# 70 - Flame Sorcerer

“Who are you?”

His unkempt hair poked at his forehead. One of his ears looked as if it had been cut off, and a scruffy beard covered his lips. He was, quite literally, in rags. However, the aura emanating from him made it clear that he was far from a mere beggar.

‘Seventh-tier advanced…’

Though I was skeptical about his lack of armor, as expected, he was a wizard. Not just any wizard, but a high sorcerer on the verge of becoming a grand sorcerer. The characteristics of the mana flowing from him were almost identical to those of a Flame Sorcerer.

The fierce and hot energy typical of a wizard from the Ignis Magic Tower. Asel swallowed hard at the sight of the high Flame Sorcerer he had never seen before and slowly began to draw up his own mana.

A makeshift labyrinth set up by the academy. Although it was still a hypothesis, it was a place where the tomb of a sage might exist. And here stood a middle-aged man who was neither a student nor a professor. The possibility that he was an intruder could not be ruled out.

If one were to ask why a wizard from the Magic Tower would invade the academy, it would be a difficult question to answer, but that didn’t mean Asel could let his guard down. He openly displayed the mana he had gathered and glared at the man.

“...Oh.”

The man’s previously indifferent expression changed. His eyes, which had seemed dull as if looking at a rookie, suddenly sparkled with life. It was as if the blazing flames reflected in his eyes.

“An Electromancer… Has Cromwell taken on a disciple without me knowing?”

“...Cromwell?”

At the sudden mention of the familiar name, Asel questioned him. The man smirked and rummaged through his shabby robe.

“How curious. That eccentric woman has taken on a disciple. Hmm… Given your handsome face, perhaps more as a husband than a disciple? But then again, your energy is quite impressive…”

“Do you know Cromwell?”

“You little brat? Speaking so casually already. Well, I don’t mind.”

The man pulled out a cigarette. A cheap roll made from a blend of low-grade drugs. He lit the end and put it in his mouth. The sound of him inhaling the smoke echoed blatantly, and he smiled as he exhaled a long breath.

“A rude wizard is a specimen of a wizard. Cromwell taught you well. She had her fair share of rudeness too.”

“...I don’t understand what you’ve been saying.”

Crackle!!

Lightning crackled around Asel.

“Why are you here? What’s your reason for invading the academy?”

“The academy? What nonsense is that? What is it?”

“...What?”

“Did you hit your head on the way here? If not, why would you come to the academy from the labyrinth? I merely descended into the labyrinth through legal procedures.”

The man spoke as if he found it absurd.

The conversation felt off-kilter. Not knowing about the academy and speaking as if Cromwell were alive was quite bizarre. It was hard to label him as insane when the hierarchy he had built proved his sanity.

Then… there was only one remaining possibility. Asel asked him with a glimmer of hope.

“Is the Magic Kingdom doing well?”

“Suddenly?”

The man exhaled smoke and asked back. Then, seeing Asel’s serious expression, he chuckled and nodded.

“Thanks to our merciful king, it’s running just fine. Why do you ask?”

“.......Ha.”

His words turned doubt into certainty.

It had been hundreds of years since the Magic Kingdom fell. What could it mean for him to say that such a country was still functioning?

“Surely not.”

Celine’s murmured words seemed to echo in Asel’s ears. He frowned, feeling troubled, and reached a conclusion.

That man was not a sorcerer living in the same time period.

He was a wizard living in the past, during the glorious days of the Magic Kingdom.

“So.”

The man said.

“You entered the fifth floor of the labyrinth and ended up here?”

In the eerie mansion's interior, a grand space resembling a luxurious hotel lobby was covered with a wool carpet. The chandelier hanging from the ceiling emitted no light, and the curtains blocking the windows prevented any external light from entering this dim place.

Underneath it, the man continued, increasing the size of the flames he had ignited.

“Unbelievable. This is the fifteenth floor of the labyrinth.”

“The fifteenth floor?”

“Yeah. In the blink of an eye, the person next to you could die. The ecosystem is bizarre beyond belief. All the flora and fauna behave as if they were modified to kill humans, and even the walls and floors sometimes crack open to try to claim flesh and blood.”

“........”

“You’ve fallen into such a place. It’s unfortunate, but you’ve been caught in the labyrinth’s transition.”

They didn’t feel the need to inform the man that he was from the past and they were from the future. There was no reason to deal with the consequences of that revelation, and unless he asked first, they had no obligation to answer.

Anything could happen in the labyrinth. Naturally, it was possible to encounter people from the past. They were navigating the current situation, engaging in conversation with him. Since the man showed no intent to fight, there was no need to draw blood; they were exchanging information through dialogue.

If he were a fallen wizard, it would be a different story, but he was a wizard who had merely walked the path of the Magic Tower.

There was plenty to gain from their conversation.

“There’s no way to resist the labyrinth’s transition. It’s frustrating, but it just happens as it pleases. You have no choice but to accept it.”

“...More than that, I want to ask your name first.”

Asel interrupted him with a question. The man then realized he hadn’t introduced himself and smiled.

“Pascal Theron. I’m affiliated with the Ignis Magic Tower and currently working as a labyrinth explorer.”

“If you’re affiliated with the tower, there shouldn’t be a reason for you to enter the labyrinth.”

“True. But I’m personally looking for something.”

“An artifact?”

“No.”

The man replied with a bitter smile.

“I’m just trying to find the corpse of my wife who died on the seventeenth floor and her wedding ring. I’m doing this absurd labyrinth exploration for that.”

“...Have you been down to the seventeenth floor?”

“Once.”

Whoosh.

The flames flared up momentarily.

“My companions all died at the entrance. They were supposed to be capable, but they couldn’t do anything and all perished. I was the only one who survived and managed to escape.”

“........”

“That place… is hell. That’s the only way to describe it. It’s a place teeming with creatures created by a fallen transcendent, living solely to kill. You’ll probably die the moment you set foot in there. Don’t question it. Don’t act arrogantly. Just accept it.”

“........”

Instead of responding, Asel glanced sideways at Celine and Saya.

The expressions of the two, which had been bright until now, darkened in an instant. They probably felt their motivation plummet after hearing Pascal’s words.

It was only natural. The curiosity of a wizard ultimately meant nothing in the face of death.

But Asel did not forget.

This space was a makeshift labyrinth set up at the academy. It was open enough to be used for club initiation ceremonies. Was it even conceivable to die in such a place? Surely they wouldn’t have created and opened such a space thoughtlessly.

‘Even if Pascal’s words are true, it’s uncertain whether that applies to the makeshift labyrinth.’

Ultimately, it was something that could only be known by going down there. Pascal had told them not to question it, but Asel needed to see the end of this labyrinth to understand the words inscribed on Aleph.

If this labyrinth truly existed up to twenty floors like a real one, then the sudden transition from the fifth to the fifteenth floor might be an unexpected boon. It meant they could check if the sage’s tomb was located just five floors away.

‘There are no records of a sage visiting the real labyrinth, so Pascal probably wouldn’t know about his whereabouts either.’

Thus, asking him about the sage’s whereabouts would be meaningless. So Asel asked something entirely different.

“A fallen transcendent? I thought there was a demon of emergence sealed beneath the labyrinth.”

The labyrinth was a kind of world created in a very ancient time that had yet to be conquered. At its end lay a sealed demon, and the ecosystem of the labyrinth was believed to be twisted due to the influence of that demon, according to historical records.

It was the same in reality. Once it was proven that the waves emanating from the labyrinth matched those of a demon, everyone accepted it.

The term “fallen transcendent” was entirely unrelated to the labyrinth. It was the first time he had ever heard the term itself.

According to records, most of the transcendent beings that existed had ascended to the heavens after attaining divinity. Only the sage, who chose to remain mortal, passed away on this land. The rest had all left this realm.

How could such transcendent beings have created the ecosystem of the labyrinth?

“Recently, there’s been a lot of information distortion. Maybe it’s because you’re young, but you’re also holding onto incorrect information.”

“...?”

“Damn devil-worshippers. They need to be cleaned up sometime. There are too many of them in high positions. That’s why kids like you don’t even know what a demon really is.”

“...Aren’t demons beings born in hell?”

“No.”

Pascal shook his head.

“Demons were mortals. Beastmen, humans, elves, dwarves, dragons, etc. They were originally beings that lived on this land.”

“...What?”

“Then, if they perform a certain ritual, gain a trigger, or grow to the point where their realm touches the heavens, they finally gain the right to challenge divinity. In simpler terms, if they defeat the existing gods in battle, they become gods themselves.”

“....”

“And gods have never lost even once. Just look at how the name of the church has never changed.”

Pascal picked up another cigarette and continued speaking.

“So where do the transcendent beings who lost go? Those who were defeated in battle against the gods can never set foot on the ground again. Where are they, and what are they doing?”

“...Ah.”

“You’ve probably guessed it right.”

He smiled as he looked at the three of them, who were staring at him intently.

“Transcendent beings who did not die in battle chose to distort their own realms to survive. But the backlash from the distortion of those who had once attained divinity was immense. Their very essence was twisted.”

“...Is that what makes them demons?”

“The first vampire became a demon of blood, and the first saint who denied the gods became a demon of mercy. The elf who governed the tree of knowledge became the Demon of Knowledge, and the continent’s most outstanding healer became the Demon of Emergence. Countless other demons exist as well.”

“...Is that even possible? I thought there were very few officially recognized transcendent beings in history.”

Saya asked, and Pascal answered while flicking off the ash from his cigarette.

“Of course, it’s impossible. But then a strange being appeared, and impossibility became possibility.”

“...Who appeared?”

“The Demon of Possibility.”

Pascal continued, gazing at Asel.

“It’s unclear exactly what ritual was performed to achieve transcendence or what abilities he possessed. But since that being suddenly appeared, the number of demons has certainly increased. It’s information that devil-worshippers are trying to hide, but those who know already know.”

“....”

“Has your curiosity been satisfied? Dimwit?”

Pascal asked with a grin. Asel stood up with a bitter smile.

“I’ve heard your personal views on demons. But I can’t fully believe it. There’s no evidence.”

“Do as you wish. Whether you believe it or not is none of my concern. After all, your master will tell you everything.”

“It’s late to mention this, but my master is not Cromwell.”

At Asel’s statement, Pascal frowned and looked him up and down.

“What? Then how did you learn the Electrification Art?”

“I had another master. Her name is Ena Renatus. Do you know her?”

“No. Where did that mutt come from?”

“Good to know you don’t.”

It was no surprise that Pascal didn’t know Ena, as the time Cromwell was active was much earlier than when Ena began her career.

“More than that, I have something I’m curious about.”

“Again?”

“I want to ask something when I meet a Flame Sorcerer from the Ignis Magic Tower.”

Asel said this while forcibly taking control of the flames Pascal had manifested and overlaying his own magic on top of it.

[Fireball]

Whoosh!!

The gathered flames took on a spherical shape. Asel placed it in his palm and looked at Pascal, who wore a bewildered expression, and asked.

“I’ve learned fire magic through self-study, but I’ve never received professional insights. So I’d like to ask for your opinion.”

“...Self-study? An Electromancer learned fire magic through self-study and stole control of my magic?”

Muttering that, Pascal’s expression shifted to one of interest as he stared at Asel’s magic.

“What are you doing?”

# 71 - Flame Sorcerer (2)

“Whether it's Electrification Art or Flame Spell, magic focused on firepower is difficult to master. Even if you learn one, picking up another fire magic isn't easy.”

Pascal said while stretching his stiff neck.

“It's as if the higher-tier magic is jealous and tries to consume other magics. You can think of it as an obsessive lifelong companion.”

“I've never felt that way.”

“That's because you're such a crazy bastard.”

Outside the mansion turned into a resting place, Asel and Pascal stood facing each other at either end of the brightly lit clearing. Celine and Saya stood at a distance, looking anxious. Asel glanced at them before turning his head back to Pascal and said,

“Have you ever seen a magician using more than one type of destruction magic?”

“I have. But they were all mediocre.”

“…….”

“Have you seen a Magic Swordsman? It's tough to reach the limits of human lifespan even mastering just magic and swordsmanship, yet those fools choose both and end up being neither. The Mana Core they created is a weird mix with the Mana Heart, and its efficiency is completely wrecked.”

“Hmm.”

“Those who have mastered both types of destruction magic are just like those Magic Swordsmen. Dual attributes? Multiple attributes? It's impossible to suppress the mana that runs wild with that. Even if they have the talent, it doesn't matter. Magic has to allow you to use it.”

Pascal took out a cigarette and continued speaking.

“Simply put, it's luck. No matter how good your talent is, if the proficiency of the other magic is higher, it will rebel and try to consume the magician. If you're lucky, it might manifest well, but if you're going to gamble every time in battle, it's better not to use it at all.”

“Is that so?”

“In that regard, you're strange. You learned Electrification Art while building up to the sixth tier, and now you're trying to take control of my magic with Flame Spell? Are you some kind of bastard child born from a sage?”

“My parents were farmers.”

“Farmers who grind people up, I suppose.”

“I did worship demons.”

“……Hey, what the hell am I supposed to say to that?”

As Pascal cursed, Asel chuckled and relaxed his shoulders.

“So? What’s the sudden reason for calling me out here?”

“Stop pretending you don't know.”

Pascal said that and slowly drew up his mana. The hot mana of the Electromancer, realizing its Uniqueness, filled the chamber and ignited the air. The temperature in the space seemed to rise momentarily. Asel confirmed that there were scorch marks on part of the Shield and smiled wryly.

“Let's have a duel. This is how magic is traditionally understood.”

“That's ignorant.”

“It's the tradition of the Magic Tower. Those who have been burned a few times learn to handle fire better.”

Flames flickered at the tip of Pascal's cigarette.

“And your flame magic, how should I put it... it doesn't seem like the traditional magic of the Ignis Magic Tower. It seems like it's been revised based on that.”

“There's a reason for that.”

“Well, whatever. I don't care about your personal circumstances. Show me that magic you claimed to have self-taught.”

Asel raised his mana while watching the increasingly red tip of Pascal's cigarette.

“Are all the people from the Ignis Magic Tower as aggressive as you?”

“Do you think those who handle fire would be calm?”

Pascal noticed the steam rising around Asel's body and grinned.

“We only calm down when there's nothing left to burn. We call that death.”

“How romantic.”

“Without that, it's just a place of corpses. It's clearly different from that milk-smelling Aurora Magic Tower magician.”

At the mention of the milk smell, Celine, who had been standing at a distance, grimaced, but Pascal paid her no mind. Instead, he pinched the cigarette he was holding and flicked it toward Asel. The flame ignited the cigarette, and in an instant, it grew larger, shooting toward Asel with the intent to obliterate him.

[Burn Spear]

Whoosh!!

Asel tilted his head as he watched the fiery spear flying toward him.

A duel that had suddenly come to fruition. A duel with a magician from the Magic Tower who possessed a tier higher than his own. There were plenty of reasons to welcome it, but no reason to refuse. He had to respond to this duel to raise his proficiency in Flame Spell, which he used as much as Electrification Art.

‘It would have been enough just to watch the magic and give advice.’

But with Pascal coming at him like that, it was only right to respond earnestly.

Asel thought this as he reached out toward the approaching magic.

Crack!!

The flames were sucked into his grasp. In the blink of an eye, they were expelled in the opposite direction.

[Flame Inhalation]

[Scorching Flame]

He sequentially chanted two flame spells and manifested them simultaneously.

Whoosh!!

Crimson flames poured over Pascal's body like a wave. Pascal grinned and stomped the ground hard.

[Flame Wall.]

Asel's magic was blocked and scattered by the rising wall of flames. He grabbed the remnants of the magic that was about to disappear and forcibly fixed it, then used the remaining remnants to manifest a new spell.

[Single Point Ignition]

The rising flames contracted into a single point, containing immense energy. Asel clenched his fist, and it exploded like a bomb, pushing Pascal's body back.

Boom!!!

A momentary light burst forth, making it hard to open his eyes. Black smoke filled the chamber.

Asel used a smoke spell to clear the swirling smoke.

What appeared before him was Pascal, leaning against the wall, taking another drag from his cigarette.

He wiped the soot from his cheek and chuckled.

“There are many spells I’ve never seen before. It seems your claim of self-study isn’t a lie.”

“........”

“The power of your magic is impressive. Thanks to my flame resistance, I probably wouldn’t even get burned by ordinary magic. My skin is just a bit scorched. Even without using a defensive spell, it's top-tier magic.”

He added that and detached himself from the wall. Behind him, long flames flickered like wings.

“However, it's still lacking.”

Boom!!!

In an instant, his figure vanished from Asel's sight.

His swift movements were so fast that they couldn't even be detected by Asel's sensitive perception. Asel immediately activated a detection spell to find his location, but Pascal was even faster.

“Flame Spell always needs to be excited.”

In the blink of an eye, Pascal reached Asel's back and kicked him while saying,

“You're too calm.”

[Flare]

Boom!!

Flames exploded beneath his shoe. Unable to withstand the sudden recoil, Asel was pushed back. He grimaced and flicked his fingers at Pascal.

[Flame Bow of Annihilation]

At the same time, hundreds of fiery arrows shot forth, aiming to pierce Pascal's entire body. Pascal dropped the cigarette he was holding into the air.

[Guardian Flame]

A white flame swelled up like a balloon, protecting Pascal's body. Asel clicked his tongue, preparing for the collision.

And then, bang.

Asel crashed into the wall, kicking up dust. He shook off his disheveled hair and glared at Pascal.

‘That last hit shattered my Shield completely.’

The Shield, one of the most basic defensive spells that Asel always kept active. He had stacked dozens of layers in a moment of reaction, but with just one kick from Pascal, they all crumbled.

Rebuilding it would be no problem, but taking a direct hit without a Shield would surely leave him unable to pick up the pieces. Asel exhaled a heated breath and slowly calmed his mana.

“My Uniqueness is specialized in piercing.”

At that moment, Pascal walked toward him and said,

“Your Shield seems quite sturdy. But just that won't be enough to block my magic. It would be more efficient to defend with the same type of magic.”

“Thanks for the advice.”

“What for? It's just a duel.”

He smiled and lifted his feet slightly off the ground.

“But battles should be taken seriously.”

[Flame Walk]

Flames surged from his shoes, slightly lifted off the ground. With the friction with the floor completely eliminated, Pascal charged at Asel with threatening speed. Asel wiped the expression off his face and opened his clenched hand.

Spiraling flames blossomed on his palm. Soon, it transformed into a massive fiery vortex, violently rotating around Asel like the eye of a storm.

[Great Flame Whirlwind Pillar]

Boom!!!

Originally created as a large-scale destructive spell, depending on how it was used, it could also serve as a means of protection. Pascal dared not underestimate the fiery vortex and retreated.

‘He has a natural combat sense.’

He was flexibly responding to the situation, using magic he hadn't learned from anyone. A feat impossible for wizards who only sit in their study and research. He must have experienced enough as a combat magician that was unbefitting of his young age.

His skilled magic was in stark contrast to his youthful appearance. Pascal smiled widely as he felt the atmosphere intensifying.

For a Flame Sorcerer, the tension and excitement of battle are merely kindling. He willingly accepted the hormones and emotions his brain sent him and overlapped his hands to chant a new spell.

[Prominence]

Crack!!

As if the space was warping, a massive fireball bloomed at the center, creating a mirage. It was a spell with terrifying power. The heat radiating from it melted the ground and walls, igniting the air.

Just as Celine thought it was an attack that exceeded the bounds of a duel and hurriedly began to chant a spell,

“Great Flame Gate.”

A low voice emerged from within the swirling vortex.

Soon, the fiery vortex writhed violently and formed a massive gate. Standing right in front of it, Asel murmured while staring at Pascal,

“Open.”

Screech!

The Great Flame Gate that had formed behind Asel opened with a sound like scraping the ground. From within, the waves of flames that had been spinning madly surged forth, all aimed at Pascal. Pascal laughed loudly and shot forth the Prominence he had summoned.

Thus, fire collided with fire. A pure white explosion erupted at that point.

Boom!!!

With a sound that shook the world, the moment the vision turned pure white. Even amidst it all, the two magicians recognized each other clearly.

Perhaps due to the clash of similar levels of power, both suffered minor burns but were not seriously injured. They both understood how absurd that was.

The capabilities of a magician who has realized their Uniqueness and one who has not are worlds apart. Regardless of the proficiency or power of the spells, a magician with Uniqueness holds an overwhelming advantage in battle. That was an absolute fact and truth.

However, the flame magic Asel had mastered was a special magic that could even turn the same flames into firewood, and coupled with Asel's insane talent, it forcibly suppressed the advantage of Uniqueness, placing him on equal footing with Pascal.

An unbelievable feat. But it was reality. Pascal grinned widely, feeling his entire magical life being thoroughly denied.

“You bastard! You crazy bastard! You’re the next master of the Ignis Magic Tower!”

“I have no intention of joining the tower.”

Asel smiled wryly and waved his hand in the air.

“I already belong somewhere.”

[White Light Fire Line]

Kiiiiiing!!

A white line blossomed between Asel and Pascal. The moment Pascal realized that it was the result of compressing a large amount of energy and heat, the line expanded and released the surrounding flames and heat.

That alone sent Pascal's body flying back, shattering the mansion's window and rolling inside.

At the same time, dozens of fireballs erupted from within the mansion. Asel ignited flames in his grasp and swung them wide like drawing curtains.

Thud thud thud thud!!

The fireballs pounded against the curtains and scattered. Asel confirmed the end of the attack and spread his wings of flame, rushing into the mansion. As soon as Pascal saw his face, he burst into laughter.

“Yeah, that's it! Get swept up in the heat of battle! Don't think about anything else, just fight! That's the essence of a Flame Sorcerer!”

“I don't particularly intend to become a Flame Sorcerer.”

Asel joined his hands, watching Pascal reach out to him.

“But I don't feel bad about it.”

[Burning Transformation]

A gentle flame shot out between his perfectly overlapping palms. The moment it collided with the flame spear shot by Pascal, it returned to Asel's grasp. The moment Pascal realized it was a trick,

Asel grinned and twisted his joined hands.

[Incineration]

The retrieved flames condensed in Asel's hand. Along with that, they radiated in the form of blue flames. Pascal, with a smiling face, let his body be engulfed by the flames.

Boom!!!

The azure flames, advancing with immense mass and high temperature, slammed Pascal's body into the stairs leading to the second floor, and Asel formed a massive flame greatsword above him and brought it down.

The rising flames pierced through the mansion's ceiling, incinerating the entire central lobby. Structures unable to withstand the heat melted away, and the spreading flames painted the inside and outside of the mansion a vivid red.

“Phew……”

Asel exhaled a breath that now felt almost hot as he walked toward Pascal.

Under the rubble of the collapsed stairs. Lying in a pit engulfed in flames, Pascal looked up at Asel, who was gazing down at him, and chuckled.

“Your face suddenly looks calm. Are you going to stop? I’m willing to take more hits.”

“……If we go any further, I feel like we’ll both get serious.”

“I did get a bit too excited.”

Pascal sat up straight, brushing off the dust from his head. Ignoring the burn marks etched all over his body, he popped a blister on his forehead and said,

“I'd like to play more, but… as you said, if we keep this up, someone will get seriously hurt. There aren't many means to treat injuries here, so it's best to exercise restraint.”

“……For exercising restraint, we sure hit each other quite spectacularly.”

Asel smiled wryly as he gazed at the flames that had taken over the mansion. Pascal chuckled as he got up.

“It’s a duel between Flame Sorcerers. We have to accept that the space will be destroyed.”

“If we’re being technical, my essence is that of an Electromancer.”

“Let’s not nitpick the trivial. More importantly, you.”

He continued, looking at the steam rising from Asel's body.

“Your body temperature is quite high. It seems to be a reaction from the spell, so you should lower your body temperature quickly. Otherwise, you’ll collapse.”

“I know.”

The flame magic Asel used was a peculiar magic that, in exchange for its destructive power, could even turn the magician themselves into firewood. Using it excessively would inevitably lead to backlash.

However, it wasn't that there was no way to cope, so it wasn't a big problem. Asel activated the Ice Peony he was wearing, rapidly lowering the surrounding temperature. As it adjusted, the steam pouring from his body thickened and soon stopped completely.

By generating opposing mana, he canceled out the side effects. Asel's attempt to use flame magic and freezing magic simultaneously was to eliminate these side effects altogether.

‘There’s not much time left.’

The research that had been ongoing for a long time. The results would soon be obtained.

Asel thought this as he stopped activating the Ice Peony. Pascal, seeing that, exclaimed in admiration.

“You have a strange magical artifact. It's quite an advanced spell.”

“Now that the duel is over, I’d like you to answer honestly.”

Asel turned his head toward Pascal and said,

“How's my flame magic?”

“It’s not just okay.”

“…….”

"Being terribly calm is a poison, but even a calm flame is enough to burn someone. It seems better to follow a path you've set for yourself rather than taking someone else's advice. There's no need to obsess over the Magic Tower's magic or anything like that."

Asel hummed thoughtfully at his honest sentiments. Pascal placed a hand on his shoulder and asked, "So? Were you satisfied with the sparring?"

"...It was fun, I suppose."

Asel answered with a smile. Pascal chuckled and patted him on the back.

"Hey, you bastards!"

Just then, Celine threw open the shattered front gate and stomped in, panting. She pointed a finger at the blazing mansion lobby and shouted, "What the hell are you doing, ending things all warm and fuzzy? How are you going to clean this up! Where am I supposed to relax now!"

At Celine's cry, Asel immediately pushed Pascal away and walked towards Celine. Then, he glared at him and sighed.

"How are you going to clean this up, Pascal."

Pascal's face instantly crumpled at Asel's quick abandonment.

"You fucking bastard."

# 73 - Escape (2)

It hadn't been long, but Asel's eyes snapped open. He ran a hand through his disheveled hair and sat up.

His condition... wasn't bad. The Mana he had used up in the sparring match had all returned, and his body felt refreshed. There seemed to be no obstacles to escaping the Labyrinth. That alone was enough.

"Oh, you're awake?"

He turned his head at the sudden voice. Saya, sitting on the sofa and brushing her tail, came into Asel's view. Asel walked towards her and replied.

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yes. I just closed my eyes, and I fell asleep right away, so I just woke up. Did you sleep well?"

"So-so."

Asel snapped his fingers, creating a small bonfire in front of the sofa. Ignition through basic Flame Spell. He channeled electricity inside, forming a flame that burned on its own without needing attention. Asel felt the surrounding temperature rise and plopped down in the empty seat next to Saya.

The sofa was quite plush. Not as much as the ones in the dormitory, but it seemed sufficient for spending a night. The sofas in the Witch Council were made of similar material.

"But Asel, isn't this situation a bit... excessive for a club initiation?"

Saya suddenly asked. Asel only rolled his eyes, met her gaze, and listened to her words.

"Usually, when you think of initiation, you just think of being bullied. But this is..."

"Too dangerous?"

"...Yes."

Saya nodded timidly. Asel gave a bitter smile and leaned back against the backrest.

In fact, up to the 4th floor of the temporary Labyrinth, it wasn't that dangerous. To exaggerate a bit, if he wanted, he could have slaughtered the native creatures and moved on at any time. But now that they had passed the 5th floor and been forcibly transferred to the 15th floor, the situation had changed a bit.

Pascal Teron. A powerful Flame Sorcerer who would later reach the realm of Archmage and take the position of Magic Tower Lord.

He had said that the 16th floor of the Labyrinth was dangerous. Saya, who had been half-doubtful until then, would have realized through her duel with Asel that he was not an easy opponent. Perhaps that was when she began to trust Pascal's words.

When someone with power says something is dangerous, there is always a reason. From the 16th floor of the Labyrinth, even high-ranking Flame Sorcerers were in a desperate struggle for their lives. For Saya, who lacked combat ability, that place would be so dangerous that it wouldn't be strange to lose her life just by breathing.

"But don't worry."

However, Asel still didn't view the current situation as that serious. If this were a real Labyrinth, he would have been just as worried, but this was a temporary Labyrinth. A virtual stage set up by the academy, a fake that created an environment similar to a real Labyrinth.

Was it even possible to really die in such a place? If so, why would the headmaster open the temporary Labyrinth to the students? He wouldn't want to see the entire academy turned upside down.

Friede did not have such self-destructive tendencies. The fact that she had opened the temporary Labyrinth was consistent with the fact that it was not actually that dangerous.

The problem was that all the senses he felt were strongly asserting that 'this space is dangerous.'

There is something called the placebo effect. It means that if you believe it, your body will actually react that way. Perhaps the anxiety Saya was feeling was all a result of her senses sending signals and her brain mixing them together.

There is an easy-to-misunderstand fact. Thinking is greatly influenced by the mind, but even more so by the physical body. In that respect, Asel's way of thinking was far more extraordinary than that of ordinary people.

The transcendent mage's reason and spirit, unconstrained by the physical body. That alone allowed him to perceive the current situation more accurately and certainly than anyone else, and to calmly cool his head at any time.

Cognitive ability and the brain were more influenced by the mind than the body. Everyone knew how important that talent was to a mage without needing to explain it.

His thinking had led to the conclusion that the current situation was not that dangerous. It was a conclusion reached through rational reasoning and thought.

"Asel..."

Asel organized his thoughts as he watched Celine stagger out of the bedroom.

The burns she had suffered during the sparring match.

Then and now, she didn't feel any pain. The burn marks were clearly visible, but there was no pain at all.

Like a dream.

"Here's the plan."

Pascal said, looking at the group sitting in a circle.

"As soon as we go down to the 16th floor, we run to the stairs to return with all our might. Ignore anything that attacks us in the middle and just run."

"I have a question. How do you know the location of the stairs to return? It's impossible to go back up to a floor you've already stepped on."

"The Labyrinth changes its characteristics starting from the 15th floor. Based on this shelter, you can go down to the lower floors and come back up."

Pascal answered Celine's question. He pulled out a long flame and placed it on the floor like a thread, drawing a rough map of the 16th floor.

"Keep going straight until I signal. When I signal, turn right immediately. If you run like that, you'll see a staircase. Once you reach there, there's no problem returning."

"Can't the monsters come up beyond the stairs?"

"Of course they can. So keep running. At some point, the Nom will give up and go back, so run like crazy until then. If you want to live."

The meeting ended briefly like that. After establishing a plan that was embarrassing to even call a plan, the group immediately stood in front of the stairs leading down to the 16th floor.

"..."

The energy emanating from below was ominous. Just standing still made them feel a sense of pressure that tightened their breath. It felt stuffy and irritating, as if foreign substances were mixed in with their breathing. The hairs on their bodies stood on end as if they were facing a murderer head-on. A high concentration of Mana pressed down on their bodies as if trying to crush them.

The more sensitive to Mana a mage was, the more intense the pressure was. Pascal loosened his body as if he was used to it, but Celine trembled and swallowed hard.

She had spent her childhood in the slums, but she was still afraid of death. Even after becoming a mage, she had stayed in the Magic Tower and continued her research, so even if she wasn't ignorant of combat, she didn't have much experience. Going into a place where she could lose her life was still a scary and frightening thing.

"It's okay."

At that moment, Asel muttered, grabbing Celine's trembling hand. He met the eyes of Celine, who turned her head towards him, and burst into a chuckle.

"If you want, I can hold you and run."

"...I'm fine, okay?"

Celine replied gruffly for no reason and squeezed Asel's hand tightly.

"...But I feel relieved."

"Is that so."

Asel kindly offered his hand until she calmed down. Pascal, who had put the last cigarette in his mouth before going down to the Labyrinth, saw the scene and wore a sly smile.

"What is it? Are you two lovey-dovey?"

"It's not like that!"

"Since ancient times, it has been said that a big denial is a big affirmation. I can see your future clearly, that's what I'm saying."

"Wh-what."

"If you don't want to die from exhaustion after sucking and kissing later, at least build up your stamina, you star-gazer. If it's you two, the child that's born will be worth seeing. Be sure to send them to Ignis Magic Tower later!"

Asel ignored Pascal's shout and tightly grabbed Celine, who was about to jump forward. Celine struggled in his arms, then took a rough breath and looked up at Asel.

"I'm an expensive woman. I'm not an easy woman who falls for the status of a noble!"

"Who said anything? Who's a noble here in the first place."

"...? Aren't you a noble? You look exactly like a noble."

Celine muttered, blinking her eyes. Asel let go of her and replied.

"I'm from the slums. You can practically say I grew up there. You can tell by the fact that I don't have a last name."

"Slu-slums? You too?"

"...You too?"

"Me too!"

Celine's expression brightened. She never thought she would meet a mage from the same back alley in the academy. Feeling a sudden surge of affection and intimacy towards Asel, Celine tapped his chest with her fist.

"Did you have parents?"

"I ran away because they were demon worshippers."

"Mine are all dead! But my mom was a good person."

"What the hell is this otherworldly conversation? Is there a new trend of asking about each other's parents that I don't know about?"

Pascal, unable to listen to the two people's story, interrupted. He threw the cigarette he was smoking on the floor, sighed deeply, and began to descend the stairs.

"Shut up and let's go now. It's good to loosen up the atmosphere, but we need to avoid loosening up too much. Keep some tension."

He was right. Asel roughly ruffled Celine's hair, who was grumbling, and followed right behind Pascal. Celine and Saya followed closely behind. Asel cast overlapping Physical Enhancement magic on the two of them and pulled up his Mana so that he could react at any time.

Flame Spell and Ice Spell are advantageous for speed battles. Electrification Art far surpasses the two magics in attack speed, but the mobility of the sorcerer themselves inevitably decreases.

He would if he could turn his body into lightning, but Asel's level had not yet reached that point. He would only dare to try it after realizing his Uniqueness.

"Get ready."

After descending the stairs to some extent. Pascal muttered, shaking his legs. Asel identified the presence of a creature beyond the end of the stairs and hardened his face. Pascal didn't bother to look back, but raised his Mana and made a hand seal, continuing his words.

"Let's go."

The moment he uttered those words.

[Prominence]

Whoosh!!!!

A huge sphere of flame was summoned in front of Pascal. It was fired forward like a cannonball. That alone brightly illuminated the dark Labyrinth corridor, and the burning native creatures revealed themselves.

Their form was similar to humans. But they had six heads. A toothed heart pumped through their wide-open chest, and their lungs ate their ribs and spat out bone fragments.

The shattered shoulder blades pierced through the skin and transformed into real wings. Each of the six heads had one set of features, and at the same time as their large eyes turned to ashes, their mouths, torn into an X shape, opened wide and emitted a shriek.

-Kieeeeeeeeeeeek!!!

A loud scream that made their brains ring. As if resonating with it, similar sounds erupted from all directions.

Now. Without needing to say anything, everyone simultaneously began to sprint through the Labyrinth with all their might.

[Flame Walk]

Pascal killed the friction of his shoes and shot forward as if sliding. Asel spread wings of flame behind him, Celine summoned a large planet and climbed on top of it. Saya transformed her appearance into a fox with Yokai power and ran madly on all fours. The released tails overlapped as if they had become one and spewed out Yokai power.

Everyone's speed was similar. But Saya and Celine were focusing all their minds just on maintaining their speed. They had no room to deal with the approaching monsters.

Whenever that happened, Asel and Pascal busily moved their hands. The two running people perfectly understood what each other had to do without needing to talk.

[Flare]

Flames erupted from Pascal's footsteps as he stepped forward. That alone cleanly blew away the upper bodies of the monsters that were running towards them. Asel used the repulsive force of Pascal's magic to move to the very back of the group. He then chanted Electrification Art.

[Sharp Lightning Destruction]

A faint current flickered from his fingertips. Soon, the moment it collided with one of the monsters, a huge storm of thunder ripped through the space. The monsters that had been chasing after them in grotesque forms were decomposed and scattered on the floor.

But they didn't die. The severed arms became a single life form and split off from the main body. Mouths appeared on the cut surfaces, and bones that had popped out with a crunching sound formed legs. The Nom screamed sharply and immediately rushed towards the group.

The remaining body fragments were similar. Splinter that did not die and continued to harbor life. The torn lungs and heart, intestines, and even brain fluid were condensed to form a single life.

It felt like common sense was being thoroughly denied. Asel let out a hollow laugh and manifested Flame Spell in the opposite direction behind Saya and Celine. Then, using the magic as propulsion, the two were quickly shot forward. Asel grabbed the heart that had leaped to bite his leg with Mana thread, shredded it, and increased the output of his wings.

Kwaaaaaaaa!!

Fiercely rotating wings of flame. That alone released overwhelming heat around them. It was a magic with extremely poor Mana efficiency, so he couldn't maintain it for long, but the output alone was top-notch.

Just by spreading them, they wouldn't be able to recklessly attack. Asel shot one more Electrification Art and flew towards Pascal. He looked up at him while staunching the blood from his bloodied fingers.

He didn't bother asking how he got hurt. Questions with obvious answers were of no help anyway.

"How much further?!"

"Not much left!"

Pascal answered while pouring out spheres of flame. Asel distorted his face and quickly made a hand seal.

[Flame Crimson Line Rotation]

Lines of burning flame bloomed from the tips of Asel's ten fingers. He stretched them out in all directions as if manipulating a puppet, and at the same time, pulled them in sharply. Then, the lines of flame rotated violently, releasing heat and flames around them. The monsters were smoothly sliced ​​the moment they touched the high-temperature threads.

"Ah, shit!"

Celine wasn't just standing still either. Whenever she had a moment, she created meteor showers and pierced the heads of the monsters. Saya also stopped the movements of the monsters for a moment through hypnosis.

That alone was enough. A gap was created momentarily. Pascal forcibly tore through the gap and created a huge storm of flame.

"Turn!"

He shouted and changed direction to the right. Asel rotated his flight direction as it was, adjusted Saya's inertia, and prevented her from crashing into the wall. Saya looked up at him with vertically torn pupils, then pulled up her Yokai power even more and increased her size.

"Krrrreureureuk...!"

She crushed the entrails flying towards Asel while emitting a chilling resonance. Even in the midst of that, her speed did not decrease. It was proof that she was properly controlling her body, which had turned into a beast.

He had been worried that she would fall behind, but her operation was at a high level that was almost embarrassing. Asel stroked Saya's soft fur once and looked back, snapping his fingers. At the same time, lightning was emitted in a fan shape, catching and burning the monsters as he moved forward.

The space behind him opened up momentarily. He would be able to buy some time until the sliced Nom split and gained life. Asel turned away from Saya, who was running towards him, and turned his gaze forward.

At that moment, he saw a staircase in his line of sight. A staircase that was dug upwards instead of downwards. At the same time as he confirmed it, Pascal looked back at the group.

There was no conversation. They had just spurred on.

And at that moment.

-Geuwoeeeeeeeeeeeo!!

A huge pile of corpses fell right in front of the stairs. No, to be exact, it was a phenomenon like a golem created by a pile of corpses. The presence he felt at first glance was ominous. Ignoring it seemed impossible.

But they couldn't continue the battle either. They had bought a little time, but it was clear that monsters would pour out from behind again while they were fighting.

Then the best way is for one person to deal with the golem while the others go firstㅡ

"Shut up, you bastard!""

The moment Asel thought. Pascal shouted roughly and made a hand seal. At the same time, one red drop fell to the floor between his hands.

Kwaaaaaaaa!!!

Flames that incinerated the space entirely spread to everything except the group. In an instant, the golem melted down to the point where its form was unrecognizable. Crimson blood evaporated the moment it touched the floor, and flesh turned to ashes, scattering without leaving a trace.

It was obvious at a glance. It was definitely a high-level magic boasting extreme firepower even within the Flame Spell. Asel stared at the flames engulfing all sides with burning eyes, running after Pascal.

He folded the wings of flame. It was clear that using it any further would deplete his Mana, resulting in a loss of combat power. He ran on his own two feet, watching Pascal's back as he breathed roughly.

"Haa... haa..."

He was out of breath in an instant. Maintaining a magic with shattered efficiency constantly, and using other magics in succession, his body wouldn't listen. It wasn't to the point where his legs gave way, but he could definitely feel that his speed had slowed down compared to before.

At this rate, he would collapse from exhaustion before even reaching the stairs. Asel gritted his teeth, moving his legs while screaming so hard his molars felt like they would break. At that moment, Saya bit his clothes and accelerated, stepping on the remains of the golem that was beginning to regenerate.

"Saya!"

"Woof!"

Instead of answering, Saya barked once, snatched Celine, put her on her back, and slapped Pascal's body with her front paw as he waved his hands as if telling her to take him too.

"Keuh?!"

He flew towards the stairs with a flustered expression. Saya frowned at her slightly burnt front paw and threw herself towards the stairs. The giant fox slipped into the stairs, and as her body returned to its original form, the two people who had been hanging on rolled onto the floor.

"Keheuk... woof woof...!"

Saya lay sprawled on the stairs, barking pitifully. Asel quickly regained his senses, fixed Saya and Celine with Mana thread, and began to run up the stairs. Pascal followed beside him, muttering curses.

"Damn it, why only slap me and act up!"

He grumbled, burning the blood flowing from his finger. Asel didn't bother to answer him, instead running until he couldn't feel the presence of any more monsters.

Thanks to Celine intercepting the monsters with magic, their presence disappeared cleanly before long.

# 74 - Escape (3)

As the situation became safe, a sense of lethargy pressed down on Asel's entire body. He exhaled deeply and slid down the wall, sitting down. Pascal, after tearing a bit of his clothing to bandage his severed finger, rummaged through his pockets in search of a cigarette.

But there were no more cigarettes left. He grimaced and cursed under his breath.

“Life, damn it.”

For a smoker, a cigarette is akin to life itself. After such a significant event, one must smoke at least one.

But with nothing left, there was no way around it. He let out a deep sigh and leaned against the wall.

“Are you okay?”

Asel asked Saya and Celine, who were both panting beside him. Celine nodded immediately, thumping her chest with her fist.

“I’m out of mana, but I’m not exhausted. I think I can walk on my own.”

“Glad to hear that. What about you, Saya?”

“Yip yip yip!!”

“?”

Saya didn’t speak but let out a sharp fox-like cry. Although her appearance had returned to that of a human, it seemed her language ability had not yet returned. It was probably a side effect of her transformation back from a fox.

Fortunately, it seemed her intelligence hadn’t regressed, as she nodded at Asel, indicating she was okay. Asel forced a smile and lowered his head.

The plan they had hastily devised had, thankfully, worked out well. The regeneration and division abilities of the monsters were somewhat peculiar, but they had survived nonetheless. The ability to think this way was a privilege of those who had lived through it.

“...Huh.”

He raised his head and stared at the long staircase ahead.

The energy he felt now was simply comfortable. The mana and killing intent that had weighed down on him had vanished as if it were a lie. His breathing was smooth, and he didn’t feel bad at all. A pleasant sense of lethargy circulated through his body.

“Hey, speaking of which, I forgot to ask.”

While he was closing his eyes and contemplating his mana, Pascal suddenly spoke up. Asel opened his eyes again and rolled them to look at him.

“What’s your name?”

“Asel.”

“Asel... Asel, huh...”

Pascal repeated his name as if trying to remember it, then broke into a grin and extended a fist toward Asel.

“I remember. If you ever stop by the Magic Tower, feel free to use my name.”

“...I’ll make good use of it.”

Asel smiled bitterly and tapped his fist against Pascal’s.

Pascal’s words were quite cheerful, but unfortunately, he was a figure from the past, a mere illusion created by the Labyrinth. The events that had transpired here would not affect reality. The likelihood of that was exceedingly low.

Still... it felt good. It was hard not to feel a sense of camaraderie with someone who had faced adversity together. Even if he was no longer a figure they could see in reality.

Pascal withdrew his fist and asked, “What will you do once we get up?”

“Well... I’d like to rest a bit first.”

“I can agree with that.”

Pascal chuckled softly and turned his body toward the stairs. Having had enough rest, it was time to continue their arduous journey. Climbing fifteen floors on foot was no easy task.

Asel patted his thighs, which felt like they were about to burst, and stood up.

And at that moment.

Creeeak.

A horrific noise, like chalk scraping against a blackboard, filled the air, and the world around Asel began to warp. It felt as if the very fabric of space was shattering. A sense of helplessness enveloped him, as if he had become a mortal standing before a transcendent being.

“...!”

He opened his mouth, but no sound came out. His body wouldn’t move. Pascal stood frozen in mid-air as if time had stopped, and Saya and Celine were also completely still. The only things that moved were his eyes and thoughts.

‘What the hell is going on all of a sudden?!’

It was hard to make an accurate judgment, but something was definitely wrong. Asel concentrated as hard as he could to draw up his mana, but it felt as if it had frozen, refusing to obey his will. This was the first time he had ever felt such a rejection from his mana.

Under any circumstances, even under the interference of a great mage, his mana had always followed his commands until now, but it was currently acting against his will. Asel wasn’t foolish enough not to understand what that meant.

A being higher than a great mage.

A monster that had reached transcendence and possessed a god-like perspective. A ruler who had reached the realm of divinity that mortals could only look up to for their entire lives.

It was clear that this being was the one responsible for the current situation.

“...!”

The moment he realized this, the space before Asel began to shatter like a broken mirror. The cracks spread rapidly around him, all shattering at once and pulling Asel into a dark void.

In an instant, his vision flipped. Without a moment to comprehend, he was thrown into a space of darkness. In that place where not a single ray of light existed, Asel felt as if he were lying underwater. He couldn’t tell if he was actually lying down or if it was an illusion caused by the confusion of standing.

And at the same time, a voice began to resonate directly in Asel’s mind.

[The Labyrinth was a space I created to find a successor myself.]

Whether it was a man, a woman, an old person, or a child, the voice was so mixed up that he couldn’t grasp anything. However, ironically, that chaotic voice began to slowly calm Asel’s mind.

[In the moment of approaching death, I poured all my remaining mana into creating my own sanctuary and tomb. I chose to imitate the Labyrinth not for any significant reason, but because I thought its form would be the most suitable. There must be appropriate trials and rewards for many to challenge this place.]

Asel’s eyes, which had been wide open, narrowed sharply. He focused his mind as much as possible to concentrate on the voice in his head.

[While creating the tomb, I heard that an academy would be established here. It was a stroke of luck. An academy attracts all sorts of talented individuals, so there was no reason to refuse. I immediately approached the headmaster and requested to open my tomb to the students. The headmaster looked troubled, but ultimately allowed the opening in exchange for not publicly declaring that this was my tomb. It was a good enough condition, so I accepted his proposal.]

The word “tomb” dug into Asel’s mind. The inscription of the sage’s tomb that had been engraved on Aleph suddenly came to mind.

[As I said, I created the Labyrinth to find a successor. What happens to my tomb is of no concern. Rather than being known as a sanctuary that foolish mages block off from outsiders, it might be better to be known simply as a Labyrinth. The future is uncertain, but I couldn’t help but have some expectations.]

[However, the arrival of the Demon of Possibility was something I never anticipated.]

The mention of the Demon of Possibility again. He could no longer even guess where it wouldn’t intrude. It was enough to suspect that it might be the most influential being among demons.

Even as the voice continued, it went on.

[He was a rather alien demon. Not living in hell, but existing somewhere in the void between this world and hell, a transcendent being who sits like a large black tree, never moving. He shows no interest in killing humans and instead acts as if he wants to protect them. Perhaps that’s why I was able to converse with him. I can no longer remember the exact reason.]

[He proposed to me that he would bear the “Fruit of Possibility” that would allow someone with greater talent than me to visit the Labyrinth. The price was my soul. To break the cycle of reincarnation and enter eternal rest. I gladly accepted his proposal.]

[After all, my life was already short due to illness. If I could obtain a certain future, I could give up my life without hesitation. I don’t know the exact timing, but still, I dedicate my life to the future.]

As the voice continued, Asel’s heart gradually calmed. He felt the pounding of his own heartbeat and gently closed his eyes.

[This is a message and testament I leave just before my death. If the Demon of Possibility has not betrayed me, surely someone will hear these words. I made the condition for this to be someone with a similar level of mana sensitivity and control as mine.]

[I hope that whoever is listening to my testament, whether they are a mage or a swordsman resulting from talent, will inherit my will.]

[Kill the Demon of Birth. And save the world.]

Thud.

The voice cut off for a moment, then returned in a mechanical tone.

[You have escaped the Labyrinth. Rewards will be given.]

[Escape point: 16th floor.]

[As a reward, “The Sage’s Testament” will be given.]

[Thank you for your hard work.]

As the voice faded, Asel’s vision began to brighten. When the world was fully illuminated again.

“Gah!”

Asel exhaled sharply, his eyes wide open as he sat up. Reine, who had been sitting beside him, jumped in surprise at his sudden awakening.

“Ah! You scared me! You woke up so noisily!”

At Reine’s unexpected voice, all of Asel’s senses returned to reality. He was sweating profusely as he glared at Reine, who flinched at his rather fierce gaze.

“Uh... I’m sorry?”

“...Senior. Where are we?”

With a voice cracking, Asel first asked that. Reine cleared her throat and replied.

“It’s the bedroom behind the clubroom. Surprise~”

“...Bedroom?”

“The Labyrinth actually takes place in a dream. They say it’s because the Dream Demons are involved in the creation process. We just took care of you while you were asleep and laid you down here.”

“...In a dream. You’re saying it’s in a dream.”

Asel muttered as he covered his face with his hands.

He had suspected it might be a dream since there was no pain from the burns, but he never thought it would be real. If that were the case, the moment his consciousness had momentarily cut off when he first entered was likely an additional procedure that occurred during the process of entering the dream.

If it was the power of the Dream Demons, it was only natural that Asel wouldn’t have noticed in advance. Hetero abilities that occur at the level of a species are impossible to detect without directly seeing their remnants, no matter how high one’s mana sensitivity is. It would be difficult for Asel, unless it was a member of the same species.

...His thoughts briefly wandered elsewhere. Asel exhaled deeply and recalled the Sage’s Testament. What was important now was not the fact that the Labyrinth was a dream, but rather organizing the new information he had obtained.

‘It’s true that the Labyrinth is the Sage’s tomb and final work. I understand that its goal is to find a successor.’

Since he had anticipated it, accepting it was easy. However, the word “successor” complicated his thoughts considerably.

The sage, who had thrown away his talent for the next generation through a contract with the Demon of Possibility. A transcendent being whose reincarnation and cycle had been severed, and whose soul had completely vanished from the world. A quirky mage who had hammered all traces of himself into the Labyrinth.

It was easy to predict where the talent he was searching for was currently located. Asel looked down at his chest, his face contorting.

‘It’s me.’

There was no room for doubt. The talent the sage had longed for, sacrificing his past and future life, was none other than himself.

The mana sensitivity and control that could be compared to that of the sage. The fact that he had heard the testament that could only be heard with such abilities meant that the talent the sage had hoped for in the future was Asel.

The certain future established through the sage’s contract with the demon.

Was it truly a random outcome that Asel existed in that future? Was it merely a coincidence that he had heard the sage’s testament in place of a genius who might have existed in the past or one who might be born in the future?

It couldn’t be. He was a transcendent being strong enough to engage in battle with gods. It was clear that there was some plan behind why he had passed the sage’s testament to Asel.

“...”

Now, it was a plan that he couldn’t even begin to guess. According to the sage’s testament, he mentioned a peculiar demon whose goal was to save humanity, so it was clear that it was related to that. The rest... he didn’t know.

But one thing was certain.

The Demon of Possibility.

That being was plotting something.

# 75 - Dating Game with a Vampire

What does the demon of possibilities truly desire? Does it genuinely wish for the salvation of humanity, or is that merely a deception?

“......”

Understanding the psychology of a transcendent being was as impossible for a mortal as it was for them to comprehend the lofty gaze that looks down upon all from a great height—how noble and yet chilling it must be. Surely, they desire things that the perpetrator could not even imagine, and they are likely executing those desires.

To approach the truth, one had no choice but to either descend into the entire labyrinth or to hide among the devil worshippers. Either way, it was impossible to resolve the matter immediately, so Asel let out a deep sigh and sprawled back.

At that moment, Reine smiled faintly and spoke to him.

“Are you tired?”

“......I am a bit tired.”

“Everyone feels that way after entering and exiting for the first time. The mental strain is quite severe.”

“More importantly, where are the others?”

In response to Asel's question, Reine pointed with her finger to his side. When Asel turned his head in that direction, he saw two people just waking up, shaking off their sleepiness with disheveled hair.

They seemed to be in good condition. After all, the labyrinth itself was a dream, so perhaps that was to be expected. The burn that Saya had received from hitting Pascal had also disappeared, and Celine appeared to have recovered from her Mana depletion, looking much more relaxed.

Suddenly, she gasped and began to survey her surroundings.

“W-what? Where are we? Are we still inside the labyrinth?”

“Yip yip!”

Saya chimed in, mimicking a fox's cry in response to Celine's confusion. Reine personally explained the nature of the labyrinth to the two, causing their faces to contort in a strange manner.

The events that had transpired in the labyrinth were far too vivid to be merely dreams. The gap between reality and the experience felt almost nonexistent. Hearing that all the near-death memories from such a place were just dreams could not help but evoke a peculiar feeling.

Crossing the line between life and death holds no meaning if one dies, but if one survives, it becomes a monumental experience. It aids in growth and profoundly impacts a person's fundamental imagery and abilities. This is why many knights and sorcerers seek out battlefields.

The labyrinth, in essence, was not much different from a battlefield. The target of combat was not a fellow human but rather monsters. The level of danger was similar to that of war.

Having somehow survived such a place, hearing that it was all a dream was understandably disheartening. Celine, like Asel, began to mess up her hair with her hands and lay back down on the bed.

Asel brushed aside her hair that fell over his face and asked, half-hoping.

“Celine, did you hear any voices while escaping?”

“Something about a reward? Yes, I heard it. They mentioned some information about ‘the 50 years of records left by a Stellar Rank Sorcerer.’”

Celine casually turned her head and replied.

Records left by a Stellar Rank Sorcerer. This was a different reward from the sage's last words that Asel had received. It seemed that the sage's last words were conveyed solely to Asel. However, for Celine, the records of the Stellar Rank Sorcerer would undoubtedly be of great help. Documents left by a sorcerer of the same lineage were a significant opportunity in themselves.

The important thing was that, regardless of the differences in rewards, she too had received a reward.

Perhaps, regardless of the sage's last words, both the labyrinth and the minor labyrinth were designed to grant rewards to those who escaped.

There was no need to ponder who the entity behind this was. It was likely something the sage had laid out to instill a sense of reward.

“What kind of sorcerer was he to make all this possible?”

The more one delved into it, the more one could only feel awe towards the sorcerer. Asel forced a bitter smile and asked Celine what the contents of the records were.

Celine readily shared what she had heard.

“If a person kills one person, they are called a murderer. But if they kill thousands or tens of thousands, they become a hero. In that sense, he was the greatest hero in this world.”

“......”

“A mass murderer, a scholar, a ruler—arrogant yet noble and sublime. He killed all the people of the continent except for me and himself before they could be slaughtered by the demons, laying the groundwork for the transcendent ceremony. The astonishing fact is that all those killings were done with consent.”

“......What?”

“Even the master who could not resist, and the sorcerer who could take thousands of lives with a mere gesture. They all willingly offered their necks to him. Thus, he killed family, killed masters, killed friends and lovers. They all trusted him and willingly became sacrifices for consciousness.”

Celine continued speaking, her expression questioning whether this was right.

“No one knows what he felt at that time. I, the only survivor, am no exception. Frankly, it didn’t matter. He did not seek understanding, and I had no intention of understanding. We were merely the last remnants of humanity left in this world for a single goal. Personal feelings were nothing but impurities.”

“He took the lives of millions to prepare for the ceremony, and I was assigned the role of forcibly aligning all the constellations in a straight line to open the void space. This was to be our final collaboration, he and I, who were once academy alumni... or so it ended.”

“......Isn’t there only you as a Stellar Rank Sorcerer in the academy?”

When Asel asked with a serious expression, Celine pondered for a moment before shaking her head.

“There’s one in the third year and one in the fourth year. There are quite a few Stellar Rank Sorcerers from the academy at the Magic Tower. If you look through the character encyclopedia, you might find some who have already passed away but were from the academy.”

“Sure, that’s one thing. But what the hell does it mean that he killed all the people of the continent?”

“......I don’t know.”

Celine scratched her cheek and rolled her eyes.

“Well, isn’t it something about parallel worlds? It’s a theoretically existing realm, but without that, it doesn’t make sense.”

“......Parallel worlds.”

Asel muttered as he looked up at the ceiling.

He already knew that parallel worlds existed. He had memories of his past life and confirmed the existence of regression through Grace, so there was no need to ponder the existence of parallel worlds. However, he couldn’t grasp the intention behind Celine being informed about parallel world information, especially when it was unrelated to magic.

“......Hah.”

He was returning from a club he had joined lightly, only to be burdened with all sorts of complicated thoughts.

It was ironic.

“I ultimately wasn’t much help.”

As they left the club room and headed back to their respective dorms, Saya, who had suddenly learned to speak, opened her mouth unexpectedly. Asel, who was walking ahead, turned around and tilted his head.

“I thought it was fine.”

“I didn’t do as well as I thought. I feel like I’ve just become a burden.”

“Don’t worry about it. It wasn’t even your area of expertise.”

While Saya could handle magic, she wasn’t specialized in combat like a sorcerer or knight. Her true strengths lay in magical engineering and guild management, which had nothing to do with hunting monsters in the labyrinth. It was only natural for her to show a lack of ability in combat.

However, whether she thought differently, Saya lowered her head with a bitter smile. It was clear to anyone that she looked dejected.

“I appreciate you saying that, though.”

“......”

“If there’s a chance, please visit our guild. I’ll treat you with the utmost hospitality then.”

Without waiting for a response, Saya bowed her head toward Asel and turned her body toward the dormitory. Asel stared at her back for a moment before letting out a deep sigh.

It seemed she was feeling more burdened than he had thought. If he had known this would happen, he would have visited her beforehand; the situation was turning out quite strangely. It seemed he would need to make time later for a serious conversation.

“Well, I’ll take my leave here.”

Celine said as she poked Asel in the side with her finger.

At the fork leading to each dormitory, Asel smiled bitterly and nodded. Celine left a message to see him next time and walked toward her dormitory. Asel also headed straight to his room.

As he walked along the smoothly paved path, the grand dormitory soon came into view. Until the midterms, there were only four people living in the building. Asel greeted Lacey, who was cleaning in the lobby, and as soon as he entered his room, he collapsed onto the bed.

“......Hah.”

The faint scent of Ena still lingered on the bed. Asel felt a strange sensation and cast a cleaning spell over the bed, then pressed his hand to his forehead while staring at the ceiling.

“Minor labyrinth... the sage’s tomb... Stellar Rank Sorcerer... parallel worlds... and the demon of possibilities...”

Just the new information he had learned today was this much. Merely recalling it made his temples throb. There was nothing to take lightly.

However, he was currently extremely tired, and there weren’t enough clues to yield any substantial answers, even if he racked his brain. In the end, he had no choice but to continue exploring the minor labyrinth or to sneak into the devil worshippers’ midst to gather information about the demons.

Neither option was easy. Asel sighed deeply and gently closed his eyes.

“Let’s just rest for today.”

With the mental strain already high, the influx of information felt like it might burst his head. At times like this, it was much better to rest as much as possible rather than overthinking. Considering his condition, it was wise to focus on resting for the time being.

Now that he thought about it, since enrolling in the academy, he had been caught up in all sorts of incidents instead of enjoying his youth. For now, until the midterms, he should aim to organize the information he had gathered and diligently study magic while focusing on his academic life.

Asel thought this and cast a sleep spell on himself. Soon, he exhaled softly and fell asleep.

The academy takes weekends off. There are no classes or clubs. It is purely personal time. Professors, as if waiting for this moment, often stroll outside the academy grounds to enjoy their leisure time. The same goes for the students.

Despite the pride of being an academy student, the weekend that arrives after a week filled with classes is undeniably sweet. It wouldn’t be strange to say that one lives solely for the weekends throughout the week.

Asel didn’t particularly wait for the weekend like others, but he did enjoy it quite a bit for the simple reason that he could sleep in. Falling asleep as the moon began to wane and waking up when the sun was high in the sky brought about an indescribable sense of pleasure.

Today was no different. Asel woke up around 2 PM, made a simple sandwich for a late breakfast and lunch, tidied up his messy hair with magic, and took care of his bedding and dishes using the life magic he learned from Hailey.

Then, he immediately lay down on the sofa and began reading a magical book.

It was a book related to freezing formulas. He had borrowed it from the library, a transfer from the Magic Tower to the academy. He had borrowed it a few days ago, and it was surprisingly interesting, so he was reading it multiple times.

“Should I focus on improving my freezing formula proficiency for a while?”

Asel thought this as he wiggled his legs.

Knock knock knock!

Someone began to pound on the dormitory door vigorously. Asel tilted his head in confusion, placed the book he had been reading on the table, and opened the door.

“Ah, Asel!”

Standing at the door was Elena, dressed in casual clothes, looking extremely excited. Asel looked down at her and asked.

“What’s up? What’s going on all of a sudden?”

“I have a favor to ask!”

“A favor?”

As Asel echoed her, Elena took a step forward and declared with determination.

“Be my boyfriend!”

“?”

Asel’s face contorted oddly at her declaration.

“What kind of nonsense is this?”

# 76 - Dating Game with a Vampire (2)

“So,”

Asel pressed his hand against his throbbing forehead, staring at Elena, who was sucking on a blood pack.

“You need someone to go to the auction house with you, right?”

Her sudden declaration of wanting to be his lover was not based on affection or love, but rather a request for him to join her as a partner at the auction house happening that evening. The underground auction house on the academy grounds required a male-female pair for entry. She had come to him because there was something she needed to buy there.

“Exactly!”

The auction house on the academy grounds was a legitimate venue operated by the Leonard Trading Company, a hub where all sorts of items gathered. It was a storage of relics, each tool specifically prepared for academy personnel, desperately seeking their owners.

Asel had only heard of this place through stories. He knew it existed but had never visited. It wasn’t just that he found it bothersome to go; he simply had no need for anything there. Unless a remarkable magical artifact came up for auction, he had no reason to go. According to the rumors he had heard, the most valuable item recently auctioned was a griffin feather.

Of course, that was no trivial item. The griffin feather, widely used in alchemy and as a magical catalyst, was worth hundreds of gold coins. However, it simply wasn’t necessary for Asel.

He had thus lost interest in the auction house until Elena suddenly showed up asking him to go with her.

It seemed that a new item had caught her eye. Asel asked her what it was. Elena leaned forward slightly and replied.

“It’s a Bloodsucking Sword! It’s a dagger that gets stronger the more blood it absorbs! I thought it would be better to have a weapon I can handle directly rather than making one from blood every time I fight!”

A Bloodsucking Sword. It was indeed a fitting weapon for Elena, a vampire. Since she could freely control the frenzy that came from craving blood, it made much more sense for her to acquire it than to let a mediocre swordsman get their hands on it.

However, Asel found it odd that, despite the fact that the Duchy of Valdemia must have had all sorts of weapons stored, she hadn’t brought any of them with her.

Well, it didn’t matter. Everyone has their reasons. It would be silly to seriously ponder someone else's family matters.

Asel dismissed the question that had arisen in his mind and nodded at Elena.

“Alright. I’ll help you. What time and where do I need to go?”

He was a bit bored anyway, and since he was going to the auction house, he might as well take a look around. Asel readily accepted Elena’s request. Elena’s eyes sparkled as she jumped up from her seat.

“Are you really going to help? Wow, thank you! You’re the only one I can count on!”

Elena bounced over to Asel’s side and hugged him. It was an unexpected display of affection, but since it was Elena, it didn’t evoke much of a reaction. It felt like a large dog that loved people had attached itself to him.

Still, it wasn’t unpleasant, so Asel chuckled and ruffled Elena’s hair. Despite her hair getting tousled, Elena showed no signs of discontent and enjoyed his touch.

After a moment, Elena, leaning closely against Asel, looked up at him with her blood-red pupils and spoke.

“Just come to the plaza at 6 PM. Dress as nicely as you can! The dress code is suits and dresses today!”

“Really? I’ll have to wear something appropriate.”

“I’m going to wear a black dress. You should wear a black suit too!”

“Okay.”

Asel smiled faintly and tapped Elena’s pointed ear with his fingertips. Then, a sudden curiosity struck him, and he asked her.

“By the way, why me? You could have asked someone else.”

“Oh, that?”

Elena turned to face Asel with a bright smile.

“You’re the only guy I’m close to!”

The academy grounds were quite lively even in the evening. The streets were bustling with students enjoying the weekend, and shops adorned with colorful lights sparkled brightly, driving away the darkness. Asel sat on a bench in the plaza, staring blankly at the scene.

Perhaps it was because he had been through a lot recently, but as he enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere, he couldn’t shake the feeling that something might suddenly go wrong. While being overly sensitive was better than being oblivious to danger, Asel himself thought it was a bit excessive.

However, once he became aware of it, the feeling gradually subsided, and after a few minutes, he was able to enjoy the academy’s nightlife purely.

“How are you going to handle the midterms? Have you reviewed the problems the professors gave us?”

“Let’s make sure we don’t lose in the inter-class competition this year, everyone! No matter what, the freshmen have to win!”

“Um, Sarah… I recently developed a crush…”

Students chatted about various topics. The sounds of street vendors calling for passersby and friends greeting each other echoed softly in Asel’s ears.

‘Ah, youth.’

Asel thought this with a somewhat nostalgic smile. At that moment, a familiar face walking toward the plaza caught his eye.

“Where are you…?”

Her usually tied-back white hair was now flowing freely. A red flower decoration was pinned in her hair, and an obsidian ornament dangled from the tip of her pointed ear.

She wore a black dress that minimized exposure. Aside from the upper chest covered by translucent black fabric, the only visible skin was her shoulders, collarbone, and thighs revealed by the split in her skirt.

However, that was hardly enough to conceal her body. Although the fabric wasn’t tight, it was pulled taut around her chest and hips. In contrast, her waist seemed to have a bit of room, causing the dress to sway side to side with each step.

Despite her explosive figure, her unmade-up face exuded a youthful girl vibe.

Even Asel, who had grown up around many women, found himself momentarily captivated by her appearance. He stared blankly at her, wondering if this was really the same Elena who had once seemed like a puppy. Just then, as if sensing his gaze, Elena, who had been looking around, spotted him and broke into a wide smile.

“You came quickly! Did you wait long?”

“...No. Not for long.”

As Elena approached, asking her question, Asel stood up to respond.

Elena looked up at him, marveling.

“Ooh…! You look even cooler all dressed up!”

“You look pretty too.”

“Hehe. Thank you!”

Asel burst into laughter at her beaming face.

It was always a pleasant smile. For a creature that fed on human blood, she looked far too harmless. One might even suspect that she had evolved to sink her teeth into necks in such an innocent manner.

That was a pointless thought. Asel patted his hair back with his palm and looked at Elena, asking.

“So? Where do we go?”

“Follow me! Let’s go right away!”

Elena shouted as she grabbed Asel’s hand. He obediently followed her lead.

Their joined hands were colder than he expected. Being a vampire with a naturally low body temperature, he could feel the warmth being drawn away in real-time. And whether that sensation was pleasant or not, Elena shivered and let out a soft sound.

“It’s warm…”

“Do you like it?”

“I do! Hold my other hand too.”

“Alright, alright.”

Asel smiled and extended his hand, and Elena switched positions, this time tightly gripping his right hand. The cool sensation flowed down Asel’s arm, while warm heat penetrated Elena’s entire body. With the pleasant mix of coolness and warmth, they made their way toward the auction house.

Then suddenly, Elena spoke up.

“Oh, right. I forgot to tell you this.”

“...? What is it?”

“Normally, you can enter the auction house alone, but this time it’s only open to couples! The reason is that they say a lot of good items come in for lovers.”

“Hmm… really?”

“So we have to pretend to be a couple at the auction house! Otherwise, we might get kicked out?!”

“You mean we have to act?”

“Yep!”

Elena nodded vigorously. Asel let out a hum and then smiled, nodding in agreement.

“Leave it to me.”

Asel was somewhat confident in his acting skills. He had performed in over ten plays at Wiheim. Among them, there were quite a few themed around love, so it would be enough to imitate the behavior patterns of the actors from those performances.

The concept would be a cold but warm man to his girl. That was the role that had been more popular than the lead despite being a supporting character.

As Asel made that determination and began to mentally prepare himself, Elena muttered thoughtfully.

“But what does being a couple even mean?”

“Have you never met a romantic partner?”

“No. I’ve only lived in the castle and my father has turned down all my engagements. I’ve never really talked to anyone other than my dad and brothers.”

“Sounds like they really care about you.”

“Maybe? But Asel, have you ever dated a girl?”

“I’ve received plenty of confessions, but I’ve turned them all down, so I’ve never dated anyone.”

“Ooh… so we’re in the same boat?”

“Looks like it.”

Elena hugged Asel’s arm and smiled brightly.

“Is this kind of behavior okay for pretending to be a couple? I’ve seen girls hugging guys’ arms like this in plays.”

“Do whatever feels comfortable. I’ll go along with whatever you want. Or do you want to do what I say?”

At Asel’s suggestion, Elena nodded without a moment’s hesitation.

“Okay.”

I want to die.

I want to bury my nose in the water right now and drown. Then I wouldn’t have to see these damn couples.

Nigel thought this as he expressionlessly handed a ticket to a woman.

“You may enter.”

“Thank you. Let’s go, honey.”

“Sure.”

The neatly dressed couple passed by Nigel and entered the auction house. He watched their retreating figures, then grimaced and tugged at his hair.

‘Why am I here as a solo while they’re all lovey-dovey?!’

It had already been hours since he had let dozens of couples into the auction house. At first, he was okay with it, but his heart was gradually shattering. Watching the couples flirt with each other made his insides boil with rage. What kind of couple items warranted such conditions for entry to the auction house? The more he thought about it, the more rebellious feelings surged against the auction house owner.

Why did he have to be in charge of the entrance on a day like this, damn it.

Just as Nigel was thinking this and shedding tears, another group of guests appeared from the opposite side.

He quickly regained his professional demeanor and stood at attention with a blank expression to greet the guests.

“Here?”

“Yes!”

Once again, it was a couple. However, the appearance of these two was incomparable to any of the previous visitors. The man was striking, and the woman exuded a cute yet seductive aura.

Nigel found himself staring blankly at the woman, captivated by her beauty, even as the couple approached and stood in front of him to express their intent to enter the auction house.

“Hello. We’d like to enter.”

“...Wow.”

As they got closer, their beauty shone even brighter. The woman had pale skin with delicate features and blood-red eyes. Her long white hair, reaching down to her waist, gave her an ethereal quality.

Even though she was close, she felt distant. Just as Nigel was staring at her intently, the man suddenly pulled the woman into his arms, revealing a fierce aura toward Nigel.

“Do you have business with my girl?”

Caught completely off guard by their concept, Nigel quickly snapped back to reality and bowed.

“...Hohere?”

Meanwhile, Elena blushed, seemingly at a loss for words, and uttered something strange.

# 77 - Dating Game with a Vampire (3)

"Fortunately, we made it safely."

Asel muttered as he tucked the two admission tickets into his pocket.

Fortunately, Nigell did not suspect the two of them and allowed them to enter the auction house. This was proof that their ruse had not been discovered. Standing at the entrance, he could see that Asel and Elena looked like a couple, just as he had intended.

It was rewarding to have established the concept so clearly. Asel smiled with satisfaction as he glanced down at Elena walking beside him.

"Are we heading straight to the auction house? Or should we take a look around here for a bit? There's still some time before the auction starts."

"……."

"Elena?"

There was no response. For some reason, her expression was blank. Her cheeks were flushed, and her lips seemed to be trembling as if she had something to say. Her clear, blood-red eyes were restless, darting around.

It was a rather unusual sight for her, who was usually so lively. When Asel poked her shoulder with his finger and called her name, Elena jumped and turned her head sharply.

"Yikes!"

"……? Why are you so startled? Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

"Ah, no! I just, um, um, was thinking for a moment!"

"Really?"

Asel shrugged off her overreaction and adjusted the slightly askew position of his coat. Elena looked up at his face and swallowed hard.

'Why am I like this?'

The hug that wasn’t really a hug from before. Ever since then, Elena's heart has been racing as if it were broken. Whenever she sees his face, she feels heat rising, and her fingers twist together. It feels as if an unknown wave of emotion is stirring through her body. She didn’t know what that feeling was, but it was clear that it was currently occupying her mind.

Feeling her face grow hot for no reason, Elena stepped a pace ahead of Asel and pointed at the various shops that had set up in the auction house.

"Le, let's wander around a bit before the auction starts! There’s so much to see, haha!"

"……?"

Asel shook his head at her erratic behavior but matched her quickened pace as she began to walk faster. After all, they were visiting the auction house at her request, so he intended to follow her wishes. Since they had time before the auction began, wandering around wouldn’t be a big problem.

"Welcome."

The first place they entered was an accessory shop filled with dazzling jewelry. Exquisitely crafted gems filled the display cases, and stones with good Mana conductivity emitted a faint glow. The two of them looked at the items for a moment before exiting the shop.

Next, they visited a food stall selling simple snacks. Elena ordered a piece of bread, and Asel ordered fried chicken. The two of them walked down the ornate corridor of the auction house, each holding their food.

At that moment, they spotted an auction house staff member walking toward them. Asel immediately donned his concept, poking a piece of fried chicken with a stick and offering it to Elena.

"Ah~"

"Uh, yeah?"

"I'll feed you."

"Ah, um."

Elena awkwardly opened her mouth, and Asel fed her a piece of meat. Her sharp fangs tore into the meat, and her molars crushed it. After a few chews, she looked at Asel with sparkling eyes.

"It’s delicious! Give me one more!"

"Here."

Asel felt the staff member glancing at him as he passed by, and he fed Elena another piece of meat. This time, without any awkwardness, she opened her mouth wide and chewed happily.

Joy spread across her face. Asel chuckled and ruffled her hair, popping the last piece of fried chicken into his mouth.

"A drink of blood would be perfect right now. What a shame."

"You say such scary things so casually."

Before he knew it, Elena had returned to her usual self, murmuring as she wiped her lips with her finger, and Asel replied while wiping the seasoning off the corner of her mouth.

[Ah, everyone, welcome. I am the owner of the auction house and the head of the Leonald Trading Company, Leonald.]

Just then, Leonald's voice began to echo from the ceiling. Everyone strolling through the corridor stopped in their tracks and looked up at the ceiling.

[I am very grateful to everyone who has visited our auction house today. I believe most of you have come a long way to purchase the newly released couple items.]

The man's voice was powerful. It exuded the arrogance and confidence typical of a trading company head. As the owner of a prestigious trading company that operated an auction house within the academy grounds, it was only natural for him to be overflowing with self-assurance. The amount of gold coins he dealt with must be in the tens of thousands.

[We pledge to provide the best experience for all our customers. We have prepared a generous selection of newly acquired items, so please feel free to participate in the auction. There are many items not only for couples but also useful for scholars, knights, and mages, so we encourage everyone to actively participate!]

"By the way, I heard the Guardian Tree's staff is going to be auctioned off this time, right? I have to get that."

"I'm planning to buy the horn of the pentagonal beast. It's a great catalyst."

As Leonald's voice continued, the surrounding noise began to swell. Everyone was discussing what items they would purchase from the auction. Fortunately, no one seemed to be aiming for the Bloodsucking sword that Elena had set her sights on.

Of course, that didn’t mean they could let their guard down. The auction house was always full of variables, so it was wise to have enough money on hand.

The good news was that at Leonald's auction house, there was no need to pay immediately. As long as the payment was made within 24 hours, the items would be transferred to the buyer. That was why Elena hadn’t gathered her gold coins just yet. She probably intended to keep them safely in her dormitory and bring them out after winning the bid.

'I might buy a few things if I find something I like.'

Asel had quite a bit of money saved up. While he couldn’t spend astronomical amounts, he could comfortably purchase some high-priced items. If there were interesting items related to magic, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to buy a few.

[In five minutes, the auction house will open! The list of items being auctioned is written on the back of your admission ticket, so please enter and purchase when your desired item comes up! I hope you have an enjoyable auction and a happy transaction. This is Leonald, signing off! Have a wonderful night and a delightful evening!]

With that, Leonald stepped back.

With the news that the auction house would soon open, the people strolling through the corridor began to flock toward the auction house. Asel and Elena sat side by side on a nearby bench, scanning the list of items written on the back of their tickets.

"The Bloodsucking sword is… coming up quite late?"

"Yeah. I think we’ll have to wait at least three more hours."

The list of items was divided by time slots. The Bloodsucking sword was positioned in the middle of that list. As Elena said, they would have to wait three more hours for the item to come up on stage. There was nothing particularly interesting among the items coming up before it.

A staff that enhances the power of magic was meaningless from the fifth tier onward.

Armor that creates a shell to guard against external shocks was less efficient than the Shield or interception magic created by Asel. The same went for catalysts used in Alchemy.

The only item that piqued his interest was the grimoire that would come up after the Bloodsucking sword.

'Basic Dark Magic…'

Dark Magic is not legitimate magic like Blood Magic or Necromancy; it is treated as heretical magic. Just using it would earn one the disdain of other mages, and it would make one an outcast in any group.

The only places where one could fit in would be among demon worshippers or criminal organizations. Thus, Dark Mages are relatively few in number and do not reveal themselves carelessly. As a result, information about Dark Magic is strictly prohibited from leaking among them.

Even so, it was unlikely that any normal group would handle Dark Magic.

Therefore, it was quite unusual for items related to Dark Magic to be put up for auction. It was not common for a grimoire recorded by reclusive Dark Mages to be publicly displayed like this.

However, it wasn’t entirely strange, as there were instances where items belonging to defeated Dark Mages ended up at auction houses. These items were always in high demand among collectors, and many people were willing to pay a high price for them.

Asel wasn’t a collector per se, but he had a considerable interest in Dark Magic. Just as he was trying to master Blood Magic, he had also been interested in Dark Magic and Necromancy for some time. With this opportunity presenting itself, there was no reason to turn it down.

'At least I’ll need to spend a hundred gold coins.'

If no one followed him, he might spend less than that, but who knows? Surely there would be collectors here.

Collectors are typically people with an unusual amount of money and time. There were probably a few people here looking to collect items related to Dark Magic. The thought of having to compete with them in cash made him feel a bit tight in his pocket.

"What should we do with the remaining time?"

Just as Asel was pondering this, Elena blinked her eyes and asked. Asel set aside his thoughts about the grimoire and looked at the map of the auction house hanging on the wall.

The largest area was, of course, the auction house where the auction would take place. This massive stage took up almost half of the underground space. Next to it was a banquet hall connected to the auction house.

* A banquet hall with a variety of food, drinks, music, and dance is prepared! If you wish to take a break during the auction, please come this way!

It was an explanation about the banquet hall. After a moment of thought, Asel turned to Elena and suggested they head to the banquet hall. Elena's eyes sparkled at the word "banquet," and she nodded vigorously.

The banquet hall was large enough to rival that of a noble's mansion.

With gold and red paint, it exuded a glamorous and luxurious atmosphere. Musicians sitting in a corner played elegant melodies, and various couples danced and drank, filling the air with laughter.

"Wow…."

Perhaps she liked this kind of atmosphere, as Elena exclaimed in admiration and dashed into the banquet hall. Then she turned to Asel, waving her hand as if to hurry him along. Asel chuckled and approached her.

Just that alone created a picturesque scene. The appearance of the handsome couple drew the attention of those who had arrived early, and the musicians picked up the tempo, playing lively music in response to the atmosphere. Asel held two cocktails handed to him by a banquet staff member, smiling as he offered one to Elena.

"Do you like it?"

"Yeah! I love this kind of atmosphere! With music and dancing!"

"If you like it, then I like it too."

Perhaps because there were many people around, Asel donned his concept once again. He stood next to Elena, who was humming softly with a faint smile, sipping his cocktail.

To others, they appeared as a lively country girl and a cold noble prince. In reality, it was the opposite.

"Excuse me, Prince."

At that moment, a tall man approached Asel and cautiously called out to him. Asel subtly rolled his eyes to check the man's face.

With striking golden hair and green eyes, the man wore a friendly smile while accompanied by his partner. Asel glanced at the two of them and replied in a low voice.

"Is there something you need?"

The noble manner and dignity that Asel had learned from Ena made him appear convincingly noble. Internally, he admired his own acting while maintaining a cold expression. The man chuckled awkwardly and scratched his head.

"Um… the thing is, my partner wanted to see you two dance, so I was wondering if it would be too much trouble to ask."

"……Dance, you say?"

"Yes. My partner is an artist, and they think watching you two dance would inspire them. They believe it’s because you both are so handsome and beautiful. Would it be possible?"

"……That’s quite an unexpected request."

Asel replied with a neutral expression. However, Elena seemed to have a different thought, as she tugged at Asel's sleeve and said brightly after hearing the man's words.

"I’m okay with it! Let’s dance together!"

"……Are you sure?"

"Yeah! When you come to places like this, you’re supposed to dance!"

Since Elena was okay with it, Asel smiled and nodded.

The man's partner's eyes sparkled at that.

"A cold nobleman who can’t refuse a woman’s words… how can there be such a storybook couple? Inspiration is flowing…!"

Her eyes resembled those of a madwoman. Asel looked at her with a puzzled expression before following Elena, who was walking toward the center of the banquet hall. The musicians suddenly stopped playing, signaling each other before starting to play the most representative classical piece.

It was clear that they were playing with an eye on this side, and Asel forced a smile.

After a moment, he composed himself and bowed toward Elena, extending one hand.

"Would you care to dance with me?"

Elena giggled at the request and gently placed her hand on his.

"Yes!"

# 78 - Dating Game with a Vampire (4)

During the time spent in Wiheim, Ena had once told Asel that wizards often get involved with nobles, so she shared a few things about the qualities of nobility, including some precautions.

Among those were things that were quite obvious to follow, and others that seemed so absurd that Asel questioned their validity. But what could he do? Since the one giving the advice was Ena, Asel quietly stored the information she provided in his mind. This way, he was able to naturally learn a few dances to perform at the banquet.

He couldn't dance as if he were born a noble, but he could at least mimic it to some extent. He practiced repeatedly with Evelyn and Ena, and received passing marks.

However, in front of the real princess, his awkwardness became glaringly obvious.

"Hehe."

The Principality of Valdemia. A city-state ruled by the legitimate children of its founder. There, a beautiful vampire princess, who had spent her entire life, finally stepped out into the world.

The hands they held were cold. Her smiling face resembled a lively girl visiting a flower garden. Her long, flowing white hair sparkled in the light, and Asel's reflection appeared in her vivid crimson eyes peeking through her half-closed eyelids.

In Asel's obsidian eyes, only Elena's figure was reflected.

At this moment, the two of them moved their bodies to the music, gazing only at each other.

"Asel, you can't dance very well, can you?"

Elena whispered as she placed her hand on Asel's shoulder. Asel embraced her waist and leaned in close to her pointed ear to respond.

"It's you who dances well."

"Hehehe! I have something I'm better at than you. I'm so happy."

"There's a lot."

Elena took his outstretched hand and lightly spun around, pulling him back into her embrace.

They were so close that only each other's faces were visible. Asel smiled faintly as he looked down at her.

"So tell me what to do. I still have a lot to learn."

"…Is this acting?"

Elena asked, her cheeks slightly flushed. Asel smiled playfully.

"Well, what do you think?"

The sound of the violin amplified. As if they had made a promise, Elena and Asel stepped back from each other and bowed.

Asel placed his hands on his abdomen and back, bending at the waist, while Elena gently grasped the hem of her dress and bowed her head. Then, with slightly lighter steps than before, they walked towards each other, holding hands and spinning.

From that moment, all eyes in the banquet hall were focused on the two of them. The musicians played faster, and the staff carrying cocktails and whiskey stared blankly at the two dancing and laughing.

"Ah…"

The man who had requested the dance was no exception. Her partner had taken out a notebook he had kept hidden and was sketching.

Even amidst all this, Asel and Elena could only see each other.

In the ruby-like eyes, the man's face appeared.

In the obsidian-like eyes, the woman's face appeared.

No matter how hard they tried not to, they couldn't help but be aware. No matter what anyone said, the protagonist of this moment was the person right in front of them.

The music gradually intensified. Along with it, their dance became more vigorous, and beads of sweat began to form on Elena and Asel's foreheads. With even the slightest movement, the droplets scattered in all directions, sparkling like lights.

"…Hah."

"Are you out of breath? Is it hard?"

Asel asked, looking at Elena, who was in his arms. Elena shook her head with a small smile.

"No, it's not hard. More than that…"

Elena's gaze suddenly shifted to that of a predator. Her pupils slightly constricted, locking onto Asel's neck. As they moved in sync, the rough breaths escaped her lips more frequently. By the time Asel sensed something was off…

Bam bam bam!

With a loud trumpet sound, the music came to an end. In sync, Elena wrapped her arms around Asel's neck and leaned back, while Asel supported her waist, bringing their dance to a close.

"Hah… hah… hah…"

"Are you okay? You're not hurt, are you?"

"My chest… feels a little…"

There was no sign of pain on Elena's face as she spoke. Instead, it was stained with excitement. The budding feelings she didn't even recognize, along with the rising thirst for blood, began to dominate her mind.

Why does Asel look so delicious today? I want to sink my teeth into that neck right now and drink his blood. Pressing my body against him, hearing his mixed sounds of pain and pleasure while licking and sucking the wound would feel so good.

No! I would be hated for that. I don't want to ruin my relationship with Asel. After all, we're friends.

Friends? Are we really just friends? Usually, the ones I feel this thirst for are…

"Elena?"

"Hyah!"

Asel's face brought Elena back to reality. She snapped out of it, realizing that thunderous applause was ringing out from all around. It was the praise from those who had been deeply moved by their dance.

"Th-thank you! I'm feeling so inspired right now!"

The partner of the man who had requested the dance approached and said. Asel quickly stiffened his face and replied, "No, it's nothing," before looking at Elena with warm eyes again. The way he pushed through the concept he had chosen was so perfect that it could be considered a model for wizards.

The problem was that Asel hadn't informed Elena of his concept beforehand. So, she couldn't gauge where his acting began and where his sincerity ended. All she had heard was that he would act like a lover, so she should follow along well.

The actions that came to Elena's mind as "lover-like" included holding hands, hugging, drinking blood, kissing, drinking blood, playing together, and, in any case, actions involving blood.

But there was none of that in Asel's behavior today. The only time he had mentioned "my girl" was when they entered the auction house. Other than that… had Asel ever acted like a lover? Wasn't everything else genuine?

If Asel, who had acted like a lover all day, heard this, he would feel wronged, but Elena didn't bother to ask.

Instead, she looked up at Asel, who was swallowing his saliva and smiling softly.

A subtle gap manifested from the lack of proper communication and differences in common sense.

'Asel sees me differently than he sees that girl…'

Thanks to that, such thoughts inevitably arose in Elena's mind.

After staying a bit longer at the banquet, Asel and Elena moved together into the auction house.

Asel didn't bother to let go of the hand he was holding. After all, it was an act that needed to be sustained, and since Elena seemed to enjoy interlocking their fingers, he left it as it was.

Swish.

He took out the entrance ticket he had kept in his pocket and moved to find their designated seats.

Row F, seats 45 and 46. It was a spot not too far from the stage where the items would be presented. It seemed they had gotten a pretty decent seat.

"Now! The next item up for auction is the 'Love Potion'! Created by the most famous alchemist guild in the imperial capital, it makes the person who consumes it feel a deeper love for their beloved! It's highly recommended for couples looking to rekindle a strained relationship or for those who want to enjoy a special play! We'll start at a modest 5 gold coins!"

As they walked, the auctioneer's voice echoed loudly, amplified by magic. Asel glanced at him and then turned his head toward the beautifully placed pink potion on the cart brought in by sturdy men.

'A love potion, huh.'

Alchemy is a fascinating discipline. There are potions that can cure the ailments of those who are suffering, potions that can make trees and plants flourish just by being sprinkled on the ground, and potions that can assassinate someone without a trace.

However, potions that manipulate human emotions are quite rare. Perhaps due to their scarcity, the guild only sells a few at auctions like this.

Such rare items usually have their recipes kept secret, leading to a monopolized market. This potion was likely no different.

While it piqued his interest, it wasn't enough to make him want to spend gold coins. He needed to save every bit of gold he could to buy the items he truly wanted.

Elena seemed to have similar thoughts, as she checked the item listed on the back of her ticket again and turned to Asel with a somewhat excited expression.

"It's the next item! I'm looking forward to it!"

"How much are you thinking of spending?"

"Hmm… around 500 to 700 gold coins? I don't plan on spending too much!"

Elena replied with a bright smile. In contrast, Asel let out a hollow laugh.

As expected of a princess, her planned amounts were extraordinary. There probably weren't many people here who could spend over a hundred gold coins. But 500? That was like a natural disaster for those aiming for the Bloodsucking sword.

"Hmm."

Honestly, it wasn't his concern. If she wanted to, she should have had more money than Elena.

Asel thought this while staring blankly at the woman who had just won the love potion. The potion sold for 25 gold coins. It wasn't an exorbitant amount, but for something consumed in a moment of leisure, it was quite an absurd price.

'She must have an unusually large amount of money.'

Well, that’s why she would come to an auction like this.

"Asel."

Just as he was lost in thought, wearing a nonchalant expression, Elena suddenly called his name. Asel blinked and turned to her.

"Yeah? What is it?"

"…Hih, never mind!"

She gazed into Asel's eyes for a moment, then suddenly burst into laughter and turned her head away. Then, as if her mood had lifted, she began to sway her legs back and forth and hum a tune.

Asel found it quite absurd, but since Elena was such a harmless and perpetually happy girl, he didn't think much of it and turned his head back toward the stage.

The next item after the love potion was a strangely shaped octopus. The auctioneer passionately described it as a rare octopus caught only near the magical sea, famous among gourmets for its taste.

In the end, the octopus was sold for 5 gold coins. Whether the old man who won it had been aiming for the octopus from the start, he laughed heartily and moved to the private room prepared for bidders at the back of the auction house. After a brief silence, the auctioneer raised the amplification device once more.

"Now! The next item is very special! A unique magic sword that becomes sharper and harder the more blood it absorbs! The Bloodsucking sword! It is said to have excellent compatibility with vampires, but even non-vampires can handle it without issue! I have no doubt it will be an excellent choice for those dreaming of becoming heroes! This item will start at 20 gold coins!"

20 gold coins.

That was a significantly higher price than any item presented so far. However, it seemed that not many people cared about that, as quite a few raised their hands to express their intention to buy. The auctioneer smiled broadly and asked anyone considering a bid below 25 gold coins to lower their hands.

About five people clicked their tongues and lowered their hands.

That left roughly ten people, including Elena. They exchanged wary glances at each other. Only Elena was smiling brightly.

"Please lower your hands if you're considering a bid below 30 gold coins!"

This time, about three people lowered their hands.

"35!"

Two people frowned and slumped back into their seats. Now only five remained.

"40!"

One person dropped out.

"50!"

No one lowered their hands.

"60!"

"Ah, damn."

One person cursed and stormed out.

After that, no one lowered their hands.

70, 80, 90, 100.

As the values increased sequentially, the auction house began to buzz. The remaining bidders were a fierce-looking woman, an old man, and Elena. Elena glanced at them and stuck out her tongue, shouting before the auctioneer.

"200 gold coins!"

"200! 200 gold coins have been bid! If anyone is willing to pay more than this beautiful lady, please speak up."

"300."

The old man immediately responded. Elena wasn't going to back down.

"400 gold coins!"

"400! Is there anyone willing to bid more than 400?"

This time, there was no response. The old man clicked his tongue and glared at Elena before sitting back down. The auctioneer shouted loudly at the sight.

"400 gold coins, sold!"

"Wow!!"

Elena beamed and hugged Asel's upper body.

Asel felt the intense gazes pouring in from around them and gently brushed her hair.

Then, Elena buried her face in his neck and let out a long breath.

"…?"

Asel felt an indescribable chill from that hot breath.

# 79 - Dating Game with a Vampire (5)

Apart from Elena's auction being over, Asel's auction was still ongoing.

The item that came up after the Bloodsucking sword was the 'Black magic grimoire'. As soon as Asel saw the item on stage, he immediately expressed his intention to purchase it. Besides him, there were others who wanted to buy the grimoire, and they rose from their seats. Asel immediately bet 50 gold coins from the start.

"50 gold coins! Anyone want to go higher! Is there anyone who wants to bid higher!"

"I'll raise it to 70."

Said a kindly looking old man. Not to be outdone, a plump woman also covered her mouth with a fan and shouted.

"80."

"80! 80 gold coins! Anyone higher?"

"Hehe, well. 85."

"90."

"93."

"95."

After the woman's words, the old man chuckled and sat down. Asel stared straight into the eyes of the woman glaring at him and quietly opened his mouth.

"100."

"100! 100 gold coins!"

100 gold coins. This was within the expected range. But spending more than this would be a burden even for Asel. It wasn't that he couldn't afford it, but he would inevitably have to live frugally for a while. If possible, he wanted to end the auction here.

However, the woman hesitated for a moment, talked to her companions sitting around her, and then carefully opened her mouth.

"110."

"What the fuck."

110 gold coins. For a grimoire. Moreover, it was an exorbitant amount of money to spend on a heretical grimoire. Asel gritted his teeth and glared at the woman who was sneering at him. Then he sighed deeply and narrowed his eyes.

'Should I just pour it all in?'

If he threw in all the gold coins he had without thinking, it would be easy to win the auction. But the dark future that would follow was obvious. He would have to survive on free school meals until the support money from Wiheim came regularly.

It's not like he couldn't eat it. It's not that he couldn't eat it... but still, surviving a month on just that was a bit much. He wasn't picky about food, but he enjoyed the pleasure of eating itself.

But what could he do? If he wanted to get the grimoire, he had to accept the bleeding.

'If I learn black magic, I might be able to infiltrate demon worshippers or that kind of group, so it's right to push myself a little here.'

Information about black magic was thoroughly suppressed, so even if he tried to imitate it with the knowledge he had vaguely heard, he would be quickly exposed to real black magicians. So knowledge of authentic black magic was essential. He was also basically interested in it.

So, it was necessary to push himself a little here. Just as Asel was thinking that and making a determined expression, Elena tugged at his sleeve.

"Ugh."

Asel staggered from the considerable force of the pull. Elena leaned into his leaning upper body and whispered in his ear.

"Money, shall I lend it to you?"

It was similar to the whisper of a devil. Asel involuntarily asked back in polite language.

"Yes?"

"Yes, I have a little more funds left than I expected. I could lend you some...?"

"No, then I'd feel too sorry."

"I'm okay with it?"

"Even so..."

"If you're really worried, lend it to you in exchange for granting me three wishes later! How about it?"

"...Are you really okay with just that?"

"Of course! I don't need interest either! Just give me three wishes and I'll lend you as much as you want!"

Elena said that with a slightly excited breath and sparkling eyes. Asel hesitated for a moment, then smiled bitterly and nodded.

"Please."

At the time, Asel had no idea how this would turn out. He purely appreciated Elena's kindness and just thought he should treat her better. So he didn't see properly.

"...Heh."

Her gleaming Fangs.

Basic Black Magic Grimoire. Sold for 125 gold coins.

100 of them were Asel's, and 25 were Elena's. After buying what they wanted, the two of them moved to the back of the stage without looking back. The auction house staff, who had prepared the items in advance, saw the two of them and guided them to their respective rooms.

"See you later!"

Elena greeted Asel and slipped into the room. Asel also waved to her and stepped into the room.

"Ah, welcome."

In the room, a scantily clad woman was sitting on the sofa. A black book was placed alone on the table in front of her. Asel looked down at the smooth cover of the book and sat opposite the woman. She smiled and handed him a pre-prepared tea.

"Congratulations on your successful bid. I watched the fierce battle very well."

"What are the precautions?"

Asel asked with a expressionless face.

The other person was a high-ranking official who seemed to hold a high position in the company at first glance. He couldn't rule out the possibility that she already knew the various aspects he had shown outside. So Asel didn't stop acting even though Elena wasn't around. It was a very excellent choice.

"...As I've heard, you have a very cold personality except for your woman."

"...Did you observe us?"

"I didn't particularly observe you. It's just that our employees came and told us like cuckoos."

She put the coffee cup she was holding on the table and pushed the grimoire towards Asel, continuing her words.

"As you know, it's a black magic grimoire. If you're going to learn magic, I don't really recommend it. Just keep it as a collection, just as a collection."

"I'll do as I please."

"Oh, you're so cold. But since you cherish your woman so much, I don't think you'll recklessly dabble in black magic."

Asel ignored her words and placed his hand on the grimoire, secretly operating Mana.

It was to check if it was a copy or a replica, but fortunately, the grimoire was genuine. He could feel the gloomy and autocratic Mana unique to black magicians from each and every engraved letter. This was enough to satisfy him.

"How do I pay?"

"Leave the item here and bring the bid amount within 24 hours. Then we'll give you the item right away."

"I'll bring it right now."

"You're very impatient. Of course, we like it-"

She covered her mouth and smiled like a fox. Asel got up from his seat and left the room without looking back. Not long after, Elena also came out.

She saw Asel and came to him with hurried steps, saying.

"Asel! How did you decide to pay? Are you going to pay right away?"

"I said I would for now. If you're thinking of giving it to me tomorrow, I'll come back tomorrow too."

"No, let's process it quickly and go."

Asel nodded at Elena's words. The two of them left the auction house, got money from their respective dormitories, and visited the auction house again to pay the price right away.

"Confirmed. Now this is yours."

That's how the Bloodsucking sword became Elena's, and the grimoire became Asel's. Asel left the auction house with Elena and quickly speed-read only the very beginning of the grimoire while walking down the street.

[Black magic is a magic that establishes a law that separates you and the world. You are free within that law, and the world cannot bind you. While other magics follow the theories and laws of the world, we build our own precepts. Therefore, we do not have the concept of lower, middle, or higher magic. The power of magic varies depending on how strong the law you build and create is.]

"Hmm."

Asel quickly read the part included in the preface of the book and closed the book again.

Magic that establishes a law between the world and oneself. He knew it was unique, but he never dreamed that the method would be to divide the boundary line. If he had met a black magician in person, he would have been able to get a sense of it, but unfortunately, black magicians were a rare species. It was not easy to meet them in such a sunny place.

'If I want to learn it properly, I'll have to set a date and just study it.'

A unique magic system that he had never seen before. To master it, he would have to build up some proficiency in ice Formula first, and then try it right away.

It's not that far in the future.

"Hey, Asel."

While Asel was putting the book in his arms, Elena, who was also wearing the Bloodsucking sword around her waist, turned to him and opened her mouth.

"Do you have any plans later?"

"No, I don't."

"Then, can you go somewhere with me for a while?"

A question asked with blushing cheeks and slightly averted eyes. Asel didn't take it seriously and nodded.

"Okay."

"...! Okay! Then follow me!"

Elena, who received Asel's affirmation, ran to him with a lively expression, hugged his body, and spread out her blood-colored wings as they were. Bat-shaped wings created through Bloodflow shaping. As it fluttered once, Elena and Asel floated into the air as they were.

The upper part of the clock tower, reached through such careful control. The two landed in a space for managers created between the tower and the roof. As soon as Elena's feet touched the ground, she folded her wings, put her hands on the railing, and looked down at the academy. Asel also roughly straightened his slightly disheveled hair and stood next to her.

"...Oh."

A time close to midnight. The academy grounds with more darkness than light. Nevertheless, as if symbolizing the weekend, many people were still walking the streets and shops with various lights were shining brightly. Above it, the blue moon swam gracefully.

It was a beautiful night view. The wind blew through her hair, and the unique scent of spring flowers wafted in the air.

It wasn't as good as Wiheim's night, but there was no shaking in the impression that it was beautiful. Asel smiled warmly, leaned on the railing, and blankly watched the night streets. As he was doing that, Elena chuckled and took a step closer to him.

"How is it? Is it pretty?"

"...Yeah. It's pretty."

Asel said that with a faint smile, and added one more word as a joke.

"I think it's more so because I'm with you."

"...Wh, what are you saying."

"Haha."

Asel was smiling and accepting Elena's grumbling, who was blushing and poking him in the side, when the moonlight began to shine on the two of them. Elena, who was looking at the sky for a moment at the blue light that illuminated the upper part of the clock tower like a stage light, leaned her head on Asel's shoulder and whispered softly.

"Asel, I'm going to use one Wish ticket."

"Already?"

"Yeah. I don't think I can use it unless it's now."

"...What is it?"

At Asel's question, Elena only slightly raised her eyes to meet Asel's eyes.

"I want to drink your blood."

"...I can just give you that much. Wait a minute."

"No, not the blood from the wound. I want to suck it by directly sinking my Fangs."

"......"

"Can't I?"

Elena said that with an expression mixed with shyness, eagerness, and excitement. Asel was wondering how to accept this, but he just readily accepted it.

"It's okay to do it."

Normally, he would have seriously considered it. Giving a vampire his neck also included the meaning of 'I cherish and love you' beyond the meaning of 'I trust you'. He didn't know that much about the ecology of vampires, but he could fully understand through books what meaning they gave to the act of vampirism.

So if she had made such a sudden request in a normal atmosphere, Asel would have seriously considered it and come to a conclusion. Perhaps the conclusion would have been a refusal.

But not now.

He had built enough trust with Elena.

He thought of her as a friend.

Above all, he was drunk on the moonlight.

He was drunk on the atmosphere.

Her pitiful and anxious appearance stimulates his brain.

That's why he allowed it.

No, it's all just excuses.

In fact, there was no grand reason.

He just wanted to do it.

"Here."

Asel slightly loosened his shirt and revealed his neck. As soon as Elena saw his white skin, she swallowed her saliva and climbed on top of him as if attacking him. Asel, who was instantly laid down on the floor, smiled as he stared at the blood-colored pupils looking down at him.

"Haa... Haa... Haa...!"

Elena couldn't stand it any longer and sank her Fangs into Asel's neck with a crunch. At the same time, Asel's groan due to the stinging pain leaked out of his mouth, and Elena, as if more excited by it, pressed her body against him.

"Haup, Haeu, Heueueueu..."

Her lips fell from his skin, and Elena licked the wound pierced by her Fangs, letting out a moan filled with pleasure. Then she sank her teeth in again and swallowed the blood flowing from the four holes.

"Drink slowly. You'll get indigestion."

Asel smiled bitterly as he stroked her hair.

In that way, only the vampire's moans and the sound of stroking hair quietly echoed in the clock tower for a while.