# 50 - Imprisonment?

"I've heard about the Ma'an story."

Irina said. She exhaled a puff of cigarette smoke out the window, then pulled out a small case from her pocket and tossed it to Asel. The case hit Asel squarely in the head, causing him to topple backward.

"Cough!"

"Die."

Ena, who was sitting next to him, reacted immediately. She ignited a current in her hand and glared at Irina. Irina shook her head in exasperation.

When will that overprotectiveness and obsession of hers ever improve? It's terrifying how, even at her age, she acts like she would give her guts and liver to her student. It even felt like it was getting worse as the days went by.

'I will never act like that when I take on a student.'

Irina vowed silently as she placed her pipe on the table and moved closer to Asel. Ena shot her a deadly glare, but Irina ignored it and sat next to Asel, who was rubbing his nose.

"Open it."

"What is this?"

"You can't see properly right now. It's something to help with that."

Asel let out a low sound and opened the case at Irina's words.

With a click, the case opened to reveal a pair of glasses of a suitable size. The lenses were not too thick, and the frame had an impressive shape. While they didn't have vision correction capabilities, they were designed to block Mana from passing through to the left and right sides based on the lenses.

Just as high-conductivity Mana minerals are expensive, materials with high shielding rates are also quite costly. This pair of glasses would likely be worth dozens of gold coins.

Asel expressed his sincere gratitude to Irina for such a precious gift.

"Thank you. I'll use them well."

"Yeah, yeah."

Irina replied and stood up, placing the pipe between her fingers. Then, looking down at Asel, she asked in a serious voice.

"So, what exactly happened?"

"......"

"You've only been at the academy for a few days. But suddenly, why did you come back looking like a bloody mess? I don't think the academy seniors would bully you. Considering it's the time for the first assignment, is it related to that?"

"......How do you know the academy schedule?"

"I used to be a professor for a short time. Not anymore, though."

Anyway.

Irina said that and tapped the tobacco leaves into her pipe.

"Is it about the first assignment? What happened there?"

Asel first checked Ena's face before answering. The fact that the Necromancer had referred to her as his sister lingered in his mind. He worried that he might just burden her with more trouble if he spoke carelessly.

However, Ena looked eager to find out, her face itching with curiosity. Ultimately, Asel hesitated for a moment before revealing everything that had happened that day.

The two of them remained silent for a while after hearing the story. Both of their expressions were not particularly good.

After a long pause, Irina sighed deeply and spoke first.

"It’s probably the Virsia Clisen. Of course, it's a pseudonym, and they even created an organization named Virsia based on this side. It's a trashy group that gathers all sorts of criminal sorcerers to do whatever crazy things they want. It's been a while since they were listed as targets for extermination on the continent."

"......"

"I never thought that such a person would be hiding in a mountain valley, researching synthesis formulas. And to forcibly gain a second talent by sacrificing lives? It would require at least tens of thousands of lives for that."

"......The figure is quite accurate. It seems this has happened before."

"It was common."

Irina continued in a voice filled with disgust.

"To bloom talents at the cost of lives. As soon as that fact became known, bloodshed swept across the continent. It was not uncommon for an entire country to be wiped out or disappear from the map almost daily."

After the demon of possibility was born, there was no place on the continent that wasn't stained red. Most of the dungeons and labyrinths that still exist today were created to handle the rituals that took place back then more efficiently. Or they were means to seal transcendent beings who had forsaken humanity.

In either case, creating them required countless sacrifices.

A reality more hellish than hell itself. Irina, who was born during that time, still remembered the mountains of corpses and the seas of blood that were visible everywhere.

"Now, such acts are thoroughly controlled and rarely occur, but the story changes in lawless zones. Virsia probably conducted their rituals in a lawless zone."

A lawless zone refers to a territory where no state exists. It has become a place where monsters swarm, and due to various natural disasters and beasts, it is uninhabitable. It is a land ruled not by the laws written in books but by the swords and spears in hand, a place of survival of the fittest. Thus, it is often a hideout for criminals and demon worshippers.

What happens there is never known to the outside world. Therefore, those living in lawless zones can die in any number of ways, and those living outside have no way of knowing.

The same goes for Virsia's rituals.

"If necromancy is combined with synthesis formulas... it won't be easy. I need to report this to the alliance separately."

"......"

"And touching a Witch Council sorceress will come at a cost."

Irina said, placing the pipe in her mouth and speaking in a low voice.

"From today, I will officially designate Virsia Clisen as a priority target for extermination, promising to spare no effort in support from the alliance and the Witch Council. Is that alright, Ena?"

At Irina's question, Ena nodded immediately.

"It was a bad connection that I had to deal with in the first place. If I had killed her back then, this wouldn't have happened..."

"Don't blame yourself. We both know how things were back then. We didn't have the luxury to catch and kill Virsia."

"......Still, it bothers me. The fact that past connections continue to affect the present."

"That's enough. Let's leave the heavy talk here."

Irina said that and exhaled smoke, bursting into a grin.

"More importantly, you're quite impressive. You used a teleportation formula there? A teleportation formula that uses a medium as a power source right on the spot? I doubt anyone has escaped from Virsia like that."

"I might have."

Asel replied with a small smile. At his response, Irina's lips twitched.

"Oh my, look at you! Have you gotten arrogant while I wasn't looking? Ena, how are you training your student?"

"Shut up. Don't insult Asel."

"No, I was just joking..."

Irina said in an awkward voice, but Ena completely ignored her and leaned against Asel, pulling his hand and placing it on her head.

Asel quickly realized what she wanted and gently stroked her hair.

"Harder."

"Okay, okay."

He applied a bit more pressure as per Ena's request, and only then did she seem satisfied, purring like a cat as she enjoyed Asel's touch.

Watching this, Irina spoke in disbelief.

"What is this situation? I thought it was just a joke, but are you really continuing a forbidden relationship without acting your age?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Ena! Think about our ages! Asel is younger than you and should be going for a bouncy girl!"

"Shut up."

Zzzzzzz!!!

A current sparked at Ena's fingertips.

At that moment, the previously locked door creaked open, and a purple cat dashed in, landing on Asel's face.

"Ugh!"

"Little one! You almost died!"

The cat said. Asel recognized the owner of that voice and mumbled.

"Lady Bell."

"Who did that! Who bullied our little one! Those fucking bastards! Just say it! I'll kill them all!"

"Before that, let me breathe..."

"Meowww!!!"

Bell roared. Asel spat out the fur that had entered his mouth and glanced at Ena for help. Ena chuckled and grabbed Bell by the scruff of her neck, pulling her off Asel's face.

"Calm down, Bell. It's nice that you came to visit, but Asel is still a patient."

The fact that Asel was in critical condition was already known to the Witch Council. Irina had hastily spread the news in case of emergencies.

Fortunately, the situation she had feared did not occur. Asel regained consciousness and did not suffer any significant aftereffects. However, there were still some who wanted to visit him, so she had specially informed them of the location of the church where Asel was staying.

Bell was one of them. She hung limply in Ena's grip.

"I feel terrible. I hate it when someone touches my people."

"Is Lady Bell one of your people?"

"Of course! We're close!"

"I've never heard that before. Were we that close?"

"This brat?"

Bell's brow furrowed as she threw a punch toward Asel's face.

"Meow meow punch!"

Asel burst into laughter as her soft punch landed on him.

"I feel so good."

Elena murmured as she stood on the deck, feeling the sea breeze. One of the crew members, who had been watching her from a distance, said in a low voice.

"You're cute."

"Wake up. You're not someone who can even think about her."

The alchemist, Caitlyn, replied while rummaging through the organs of a sea monster.

The magnificent sea spread out behind the duchy. The sea monsters that inhabit the deep below serve as quite good catalysts for alchemy. The three giant sharks they hunted, led by Elena from the combat department and the archer, Davi, were no exception.

Sea monsters inherently possess the refreshing and clean energy unique to the sea in their hearts. By refining this, one can create potions that have various effects, such as antidotes or the ability to breathe underwater or withstand water pressure.

What Caitlyn was trying to produce was a potion of that kind. A potion that completely removes resistance to water. Given the difficulty of the materials, simply making it would guarantee a high score.

Caitlyn crawled out from the split belly of the shark and said.

"If you want to date Elena, you'll have to start by getting through the duke who rules the duchy and all the defenses of the vampires. Can you handle that?"

"......Why go that far? I just said she's cute."

"Put that smirk down. Now come and bring me the heart."

She threw a dagger at Duke. Duke barely caught it with a surprised face.

"You crazy woman! Why would you throw this dangerously!"

"It's not dangerous, so just come. Anyway, in this assignment, you're the one being carried. If you don't want to be remembered as a useless bug in Elena's memory, help with the butchering."

Elena's group was quite balanced, consisting of two from the non-combat department and two from the combat department. However, the non-combat members, Caitlyn and Duke, had to split into the Alchemy Department and the Magical Engineering Department, choosing one of the two. So, the selected one was the Alchemy Department, where Caitlyn belonged. Duke, from the Magical Department, had done nothing in this assignment.

All he had done was investigate sea monsters to the point of losing his hair. Even that was nothing compared to Elena, who had extensive experience sailing the seas. Thus, his voice was weaker than Caitlyn's.

"......Why am I, a noble, doing this?"

"Who said you're a slave? Just shut up and cut your veins."

"I can't cut my own veins, so I'll obediently follow your orders."

"Shut up."

Caitlyn slapped Duke on the back. Duke screamed and fell into the belly of the monster.

Though she said that, Caitlyn quite liked Duke. Despite being a noble, he seemed uncomfortable with being treated like one, and his occasional jokes were hard to dislike.

And as for status, Elena, who was the highest in their group, was similar to Duke.

A princess with a country girl-like personality who neither ordered others around nor was authoritative or oppressive.

Elena was like a heroine straight out of a book. It was impossible not to like her, regardless of gender.

"What are you doing?"

"Oh, Caitlyn."

Elena smiled brightly as she gazed at Caitlyn, who approached her. Then she leaned against the railing, looking down at the vast sea.

"I was just watching. The sea is beautiful."

"I've heard that vampires die when they enter flowing water?"

"That's a lie! We swim and play when it's hot! We eat garlic, and we don't care about crosses. The closer you are to pure blood, the less affected you are by the sun! It's all nonsense!"

Who spread such rumors? Elena added that and leaned over the railing. Caitlyn chuckled as she gazed at the harbor of the academy, which was starting to come into view.

"The group assignment is ending now. It was quite a good team."

"Yeah... I was worried that Asel seemed to dislike group assignments, but it turned out to be a good experience."

"You're talking about the top student from the Magical Department, right? You seem pretty close?"

"Yep! Elena and Asel are the closest! They took the entrance exam together and even ate together!"

"Is that so?"

Caitlyn laughed.

"Then who do you like more between the two?"

"Uh... um... I like both..."

"But if you had to choose just one? If both fell into the water and you could only save one, who would you save?"

"I guess I would save Elena since she can't swim? Asel seems like he could float out on his own."

Lady Hargelin can't swim. Caitlyn imagined the cold-looking girl floundering in the water and burst into laughter.

"So you like Elena more?"

"That's not it. I like both!"

Elena said that and bared her fangs, threatening Caitlyn.

"More than that, stop asking questions like this! It's boring!"

"Got it. Then another question. Do you have someone you like?"

"I don't."

Elena replied with a calm expression. Caitlyn realized that her words were not a lie and nodded. She had been worried about what would happen if a bad boy's name popped out of her mouth. It seemed there was no need to worry.

"What about me?"

Duke suddenly popped out from the belly of the monster and shouted. Elena immediately shook her head.

"I don't like you! Dad said all men are wolves!"

"Asel is a man too!"

"Asel is a good wolf! A handsome wolf!"

"Goddamn world. It's always about looks."

Duke grumbled and went back into the monster.

Meanwhile, the ship continued to move forward. The water gradually became shallower, and now the harbor was appearing larger than the sea.

Screeeech!!

Before long, the ship docked. As it was a ship operated by the duchy, the sailors politely moved the monster to the harbor.

After that, only the parts that served as resources for alchemy, including the monster's heart, were removed and sent to the monster disassembly workshop. In return, they received one gold coin. Elena and her group finished their commemorative meal at a nearby restaurant with the money they received and returned to the academy.

However, for some reason, the academy seemed more chaotic than usual.

"Please check how many members have not yet returned. The group assignment must end now."

"Four survivors, including Saya, are currently being treated at the academy's medical department. We have received a promise that someone will be sent from the faculty by tomorrow."

"Saya, Quill, Warren. These three students are suffering from severe mental stress as well as physical trauma. It seems that the student who saved them is missing, causing them great distress. As for Gorsel, who has lost all his group members, he is in a state of periodic crying and seizures."

Judging by the faint conversations of professors running through the hallway, it was clear that something unusual had happened. Elena, who had just returned, tilted her head at the bustling atmosphere when one of the Magical Department professors spotted her and quickly approached.

"You're Elena, right? Welcome back. The other team members... they're all safe too. That's a relief."

"Yes... more importantly, is something going on? Everyone seems very busy..."

"Ah... well, that's..."

Just as the professor was about to answer Elena's question, a shout came from the end of the hallway.

"So, Asel is missing? And after fighting an 8th Circle Necromancer? You can call that missing?! He's dead! You're using the word 'missing' to sugarcoat it as much as possible!"

"...I understand that the academy reviewed the request clearly. The fact that this happened despite that means it's the academy's problem, isn't it? If you want to use the word 'missing' at least take responsibility and make an effort to find Asel! But why is everyone just running around here? Asel is someone I considered a close friend. If such a person goes missing due to the academy's mistake, and the academy doesn't even try to find him... the Hargelin family will be very disappointed in the academy."

It was the voices of Celine and Ellen, respectively. Celine, who was questioning in a high tone as if to tear them apart, and Ellen, who was arguing in a suppressed voice, had the same anger in them, even though their tones were different.

However, Elena didn't hear the details of their argument.

Only the cause of their argument pierced her ears.

"...Asel is missing? Dead?"

# 51 - Imprisonment?(2)

Asel had regained consciousness, and already a week had passed.

Irina and Belle had returned to Wiheim a few days ago. However, Ena still lingered close to Asel, spending time in the place nearest to him. It would be a lie to say it wasn’t burdensome, but still, Asel didn’t push away his master’s worries and affection.

It was only natural. Ena hadn’t stayed for her own benefit; she remained purely to take care of Asel, so there was no reason to push her away.

That said, it was a bit frustrating that she wouldn’t let him out of the room at all.

“Can I go for a quick walk?”

“No.”

“When will I return to the academy?”

“Someday.”

“I need to report my survival.”

“Do it later.”

Whenever he tried to do something outside the room, it was always like this. Occasionally, when Ena went out, he would try to force the door open, but the magical circuits were so complex that it took too long. It was faster for Ena to return than for him to unlock the magic.

In fact, his attempts to disable the magic were discovered, causing the circuits to become even more tangled. The formula in that state was so complicated that it was a miracle it worked at all. Asel admired Ena’s skill in formula creation and completely gave up on escaping alone.

Unless Ena was gone for about three hours, he didn’t even dare to try.

‘I’m completely imprisoned.’

At this point, he couldn’t help but realize it. Asel sighed, acknowledging that he was confined. At that moment, Ena, who had been reading a book beside him, glanced over.

“What’s wrong, Asel? Are you still in pain?”

“……No, I’m fine.”

Asel lifted his glasses with his index finger as he spoke. Ena shot him a brief look of suspicion, but soon returned to her reading. Asel secretly took off his glasses and confirmed that his vision was so blurry it felt shattered, causing him to frown.

Honestly, whether he was imprisoned or not, it didn’t matter much as long as he was with Ena. If it became too much, he could always seek help from the outside.

What mattered was his eyes.

His body had mostly recovered. His mana flowed well, and even after some intense exercise, he didn’t feel any pain. However, his eyes caused a pain that felt like his brain was frying if he kept them open for even a short time.

It wasn’t just the pain from being on the verge of opening his eyes. It was caused by something far more advanced.

‘I didn’t expect my talent to bloom in this area too.’

The spontaneous awakening of magical eyes wasn’t common, but it wasn’t entirely unheard of either. In such cases, the eyes that were most suited to a person would awaken without any obstacles through certain actions or the absorption of elixirs.

Theoretically, Asel should have been the same. However, his innate talent was holding him back.

‘There are too many suitable magical eyes, and I can’t choose one.’

The magical disciplines Asel primarily dealt with exceeded at least five. He also applied basic magic from other disciplines, and if he researched and delved deeper, there was an abundance of options to use as his main focus. In such a situation, various types of magical eyes resonated with each type of magic, overworking his eyes and brain.

‘In the end, do I have to make a choice? Or should I wait?’

He didn’t know. The fortunate thing was that thanks to his glasses, his daily life wasn’t greatly affected. He could take his time to think until he returned to the academy. There was no need to act hastily.

Asel thought this as he gazed at the bracelet wrapped around his right wrist.

Putting aside his concerns about magical eyes, the most important thing at the moment was to integrate the long-considered remote targeting formula with electrification magic.

‘There’s no need to sit at a desk and ponder.’

He had already confirmed the formula. It was a spell that automatically intercepted and reflected attacks that went beyond his perception. He closed his eyes and envisioned the intricacies of that formula in his mind. He integrated it into the electrification spell he had already devised, slowly channeling his mana. During that process, he fixed any areas where the flow of mana was strangely altered.

The creation of magic. It required an extraordinary level of talent and effort, even if it wasn’t at the level of a Grandmaster. Asel achieved this within less than ten years of learning magic. It was a remarkable achievement that would make most magicians weep with envy, but Asel frowned at the magic he had created, dissatisfied.

‘It needs to be faster than this.’

He compressed the destructive power and speed unique to electrification magic to its extreme. Some of the mana burst out due to the pressure, but he didn’t stop compressing. If an attack came from the outside in that state, the compression would release, causing mana and lightning to explode outward.

Thus, he completed the creation of the magic. Since it was a spell he had been planning for a long time, and he had already built up some of the formula, the work wasn’t too difficult.

Asel opened his eyes, smiling with satisfaction. He then locked eyes with Ena, who was looking down at him.

Her lake-blue eyes blinked as she opened her mouth.

“……You just created magic, didn’t you?”

“Uh… yes.”

“What kind of magic is it? Show me.”

Having already seen the magic Asel created from the lake, Ena wasn’t surprised that he had made magic. Instead, she seemed curious, nibbling on her lips.

Asel smiled and showed her the magic he had created.

“I’ll be back shortly. Rest well.”

Ena said. She opened the long-locked door while wearing an outing hat for the first time in a while and stepped outside. Asel waved her off with a smile, then sprang up from his seat and opened the window.

Even this was impossible since Ena had locked it, but at least he could open the window.

That was exactly what Asel was aiming for. He leaned slightly out of the window and shifted his gaze to the side. There, he spotted a messenger bird huddled in the corner, trembling. The moment the messenger bird made eye contact with Asel, it squawked and rushed toward him.

[Caw caw!]

“Good, you came.”

Asel grabbed the messenger bird’s hot metallic neck and pulled it into the room.

The messenger bird, which had been ordered to send a letter to Ena, had returned to the point in time after Asel was imprisoned in the cathedral but had been waiting outside the window, following its master’s command not to show itself until it was found.

As a self-operating mechanical device, the endless wait was a challenging experience for the messenger bird as well.

Of course, Asel didn’t care about that. He immediately sat at his desk and began writing a letter to send to the academy.

Ena had said there was no need to report his survival to the academy. She didn’t particularly like the academy, and given what had happened, her feelings toward it must have plummeted to the depths.

He understood. Asel himself felt that his trust in the academy had diminished compared to before.

They had clearly said it was a vetted request, yet suddenly an eighth-tier Necromancer had appeared out of nowhere.

From Asel’s perspective, it was impossible not to suspect that the academy had either failed to properly vet the request or that there was a traitor working to lead the students into danger.

Whether it was true or not didn’t matter much. The fact that the most prestigious academy on the continent had acted in a way that could raise suspicion was the real issue. Perhaps by now, Friede was running around trying to explain things.

However, separate from that, he intended to report his survival. It wasn’t so much for the academy as it was a decision for the people he had become close to there.

The death of someone he considered a friend, even if not very close, was bound to be a significant shock.

Especially since Grace was someone who had witnessed Asel’s death in the previous round. Hearing news of a death shortly after reuniting would surely cause his recently improved mental state to plummet.

‘That must be prevented.’

Not just Grace. The escaped members, including Saya. Asel didn’t want to make them feel guilt or indebtedness.

“Please deliver this to the academy’s headmaster. Since you’ll be at the academy, there’s no need to find a mana source for your location, right?”

[Grr!]

“Good. And you can also give this to Saya at the academy. I’m counting on you again this time.”

Asel stuffed a letter into the messenger bird’s body. The bird nodded vigorously and eagerly absorbed the mana Asel provided.

Then it soared away, performing acrobatics beyond the open window. Asel closed the window only when the messenger bird was no longer in sight.

Turning around, he took in the unnecessarily large room.

‘There’s nothing special to do now.’

He had waited until Ena left to finally send the letter. Aside from that, there were no other scheduled activities. Asel pondered how to spend this time and decided to do some light exercise.

He needed to engage in rehabilitation activities anyway. He had to oil his creaking joints from not being used properly for days and stimulate his muscles to recover his lost strength.

And… thinking of strength brought back memories of the battle with the Necromancer.

The combat style he had experienced before meeting her was mostly about not moving much and acting with minimal movement while casting spells. However, in fights against powerful opponents like the Necromancer, he couldn’t do that at all. He had to move as quickly as possible to change the tide of battle or turn the situation in his favor.

For that, stamina was essential.

‘This is annoying.’

Asel sighed deeply at the thought of having to exercise, something he had never done in his life, but since exercise wasn’t bad for his body, he decided to approach it with a good mindset. He immediately tossed his coat onto the bed and dropped to the floor to start doing push-ups.

His knowledge of bodyweight exercises relied on memories from his past life. He pushed himself to the point of failure with push-ups, then moved on to squats and burpees.

Before long, sweat poured down like a waterfall. Asel caught his breath, brushed back his sweat-soaked hair, and wiped his face with his shirt.

At that moment, the door burst open, and Ena returned.

“I’m back. Asel, is there anything… uncomfortable…?”

Carrying a bag full of bread, Ena started to speak but then abruptly closed the door upon seeing Asel’s upper body slightly exposed.

Bang!

The door slammed shut with a loud noise. Ena stood in front of it, taking a deep breath.

“??”

She was swept away by a torrent of intense emotions, not even understanding why she was feeling this way. Just from catching a glimpse of Asel’s sweaty abdomen, her head felt like it was on fire, and her heart raced as if it were malfunctioning, with blood rushing through her body like crazy.

“Master? What’s wrong?”

“……Ugh!!”

At the sound of Asel’s concerned voice from beyond the door, electric signals coursed through her entire body. Ena prioritized calming herself over figuring out the cause of all these strange phenomena.

“Haah, haah, haah.”

She took deep breaths to soothe her heart and cooled her heated head with the rationality of a magician. Once her emotions settled to some extent, Ena let out a long breath and opened the door with her usual expressionless face.

At that moment, her eyes met Asel’s, who was standing in front of the door.

“Are you okay?”

Asel asked, his face glistening with sweat.

Bang!

Ena closed the door again.

# 52 - Return

Grace's return to the academy was delayed by a few days compared to others.

The request had already been resolved. The team members had returned to the academy, and Grace had only postponed her return for a brief errand.

It wasn't a big deal. She had just visited the mansion to retrieve something from her family.

During that time, she had also taken down a criminal organization that had nested in the territory, replenishing her wallet, and spent a bit more time than expected searching for a few fateful encounters from her memories. However, she still managed to return before the academy's designated period.

'Did Asel handle things well?'

As she walked through the bustling academy grounds, which were less crowded than usual, Grace pondered.

She couldn't precisely gauge the extent of Asel's magical abilities. However, she knew that they were certainly not low.

She had learned who was responsible for the Lightning from a clear sky that had struck during the entrance exam. It had been quite a shock at the time.

The only Electromancer she had known, including memories from the previous cycle, was Ena. The sight of her unleashing various forms of lightning to confront monsters and demons had left a significant impression on Grace.

Although Ena had died before the final battle, it was true that she had bought them some time.

So when Grace heard that Asel was a Disciple of Creation, she felt a sense of relief. She was someone trustworthy enough.

The fact that she was a woman was a slight concern, but Ena had never cared about such things, so there was no need to worry too much on that front.

In many ways, she was a commendable person. Both her skills and character were admirable. If Asel had learned under her, there seemed to be no need to worry about Asel's abilities either.

She would probably complete her assignments with top-tier grades. Perhaps she would even finish the midterms well and enter the upper class. Grace had set her sights on that place as well, and she vowed to meet Asel there.

Lost in thought, she soon arrived at the academy grounds. Grace tapped her fingers on her sword and decided to visit the dormitory first. After entering her room, changing her clothes, and completing a quick wash, she tossed a ring she had brought from her family onto her desk.

It was a magical artifact that extended her perception time, allowing her to split a second into a moment. It was considered a fine item even within the Baidel family, but Grace felt no particular excitement upon seeing it. To her, the ring was merely a tool to prepare for the upcoming midterms.

She had brought it out with her family's permission, and proving her own capabilities to them meant nothing to her. She had simply done what needed to be done.

Not feeling exhausted enough to need rest, Grace put on a light shirt and leather pants and left her room.

Before that, she stood in front of the mirror to check her appearance.

Her face was bare, untouched by makeup. She had the look of a naive girl who didn't know how to apply cosmetics. Yet, her face showed no signs of fading beauty. After putting on a smile, she left her room and stood in front of Asel's door.

“Ahem.”

Clearing her throat, she knocked on his door.

“Asel, it's me. Do you have a moment?”

The series of events from a few weeks ago had left a significant mark on her as a dark history. For several days afterward, she had only about ten blankets left with holes kicked through them. It was an unbearably embarrassing and shameful memory.

However, there were also some positive effects.

By revealing her regression, her mental burden had lightened somewhat, and she had resolved not to cling desperately to the relationships from her previous life.

It wasn't easy, but Grace had managed to do it. So, she decided to rebuild her relationship with Asel from the beginning. Starting as friends, becoming aware of each other, and ultimately envisioning a rosy life together with children.

Today was the first step toward that.

“Asel?”

But there was no response. Grace tilted her head and called his name again, but there was no sound of footsteps. Only then did she realize that there was no sign of life coming from inside the room, and she pouted her lips.

'Has he not come yet? Or is he out for a bit?'

Either way, it was disappointing. With a face full of regret, she left the dormitory and headed toward the main building of the academy. It was then that she realized the atmosphere of the academy was unusually subdued.

This was an exceptional case for a place that was usually full of vitality. Grace tilted her head as she overheard the murmurs of the second-year students moving in clusters. Her honed senses as a swordsman captured even the smallest sounds accurately.

“They say this year's new students are something else. If they died or went missing during the first assignment, isn't that basically nothing? Or did they all take on ridiculously difficult requests just to show off?”

“Even if they say it's difficult, it's still at the academy level. It's not like they couldn't solve it. It's just a lack of ability. Still, it's a pity. Isn't it the first time in history that an academy student has died during the course of their studies?”

“That's why they're even talking about taking a leave of absence from the entrance exam. Ugh, this sucks. Because of these guys, we might have to take a break too.”

'...Someone died during the assignment? A new student?'

Grace's face crumpled as she overheard their conversation.

This was something that hadn't happened in the previous cycle. There had been a terrorist attack during the entrance ceremony, but even then, there had been no casualties. There had only been a few injuries. No fatalities.

Of course, many things had changed since Grace's experience in the previous cycle. There had been no terrorist attacks, and there had been no minor incidents up to this point.

However, based on Grace's experience, if something that had happened in the previous cycle was not occurring in the present, it was certain that something else would come back in its place.

Perhaps all of this had erupted in connection with the first assignment.

“......”

Grace's face crumpled. She stood still for a moment, desperately trying to think.

At that moment, a male student who had been in the same group as her approached. He had a smile that anyone would find charming and waved at Grace.

“Oh, Grace! You're back. When did you come? You should have told me.”

“...Why should I tell you that?”

Grace replied in a cold voice. The slight hostility in her tone made the boy flinch.

“I-I was just making conversation. I didn't mean anything by it.”

“Is that so? Then now...”

Grace was about to tell him to shut up but suddenly hesitated, struck by a thought.

It was true that she didn't like the guy who had been overly friendly since their first meeting, but he was still a decent person to resolve her curiosity.

“I heard someone died and went missing during this assignment. Is that true?”

“Oh, that? Apparently, it's true. The guy's name was Gorsel, and all his teammates except for him died, and one wizard who was in the same group as Saya is also missing. The guy's name is...”

The name Gorsel was one Grace had never heard before. He was likely someone who, like Asel, had not entered the academy in the previous cycle.

Grace turned her head toward the boy, feeling an inexplicable unease about that name.

“What's his name?”

“Uh, let me think... Ah, I remember. Asel. That was definitely his name.”

The moment she heard that, Grace's mind went blank. She stared wide-eyed at the boy's face.

“...What?”

“I heard he went on a Doppelganger hunt and met a Necromancer, and they had to escape in a hurry, but only Asel couldn't get away and was declared missing. Well, they say he's missing, but he's basically dead—”

“Shut up!”

Grace shouted before the boy could finish his sentence. Her voice, filled with Aura, silenced him. But Grace paid no mind to him, covering her face with trembling hands.

'Asel is missing? Dead? Why?'

Grace had already experienced Asel's death once. The image of his face, forced to smile while spitting blood, was still vivid in her mind.

This life would be different. She vowed never to let him die in this new opportunity.

As soon as she realized her regression, she had made that promise and had worked tirelessly to fulfill it. Thanks to that, she had even earned the title of the youngest Expert in the Empire, but that wasn't enough.

The impending disaster was not something that could be stopped with mere expertise. She needed to aim for mastery and beyond. So, she had been tirelessly searching for fateful encounters and continuing her training to grow stronger.

This was the result. The complacency of thinking that being in the same academy meant there was no danger had put Asel's life at risk, regardless of her own level.

Perhaps it wasn't entirely her fault. No, objectively speaking, it was likely the academy's mistake that was the root of the problem.

But Grace believed that the cause of Asel's disappearance or death lay with her. The fact that she had knowledge yet had not actively tried to prevent it tightened her chest.

Whether that was true or false didn't matter. She gritted her teeth and spoke to the boy.

“Where's Saya?”

“……”

“……”

The two stared at each other with awkward eyes before quickly turning away.

# 53 - Breaking the Academy

Today, my master has become strange. No, perhaps it started yesterday.

I can't even tell exactly when I realized it, but for some time now, my master has not been making eye contact with me. Her responses were as brief as always, but the emotions contained within them seemed anything but short; they were rather complicated.

“Hmm, ahem...”

For a child to survive in a slum, they must constantly strive to please the adults around them. They had to sense their moods and maintain an appropriate demeanor to ensure their limbs grew up safely.

In that regard, Asel had a knack for picking up on others' emotions. It was no challenge at all to discern the feelings behind Ena's seemingly meaningless cough.

‘She seems confused.’

Suddenly feeling confused was not an emotion one would expect from someone who had been sitting and reading all day. Surely, something must have stirred her thoughts, but she wouldn’t answer any questions, leaving me at a loss.

“Master.”

“Hyah!”

“...?”

“Ahem! Why did you call?”

“...It’s nothing. I just wanted to call you.”

“Okay.”

Conversations always went like this. Whenever Asel called Ena, she would let out a strange scream and drop the book she was holding. Ena’s high-pitched voice, which was usually so calm, was a rare sight that even made Asel flinch. It was hard not to think, “I can’t believe my master would make such a sound.”

Sometimes, there were occasions when she wouldn’t respond at all when called. Each time that happened, if Asel looked at her, Ena would always be staring blankly at the ceiling. It seemed she was mumbling something with her lips moving, but her voice was so quiet that Asel couldn’t catch it.

While it wouldn’t be impossible to eavesdrop with magic, Asel didn’t feel the need to go that far.

They say a wizard without curiosity is a corpse, but that doesn’t mean one should intrude on someone else’s private life.

“...Hmm.”

Anyway.

The strange things about Ena were not limited to just one or two. She couldn’t make eye contact and couldn’t maintain a long conversation. Whenever she tried to force eye contact, she would quickly turn her head away, unable to keep her pupils still. Then, she would blink as if she didn’t even know why she was acting that way.

It seemed her mind was too tangled for normal communication to be possible.

That was the opportunity.

Asel planned to get a definite answer from Ena today about releasing her confinement. Under normal circumstances, it would be impossible, but for the confused Ena, it shouldn’t be too difficult.

From the moment the thought arose, the plan began. Asel cleared her throat to draw Ena’s attention, then carefully set the book she had been reading down on the bed.

“...”

Pretending not to notice, Asel realized that all of Ena’s attention was focused on her. Whether it was because she lacked the talent for eavesdropping or not, Asel could feel her gaze glancing over. However, Asel deliberately acted as if she didn’t notice and gazed out the window with a wistful expression.

Then she murmured.

“...I miss them.”

“...”

“Ah, I miss my friends. How long do I have to stay here?”

“...”

Would she show any reaction? Or would she remain completely unresponsive?

Asel continued to look out the window with a nervous heart.

At that moment, she heard the sound of a book being closed behind her.

The moment she heard that, Asel smiled brightly inside.

It was a big catch.

“...Do you want to go out?”

Ena spoke in a voice that seemed a bit apologetic. Asel turned to her with a wry smile.

“Ah, did you hear? I’m sorry. I was just talking to myself.”

“It’s fine. That can happen.”

Even though they were having a conversation, Ena still wouldn’t make eye contact with Asel. Normally, Asel would feel disappointed, but now it was a welcome reaction.

The fact that she had to deceive the one who had cared for her all her life made Asel’s heart ache a little, but she couldn’t stay stuck here forever. It was a crucial moment that called for a decisive move.

But before Asel could speak, Ena spoke first. She rummaged through her belongings and pulled out a letter as she continued.

“Don’t worry. You’ll be able to return to the academy soon.”

“Excuse me?”

That was an unexpected response. She had thought Ena was keeping her locked away in the cathedral, but it seemed that wasn’t the case.

But if that were true, there would be no reason to confine her here. Why was she so wary of letting her go outside?

Asel desperately tried to figure out Ena’s intentions. However, she couldn’t quite grasp what Ena meant.

It was only natural. The reason Ena had kept Asel confined, not really a confinement, was simply that she wanted to spend time alone with her disciple, whom she hadn’t seen in a long time.

Ena herself might think it was to make it difficult for her to escape if Virsia attacked, but deep within her, emotions and desires were slowly growing that were entirely different from her rationality.

She wanted to have private conversations with Asel. She wanted to discuss magic while being close to Asel. As fellow Electromancers, she wanted to share their understanding of the formulas they had each developed. Furthermore, she wanted to feel his body warmth and connect through their skin.

That was in the realm of the unconscious. A desire born from instinct and longing that she herself was unaware of. An obsession with her disciple that she didn’t know when it had begun, along with a desire to protect and possess him, was slowly growing within her.

She just hadn’t realized it yet.

But as always, sweet moments pass quickly. Confusing emotions and complicated feelings had to be pushed aside for now.

Ena read the letter she had taken out again, her expression hardening.

The letter bore the clear seal of the academy’s headmaster. It was sent directly from Friede.

[In two days, come to the western mountain of the academy. There, we can minimize the damage.]

Unlike the large sheet of paper, the content was short. But that was enough. Ena put the letter away and closed her eyes.

“Probably starting in two days, there will be a temporary suspension at the academy. It should last about a week, so just stay here until then.”

“A temporary suspension?”

“It’s the time it will take to publicize and resolve what you experienced this time. Don’t worry too much. I’ll take care of everything.”

She was all too familiar with destruction and damage, having done it so many times it had become tedious. It was her first time in a territory ruled by the empire, but since she had received the headmaster’s approval, there was no reason to hesitate. Of course, she would have to take action, but there was no need to worry about the aftermath of destruction before using magic.

Ena thought this as she opened her eyes.

At that moment, her gaze met Asel’s, who was sitting in the chair across from her. Asel leaned slightly forward and asked.

“Are you speaking, Master?”

“Ugh, ahhh...!”

Caught off guard by the unexpected ambush, Ena’s face flushed as she stood up.

Still, she needed more time to regain the distance between her and Asel.

The academy has what are commonly referred to as entrenched interests. This term mainly refers to professors and staff from high-ranking noble backgrounds. They possess a deeper affection for the academy they work at than one might expect, and they tend to regard it as their own honor.

In meetings, they often prioritize the academy’s prestige over the students themselves and look down upon those who voice opposing opinions. In severe cases, they would go so far as to harass someone until they left the academy or silence their voice altogether.

Of course, they did not resort to extreme measures like assassination. It wasn’t a matter of conscience or morality; they feared that if a rumor spread that one of the academy’s staff had been assassinated, it would tarnish the academy’s reputation.

All of this was to fill their own pockets. Luminous Academy treats those who belong to it with the same high regard as its reputation. This applies not only to students but also to professors and staff. Working at the most prestigious academy on the continent is equivalent to having one’s abilities recognized.

And those who have their abilities recognized naturally attract wealth, whether in salary or bribes. The amounts that flow into their pockets are unimaginably large. Their view of the academy’s honor as their own is rooted in all these reasons.

They claim to care for the academy more than anyone else, yet they are the ones who care for it the least—this is the contradiction of entrenched interests.

It was their doing that prevented the publicization of the first-year incident.

“Let’s keep this quiet. We just need to silence a few people, including Saya. It’s unfortunate that they died, but those who can live should live. There’s no need to expose the academy’s incompetence and suffer losses. Isn’t that right, Headmaster? For those of us with families to support, it’s best if nothing happens that could tarnish the academy’s honor. Please consider us as much as you think of the students.”

When one of the entrenched interests spoke like this, it was only natural that the others would fall silent.

Of course, a few individuals stood up, saying they wouldn’t tolerate such nonsense, but they were in the minority. And such public opinion battles always favored the majority.

Friede had no choice but to comply. This wasn’t an academy she was running alone. Although her voice wasn’t weak, it still lacked the strength to stand up against the majority of high-ranking nobles.

So even if she were to ignore their opinions unilaterally, it would complicate matters if they were uncooperative during the upcoming midterms.

In her heart, she wanted to uproot not only the entrenched interests but also their entire faction, but it was impossible at this time, which was not suitable for personnel changes. At the very least, she had to wait until after the midterms and find a suitable justification to get rid of them.

“...Hah.”

The more she thought about it, the more her anger boiled.

If it weren’t for the responsibilities that came with her position, she would have danced with swords in both hands like she used to; it was truly frustrating.

But just as there are downhill paths, there are uphill paths as well. There was no rule that said she had to suffer alone.

In that regard, receiving a letter from Asel containing a survival report and, shortly after, a letter from Ena stating she would destroy the academy was a stroke of luck.

Normally, she would have been tearing her hair out and struggling to stop Ena, but this time was different.

Justification? There was plenty. Her disciple had nearly died, and instead of compensation, they were rushing to cover up the incident. Even if they came and destroyed everything, the judge would side with Ena.

Sense of crisis? That was also sufficient. What could be more dangerous than a grand wizard rampaging and unleashing lightning indiscriminately?

It was a situation where the entrenched interests of the academy would be alerted, and the justification for that action fit perfectly. As soon as Friede realized this, she struck a deal with Ena.

It was fine to destroy the academy. But she requested that it be done in a way that would minimize damage, and in exchange for stepping back at the end, she asked for the incident involving her disciple to be publicized, compensated for, and apologized for. In return, she would comply with whatever Ena wanted!

She conveyed this sentiment in a letter to Ena, and surprisingly, Ena accepted.

Friede, who had secretly thought Ena would refuse her request, jumped up from her seat the moment she received her agreement and began to dance with Plume. Plume, thinking Friede had finally lost her mind, joined her with tears in her eyes.

When she was an enemy, she was the scariest of all, but when she was an ally, she was the most reassuring wizard. With Ena backing her, Friede had nothing to fear.

The recent decrease in her hysteria was all due to this.

“Hehehe.”

She chuckled softly as she stirred her teacup. She soon placed the cookies and cakes she had baked for refreshments on the table, opened the window with a clear view of the western mountain, and settled into the sofa.

It had already been two days since she informed Ena of the place and time to destroy.

Today was the scheduled day.

Since access to the western mountain had been strictly prohibited for several days, there was no need to worry about any victims. Just in case, she had even cast detection magic, so there was no need to fret about Ena killing someone.

Everything was perfect.

The first collaboration between an elf bound for centuries and a grand wizard. The moment Friede saw the white flash streaking across the sky, she smiled widely.

KWA-BOOM!!

A sudden white lightning bolt struck the peak of the western mountain of the academy as if to split it apart. All eyes of those wandering around the academy were momentarily fixed on that spot, and Friede excitedly bit into a cookie.

‘I decided to intervene about 30 minutes after Ena starts rampaging, so until then...’

I’ll just watch.

“Hehehe.”

Watching the academy grounds she had nurtured for a lifetime crumble was exhilarating.

The overwhelming sense of betrayal that surged forth felt so good it was almost euphoric.

Eat this, you entrenched bastards.

A word from the author (Author's note)

Thank you for your support, Igeogeodeunim. I apologize for the late confirmation.

# 54 - Breaking the Academy (2)

Ena's nickname, The Beginning, was no mere coincidence.

The land, the sea, and the sky. Each domain was a gift from a supreme being that had existed since the birth of humanity, and it was the role of those who walked the path of magic to explore it.

The first sorcerer, Glut, said so.

Thus, in accordance with his will, each domain could only have one representative title per era. Occasionally, there were vacancies due to the absence of talent, but fortunately, all three positions were currently filled.

The sorcerers representing each domain were as follows:

The supreme earth sorcerer, Ok-gon, representing the land.

The pure water sorcerer, Hae-cheong, representing the sea.

And the fierce Electromancer, The Beginning, representing the sky.

Traditionally, the sorcerers representing the sky had always been Stellar Rank Sorcerers. The movements of the stars, guided by their gestures, and the explosions of stars blooming from their fingertips always bestowed wonder upon people. Even fellow sorcerers could not help but marvel at the beautiful and violent spectacle of those stars.

That was until everything was shattered by the pure white lightning.

Few now remembered that day.

The girl who walked the battlefield, blank-faced, unleashing pure white lightning just ten years after the fall of the Magic Kingdom, the true ruler of the continent. Wherever she went, the sky would tear apart, piercing even the stars of those proud Stellar Rank Sorcerers to harness her own power, a monster of reverse calculation.

Even planets that obscured the sky were useless. Regardless of what the sky was like, that monster would inevitably summon clear skies.

Thus, she was The Beginning. Covered in blood, and by the time that blood turned to ashes and vanished, she had been called that for some time.

Now, it was a history of war that remained only in texts. As a result, few truly understood the weight of the name The Beginning and why that sorceress had garnered such infamy.

However, those who remained always spoke of The Beginning in this way:

Never, under any circumstances, turn her into an enemy.

It was the utmost praise for someone who had once been an adversary.

Suddenly, a white lightning struck. Though there were no dark clouds in the sky, a sharp bolt of lightning fell from the clear sky. The vibrations and noise were so intense that even the main building, where classes were being held, shook, drawing the attention of all students and academy staff.

“What’s going on all of a sudden?”

“Is it going to rain? But… the sky is clear?”

“Must be a fox rain.”

“Does lightning strike during fox rain?”

“Hey, hey, be quiet. The professor will get angry again.”

The classroom where the magic combat class was held was no different. However, unlike other places, the commotion did not escalate much. This was because Professor Firenze, who would erupt in anger at the slightest sound during class, was firmly standing at the lectern. As a result, the students could not look outside even if they wanted to.

Perhaps Professor Firenze would continue the lesson regardless of what was happening outside. They held back the urge to sigh and forced more strength into their pens.

“...Ah.”

But contrary to their expectations, Professor Firenze could not continue the lesson. Instead, as if captivated by something, he approached the window and gazed beyond it. The students tilted their heads at his back, but he paid them no mind.

All his attention was focused on the pure white lightning connecting the sky and the earth.

“Impressive.”

Lightning is originally just a flash of light that lasts for a moment. Its instantaneous destructive power and brightness are not to be underestimated, but its duration is particularly lacking compared to other natural phenomena. This characteristic is, of course, reflected in Electrification Art as well.

However… that lightning was not disappearing. Instead, it was growing larger, radiating brilliance as if it would incinerate both sky and earth.

How could that be possible? What kind of imagery did it possess, and what kind of uniqueness did it have to perform such a miracle?

Firenze instantly recognized who the owner of that lightning was. This only heightened his excitement.

The foundation of his field of study, magic combat, lay in war and conquest. The great figure who had experienced the history of that war was right there. The reasons for coming here and suddenly casting magic were irrelevant in the face of a sorcerer's curiosity and fighting spirit.

He wanted to see it directly. He wanted to feel it in his body.

That greatness.

That power!

“Professor Firenze! We’re under attack! A strange monster has invaded the western mountain of the academy!”

At that moment, as Firenze clenched his fist, the academy's supply officer burst through the classroom door, shouting.

The word "attack" caused the students to stir. Some began to rise from their seats, debating whether to flee or to fight against the crisis facing the academy. Meanwhile, Professor Firenze remained silent, his gaze fixed on the growing white brilliance.

“Professor Firenze!”

Just then, the supply officer, who had approached Firenze, grabbed his shoulder and shouted. He opened his mouth to tell Firenze to evacuate immediately.

But Firenze was quicker.

Still gazing out the window, he murmured.

“There is a great sorcerer over there.”

“...What?”

“Perhaps there lies a living monster that contains the essence of all combat magic theories defined to this day.”

“Professor Firenze, this isn’t a training situation. I don’t understand what you’re saying all of a sudden—”

“As a junior walking the same path of combat magic, how could I pretend not to see that?”

Ignoring the supply officer's words, Firenze threw open the window.

At that moment, a brilliant white light began to explode from the sky. The light soon split into lightning and fell toward the earth.

KWA-AAAAAAANG!!!

The world lights up. The amount of light surpasses all limits, momentarily darkening vision. The chilling aura and electric current transmitted through the air expand every sense in his body. Just the impact of the violent mana made his hands tremble.

Everything felt exhilarating.

“‘The sky she walked under was endlessly clear, yet the land was entirely ash.’”

“What on earth are you—!”

“I finally understand the meaning of that sentence. Senior.”

Firenze grinned widely and threw himself out the open window.

“I’m going to see her now.”

WHOOSH!!!

The wind lifted his body.

Ena stood majestically in the sky, looking down at the earth. The pure white lightning dancing behind her twisted and burned trees and the ground, moving as her eyes did. It was destruction achieved purely through the release of raw mana, without any formula being invoked.

This would exponentially increase the amount of mana consumed, but for Ena, who was naturally overflowing with mana, it was not a burden at all.

“...Hoo.”

The wind blowing was cold. It had warmed up quite a bit, but the weather was still chilly. It seemed there was still some time before summer arrived. Though it had been quite a while since she had become free from the constraints of the seasons, her preferred season still remained.

‘When summer comes, should I go to the sea with Asel?’

Ena thought this and let out a small laugh. Then, surprised by herself, she covered her mouth with one hand.

Again. Once more, just thinking about Asel made her smile involuntarily. It had always been like this, but it felt even more intense recently. Moreover, for the past few days, she had found it hard to look directly at Asel's face, and long conversations made her heart flutter to the point of being unbearable.

‘What could the reason be?’

Ena pondered for a moment but could not come up with an answer. A sigh escaped her lips.

Well, it didn’t matter. After all, this wasn’t what was important right now.

Ena narrowed her eyes and glanced at the academy professors gathered at the foot of the mountain. They looked like small dots from afar, but she could clearly perceive their urgent expressions as they discussed various matters.

She could eavesdrop, but she chose not to. After all, their chatter wouldn’t change the situation.

She was aware that this situation was a play created by Friede and herself. Therefore, she was neither excessively angry nor engaging in acts of destruction. She planned to rampage moderately, talk about Asel, and then leave.

The discussions with the alliance had already concluded. The Leader, who was about to invade the academy directly to ascertain the truth of the incident, had respected Ena's wishes for the time being. However, once she finished her business here, he intended to take action himself.

It was a good thing, after all. Preventing the invasion was the academy's responsibility, not something Ena needed to concern herself with.

“......”

Honestly, if someone were to ask if she was truly angry, the answer would be no. She simply wasn’t at the point of losing her rationality.

If Asel had died or remained in a comatose state for an extended period, she would have wiped the academy off the map. Casualties or not, she would have undoubtedly made sure that all academy personnel were left alive.

Ena knew herself very well.

But now, there was no need to act that way. Asel seemed to want to return to the academy, and she had made a deal with Friede, so she couldn’t engage in reckless acts of destruction.

Of course, if asked whether Friede was justified in the current situation, the answer would be no. However, she had promised a reasonable compensation for this, so she was merely biding her time.

She was merely on hold. Depending on what kind of compensation was offered and how the situation was handled later, her stance would be determined.

“......Hoo.”

Her thoughts were lengthy. Ena exhaled deeply and slowly drew up her mana.

She intended to channel just enough mana to alleviate her anger.

‘First, I need to seal off this area.’

As Ena thought this, she brought her hand down from above. Following that motion, her mana surged, and the rampaging lightning formed a shape beneath her feet.

[Thunder Spear]

KWA-RUUUUM!!!

The massive spear of lightning revealed its majesty. Even the professors who had been chattering felt a shiver from the mana, and Ena thrust it down toward the ground. With that alone, the world momentarily flashed, and the deafening roar rendered her ears useless.

The professors, unable to protect themselves in time, fell to the ground in pain, and amidst them, Firenze soared through the air, riding the wind.

He did not slow down, and as he faced Ena's azure gaze, he shouted.

“One move!”

“......”

“Please!”

A shapeless spear of wind shot out rapidly from his feet. As a spell used by a high-ranking sorcerer of the seventh tier, its power was formidable.

But that was all. It was far from sufficient to breach Ena's defenses.

CRACKLE!!!

The lightning erupting from Ena's entire body tore through the wind. Without any resistance, it vanished in an instant, as if it had encountered a being that could not even dare to resist.

Firenze’s attack returned to nothingness so easily. Yet his face remained filled with a smile.

The sorcerer's fighting spirit and curiosity constantly spurred him on. This was merely the first move. He had no intention of being satisfied with just this.

A fight where defeat was expected. Therefore, he would pour everything into it, as thoroughly as possible, and lose.

To learn even one more thing.

To feel even one more thing.

To—

“The move is obvious.”

Ena said, looking down at Firenze.

“I have no intention of playing along.”

She extended her hand toward him.

[White Radiance Summon Death]

CRACKLE!!!

A sphere of pure white lightning exploded from her outstretched hand and shot toward Firenze.

It was too late to evade. The speed at which it was fired was beyond imagination. Thus, he quickly constructed a defensive formula and moved as far away as possible on the wind.

But the lightning was faster than he could escape the spell's range.

CRACKLE!!!

The shield he had created with all his focus vanished without resistance. The wind he had been riding disintegrated as soon as it encountered the sphere’s impact. The unique mobility of a wind sorcerer was sealed in an instant, and simultaneously, the lightning sphere reached right in front of Firenze.

“...Ah.”

A cry of despair escaped his lips.

CRACKLE!!!

Firenze's body was engulfed in pure white light. He felt a pain that seemed to tear him apart and fell.

The difference between one who studies combat magic and one who creates it was stark.

Academic zeal and fighting spirit meant nothing.

“Ena!”

A familiar voice called from beyond the bushes where Firenze had fallen. As Ena turned her gaze there, Fernan leaped toward her, his sword enveloped in aura.

Before their eyes could meet, he slashed his sword diagonally.

CLANG!!!

Fernan's sword was repelled in mid-air by Ena's magic. However, there was not a hint of disappointment on Fernan's face.

It was only natural. He had no intention of harming Ena.

He simply wanted to convey one thing.

“It's a message from the Dean. Half of the people present here support the Dean, while the other half are those who have sided with the remnants of the old powers. I’m on the supportive side. Anyway, the forces aligned with the Dean, including myself, are prepared to be half-dead, so don’t hesitate to attack vigorously.”

“Is that one of yours?”

“No. Professor Firenze is neither side. If anything, he’s a scholar obsessed with magic.”

“Really?”

That was the extent of her interest. Ena extinguished her curiosity about the sorcerer collapsing from her magic and narrowed her eyes at Fernan.

“You said I could attack without hesitation.”

“Yes. Please feel free to destroy this area! After all, I won’t be covering the repair costs!”

“You. You made my student faint during the entrance exam.”

“...What?”

The unexpected remark slipped from her lips. As Fernan questioned her, Ena grabbed his sword with her hand and invoked a spell.

“Let’s have you faint today too.”

[Thunder Transformation Fan]

CRACKLE!!!

The fan-shaped lightning poured down, engulfing Fernan's upper body.

A word from the author (Author's Note)

Have a great day, everyone.

# 56 - Underground Vault

The day after Ena attacked the Academy. As expected, all Academy operations were temporarily suspended. All academic schedules were canceled in an instant, and the upperclassmen who had been looking forward to the inter-grade competition were all disappointed.

But there was nothing they could do. Since the academic affairs officials had made that decision, it was impossible to argue.

No, even if they did argue, would anything change in the first place?

"......"

The scenery outside the window of the 2nd-year dormitory.

Originally, there was a huge mountain behind their dormitory. It was carefully managed to prevent monsters or dangerous wild animals from appearing, and even a walking trail was built, making it a haven for the 2nd-year students.

When tests didn't go well, or when they felt depressed, the 2nd-year students would often go into the mountain and spend time in their own haven. They would light a bonfire and stare blankly at the flames, or sit on a bench along the walking trail and look up at the sky. They quite liked the comfortable atmosphere that nature provided.

That mountain disappeared overnight. Instead, a broken and shattered plain was showing off its appearance. Squirrels and beavers who had lost their homes were rolling around on the ground, and the 2nd-year students who had also lost their havens were weeping. Then, occasionally, when electricity sparked from the ground, they would scream and quickly return to the dormitory.

"......Haa."

It was too devastating to be the result of an attack by a single mage. They said that a great mage could change the terrain if they put their heart into it, but it seemed that it wasn't an exaggerated expression after all. Hamon Yankov, the top student of the entire 2nd year, thought so and sighed deeply.

Born as a natural warrior, he liked stories of knights but had little interest in mages. So he didn't know how great Ena was at all. He had heard her name mentioned here and there, and knew that she was a strong mage, but he never dreamed that her power would be this great.

"......The more I look at it, the more absurd it is."

The scenery outside the window. A devastated plain, various wild animals running around on it, and 2nd-year students.

And above that.

The trace of a pure white thunderbolt streaking across the sky remained deep in the sky, flashing occasionally.

A part of the Academy grounds was completely destroyed. And it wasn't even an attack by some group, but neatly destroyed by a single mage.

It was an absurd thing to happen at Luminous Academy, which was full of powerful individuals. So much so that letters asking what happened came from other academies.

Some of the letters were mocking, but after realizing that the attacker was Ena, they all sent sincere condolences. Friede shed tears while reading the old men with white hair's heartfelt letters.

She didn't want it to be destroyed to this extent.

She really didn't know that they would have to move an entire mountain to restore it!

Even if she lamented, it was already water under the bridge. Ena had the talent to destroy, but not the talent to restore. Friede was the same. She couldn't make land rise from below without an earth Formula master.

In the end, they had no choice but to bring a mountain directly or create a completely different natural environment.

Either way, it was certain that a considerable budget would be consumed. For Friede, an elf who loved nature by birth, leaving it as it was was not an option. So she decided, with tears in her eyes, to create a forest on the plain. That instantly emptied her wallet and the Academy's budget.

But where there is expenditure, there is also income. Friede pushed through the conclusion to accept Ena's demands at the emergency Academy meeting that was naturally held.

There were objections. Most of them were people who had been away from the Academy for a while and had hurriedly returned today. They strongly requested that a decision be made after grasping the situation.

But their arguments disappeared like bubbles as soon as they saw the white scar engraved in the sky.

That's how people are. Just seeing the traces of irresistible violence extinguishes their will to fight. Even Friede, who had lived in the same era as Ena, or even longer, thought that the extreme magic Ena used was extremely dangerous.

If she hadn't controlled the output of her Mana, the entire west side of the Academy would have been blown away. Some might say that she was being too dramatic, but Friede knew Ena's full power. It wasn't for nothing that she was nicknamed a long-lived species that shouldn't be touched, even among the long-lived species.

Anyway.

The conclusion of the meeting was that all of Ena's demands would be met, and appropriate compensation would be given to the victim. Some of the entrenched elements still sent disapproving glances, but Friede ignored them. Now that she had justification, no one could stop her.

"Wait a minute! This isn't my fault, it's my assistant professor's fault! She must have made a mistake in the process of helping with the request review."

"Shut up and get out."

"Wait, Headmaster! Headmaster!!"

The professor who had been reviewing the requests coming into the Academy was also immediately fired. He was originally attached to the entrenched elements. There was no hesitation in letting him go. Even if a large-scale purge was impossible at this point, getting rid of one wasn't that difficult.

With the announcement of the name of the dismissed Academy professor, the incident that occurred in the first 1st-year assignment was widely publicized. Friede herself came to the official stage, bowed, and promised to provide the maximum compensation to Gorsel and his deceased team members, and to Asel. Along with that, the Academy was temporarily closed for two weeks.

Naturally, the Academy was in an uproar. She received all sorts of criticism and accusations, and calls poured in non-stop from nobles who had enrolled their children in the Academy. Friede became the Academy's shield and took all those attacks.

Thanks to that, her assistant, Plume, was dying. No, she was dying with Friede. It took a week to clean up the chaotic internal affairs of the Academy. The date of the Academy's reopening, which had been promised to Ena in advance, was approaching, but Friede politely asked for a little more time.

Ena readily accepted. It meant that the period she could be with Asel was extended, so she had no reason to refuse.

But Friede had another formidable enemy besides Ena.

"The tea tastes good."

It was an old man with impressive white hair and a neatly tied beard. The robe he was wearing was huge, but it couldn't hide the dignity contained within. Even though he was a mage, his trained physique was glimpsed inside the sleeves, and the dizzying and complex Mana patterns unique to Space spell masters emanated from his entire body.

As far as Friede knew, only one person on the continent possessed such Mana patterns.

A genius who completed his rank at a young age. But a strange person among strange people who forcibly broke all his ranks to learn Space Formula and rebuilt from the beginning. Nevertheless, a monster who quickly reached the 8th Circle and seized the position of Great Mage.

Wiheim Ivarren.

He smiled gently, clinking his teacup.

"Oh my, I'd like to learn whose skill this is."

"......My assistant brewed the tea. If you want, I can ask her to tell you the recipe at any time."

"Oh, there's no need for that. An old man can't steal a young woman's time, can he? I'll be satisfied with today."

Wiheim said with a good-natured smile. But Friede couldn't just smile.

He pretended not to be, but he had dozens of water snakes living inside him. He certainly had a violent tendency similar to Ena's in the past, but since taking on the role of Leader, it seemed that his means had changed from physical violence to pen nibs and the tips of his tongue.

Personally, Friede liked him better in the past. That's because a mage who does as he pleases is easier to deal with than a mage who is skilled in management.

Still, if Wiheim didn't come here to fight, there was no need to worry too much. The mage sitting next to Wiheim smoking a pipe was a concern, but she didn't seem to have any will to fight either.

In the end, it was a negotiation table. And Friede was planning to grant most of what he wanted if possible.

Anyone who knew about morality would have to do that unconditionally. Of course, she couldn't accept all the conditions he presented, but she was still going to adjust them well and aim to benefit Asel and Wiheim as much as possible.

It was better than engaging in a pointless power struggle. There was no need to do anything that would raise voices in a situation where the relationship between the parties was clear.

Friede thought so and opened her mouth first towards Wiheim, who was smiling brightly.

"First of all, I'd like to apologize. I'm really sincerely sorry that an unfortunate incident occurred at the Academy that you trusted and sent them to. I have nothing to say even if I had ten mouths."

"You should apologize directly to Asel, not me. I'm not even a party to the incident. I was a little angry, but I've calmed down now."

"Still, I'm sincerely sorry."

Instead of answering, Wiheim smiled and picked up a cookie. Irina exhaled smoke into the air.

"Of course, I'm planning to compensate for the apology. To both Wiheim and Asel. So don't hesitate and tell me what you want. I'll grant it as much as possible."

"My demands can come later. Rather than that, Asel's first."

Wiheim took out a neatly folded piece of paper from his pocket. Friede checked the contents and made a sound of contemplation.

[I want to take the Magical artifact in the Academy's underground vault. Of course, the ownership is mine.]

Not many people knew that the Academy had an underground vault where Magical artifacts were stored. But how did Asel accurately grasp the existence of the vault and want the items inside?

The answer was obvious. Friede turned her head towards Irina, who was looking at her, and sighed deeply. Irina smiled and extinguished the flame of her pipe.

"How have you been, Headmaster?"

"......I've been fine. Although it's been tough lately."

"Hang in there."

That was the end of the conversation. Irina, who couldn't drink caffeine, gulped down milk and broke a cookie in half, nibbling on it. Friede turned her head away from her and leaned back on the backrest to think for a moment.

A moment of silence passed. But no one was impatient.

Wiheim quietly appreciated the birdsong coming from outside the window, and Irina smiled while freely manipulating the smoke she had created.

After a long time.

The Headmaster's mouth opened.

"I understand. I'll provide one Magical artifact. What else?"

"I think you should hear that directly."

"......What?"

Instead of answering, Wiheim smiled and strongly struck the air.

[Otherworld]

Crack!!

Cracks appeared in the Space centered on the place where his fist touched. The cracks soon spread into fissures and extended in all directions, eventually forming a complete black passage.

And from beyond that, Asel walked out before Friede had a chance to grasp the situation. Ena followed behind him.

"It seems like it went well, seeing that the passage is open?"

Asel asked Wiheim. Wiheim shrugged and replied.

"That's right. I've already been promised one Magical artifact."

"Good. Then let's move on to the next plan."

"That's what I wanted."

The two turned their heads towards Friede at the same time. Ena sat quietly next to Irina, and Irina looked down at her and exhaled cigarette smoke.

Zap!!

"Cough!"

Lightning struck Irina's side. The retribution was so swift and accurate.

And watching all of this, Friede wore a resigned smile.

The number of enemies to deal with instantly increased from two to four.

Her vision darkened.

It was her own fault.

Author's words (Author's afterword)

Ena's illustration rough has arrived. I think I'll be able to show it to you all soon.

Have a good day, everyone.

# 57 - Underground Vault (2)

Until the letter from Norium arrived, Asel had not been particularly expecting any reward from the Academy. If they gave her something, that would be nice, but if not, it didn't matter much. However, after hearing about the Academy's underground vault from Irina, her attitude changed in an instant.

* If you go down the Academy's sewer, there's a shabby-looking prison door. Beyond that, all sorts of magical artifacts and scrolls remain in their original state. As far as I remember, there are even magical artifacts used by Cromwell, the first Electromancer.

Those words awakened all of Asel's senses.

The first Electromancer, Cromwell. A transcendent being who established a new myth of destruction and a cruel grandmaster. Asel had read the autobiography she wrote herself, so she knew quite a bit about Cromwell.

She was born in a repository of sacrifices for demon worshipers. The place where her memories first began was not in her mother's or father's arms, but inside a corpse with organs cleanly cut out, forming a pool of blood. There, she drank the blood of her kin to become an excellent sacrifice.

It was a continuous series of disgusting days. Fortunately, she did not resort to cannibalism, but starting with killing her own parents, she continued to commit murder.

It was a process to corrupt souls and use them as sacrifices to manifest the demon of the moon. Cromwell endured it all with a heart that vomited blood.

Five years passed. The year she turned seven.

By chance, she witnessed a spell used by one of the demon worshipers. And she immediately replicated it and made it her own. It took just over a second to construct the Core Reactor, and the manifestation of the spell occurred simultaneously with her thought. Moreover, she did not stop there; she quickly understood the characteristics of the spell she had used and reached a level of application.

Thus, she shattered the hideout of the demon worshipers. With a massive explosion, the cave collapsed, and she emerged as the sole survivor, squeezing through the broken rocks. After that, there was a continuous narrative of how she traveled across the continent.

Asel read that part carefully, but she was even more intrigued by the process of creating Electromancy.

* I was raised by the minions of demons. I killed those who gave birth to me under their oppression and even acquired unwanted negative Mana. The process was never smooth. Even before my ego formed, I wished for my own death.
* But I am here. I remain alive on this land. Therefore, what I can do is not to find comfort in my death but to directly grind the damned demon worshipers. That is my given mission and my life. However, with the magic I learned, it was impossible to kill those who were deeply fused with demons. Humanity has not yet built such a magnificent magical system.
* So I helped them. With the knowledge and talent I gained, I completely overhauled the overall manifestation methods and learning processes of magic. Then, by chance, I saw a lightning bolt flashing in the sky. And that changed my life.
* Nature is great. No matter how extraordinary a superhuman might be, if they throw themselves into a typhoon, they will be torn apart alive, and they cannot withstand the flames that melt lava and iron from a volcano. The same goes for the lightning that strikes from the sky. The momentary power is the spear of God that overwhelms all natural phenomena. While studying magic, I suddenly wanted to possess that.
* So I tried. I explored the power of lightning by directly striking my body with it and figured out how that power moved. I faced death dozens of times, and when I first succeeded in converting Mana into the power of lightning, the electrical signals throughout my body went haywire, causing me to repeatedly die and come back to life.
* Yet, I am here. In the end, I succeeded in making lightning my own. I have not yet created a formula to handle the power of lightning, but now lightning dwells within my Mana. The first step of a special magic that other magicians cannot even imitate, for which one must be prepared to face death just by trying to replicate it, has taken root within me.
* I named this magic Electromancy. And after confirming that no magician other than myself could use it, I referred to this extremely difficult magic to learn as special magic. Electromancy was the first special magic to appear in this world.

Thus, the autobiography comes to an end. There was no content about what happened to her afterward, what kind of life she lived, or how she met her death. However, it was certain that all the Electromancy formulas she created were heavily focused on destruction, indicating a strong scent of blood surrounding her future.

“It’s been a while, Dean.”

Anyway, that wasn’t the important part. While Asel was curious about Cromwell's life trajectory, she was even more interested in the artifacts she carried.

Cromwell was a magician with considerable skill in crafting magical artifacts during her lifetime. Although she did not make many, according to the remaining records, each magical artifact she used was of the highest quality. Some of them lay dormant in the Academy's underground vault.

It was unclear how such great magical artifacts ended up in a place like this, but honestly, that didn’t matter much. What was important was that there was an opportunity to obtain such magical artifacts.

‘As the Leader said, I will extract as much as I can.’

Asel thought this as she settled into the sofa.

There was no guilt. She had nearly died, so what did conscience matter? It was right to do her best to suck everything dry to the bone. Both the reason and instinct of a magician screamed that way.

“Have you been well? I’ve been doing alright. I’ve had a few close calls, but I’m fine now.”

“……I’m glad to hear that. I was quite worried.”

“Haha. It’s quite moving to hear the Dean express concern for me.”

“……Haha.”

Friede let out a dry laugh. While conversing with Asel, he glanced at Ena and Norium, who were sitting on either side of him.

They were not saying anything, but each was looking at Friede with their unique expressions. Just from that gaze, Friede felt as if his throat was being squeezed.

Perhaps they were preparing to pounce if he showed any signs of refusal or a ‘that’s a bit…’ attitude in the main topic that was about to come up.

Just imagining it made his fingertips tingle.

Clearing his throat deliberately, Friede looked at Asel and opened his mouth.

“I’m truly sorry about this incident. I want to sincerely apologize on behalf of the Academy.”

“Oh, it’s alright. I was hurt, but I’m still alive.”

“That’s not important. What matters is that you were put in a dangerous situation due to the Academy’s mistake. I sincerely apologize on behalf of the Academy. I will ensure that this never happens again.”

Friede slightly bowed his head and spoke with a sincere voice. Regardless of whether Norium and Ena were firmly holding their ground, it was only natural for him to apologize to Asel as a human. In matters like this, her head was not that heavy.

Asel accepted her apology with a smile and then began the conversation in earnest.

“I heard you’ve already read the letter.”

“That's right. You want to go to the underground vault?”

“Yes. I believe you have already granted permission.”

“Right. Honestly, it’s not a difficult matter. I will have one of the magical artifacts in the vault delivered to you right away.”

“Just one? I didn’t say just one.”

“?”

Friede tilted his head. Asel smiled and leaned slightly forward.

It was a transaction with clear roles of give and take. There was no need to engage in the transaction on equal terms.

“I want to take three: one for the damage done to my body, another to soothe my disappointment with the Academy, and finally one to appease my master’s anger.”

“Are you trying to rob me?”

Friede unconsciously retorted, then immediately noticed Ena's face darkening and nodded quickly.

“I shouldn’t use such harsh words. Three. I’ve acknowledged that. Take them.”

“Thank you. You truly are the Dean.”

Asel said with a bright smile. Inside, Friede was shedding tears of blood.

The magical artifacts, scrolls, and potions in the Academy's underground vault were astronomically valuable. The vault was filled with relics discovered in ruins and items gifted by renowned strong individuals just before their deaths. Thus, there were powerful and rare tools lined up.

Even taking just one to sell would significantly aid the Academy's finances. And now, three of those incredible items had been completely taken from Asel.

With the Academy's finances already in a hole and her own wallet punctured, Friede felt as if her glass-like heart was about to shatter at any moment. But she quickly steadied her mind.

Yes, this was compensation for a student who had nearly died because of her. It would be wrong to show discontent or to seek credit for such a thing. It was clearly not right as an educator or as a person in charge.

Thinking this way eased her mind.

She smiled gently and turned to Asel.

“Is there anything else you need?”

“I don’t have any. This should be enough.”

“Good. Then let’s head to the underground vault right away. I just need to prepare for a moment.”

The moment Friede said that and stood up, Norium quickly opened his mouth.

“Why the rush, Dean? Even though the conversation with Asel has ended, we haven’t even started discussing the compensation for ‘Wiheim’ yet. Please sit back down.”

“……Norium.”

“Even if you call me with such a pitiful voice, it won’t work. Come on, I have a contract prepared in advance. Just read it and sign here and here.”

“……Hiiing.”

“Ugh, listening to the whining of an elf that’s been around for hundreds of years is tough. Senior, be careful in front of Asel.”

“Shut up.”

Ena shot lightning at Norium. Norium opened a spatial pocket to lightly deflect her attack and then spoke to Friede.

“Anyway, there’s nothing significantly detrimental to the Academy in this content. And to maintain a friendly relationship with the alliance, signing here will be much more beneficial. Don’t forget that my term still has a long way to go.”

“……Hmph.”

Friede puffed her cheeks and whispered that before starting to sign the contract.

Norium immediately made a face as if he had seen something he shouldn’t have.

“Graaah!”

The path to the Academy's underground vault was laid out in the sewer connecting to the basement of the main building. Descending the damp stairs, a wide channel with clear water flowed gently, and deeper inside, there was another staircase leading down.

At the end of the stairs was a shabby-looking metal door. It resembled a prison door used to hold prisoners. However, despite its appearance, the number of spells placed on the door easily exceeded dozens.

The power of those spells was not to be underestimated. Asel stood quietly behind Friede, who began to open the door, examining the spells that had been placed on it. Then she let out a gasp of admiration.

The way to open the door before her was not by using a key or speaking a specific phrase. One had to draw the Mana circuit used when the door was first created and installed in reverse, without any errors from the beginning, for the spells placed on the door to not activate and for it to open quietly.

Moreover, simply approaching the door did not allow one to know the circuit. Only a select few individuals permitted access to the Academy were given the opportunity to remember the circuit in their minds.

It was an exceedingly complicated method. Even if the person trying to open the door was a permitted staff member, a single mistake would activate all sorts of spells, leaving the staff member in a crippled state.

Still, it was better to have strict security than to be lax. Asel quietly waited until Friede opened the door.

“It’s open.”

Not long after, Friede opened the vault door.

With a creaking sound, the door opened.

Whoosh!!

An overwhelming surge of Mana rushed from beyond. Even Asel was momentarily overwhelmed by the powerful wave of Mana.

A glow appeared in Norium and Irina's eyes, and Ena stood slightly apart from Asel with a nonchalant expression.

“Let’s go.”

Friede said. Asel twitched the corners of her mouth and stepped through the metal door.

The treasure hunt begins.

# 58 - Aleph

The moment Asel entered the vault, he grinned, feeling the immense Mana welcoming him. An intangible vortex formed by the mixture of various types of Mana. The overwhelming waves of Mana within danced around Asel, greeting him.

"This is..."

No one present was insensitive to Mana. The three archmages, sensing the Mana swirling around Asel, exclaimed in admiration. Ena wore a proud expression, pleased with her disciple's prowess.

It was quite extreme. He wondered when she had become so devoted; her infatuation with her disciple was, frankly, not a pretty sight. There was a limit to being a fool for one's student.

Friede thought so and turned her head.

Asel was already freely roaming inside the vault. There seemed to be no need for further explanation. So Friede let him wander freely and began to explore the vault herself after a long time. The other mages, though silent, also looked around the vast vault.

'More like a warehouse than a vault.'

Asel thought, gazing at the countless Magical artifacts displayed in the showcases.

The space was generally grayish. The ceiling was high, and it was long sideways, giving the feeling of being in a material warehouse of a trade guild.

However, unlike the warehouses handled by guilds, the material encompassing this vault was all high-grade metal with high Mana conductivity. The cost of building the vault alone could easily buy a mansion in the imperial capital.

But the true value of this place was not the vault itself, but the objects contained within. Asel looked into a ring inside a transparent glass case and made a humming sound.

There was no separate description of the ring. However, Asel immediately realized the effect of the Magical artifact.

This is a Magical artifact inscribed with a Formula that reverses wounds. By injecting Mana, it is a ring engraved with a high-level healing Formula that restores all wounds on the body to perfect condition once a day. However, it had a fatal flaw: it required enduring a tremendous amount of pain.

Although the Formula was very effective compared to the drawback, well. Asel didn't feel particularly drawn to this ring. It would be nice to have, but there seemed to be no need to take it from here. Asel immediately moved towards another display case.

Ultimately, the first thing to take should be Cromwell's legacy. However, searching for the Magical artifact sleeping in this vast vault by running around was virtually impossible. Even rummaging through each one would clearly take several days.

But fortunately, Asel had a means to find her legacy.

'According to the records about Cromwell, all the Magical artifacts she created were made for Electromancers.'

Then, wouldn't it be possible to find it by causing a resonance of Electrification Property Magic?

Having thought of it, there was no reason to hesitate. Asel immediately conjured a dark blue lightning bolt on his fist and scattered it in all directions.

Fzzzt.

The lightning, rapidly racing through the space, penetrated every corner of the vault in detail. As it did, it writhed to find similar Mana and resonate with it.

"……!"

Before long, Asel could feel a familiar fragment of Mana starting to be caught in the corner of the vault. He moved towards it without hesitation. A long, extended lightning bolt guided him.

Upon arrival, there was a small box placed there. The Mana emanating from within resonated with Asel's Mana, causing small lightning bolts to flow around. Asel swallowed once and carefully opened the box. In case an explosion occurred inside, he surrounded his body with all sorts of defensive Formulas.

Click.

The box opened with a soft sound. Fortunately, the feared situation did not occur. The emanating lightning was still there, but it did not go berserk or wildly rampage. Asel inwardly breathed a sigh of relief and examined the inside of the box.

"……?"

His face changed subtly.

Inside the box were an old book and a plant emitting blue lightning. The Mana flowing from the plant resonated with Asel's Mana, repeatedly flashing as if a heart was beating.

It was a strange sight. There were quite a few plants in the world that possessed Mana, but it was rare for them to have such specific attributes. Moreover, all the Mana herbs discovered to date were related to the five elements, and plants that emitted lightning like this were not even listed in the dictionary.

'It's too much to simply think of it as rare.'

If it had been discovered even once by explorers or mages, its name or characteristics would have been recorded in the dictionary. That meant that this plant had never been seen by anyone else before. Except for the person who put it here.

"……."

Asel narrowed his eyes and, instead of touching the plant, picked up the book next to it first. The book, which had been frozen as if time had stopped, suddenly fluttered as if it had come back to life as soon as Asel's hand touched it, shaking off all the dust that had accumulated.

Whoosh.

Amidst the scattering dust, the tightly closed book suddenly opened and forcibly began to covet Asel's Mana. He could have refused, but Asel quietly waited for the book to take enough of his Mana.

If the book had exuded an aura that seemed to harm him, Asel would have torn the book without hesitation. But the book showed no such sign at all, and instead emitted only a clean and pure aura. It was to the point where he didn't feel the need to refuse.

Eventually, the absorption of Mana ended. At the same time, the book, which had been opening haphazardly, stopped at one point.

It was a page with nothing written on it. But Asel narrowed his eyes and stared at the blank page. At that moment, with the sound of something cracking, black letters began to be inscribed on the white paper.

[Thunderclap Grass]

[A term referring to a life-grass that, instead of burning after being struck by lightning, absorbs its power.] Cromwell first discovered it during her lifetime, and she named it herself. However, it was not listed in the dictionary. She had a unique bad habit of not widely publicizing what she had newly discovered. The Thunderclap Grass here was the first one she discovered and presented as a gift for the academy's founding anniversary.]

As if reciting a dictionary, explanations about the plant are written on the book in real time. Asel let out a hollow laugh at the absurd sight, and the letters being written momentarily paused as if reacting to it. Not long after, it wrote a new sentence.

[I was informing you because it seemed like you wanted to view that information. If you wish to stop, I will do so.]

"……What is this?"

Asel's face hardened as he muttered at the sentence that seemed to be having a conversation. He immediately drew out Mana and began searching for the Formula placed on the book.

But there was no Formula to be detected. It was simply a book that used only the absorbed Mana to open pages on its own and record letters on its own.

It was an object that far exceeded common sense. Even Asel could not even guess at the principle and identity of the book. He even wondered if it was originally created by humans.

And the book, as if reading his mind, wrote a new sentence.

[I am a book with a self created by the Demon of Knowledge. But when my first owner died at the hands of Cromwell, the ownership was transferred to her. And through various adjustment processes, I lost some knowledge, but I was modified to be usable with human Mana.]

"……Was it an item of a demon?"

[Strictly speaking, not anymore. I no longer react to Demonic energy, and the method has been changed to react only to powerful Mana. Since Cromwell's death, I have not met a mage comparable to her, so I have not been able to meet a new owner, but fortunately, you have discovered me. I would like to make you my new owner.]

A fluent sentence continues on the white paper.

[In the first place, I cannot react to anyone except Electromancers. Cromwell took some measures to prevent ownership from being taken away again by demons or fallen mages, but because of that, even if you have powerful Mana, you must be able to use Electrification Property Magic to handle me. You are the first target besides Cromwell. Please use me.]

"You were here because Cromwell handed you over to the academy along with the Thunderclap Grass?"

[That's right.]

He was slowly getting a sense of the existence of this book. A bizarre document with a self that only reacts to someone it recognizes as its owner, or someone it wants to be. If its origin came from a demon, it was understandable that it was acting in such a bizarre form.

[Please say it's amazing rather than bizarre. Doesn't it feel bad to hear it's bizarre?]

The existence that once transcended and even grasped a portion of divinity was none other than a demon. Although it was modified by Cromwell's hand, there was no way that an item created by such an existence would have its performance degraded just because it was modified. If it was such a shoddy item, it would have been smashed to pieces long ago.

[You know well. As you thought, my performance is not much different from when I was first created. All the memories from when I was in the hands of the Demon of Knowledge have been excised, so I only know the knowledge I gained while with Cromwell, but the performance is certain.]

"Shut up for a bit. I'm thinking."

[Yes.]

Asel glared at the newly written letters and then frowned, contemplating.

He understood that the performance was good. This book, if you think about it, was no different from combining dozens of libraries into one. It was even possible to view the desired knowledge at any time. A portable knowledge warehouse that every mage dreams of. That was the situation right in his hands.

However, he couldn't just accept it. No matter how much it had passed through Cromwell's hands, its foundation was in a demonic existence. It wouldn't be strange if something terrible happened if he rashly took it.

Unless there was reliable evidence.

The moment Asel thought so, the book's page turned on its own and unfolded a new chapter. Unlike the previous blank chapter, it was a page densely filled with writing. Among the countless writings, Asel read the sentence that shone particularly brightly.

[I gift this book to you, the newly born Electromancer who follows in my footsteps and possesses great talent. This is neither a demon's whisper nor a fabricated lie. I swear in my name, Cromwell. This is a grimoire that has been completely transformed through my hands, and a library that will help you grow. If you doubt these words, please use Mana to resonate with the letters I have written. You will immediately know that everything I have said is true.]

"……A sentence left directly by Cromwell. Even the font is different from what you wrote."

[She was a great mage and researcher. She even inscribed letters directly on a book that no one but me could write on.]

Instead of answering, Asel caused Mana to resonate with the letters as the book said. Then, unlike his own Mana felt from the book, he could feel the destructive yet neat Mana of someone else.

It was Cromwell's. The ghost of the past had left its mark on the present in this way.

[Do you believe it now?]

New letters are inscribed in the empty space. Asel stared at it quietly, then chuckled and opened his mouth.

"I guess it wouldn't hurt to have a talking book."

[That is an excellent choice. From now on, I will recognize you as my new owner. Recording and storing information about your Mana.]

[Saved. From now on, you are my new master.]

The moment such phrases were inscribed, the page turned and a new blank space unfolded.

Letters were written on it.

[My name is Aleph.]

[I will be the answer to all the questions you desire.]

Author's Note

Found Chat GPT

# 59 - Sleep in Your Room

“Then what do you use the Thunder Grass for? Can I just eat it?”

Asel asked while levitating Aleph beside him with telekinesis. Aleph immediately responded to his question.

[The most effective way to use Thunder Grass is to brew it into a potion or elixir. While separating the leaves and stems to eat directly is not a major issue, you won’t be able to absorb all the Thunder Qi contained within it. Think of it as drinking water with a hole in your chin.]

“So, you mean I shouldn’t just eat it.”

[That would be advisable.]

Asel confirmed Aleph's answer and let out a long sigh.

The method of refining and brewing Mana Grass was already widely known, but that didn’t mean the process was easy. Even a decent alchemist would hesitate to handle Mana Grass for fear of ruining it.

It was said that the great alchemist Marietta could handle Mana Grass with ease, but among the alchemists still around, there was no one who could match her skill.

There was no way he could entrust Thunder Grass to such people. If anything went wrong, the energy contained within would evaporate, so he needed to ask someone reliable at the very least. Otherwise, he would have to do it himself.

‘But I don’t know anything about alchemy.’

Unfortunately, Asel was a complete novice when it came to alchemy. He had never even held the most common herbs, let alone potions.

The only field he had invested time in studying was magic, and everything else was merely a hobby for him. Alchemy didn’t even fall into that category.

This was becoming a headache. It was difficult to brew Thunder Grass himself, and it was also a challenge to entrust unregistered Mana Grass to another alchemist. Asel decided to ask Aleph how to handle Thunder Grass, just in case. Aleph, as if it were obvious, shared the recipe for a potion made from Thunder Grass.

[One Thunder Grass. One piece of Thunder Shard. One horn from a lightning beast or one scale from a Thunder Dragon. A drop of high priest's blood to neutralize these. And lastly, sugar is required. Just for the ingredients, it’s like this. The manufacturing method is even more complicated, but with your current abilities, you wouldn’t even be able to mimic it. Would you still like to read it?]

“No, that’s fine. The ingredients are absurdly bizarre.”

Asel clicked his tongue and tucked the Thunder Grass into his pocket.

Thunder Shard refers to a small orb formed when hundreds of lightning strikes gather and fall together. It is classified as a natural disaster, and wherever the orb falls, the area instantly transforms into a lightning zone, turning everything in the vicinity to ashes.

From a distance, it’s a beautiful sight, but the moment you get close, it becomes a horrific disaster that can take your life. However, that was a story from decades ago. It had been nearly a hundred years since a Thunder Shard had fallen.

Just finding one would be a laborious task.

The same goes for the lightning beasts and Thunder Dragons. They may have existed in the past, but currently, all lightning beasts are extinct. Dragons, including Thunder Dragons, have long since vanished.

The only things he could obtain right now were the high priest's blood and sugar. No matter how much time he spent, it was uncertain whether he could find the rest.

He might have to skip the entire potion-making process altogether.

Asel sighed deeply and suppressed the mana pulsing from the Thunder Grass in his pocket.

For now, it seemed best to leave the Thunder Grass as it was. It would be better than recklessly approaching it and wasting it. If it came down to it, he could always eat it directly.

With that thought, Asel turned on his heel. Aleph, floating in the air, followed him.

“Aleph, recommend something useful among the magical artifacts here.”

[Would you prefer something that aids in growth or something that helps in battle?]

“One of each.”

[Understood. Please wait a moment.]

Aleph paused for a moment to take notes, then began writing again.

[Elixir of Thunder Praise. A potion that, when consumed, allows the body to contain Thunder Qi for a certain period. It is an energy entirely different from mana, and even an ordinary person can gain superhuman strength and cognitive abilities for a brief moment upon consumption. Cromwell greatly benefited from this elixir, using the Thunder Qi he gained to elevate his status.]

“Hmm.”

[For combat, I recommend Ice Peony. It is an artifact in the form of a ring that, when infused with mana, freezes the area around the wearer for a certain period. It’s good for exploiting an opponent's openings or for stabbing with a dagger—]

“……What?”

Suddenly, the sentence was cut off. Asel frowned and glared at Aleph, but Aleph remained unresponsive, as if time had stopped. He simply floated in the air, relying on Asel's telekinesis.

Before long, Asel realized that the cause was his own mana.

More precisely, it was the mana that Aleph had absorbed. Once the mana that had filled the book ran out, Aleph had ceased to function.

In the end, to operate continuously, Aleph also required mana as a power source. In this regard, it was similar to a magical artifact, despite behaving like a living being. Was it due to Cromwell's modifications, or was it simply the nature of its existence?

He was eager to find out, but now was not the time. Asel placed his hand on the cover of Aleph's book and poured mana into it.

At that moment.

Kwarrrrr!

Aleph began to explosively absorb Asel's mana. If he were an ordinary magician, he would have experienced mana exhaustion immediately. The amount of mana being drained was so significant that even Asel felt a momentary weakness. He quickly gritted his teeth and pulled his hand away from the cover.

Then, the mana absorption abruptly stopped. A bright blue current crackled and flared up between Asel's fingertips and the pages, then slowly faded away. Asel glanced down at the lightning that had blossomed between his fingers, then looked at Aleph and spoke.

“……What are you doing?”

[I am a magical book that operates on mana. If I do not possess the mana of my master, I am just a piece of paper that cannot do anything.]

Perhaps due to the mana absorption, the previously halted writing began again. However, it felt more urgent than before.

[To be honest, I have a limited amount of activity allowed per day. This starts from the moment I first absorb my master's mana and decreases over time or as I write. Once it is completely depleted, I will stop functioning as I did just now.]

“…….”

[To increase this set amount of activity, I must either build a bond with my master or, as you did, forcibly inject a massive amount of mana. However, the latter method is a workaround, causing the amount of mana I absorb to increase exponentially.]

“……Why didn’t you explain this from the start?”

[I apologize. I thought you wouldn’t keep me if I told you. I have been trapped for hundreds of years, but I remember every single day of that lonely time. So, I wanted to avoid the fate of being chosen by my master only to end up back in the box.]

“……Hah.”

Asel sighed deeply and opened Aleph.

“If what you say is true, then you’re currently exceeding your allowed activity time. How much time do you have left?”

[10]

“10 minutes?”

[9…… 8…… 7…….]

“What the hell.”

[Please don’t abandon me. I’ve been staring at plants in a moldy box for so long. I promise to be of help. I haven’t even told you about the necessary items in the vault yet.]

Cut off.

Aleph’s words stopped there. Asel stared at the now limp book as if it had lost its vitality, sighed, and secured Aleph at his waist. Since Aleph was not in direct contact with his skin, it hung quietly in place.

‘A series of strange events.’

Asel thought to himself as he began to search for the magical artifacts Aleph had mentioned. After a while, he found the Ice Peony trapped in a frosted glass case. Without hesitation, he took it.

Such tools were quite helpful in studying magic and creating formulas. For someone like him, who was repeatedly researching to master Freezing Magic, the Ice Peony was an attractive option.

He had already acquired an overwhelming amount of theoretical knowledge, but he had never used Freezing Formulas in practice. With the power of the magical artifact, confirming the output of ordinary Freezing Magic would also help stabilize the formulas he had prepared in advance.

The performance of the magical artifact itself was also decent. There was no downside to taking it.

Now, only one thing remained. Asel immediately ignited lightning and set out to find the Elixir of Thunder Praise.

Before long, he discovered a glass vial carefully stored in a metal box. The liquid inside swirled like a tempest of lightning, and Asel smiled in satisfaction as he took it.

He continued to search for any other useful items, but there was nothing worth abandoning what he had already gathered.

Still, there were a few things that caught his eye.

If he had known, he would have pushed for five from the start. He felt a deep sense of regret.

Yet, well, he had secured enough. The elixir was excellent, and the Ice Peony would cost a fortune if he tried to obtain it outside. Not to mention Aleph.

Honestly, even just Aleph was a significant gain.

“Did you get everything?”

As he returned to the gathered group, Friede asked with a weary expression. Asel smiled brightly and replied.

“Yes. I definitely secured three items.”

“Alright…… I won’t bother checking. I trust you.”

Friede said this and led the group out of the vault.

As soon as the people left, the vault door automatically closed and reactivated the locking mechanism. With a creaking sound, the magic was activated, and geometric patterns appeared and disappeared. Asel briefly admired the sight before returning to the main building of the academy with the group.

Time had already passed into the evening. Despite being on temporary leave, students were bustling about the streets, and the setting sun painted the sky in crimson hues.

From time to time, he saw students holding hands and laughing as they passed by. Thanks to the recognition-inhibiting magic that Friede had used, they did not notice Asel and his group.

“The schedule is all done…… but we still have things to do.”

Back in the dean's office, Friede sat down the four from Wiheim and said this, then bent at the waist and spoke in a serious tone.

“I sincerely apologize once again to everyone here. I will ensure that such an incident never happens again. I will personally eradicate the remnants and pests left in the academy, so do not worry. Once the Sword Demon returns, I will gradually change the academy. We need to normalize things.”

“Keep your word. This is the last time. The moment Asel gets caught up in another mistake or power struggle from the academy, that will be the last day for the academy. I will take Asel back.”

Is that alright?

Ena glanced at Asel and asked. Asel forced a smile and nodded.

While the purpose of coming to the academy was to gain experience and interact with various people, Asel had no intention of risking his life for it. If that were the case, he would have become a labyrinth explorer or a mercenary long ago.

“I will keep that in mind.”

Friede nodded. With that, all the schedules were concluded. The group chatted briefly before heading off to their respective destinations.

Norium returned to Wiheim with Irina, and Asel decided to stay in the dormitory since his temporary leave would end soon anyway.

This left Ena feeling somewhat adrift. Although she could go anywhere on the continent by transforming into lightning, she showed no signs of wanting to leave and instead wandered around the academy grounds, humming a tune. She looked quite pleased.

Yet, she still couldn’t look Asel directly in the eye. Although she had improved since a few days ago, she still wasn’t as confident as before. Whenever a woman approached Asel, she would thoroughly push them away.

“……What’s this? What pushed me away?”

Thanks to the recognition-inhibiting magic, the person pushed away by Ena didn’t even notice her and walked away in confusion. Asel watched this scene and sighed softly.

Spending time with Ena was certainly enjoyable. But now it was time to return to their rooms. They couldn’t keep rolling around outside like this forever.

So Asel decided to introduce Ena to the best-equipped lodging on the academy grounds. Since she showed no signs of wanting to leave today, it was his consideration for her to at least get a good night’s sleep.

“I’ll just sleep in your room.”

And then came the bombshell of a response.

“Excuse me?”

At the time when the moon was full, the number of students wandering the streets began to dwindle, while the dining hall started to fill with people.

At Ena’s sudden declaration, Asel could only respond with a question.