment, aroused a rather strange feeling.

Because that was something that he, too, really, truly believed and said.

It was then.

* Thump.

The carriage shook with quite a large impact, as if it had hit a rock.

That was the only moment it shook, and after that, the carriage ran smoothly again, but Ivan froze for a moment because of Carla, who was leaning on his shoulder and sleeping.

'Oh...'

Carla leaning on his shoulder.

But she was still asleep, and she didn't move.

Even her even breathing remained the same, so he wondered what he should do.

'Should I wake her up? It would be nice to let her sleep like this. But if I wake her up, she'll be grumpy, which is annoying.'

It's more uncomfortable than you think to fall asleep with your head leaning on your shoulder, so Ivan thought that Carla would wake up on her own and sit up straight.

But because Carla seemed like she would be like this for longer than he thought, maybe even forever, Ivan gradually became concerned about her.

Quiet breathing.

Unlike her usual sharp, grumpy, and fierce self, like a snarling kitten, her quiet and peaceful appearance with her eyes closed.

Ivan found it unfamiliar, unlike usual.

'She's always been so fierce and temperamental, but she's so quiet like this...'

Carla's face as he looked down at her.

Her eyebrows were well-groomed, and her sharp nose was flawless.

He couldn't see her lips well, but they must be dyed red.

'Her appearance...'

He had to say it was truly amazing.

"Um...Ivan..."

Whether it was sleep-talking or simply uncomfortable.

Carla moved her head and leaned on Ivan in a more comfortable position, muttering his name.

Thanks to that, Ivan was startled.

He felt his heart drop.

He must be dreaming, but he was curious about the content of the dream.

What kind of dream was she having that made her call his name so plaintively?

But apart from Ivan's questions, Carla was just sound asleep and showed no signs of waking up.

'She must be sleep-talking... Would she get angry if I asked her what kind of dream she had?'

"What are you doing... Ivaaan..."

Her cat-like, venomous self.

Her cat-like, sharp self.

But at this moment, her cat-like self, seeking warmth and burrowing in.

Because of her burrowing into Ivan's side, Ivan couldn't even adjust his posture and had to give her his side.

Before he knew it, the carriage entered the Cascata mansion territory, and the shadow of the mansion began to appear far away.

Ivan moved his arm slightly and wrapped it around Carla's shoulder.

It would be okay to give her his side so she could sleep a little more comfortably.

That much, probably, would be okay.

Author's Note

I thought the contest was from April, so I had plenty of time, but when I looked at the calendar, today was March 5th.

Not much time left...

# 97 - A Dinner Party That Doesn't Sit Well

Here is the English translation of the Korean novel excerpt:

1. An Unpleasant Banquet (9)

Carla and Ivan returned to the academy on Sunday evening.

They barely made it back just before the dormitory headcount, and only after reporting their presence to the dorm supervisor did they have a chance to catch their breath.

"That was close."

"Yeah."

The two sprawled on the sofa knew it was time to get ready for bed.

Carla got up first, heading to the closet and taking off her jacket.

She took out a wooden hanger from the closet, hung up her jacket, and put it away. Carla began unbuttoning her blouse from the top down.

With each button undone, her compressed breasts sprang free as if finally liberated.

Milky white, soft breasts. Her large breasts, too big to be fully contained by a bra, swayed and threatened to spill out of her blouse.

'They're so heavy, really.'

Having big breasts is only enjoyable for others. It's only good for other people. And among others, only men enjoy it.

For the one who actually has to carry these breasts, it really makes her shoulders and back ache, and sometimes even causes headaches.

So in the end, such large breasts only serve to please others. And it's not like she can reduce their size either.

With those thoughts, Carla sighed as she finished unbuttoning her blouse. What can't be changed, can't be changed.

"Eek?!"

Carla let out a foolish scream as she was about to hang up her blouse. Suddenly, hands appeared from behind, roughly groping her large breasts.

"Hey, hey...! Let go! It hurts, I said it hurts!"

The owner of those hands was already familiar to Carla. In fact, there was only one other person in this room besides her.

"You crazy...! Let go, will you?!"

"It's fine, Carla. Don't you really like it?"

Ivan's voice whispered in her ear. Along with a puff of warm breath, his teasing made Carla frown deeply.

It's not like he'll stop just because she says not to. And it's not like her resistance would work anyway.

But simply submitting would hurt her pride, so Carla shook off Ivan's hands that were roughly kneading her breasts and turned around sharply.

* Chu.

As if waiting for her to turn around, Ivan's lips covered Carla's.

Mucous membranes met, and warm breaths mingled between them. The corners of Ivan's eyes crinkled in a smile, and seeing that smile, Carla felt her strength draining away even more from the sensation on her lips.

"...Alright, alright. At least after we wash up...eek?!"

Carla's scream rang out. Without even listening to the end of her sentence, Ivan scooped her up in his arms.

She looked quite ridiculous. Still wearing her skirt, but only underwear on top.

Though Carla was struggling and demanding to be put down, Ivan ignored her cries and carried her to the bed.

What a fine woman she is. Truly an incredible woman.

Even as he laid her on the bed and trapped her between his arms like a prison, looking down at her, she didn't lose her spirit.

Rather, she glared up at him with fierce eyes, silently asking what he thought he was doing.

"It's because you're too attractive. I can't hold back anymore."

While keeping Carla pinned down, Ivan sat up and threw off his jacket. The jacket landed haphazardly on the floor, followed by his shirt fluttering down.

His torso, finely sculpted with lean muscles like a statue, was truly manly.

"It's your fault, Carla. You're so attractive that I can't control myself."

"That doesn't make any sen-mmph."

Ivan silenced her sassy retort with his mouth. Though she glared at him with eyes full of complaint, she contradictorily didn't pull her lips away.

He found that Carla amusing. What an interesting woman she was.

"You, really, listen to-mmh."

The lips that left her mouth moved to her jaw, then her neck. Chu, chup, chook.

As a faint heat began to flow in her breaths, Carla quietly closed her eyes. Ivan's lips trailing across her skin felt so vivid.

Ivan, now familiar to her. A body now accustomed to lovemaking between man and woman.

As if to show that her body was no longer hers alone, Ivan had pulled down her bra at some point and was now licking the erect nipple at its peak.

"Ah, mm..."

How could breasts so large be this sensitive? Ivan found it a bit fascinating. With just a bit of stimulation, Carla's nipples stood proudly erect, flaunting their presence.

As he gently nibbled and sucked on one nipple, his other hand kneaded her other breast.

The soft, smooth flesh overflowing between his fingers was enough to drive one mad.

"Haa, haaa..."

Heavy breaths, a heated voice. Ivan felt he could become addicted to the sound of Carla's sighs.

"Not resisting anymore?"

Ivan asked with a smile as he lifted his mouth from Carla's nipple. But his hands still didn't leave her breasts.

"...Would you stop if I resisted?"

Ivan shook his head at Carla's question.

"No."

One thing Carla didn't want to admit was that she had begun to feel pleasure from this act.

That pleasure was so intense and powerful that she could neither reject it nor endure it. Moreover, as she became immersed in the pleasure, her magical power would rise unbidden and lightning would spark, making her body even more sensitive.

"Ah, don't..."

Carla's voice became pleading. Ivan's hand traced up the curved center of her panties. A lewd sound followed that touch.

"At, at least let me take off my clothes..."

Her fingers clutched at her skirt hem. He wouldn't even let her remove her skirt, instead making her lift it herself, as if forcing her to expose her own underwear.

Her face felt like it was on fire from embarrassment. Carla, so unlike herself, even begged Ivan, but he just shook his head with a smile.

"No, Carla. We're doing it like this today."

Looking down, it was truly a spectacular sight. Her upper body completely bare, exposing her breasts with pink nipples standing erect. And with her arms naturally pressed together as she lifted her own skirt, her breasts were pushed up even more prominently.

And her gray panties, the center now soaked dark.

Ivan felt his chest tighten as he looked down at that sight. To think that Carla, once so proud and haughty, so noble and aloof, was now lying here exposed like a female animal, with such a shameful expression.

Ivan stood up with a leisurely smile and took off his pants. The carelessly tossed pants were followed by his underwear.

Glistening drops of clear fluid beaded at the tip of his reddened glans. He grasped it and rubbed it lightly against the darkened spot on Carla's panties.

"Mm, mmh...!"

Her face was already flushed. Carla squeezed her eyes shut and bit her lip, trying her best to hold back her moans. But it wasn't so easy, and plaintive sounds still escaped from her lips.

Ivan found it amusing. Though this was his first experience with a woman's body, he thought himself lucky that it was with Carla.

"What are you...trying to do!"

Carla was getting irritated. Not only was all this teasing annoying, but being toyed with by Ivan hurt her pride.

"Then Carla, why don't you try getting revenge on me?"

"...No!"

That was the final line she could draw. She didn't want to do anything for Ivan of her own accord.

It was unavoidable that Ivan would continue to toy with her body until he was satisfied. Women of the Empire were meant to live that way, and Carla was no exception to that custom.

But one last shred of pride within her - though it may not even deserve to be called pride - was blocking that, saying it absolutely could not be done.

To caress Ivan first, that much, at least that much, absolutely...!

"Hnnggh!"

Carla thrashed like a fish out of water. Pushing her panties aside, Ivan's cock thrust its head into her wet, slick pussy.

"Haa...hoo."

Ivan let out a long sigh. Despite countless times of lovemaking, he still couldn't get used to this moment.

Unlike her proud and haughty exterior, Carla's deep insides that he plunged into were warm and unbelievably soft. As if welcoming him, they gently embraced him, making wet sucking sounds as if trying to pull in his cock.

Ivan unconsciously thrust his large cock deep into Carla's pussy, filling her completely without any gaps.

"Ngh...!" "Ah, mmh!"

Though Carla bit her lip hard, she couldn't hold back her moans. Unlike her painful first experience, now pleasure was slowly blooming there.

"Hold your skirt tightly, Carla."

"Please, let me take this off...ah!"

Though she said that, her hands were still gripping her skirt hem tightly, pulling it up. Her words and actions completely contradicted each other as Ivan roughly grabbed and kneaded her swaying breasts.

The spectacle of her large breasts being pulled up when he pinched and tugged on her nipples. Each time, the sharp pain in her breasts was overwhelmed by an even greater pleasure, making Carla cry out with lewd moans.

"Ah, don't...mmh! My, my breasts are sensitive...!"

"That's why I'm doing it...!"

With a heavy exhale, Ivan thrust his hips forward. Carla's pussy flesh enveloped his entire cock. Her juices flowed endlessly, soaking the bedsheets.

The wet sounds each time their bodies met. The feeling of reaching Carla's womb with each thrust of his cock-

All of it now belonged to Ivan. Now Ivan could embrace Carla without worrying about anyone else. Only Ivan, Ivan alone, could pour his white essence into her womb.

"Ugh...I'm coming, Carla...!"

"Ah, hng...ah!"

Carla shook her head violently as she was pierced by Ivan's increasingly frantic thrusts. She likely meant to say not inside, to stop coming inside her- but Ivan had no intention of listening.

The culmination of conquest is ejaculation inside. Ejaculating elsewhere is merely a formality. Only ejaculation inside marks true conquest of this woman.

It felt like white lightning was crackling through his mind. Carla's body shook with each of Ivan's thrusts. Her breasts bounced as she cried out in ecstasy with her eyes closed, like a doll.

"Ah! Ahh! Ngh, ah...ahh!"

As her cries filled the room, Ivan's cock suddenly swelled-

White semen poured into Carla's pussy. Thick, milky fluid filled Carla's insides, more intense than the clear juices coating her pink flesh.

"Haa..."

With a satisfied sigh, Ivan pulled his cock out of Carla. The sight of whitish semen overflowing from Carla's gaping, split pussy was magnificent.

'You're mine, Carla. You'll never escape.'

Perhaps unconscious from the pleasure, Carla lay limp with her eyes closed as purple magical energy rose from her body.

He would never let her go. Though he only intended to use her, he would absolutely never let her go.

Author's Note:

You might wonder if large breasts can really cause headaches, but honestly I'm not sure either. You may ask why I don't know, but I truly don't know even though I wish I did. I really wanted to know too.

# 98 - Her and Her (1)

1. Her and Her (1)

The old iron door opened without much noise.

Through the relatively large window, sunlight streamed in, making the interior not too dark.

“Has a conclusion been reached?”

“Yeah, it has.”

Lorenzo stepped into the room, lighting a Magic Herb as he entered. With each step he took, the sound of his boots echoed from the stone floor, making it easy to feel just how cold the ground was without even touching it.

“Lorenzo, seeing you here gives me a rough idea of what’s going on.”

With a bright smile, she spoke. In the rising smoke of the Magic Herb, a small smile was cast on Lorenzo's stoic face. Just that was enough to understand the conclusion.

“From today, you’re free, Albina.”

In truth, there was nothing substantial about the investigation.

No evidence or testimonies had emerged, and with subtle pressure coming from Cascata regarding Albina, the leadership had no choice but to give in.

“Is that so? That’s a relief. What about the children?”

“Seems like you’re worried about them, even though they’re students.”

Lorenzo sat across from her, shaking the ash from the floor. Despite his stoic face, Albina looked at him with a smile.

“They're my responsibility. I can’t help but worry.”

“…They’re doing well. Carla’s arm has returned.”

“Her arm?”

Albina’s eyes widened.

Carla, whom she had witnessed alongside Ivan, had lost her arm—specifically, her left arm. An unidentified enemy had appeared, and while facing that enemy alone, Carla had lost her arm. The left arm, which had burst into pieces without a trace, must have been beyond restoration.

But hearing that her arm had returned was indeed a curious matter.

To the wide-eyed Albina, Lorenzo began to explain everything from the beginning, step by step.

Of course, he didn’t know everything—Carla hadn’t provided detailed explanations from the start. After returning from the Inter-house Competition, particularly after the Exploration Game, Carla had her left arm restored and simply said she was “lucky,” without going into detail.

Still, it was easy to overlook, considering she was a Mage.

There are numerous factions in magic, and if you include the lower forms of magic, there are countless variations. With some spells being unimaginably bizarre, it seemed that Carla had encountered some strange fate, and for now, that was the conclusion they had settled on.

No one could fully accept that fact, but who would dare to question it? After all, Carla was the eldest daughter of Cascata.

“After going with Ivan, her arm was restored… is that right?”

“Yeah. Albina, I thought you’d know Ivan best.”

“…I suppose so. After all, I am Ivan’s guardian.”

Albina was informally Ivan’s guardian. The reason it was informal was that she had already taken on that role before Ivan even entered the academy.

She had kept it hidden as much as possible to avoid any potential issues during the entrance exam, but still.

“You must have already investigated Ivan.”

“I did. He has remarkable talent.”

Naturally, Albina had conducted an investigation after taking on the role of Ivan’s guardian. She had looked into his background, family circumstances, and other relevant details, but nothing particularly strange had come up.

“Ivan isn’t that kind of kid.”

“Are you sure?”

At Lorenzo’s question, Albina fell silent.

“I judged that he’s not the type to do something shady.”

“Is that so? Ivan doesn’t seem suspicious…”

Lorenzo lit another Magic Herb. As he watched the pale smoke spread, Albina chuckled softly.

“Seeing you burn that Magic Herb so much is a bit unfortunate.”

“Lately, there are too many prying eyes.”

“Where?”

“Aufstieg.”

“Aufstieg?”

“Yeah. Those guys are up to something. They’re shady characters. They even disguised their daughter as a son to push her into the academy. I never expected them to try to monitor the instructors.”

“A daughter as a son? So Emil is a girl then?”

Seeing Albina’s wide-eyed expression, Lorenzo glanced at her before shaking the ash from the Magic Herb. The gray ash scattered on the floor, and Lorenzo ground it under his boot.

“Yeah. The fact that you didn’t recognize her shows they put a lot of effort into the disguise.”

“A disguise? Not a transformation? If it’s a transformation like Carla’s, it should be easy, right?”

“A transformation? Didn’t you see Emil’s magical circuit?”

At that moment, Albina realized and closed her mouth with an “ah.”

Emil’s magical circuit had been twisted into a strange shape—as if the wing parts on both sides had been forcibly cut away. It was undoubtedly a magical circuit manipulated with intent, making any form transformation that would affect the wings on all four sides impossible.

“Certainly, that makes sense. I thought that magical circuit was odd too.”

“This is just a hypothesis, Albina.”

“Hmm?”

Lorenzo looked at her with a heavy gaze.

Albina stared back at him, her mouth closed. It was hard to gauge what he was trying to say with such a pause.

“…What if Dremalo is the one who cut Emil’s magical circuit’s wings?”

“Excuse me?”

“What I mean is…”

Lorenzo cleared his throat repeatedly, as if his throat was dry.

Finally, after Albina handed him a glass of water, he gulped it down in one go and let out a short sigh.

“The Family Magic of Aufstieg has descended. You know that, right?”

“Right…?”

Albina still didn’t understand what Lorenzo was trying to say.

Emil, Dremalo, and the descent of Aufstieg. What connection could there be among these?

“Emil’s disguise, his entrance into the academy, the signs of someone tampering with things. Those kinds of things.”

Only then did Albina realize what Lorenzo was trying to convey.

So she cut him off sharply with her response.

“That’s impossible, Lorenzo. Such a thing cannot happen. A descended entity can never become human.”

“Is that so?”

“Moreover, no matter how much she’s a daughter, she’s still a child. She would die.”

“Because she’s a daughter, wouldn’t they think it’s worth a try?”

After all, they were nobles. While commoners might think similarly, nobles especially tend to view daughters as having little value.

“If they accept a god, that person would die. The vessel would break. They would die. What parent would want to kill their child?”

“…That’s true. I understand for now.”

“Don’t think strange thoughts. You were the one who mentioned there are many eyes watching, Lorenzo.”

“I got it. Then I’ll take my leave.”

Lorenzo cut off Albina’s words and stood up.

After unlocking the handcuffs that had been on Albina’s arms, he led the way out, with Albina following him out of the room.

Thus ended the long confinement after quite some time.

“My back hurts…”

Carla was in pain.

Despite her sturdy physique, the vigorous activity had left her back aching, making her wish to rest for at least a day or two.

However, there was no helping it; the weekend was over, and it was the day when the academy’s routine began.

“Hey, get up. We need to go have breakfast.”

After getting ready to head to the dining hall, Carla kicked Ivan lightly to wake him up.

It seemed that the physical exertion during their intimate moments had taken a toll on Ivan, as he only scratched his head and got up then.

“Have you already prepared everything?”

“We have to eat, right? I’m hungry. Hurry up and get ready.”

“Just eat first… I’ll sleep a bit more and get ready…”

Before Carla could say anything, Ivan threw himself back onto the bed.

She considered waking him again, but seeing him snoring softly made it a bit awkward, so reluctantly, Carla turned around with a huff.

“Skipping breakfast won’t be a big deal.”

But for Carla, it was different.

If she didn’t eat breakfast, she would struggle throughout the morning and wouldn’t be able to focus in class, so she had to eat—besides, the student cafeteria wasn’t half bad in terms of taste.

In the end, Carla left the room alone.

She wasn’t loyal enough to wake Ivan again.

As she descended the stairs toward the student cafeteria, it was quite noisy.

Breakfast time was already nearing its midpoint, and most students were likely in the midst of their meals, so the noise was to be expected.

Carla entered the cafeteria without much thought.

She didn’t know what the menu was, but the sweet and slightly spicy aroma wafting through the air was enough to whet her appetite for breakfast.

“Hmm, I wonder what the menu is…”

Depending on the menu, it might be worth considering getting breakfast for Ivan as well.

As Carla thought this, she headed toward the serving area, and at the same time, she almost bumped into someone coming out from the exit.

“Oh, Regina.”

It was Regina.

The girl with flowing blue hair stopped just before colliding with Carla, looking at her.

“Regina, hello.”

In that moment, an awkward feeling washed over her.

There was still some lingering tension between her and Regina, and since she hadn’t completely cleared it away, Carla felt a bit awkward. However, she couldn’t show it, so she forced a smile and waved at Regina.

“Tsk.”

But what she received in return was a cold tongue-clicking sound.

With an expression so cold that it was unlike Regina, she glared at Carla before swiftly brushing past her and leaving the cafeteria.

And as Carla stared at Regina’s retreating figure, she stood there in a daze.

“…What was that?”

# 99 - Her and Her (2)

1. She and Her (2)

"Ivan, eat up."

Carla placed the packed lunch on the table and kicked Ivan, who was still asleep, to wake him up.

Breakfast was important... at least, Carla thought so, and it was something that shouldn't be skipped, so she ended up packing it for him.

"Ugh..."

Ivan groaned and sat up.

His body was covered in red handprints.

Some even had scratches from fingernails, which made Carla's face flush as she recalled the passion of the previous night.

"Is that breakfast?"

"Yeah. I packed it myself, so be grateful and eat it."

"Alright, thanks."

Ivan chuckled softly and got out of bed.

The blanket slipped down, revealing his naked body, and Carla's face, which had been flushed, turned red in an instant.

"Put something on, you pervert."

"After seeing everything you wanted to see?"

Ivan smirked and picked up the sheet, covering his lower body.

But it only barely covered his groin, revealing his well-proportioned body, so Carla turned her head and pointed to the lunch box.

"It's worth eating for breakfast. Eat at least a little. We have to leave soon."

"Okay, I'll eat quickly."

Ivan sat down in a chair next to the table and opened the lunch box.

Carla sat across from him, crossed her legs, and stared at Ivan.

The rice, stir-fried with finely ground pickled peppers, was fluffy and tasted good.

Carla watched Ivan scoop up a large spoonful and chew it, and Regina suddenly came to mind.

'That was the first time I'd seen Regina with such a cold expression.'

It hadn't been that long, but Regina had cried her eyes out then.

She must have been shocked to belatedly learn that Carla and Ivan had become involved.

'Well, that's understandable...'

Carla quietly clicked her tongue.

It wasn't that she didn't understand Regina's feelings.

As someone who had never loved anyone before, she couldn't fully understand Regina's feelings.

But how many poems were there about the pain of unrequited love?

Judging from those, that pain must be agonizing, bitter, and stinging.

More than anything, Carla knew the feelings that Regina had for Ivan. What's more, Regina had even more reason to feel wronged, because Carla didn't love Ivan at all.

'It all happened just because of one encounter.'

It wasn't just one encounter.

It must have been dozens.

"What are you thinking so hard about?"

Ivan asked Carla, chewing on the fried rice.

Carla, who had been resting her chin on her hand, glanced at Ivan and then decided against saying anything.

"Nothing. It's nothing."

"It doesn't seem like nothing, though?"

"It's really nothing. Hurry up and eat and take a shower."

"Okay."

Ivan chuckled softly and concentrated on his meal again.

Watching Ivan, Carla thought again.

'Is Ivan good husband material?'

No, why am I only thinking about this now?

Carla was dumbfounded by her own thoughts.

After having so many encounters, I'm only thinking about this now?

How could I be so stupid?

'He's not someone I can expect anything from...'

He's a commoner.

It wouldn't be right to expect a dowry from a commoner.

More than anything, nothing he brought would catch Carla's eye, and if that's the case, she'd have to prepare it herself...

'No. Enrico will take care of it.'

In fact, that's what a noble's daughter is for.

She's either sold off in a political marriage for the sake of the family's prestige, or she's sent down to a distant relative as a reward for pledging allegiance. Of course, Carla wasn't a pure daughter, so Enrico wouldn't have thought of that.

...Wouldn't have.

Wouldn't have...?

'Considering he tried to sell me off to Schyskeil...'

Enrico probably doesn't expect much from Carla either.

If that's the case, then to make Enrico's nose flat, Ivan needs to become stronger than he is now.

If they wanted to push out Bricone appropriately and push Contadino into one of the pillars of the empire, Ivan was still lacking.

"Ivan."

"Yeah."

"How many Lightning Bolts can you summon?"

"You mean Lightning Bolts from Lightning Magic?"

Ivan, who had almost finished his breakfast, chewed on the last couple of spoonfuls of fried rice and thought for a moment.

"If it's Lightning Bolts, I can easily do about eight. If I concentrate, ten? If I push myself, eleven."

'Is this guy really crazy?'

Carla could easily do up to ten.

If she tensed her nerves with Brain Armor, she could probably do up to twelve.

"...You need to be able to summon up to ten without concentrating. I'll teach you all the Magic belonging to Lightning Magic, so let's prepare to master Lightning Magic from today."

"A training regimen, huh? It's been a while since I've heard that word."

"Ah, geez. Don't pop out without saying anything. You startled me."

Ivan grinned at Carla.

"They're both me."

"...Anyway, let's start from today. I'll teach you everything."

"Is it okay to teach Family Magic so easily?"

Carla was at a loss for words at Ivan's question.

It's not that she couldn't answer, but it was too embarrassing to say it directly.

"...It's because I want to make Enrico's nose flat."

"I see, I see. You're not honest, are you, Viye?"

"That's it, hurry up and get ready."

Carla stood up in a fit of anger.

But she didn't have anything else to do, so she sat back down in her chair and crossed her legs. Resting her chin on her hand, she pouted unhappily.

\*

"I need to reserve a training room."

"I guess so."

"I'll take care of that..."

As they talked, Carla and Ivan entered the lecture hall.

But their conversation didn't last long.

A grim atmosphere was swirling in the lecture hall—

In an atmosphere that seemed like a fight was about to break out, Regina and Liam were standing face to face.

"Liam, Liam! Don't do it, it's nothing...!"

Emil was clinging to Liam, trying to stop him.

In contrast, Regina didn't seem nervous at all, but rather stood with her lips tightly shut, slowly glaring at Emil and Liam with a cold look.

"I didn't say anything wrong."

A cold voice was spat out.

That cold, chilling remark was probably directed at Emil.

Because Regina's eyes were on Emil.

"Regina. You're wrong. It's not that what you said is wrong. It's the time and place, and what you should and shouldn't say that's wrong."

Liam's momentum was also quite fierce.

It was the first time Carla had seen Liam so angry.

He was always easygoing and smiling, so she thought he didn't know how to get angry, but this was an unexpected side of him.

"...What's going on?"

"I should go."

Ivan approached Liam and Regina even before Carla did.

'Is that bastard really only rude to me?'

Carla was dumbfounded by Ivan's actions, but she approached the two of them anyway.

"What's going on? It looks like you're about to fight."

Ivan approached Liam.

As a result, Carla reluctantly approached Regina.

"Regina, what's wrong..."

She thought it was important to separate Liam and Regina first.

With that in mind, Carla grabbed Regina's wrist, and at the same time, she was startled by Regina, who glared at her with eyes blazing with anger.

"...Let go."

"Re, Regina."

"I said let go. You filthy bitch."

Cold and harsh words came from Regina.

Carla was startled and let go of Regina's wrist without realizing it.

Words that were so thorny that she wondered if she had misheard them for a moment.

"Wh, what...?"

"I said you're a filthy bitch. You sly little thing. If you have any conscience, you can't say that's not true, right?"

Carla was speechless and couldn't answer.

But something was wrong.

Regina, Regina wouldn't say such things—

'...No, no. Regina... she could.'

Carla calmly suppressed the anger that was rising within her.

Regina, to Carla, Regina was a victim anyway.

Whether it was intentional or not, Carla knew that Regina liked Ivan.

But, but.

"Don't ever say my name with that mouth again. It's disgusting."

Regina's eyes turned to Carla.

Eyes like a predator with prey in front of it.

Carla couldn't say anything when she met those eyes.

"...Liam, you should think carefully too. Emil, you should hide it well if you're going to hide it. You're such an idiot."

Regina only left those words behind.

After leaving those words behind, Regina moved without hesitation.

She moved and headed out of the lecture hall, and soon she disappeared completely.

"Re, Regina, Regina!"

Someone's voice was heard.

A very familiar, familiar voice.

Soon, someone appeared at the door of the lecture hall.

It was Albina.

Author's Note

Regina has a reason to be like that...

# 100 - Her and Her (3)

1. She and Her (3)

Carla wasn't one to believe that changes didn't come in singular form, but perhaps it was true, she thought.

Regarding certain matters related to the loss of her left arm, which even Carla herself didn't place much importance on anymore, didn't pay much attention to.

It would be difficult to say that those matters were settled, and even though they weren't concluded, Albina, who had been detained, was released and now stood here as an instructor.

"...It's noisy from the morning, huh. Did everyone have a good time?"

Albina didn't look particularly emaciated. Her complexion was good, and it didn't seem like she had suffered any hardships.

At Albina's appearance, Carla inadvertently, perhaps instinctively, glanced at Ivan.

Ivan was looking at Albina with a smooth smile.

Carla felt a strong urge to stomp on Ivan's toes because his face looked so hateful, but she stopped herself. After all, Carla was always the one who lost out in the end.

"Regina must have something going on."

Albina said, looking at Regina's empty seat.

However, no answer came back to her words, which clearly demanded a response.

Carla didn't know what had happened between Regina and Liam either.

There was no room to ask about it, and before she could, Regina had quickly left the classroom.

"...It's better to ask directly. Regina Parla, what's going on? Liam, you tell me."

Liam was still not completely calmed down, and his agitation was evident.

As soon as he was singled out, Liam frowned and turned to the side.

Emil, who was sitting next to him, met Liam's gaze and shook his head—but Liam blew a harsh breath over his tightly closed lips and moved them.

"...Regina, Regina Parla insulted Emil."

"What?"

Albina's eyes widened.

And it wasn't just Albina.

Not only Albina but also Carla and Ivan simultaneously widened their eyes and looked at Liam.

"This morning, Emil and I had breakfast together early and came to the classroom. There was no particular reason."

In fact, it was somewhat of a misnomer to say "together."

Emil didn't really want to, but Liam followed him around and arbitrarily had breakfast with him, and then headed to the classroom together.

The next to arrive was Regina.

While Liam and Emil were discussing the vanguard and support roles in the war, Regina suddenly said to Emil.

* To think you'd entrust your back to someone who can only use Mana bullets, Liam, you're amazing.

Emil's face turned bright red.

It wasn't wrong.

Emil couldn't use other Magical Engineering because of his abnormal Magical Circuit, and he couldn't properly use Family Magic either.

All he could use was Mana bullets, and thanks to his large Magical Power capacity, he could unleash a barrage of them to provide support... but in reality, beyond a certain point, it wouldn't even be proper support.

* You shouldn't say things like that, Regina. Emil is doing his best.

Doing your best doesn't mean you'll get the best results. Don't you know that?

That's harsh.

* Harsh? I can say worse. If you don't have talent, you should at least try to work hard. Isn't that right? Well, a half-wit who can't even hide things properly probably wouldn't even try.

At those words, Liam jumped up to block Regina.

Even that cold smile that Regina was wearing would surely hurt Emil.

"...So that's what happened."

Albina said with a sigh.

She spoke as if she was embarrassed, but Carla was the one whose heart sank as she heard those words in a slightly different sense. There were too many things that came to mind, not just one or two.

"Carla. Do you have any idea what's going on?"

At Albina's sudden words, Carla inadvertently raised her head, which had been lowered.

It wasn't that she was asking because she knew something, but it was somehow difficult to meet the gaze that Albina was giving her.

But it was also difficult to tell her honestly, and to explain the details of this kind of thing between men and women...

"Ah, no. I don't know anything."

"I was just asking if you had any idea... Anyway, I understand. I'll talk to Regina separately. Then shall we start the class for now? I'll summarize and convey the stories that have happened in the meantime after today's class."

Carla followed Albina and opened her textbook, but she couldn't focus on the contents of the textbook at all.

* Tsk.
* I told you to let go. You dirty bitch.

Words and actions that Regina would never have done normally.

Was Regina's change sudden?

Carla didn't think so.

'It must be because of Ivan.'

Carla knew that Regina had been in love with Ivan for quite a long time.

Probably everyone except Ivan knew.

Maybe Ivan knew too.

He might have been pretending not to know even though he knew.

'Even so, it's not Ivan's fault.'

It wasn't a sin not to accept unrequited love.

So it would be right to see that Regina was like this now because of Carla, who had taken Ivan away even though she knew that Regina was in love with him.

The relationship was complicated.

Carla felt like she was about to sigh repeatedly.

During the Inter-house Competition and the Exploration Game.

Everything became twisted and distorted because of that affair that happened at that time.

'Even so, to return Ivan to Regina...'

If she were to give him back.

'That's not possible.'

Actually, she didn't really know why it wasn't possible.

Carla couldn't figure it out even if she thought about it.

Do I love Ivan? No.

Do I like Ivan? No.

Do I see Ivan as a man? ...

I don't know this.

I can't figure this out.

Because it was a part that she couldn't figure out at all, Carla suffered inwardly without telling anyone.

\*

"Are you worried about Regina?"

Ivan returned to his room after lunch and plopped down on the sofa.

They had even eaten together, but Carla said she was going somewhere for a while and quickly left without even hearing Ivan's answer.

Ivan found that Carla was cute in his heart.

She seemed to be looking for Regina even now, but she probably didn't even know what she was going to do when she met her.

"There are times when she's cute like this..."

That's right.

Carla is cute.

She lacks common sense in strange places.

She has a prickly side in strange places.

She has a quirky side in strange places.

She has a dazed side in strange places.

"She also has a bold side, so I think that's even cuter."

As a child, he thought she was a boy, and until recently, Carla—he knew her as Carlo at the time.

For Ivan, that guy was an object of hatred.

Someone he wanted to break and crush.

It was fun to see him struggling to try to beat him.

Talent that he could never overcome, and even the experience and knowledge he had accumulated from his past life.

Even though he could never win against Ivan, who was heavily armed with such things, the way that guy struggled to do something about it—

It was ugly.

It was so ugly that it was unsightly.

The way he couldn't accept the gap in talent, experience, and knowledge was more than ugly.

However, when he found out that the guy he thought was Carlo was Carla, that evaluation was reversed.

It's cute how she struggles to try to win somehow.

She can't overcome pleasure every night and cries out, but it's so cute how she pushes away and pretends not to feel it.

She's picky and pretends to be prickly, but that's also charming in its own way.

Especially—

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

* You must have had a lot of women who easily fell for you. Wouldn't it be fun to try seducing a woman who doesn't fall for you?

If the body falls, the heart will fall too.

A stupid woman who doesn't even know that.

"Interesting, interesting."

Ivan stretched languidly and muttered.

It was almost time for the afternoon class, so he was planning to rest for a bit and then return to the classroom.

\*

"Emil, don't worry too much. Regina is out of her mind because of unrequited love, so she's probably like that."

"...Yeah."

The lawn behind the classroom after lunch.

Liam was lying down comfortably, and Emil was crouching next to him.

Emil's complexion was dark.

It must be because the cold words that Regina spat out had torn through his chest, leaving a large wound.

Liam glanced at Emil's face and spat out the piece of grass he was holding in his mouth, then sat up.

"...I'll say it again, Emil, don't worry about it. The words she said to you were just words she said carelessly because she couldn't control her emotions."

"Yeah... I know. Yeah... But it's true that I'm lacking."

"You're not lacking, Emil."

Emil was startled by Liam's words and looked at him.

Liam was scratching his head as if he was awkward giving this kind of comfort.

"Anyway, don't be too discouraged."

"Y, yeah."

He answered, but in fact, Emil felt like his heart was getting more and more disturbed.

The pressure from his father was tightening around him every moment.

Because of the current situation where he couldn't reveal those things, Emil felt like he was suffocating.

Author's Note

I've been accumulating contest manuscripts one by one, and it's already the 5th episode.

I think there will be about 30 by the time the contest starts.

Unless there are any special circumstances, the genre will be Eastern-style romance fantasy.

I know that Eastern-style romance fantasy isn't popular, but when have I ever written something popular? lol

# 101 - Her and Her (4)

1. Her and Her (4)

"You were here, Regina."

Carla said, catching her breath.

In truth, she had hesitated a lot about whether to speak to her or not.

It was a day with a high, blue sky.

The atmosphere was serene, and though it wasn't particularly high, Regina, standing at the top of what was still called a hill, looked like a painting.

Regina stood there, letting the wind play with her loosely tied-up hair, gazing down below.

She looked like a carefree girl at first glance, but the animosity that blazed in her eyes as she slowly turned to look at Carla was impossible to hide.

"Why do you keep following me? Are you here to laugh at the defeated girl?"

"...That's not it, Regina."

"Didn't I tell you not to speak my name with those lips?"

Carla involuntarily shut her mouth.

She had expected it, but the heavy, heavy animosity far surpassed even that expectation.

The undisguised hostility, as if she wouldn't even allow her to come close, made Carla's skin tingle.

"...You didn't come to class all day. I couldn't help but worry."

"Of course. I didn't want to be laughed at by you, and you wanted to laugh at me."

"That's not it."

"What do you mean, that's not it? I didn't know you were such a good liar, Carla. Or should I call you Carlo? Which one is your true self?"

Unintentionally, Regina's words struck at Carla's core, and she fell silent.

"Looks like you have nothing to say."

"That's not it."

"What do you mean, that's not it? Enough, I don't want to see your face anymore. So I wish you would disappear. I wish you would disappear from my sight. No, no. No, definitely not."

Regina turned sharply and approached Carla.

Her blue eyes were already clouded.

Her eyes, which were always clear and sparkling, were now filled with a dark light.

The clear resentment and hostility in her eyes came right up to Carla's face.

Regina grabbed Carla by the collar and pulled her close.

Carla, who had no intention of resisting, was pulled in by Regina, and she faced her eyes so close that she could feel her breath.

Carla felt suffocated.

Her senses, already heightened due to her sensitivity and the influence of Lightning Magic, were instantly overwhelmed by the intense Magical Power emanating from Regina.

"Carla."

"Yes."

"You know,"

Regina smiled.

Regina smiled, curling up the corners of her lips.

Regina smiled, clearly filled with ridicule.

"I wish you would just die.""

Before Carla could answer, Regina released her grip on her collar and turned away without hesitation.

"Just breathing the same air as you is unpleasant. I wish you wouldn't follow me. No, don't follow me."

With those words, Regina left without looking back.

The sound of her footsteps crunching on the grass faded away.

Carla stood there blankly, watching her leave.

In the distance, the bell rang, signaling the end of lunchtime.

\*

"Regina wasn't like that, was she?"

"No. Albina, it's not an incomprehensible situation just from listening to you."

"Hmm…"

Albina made a groaning sound and tapped the attendance book.

Looking back on the handover information she had received from Lorenzo so far, Regina was currently heartbroken.

"I never thought Ivan and Carla would end up in that kind of relationship. I thought there was a high probability that Regina and Ivan would get together."

"I know that those two didn't get together because they liked each other."

"Either way, the fact that Regina is heartbroken doesn't change, does it?"

"That's the problem. For someone who's heartbroken, it feels like her personality has changed a lot."

That was indeed the case.

The problem here was that Lorenzo had never been in love, and Albina had never been heartbroken. Therefore, the problem was that even if the two of them thought about it, they couldn't tell whether Regina was overreacting or if there was another reason.

"Let's investigate a little. I've never seen a case like this, but Albina, based on your story, I think it's a bit much."

Lorenzo said, grinding the Magic Herb into the ashtray.

Heartbreak is unrequited love.

The emotions of love are truly amazing, and if that love cannot go where it is supposed to go and flows back, the reverse effect will be tremendous.

'If we exploit that gap, there's nothing we can't do.'

The first place that comes to mind is Aufstieg.

It was impossible to figure out what they were plotting, and even Lorenzo, who had gone through all kinds of information warfare, couldn't find out anything about Aufstieg.

"Go to class for now, Albina. I'll look into this."

"Please, Lorenzo."

Albina hoped that nothing would happen.

She wondered if there would ever be another year as eventful as this one while working as an instructor, but she knew that things wouldn't get better just by standing still.

"Okay, leave it to me."

"And, Lorenzo."

"Hmm?"

A voice stopped Lorenzo as he was about to get up.

Albina's gaze was on him.

"About Ivan."

"Ivan, Ivan Contadino, you mean?"

"Yes."

"What about Ivan? Is there a problem?"

Albina hesitated for a moment.

A secret that only Albina and Ivan knew.

That secretㅡ

"...Is Ivan wearing a necklace or something?"

"A necklace, you say?"

Lorenzo tried to remember.

He tried to recall Ivan's appearance from the first time he saw him until now, but he had never seen Ivan wearing a necklace.

"No, I don't know. I don't know if he wasn't wearing one or if I just didn't see it, but I've never seen it."

"I see… I understand. I'll tell you what the necklace is later when I get a chance. You don't need to investigate it separately."

At Albina's words, Lorenzo silently nodded.

If she hadn't said that, Lorenzo would have investigated Ivan's necklace.

Curiosity arose, but he decided to put it aside for now.

"Then I'll go. Albina, be careful."

"Yes?"

Albina looked up at Lorenzo again at his sudden words.

"...The guys targeting the academy might be more formidable than you think. So be careful. There's no harm in being careful."

"What's that supposed to mean? I know that much."

"Yeah, I hope you keep being careful."

"Okay. You be careful too."

Lorenzo waved his hand and left the instructor's office.

Only after the door closed and all traces of him had disappeared did Albina let out a long sigh.

Then, she picked up a piece of paper that was on the desk.

"The situation for my return is too bad…"

The paper she picked up had the title "Trial Date Notice" written in an antique font.

\*

"Carla."

Carla, who was entering the hallway of the building with the lecture rooms for the afternoon class, hesitated for a moment at the familiar voice.

Should she turn around, or should she ignore it and go her way?

But even before she could decide, the owner of the voice quickly approached and grabbed her hand.

"I thought you'd come back to the room. I was waiting."

Carla suppressed a sigh and looked at the owner of the hand.

"...This is the lecture hall, Ivan. Other people are watching."

As she said that, she pulled her hand away.

Ivan raised the hand that Carla's hand had been in, making a strange expression.

"You didn't used to care about that kind of thing. Suddenly?"

"It's not sudden. It's right to be careful from the start. Am I wrong?"

"That's true, but I'm saying it's right to be careful from now on."

"Hmm, well."

Ivan had an idea why Carla was acting like this.

Probably, definitely—because of Regina.

Carla had changed like this after that commotion with Regina, so something must have happened between the two of them.

"Yeah, that's probably for the best. It would be uncomfortable if Regina saw."

Regina, Regina Parla.

Ivan knew how she felt—perhaps, if nothing had happened, he would have accepted Regina's feelings.

If nothing had happened, a meaningless assumption.

That assumption was shattered and twisted the moment Carlo Della Cascata appeared as Carla Della Cascata.

The wealth of the Parla Trading Company that could be obtained through Regina was nothing compared to the wealth, honor, and power that could be obtained through the Cascata family.

"Yeah, so it's better to be caref…"

Carla's words, which were about to say 'because Regina would be uncomfortable,' trailed off.

The place her gaze was directed to,

The place her gaze reached.

There, Regina was standing.

She must have been coming from the opposite direction from where Carla was entering, and Regina was frozen, facing Carla head-on.

"...Regina."

Regina's stiff face seemed to relax, and a smile bloomed.

"You two look really good together. You seem to be getting along really well. Yeah, really. Carla, you're more surprising than I thought."

"...What?"

"Love is really amazing, isn't it, Carla?"

Regina was smiling.

"To think that the rumors that the proud daughter of the great noble family is being laid by a commoner and crying out every night are true. Love is really amazing, isn't it?"

"You, what are you saying…"

"I'm just saying that the power of love is amazing."

"Stop it, Regina. I can't listen to any more of your words."

Ivan stepped forward.

Regina, who was looking at Ivan blocking Carla's path, bit her lip.

"……."

Regina hesitated for a long time, moving her lips as if she was about to say something.

She threw the book she was holding on the floor and ran off somewhere.

"Regina!"

Ivan grabbed Carla's wrist as she tried to chase after her.

"Carla."

Ivan's voice stopped Carla.

"You don't need to worry about it. It's something that would have happened anyway."

"How can I not worry?"

Ivan involuntarily released her wrist when he saw Carla's eyes.

Her eyes were shining sharply.

"You shouldn't say things like that either. Regina… no, never mind. I'll take care of it."

With her lips tightly pressed together, Carla hurried away.

Her pace, which was gradually getting faster, soon turned into a run.

'…How strange. She's unexpectedly assertive in unexpected places.'

Ivan tilted his head, watching Carla's receding figure.

Author's Note

I have something important to do tomorrow.

I would just like to ask for a comment saying 'Good luck!'

\* I've scheduled the upload!