# 90 - Aurora (3)

The die was already cast. It was impossible to pick up spilled water. From now on, all Asel could do was prepare an explanation that wouldn't offend Ena as much as possible. He doubted it would be possible, but there was no other way to survive.

Ena had been unusually interested in Asel's love life since they were in Wiheim.

Mostly in a negative way. She not only told him that he had to go through her if he wanted to date someone, but she also showed an extreme side, completely blocking other women from approaching him when they were together.

And now, this absurd news of an engagement had been delivered to her. Asel wanted to run to Ena right away and shout, "Don't believe this bullshit!" But reality was cruel, and all he had left was time.

Asel imagined the moment Ena returned and broke out in a cold sweat...

"Well, let's leave the small talk here. Shall we get down to business?"

Angelica said.

She clinked her teacup, looking at Celine, whose face was flushed red and who was constantly clearing her throat, and Asel, whose pupils were shaking.

"Celine said you came to find a sparring partner. Is that true?"

"......"

"......Asel?"

"Yes, yes? Could you say that again?"

Asel lifted his head sharply and answered. Angelica chuckled and repeated what she had said. Only then did Asel seem to come to his senses, and he changed his expression to a serious one.

"Yes, that's right. We have a joint sparring session in a week, and I wanted to grow as much as possible before then, so I came here."

"Hmm."

"I thought I could learn a lot from the mages of the Magic Tower, since they are already proven to be skilled. That's why I accepted when Celine suggested it."

"I understand."

Angelica smiled softly.

"First of all, thank you for thinking highly of our Magic Tower mages. But there is one thing I'm worried about."

"Please, tell me."

"If you grew up in the Witch Council, you must have seen all sorts of monsters. I don't know if you'll be satisfied with our mages."

Only a very small number of mages can enter the Magic Tower. Status and everything else don't matter. You could only join the Magic Tower through a skill verification process. There was a reason why Magic Tower mages were so highly valued.

However, the Witch Council had much stricter membership requirements than the Magic Tower, and many mages with established names had been nesting there for a long time, so even if there were fewer people than other organizations, its prestige was by no means low.

Rather, the damage from a clash would be even greater for the Magic Tower.

There were many big names who were quietly staying in the Witch Council, such as Ena, Irina, and Bel. They were so talented that it wouldn't be strange if they rose to the position of Magic Tower Lord.

There was a good chance that Asel, who had lived with them, would not be satisfied with fighting the mages of the Magic Tower. Angelica was worried about that.

"I see no lack in them at all."

But Asel did not back down.

Even if the mages of the Magic Tower were lacking, there was much to be gained from sparring. Just seeing the Mana flow unique to Stellar Rank Sorcerers would be of great help to his growth. He wanted to clash with them with all his might if possible.

Angelica recognized Asel's intention and smiled gently.

"Thank you for saying that. You're our future son-in-law, after all."

"......"

Asel did not answer. He was fine with everything else, but he didn't want to react to the words "future son-in-law"...

"Hmm... That's right. If we're going to spar, who would be good? A mage skilled enough to fight a 6th Circle Electromancer, hmm..."

"I'll do it."

Ermina answered. Angelica's eyes widened.

"Oh, you?"

"Yeah. I personally wanted to see how strong our future son-in-law is. And show him the power of a Magic Tower Elder."

"But even so, it's a bit much for an 8th Circle and a 6th Circle to spar..."

"It's okay."

Asel interrupted the two. He rubbed his finger over the corner of his mouth, which had unknowingly risen, and continued.

"If it's not too much to ask, I would like to ask you to do so."

"See? That guy's a monster."

Ermina chuckled and leaned slightly toward Asel.

"I was sizing you up earlier, wondering what it would be like to fight you. Normal guys can't do that. They don't even imagine it because they know they'll lose if they fight anyway. But that guy did. Even though he knew he would lose, he was gauging how far he could push you."

"........"

"Like master, like disciple. Anyway, Ena made something just like herself."

She smirked at Asel.

"A guy like that won't be satisfied until his curiosity is satisfied. Even if he fights and wins against someone else here, he'll lie in bed and think about us. He'll wonder what the result would have been if he had sparred with those people. Am I right?"

Asel smiled bitterly at Ermina's question.

"I can't deny it."

"See? I knew it. I used to be like that, so I know very well."

"...Hmm."

Angelica, seeing Ermina's pleased expression, made a humming sound and turned her head toward Asel.

"Are you really okay with this? Ermina is quite strong even within our Magic Tower."

"All the better. I will do my best."

Asel smiled and answered.

All the sparring he had done so far had been done with a moderate amount of power.

The same was true in the Witch Council. Since they couldn't inflict serious injuries on each other, they sparred in a way that sealed dangerous magic or greatly reduced its power.

Only when he sparred with the Archmage did he go all out. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to touch her clothes.

Even this was a story from years ago. Recently, he had not had a single sparring session where he had gone all out.

So, he wanted to take this opportunity. In his current state, which had grown compared to the past, he wanted to fight the Archmage with all his might. In doing so, he wanted to gauge his own limits and establish a combat system.

"...If that's what you want."

Angelica smiled brightly.

At the same time, Ermina jumped up from her seat.

"Good, I've got permission, so let's go right away, future son-in-law. Get up quickly!"

"I'm not your son-in-law."

"Don't be shy!"

"I'm going crazy."

Asel said that, but he obediently followed Ermina to the training grounds. And just as his back disappeared from sight. Celine, who had been hanging her head down all this time, jumped up and ran to Angelica. With a flustered expression.

"M, Master!"

"Yes."

In contrast, Angelica's face was calm. She stroked Celine's hair and made eye contact with her.

"What's wrong?"

"W, what is this? Why is he doing this! Why is he suddenly proposing!"

"Hmm. Who knows? Maybe he likes our Celine so much that he was waiting for an opportunity?"

"I wasn't! I, I just thought of him as a friend! In the first place, there wasn't anything that great that happened that would make us like each other!"

"Celine."

Looking down at the flustered Celine, Angelica said in a kind voice.

"You don't need a big reason to like someone. One day, suddenly. You might just like that person."

"......Ugh."

Celine didn't answer and buried her face in Angelica's chest.

Angelica whispered softly in her ear.

"So, how about Celine? Did you feel fluttered when you heard those words just now? Do you see Asel as a man at heart?"

"......"

"His face. He was handsome. His body wasn't muscular, but he seemed to be taking care of himself to some extent. His voice is good too. His smiling face suits him quite well—"

"S, stop it..."

Celine cut off Angelica's words and mumbled. Angelica chuckled and stroked the back of her head.

"Yes. So, how is it? Have you started to see Asel as a man?"

"......"

Celine did not answer.

That was enough. Her heart, which was beating like a broken machine, told her the answer instead.

Ermina chose the referee for the sparring.

There was no need to choose carefully. She just grabbed a mage who was wandering nearby and brought her along.

"Fuck."

The mage, who already had a tired expression, cursed as soon as she arrived at the training grounds, but Ermina did not let her go back. Instead, she discussed the rules of the sparring with Asel.

"What are the rules going to be?"

"How about we do it until someone shouts surrender or becomes incapacitated?"

"Hmm. Good. Any other rules?"

"No."

"Cool. I like it."

Ermina smirked and raised her Mana.

The bright, hot Mana unique to Stellar Rank Sorcerers was visualized and scattered in all directions. Her energy, which quickly occupied the space, pressed down hard on Asel's shoulders.

'The pressure is considerable.'

But that was all. Compared to the Archmages Asel had met so far, she was definitely lacking.

Nevertheless, he was not careless. In any case, an Archmage was an Archmage. They were moving monsters who could turn a city to ashes with a single gesture and were considered asymmetrical forces in war. If he were a mage with insufficient Mana control, he would have been crushed by Ermina's Mana and would not have been able to breathe properly.

Asel was not. He smiled faintly and forcibly erased the Mana pressing down on his body. Then, her Mana could not even touch Asel's body and simply floated around him.

"Hoo? You've done something."

Ermina's eyes sparkled as she confirmed that her Mana flow had been disturbed. Instead of explaining in detail what he had done, Asel slowly circulated his Mana and loosened his shoulders.

Crackle.

At the same time, dark blue currents erupted from Asel's entire body. The currents, which were not crushed by Ermina's powerful Mana, gradually, very gradually, eroded the space.

Mana that acted as if it had a self. Asel closed his eyes slightly and took a long breath. A small thunderclap spread from his exhaled breath.

"Are you ready?"

Ermina asked.

Asel opened his eyes and answered.

"Yes."

Screech!!

His pupils turned black-blue.

Author's words (Author's note)

( 灬´ ˘ 灬 )

# 93 - Demonstration (3)

“Ugh……”

As the closed eyelids lifted, consciousness returned. The gradually sharpening vision took in the wooden ceiling.

A pure white star, serving as a light, scattered light in all directions. Even when staring at it, the starlight didn't hurt the eyes. Asel blankly gazed at the light for a moment, organizing his thoughts.

'Is this the recovery room inside the Magic Tower?'

A place filled with all sorts of healing Formula that could be felt without even needing to detect them. Mages with injuries lay on the numerous beds everywhere he turned.

No one had severe injuries. Or perhaps they had been severe but were now healed.

Even at a glance, they were advanced healing Formula. High-level magic that maximized the recovery effect while reducing the pain that accompanied the healing process.

Furthermore, they had even burned anesthetic incense inside the recovery room to eliminate the pain altogether, effectively removing the disadvantage of the healing Formula. It was thanks to this that the mages exposed to the Formula weren't convulsing in pain.

Asel was the same.

Clearly, at the end of the duel, just before he lost consciousness, he felt like his arms and legs were bent in opposite directions. But now, he felt no pain at all. Seeing that his limbs were working perfectly, it seemed they had already been treated a long time ago.

As for the internal organs that had been damaged… he wasn't sure. He couldn't take them out to check, so he just assumed they were healed and moved on. He would know for sure once he left the recovery room.

"You're awake."

A familiar voice came from the next bed. Asel turned his head towards it.

Ermina, wrapped in bandages all over her body, was lying on the bed. She chuckled and stared at Asel.

"You're a monster. You thought of counterattacking instead of dodging?"

"It was an attack I couldn't dodge in the first place."

Asel chuckled and scratched his itchy neck. Only then did he realize that he, too, was covered in bandages like Ermina. His senses were dulled by the anesthetic incense, so he was late to notice. Judging by the bloodstains here and there, he must have bled a lot until just before being treated.

On the other hand, Ermina's bandages had almost no blood on them. At most, a corner of her forehead was smudged. Compared to Asel, her condition was much better.

It was only natural. The magic that the two mages had unleashed at the end was clearly superior on Ermina's side, and Asel's magic had only managed to penetrate the tiny gaps within it.

Therefore, Asel, who had been directly hit by the explosion, was bound to be in much worse condition.

'If my teacher had seen this, she would have made a fuss.'

It hadn't been long since he had fought Virsicia and returned alive. Yet, he had fainted from a mere duel. If Ena had seen it, not only Ermina but the entire Magic Tower would have disappeared on the spot.

Just imagining it was terrifying. Asel shook off his thoughts, raised his upper body, and asked Ermina.

"What's our condition now?"

"Perfectly fine. It's been 12 hours since we lay down in the recovery room. The wounds are all healed."

"Hmm."

"Or would you like me to tell you about your condition before the treatment? First of all, I was fine. It's only natural since I rebuilt my Mana barrier. Understand? The magic you used at the end didn't even scratch me."

"…You must be very happy to have won against a fledgling."

Asel said with a sullen expression. Ermina chuckled and flicked her fingers.

"If that fledgling stole magic right in front of my eyes, created a unique ice-attribute magic, and awakened a Mana Eye with ridiculous abilities, I would be happy. It's absurd even to say it. How can all these things refer to one person?"

"More importantly, what was my condition?"

"What else? You were shattered."

It was an immediate answer.

"Your arms and legs were bent in opposite directions, the skin on your head was torn, and your organs were slightly spilling out from your side… Should I say more?"

"That's enough. I'll take it to mean that it was a miracle I was alive."

"That's correct."

Ermina said that and then continued with a rather apologetic expression.

"I did something terrible. Regardless of winning, I went too far. It wasn't even a duel where I needed to win. I'm sorry."

"It's alright. I also went all out."

"Just because a 6th Circle mage goes all out doesn't mean a Great Mage should push the output of high-level magic to the limit. It's my fault."

She said after drinking the water placed on the patient's table.

"I was excited because it was my first duel in a long time. It's all because you're too amazing. You awakened my dormant competitive spirit and joy."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

"Then what else would it be? A criticism? Haa, where did such a guy come from? If time regression were possible, I would go back and make you my disciple."

"Tell Ena. Ask if she'll let you raise your own disciple."

"Are you telling me to commit suicide right now?"

At Ermina's absurd question, Asel burst into laughter. He leaned against the edge of the bed and took a long breath towards the air.

'I gained quite a lot from this duel.'

Simultaneous manifestation of multiple attributes. Acquisition of Saint-level Formula. Confirmation of the power of ice Formula, etc.

He had used them all in a near-real combat environment, and he had also gauged how much he needed to control his power in a duel. It was a bit of a shame that he couldn't use Aleph, but it would have been strange to openly use a demon's item here, so it couldn't be helped.

[I'm fine, Master, it's me, Aleph. I'm used to waiting.]

Aleph, whom he had kept in his pocket, immediately reacted to Asel's thoughts and woke up. Thanks to the Telepathic magic he had engraved, he didn't need to say it out loud, so Asel answered her words in his mind.

'You're sulking.'

[Are you talking about me? Ha! How could you say that? Although you haven't been looking for me lately, and it's quite annoying to see you flirting with other girls! I'm not sulking. I'm just a book, aren't I? Don't worry about me and do whatever you want.]

'Are you sure I can really do that?'

[Ha. I have no choice. If you feel so sorry, I have no choice but to let go of my sulking, even though I wasn't sulking in the first place. In return, I would like you to transcribe some romance novels for me and talk to me more often. Don't just look for me when you need me. Goodbye.]

Click.

Aleph's presence disappeared. Asel let out a hollow laugh and lowered his head.

He was sure she had a stoic personality when he first saw her, but why was she becoming more human than humans as time went on? Asel sighed and thought that he should carefully select romance novels for Aleph. She seemed like she would really sulk if he didn't.

And then.

Bang!

The recovery room door was forcefully opened, and a girl with ash-gray hair came running in.

"Asel!"

It was Celine. Asel smiled at her and waved one hand.

"Hello. It's been 12 hours."

"Why are you so calm when you know that!"

Celine quickly undid the buttons of Asel's shirt as soon as she approached him.

"Whoa, whoa."

Asel was flustered by her very aggressive attitude, but she didn't care and completely took off Asel's shirt. Then, she groped Asel's exposed abdomen with her hands and narrowed her eyes. She seemed to be looking for something.

Asel was initially just standing there in a flustered state, but as her hands moved higher and higher, he was startled and stepped back.

"Hey, hey. What's going on all of a sudden?"

"Ah, come on! Just stay still!"

Celine shouted and suppressed Asel's hands with one hand. Asel, whose Mana was completely empty, couldn't shake off her touch, which was enhanced with physical enhancement.

After suppressing Asel, Celine straddled his waist and began to examine his body in earnest. Asel shuddered as her slender fingers blatantly swept over his skin and shouted.

"You crazy bitch!"

"What, you crazy bastard!"

"No, seriously. What the hell are you doing all of a sudden! I'm a patient! I just woke up after 12 hours!"

"Then shut up! I need to check if there are any scars left on your body!"

"Ah."

No, if that was the intention, she should have explained it beforehand…

Asel thought so inwardly and made an embarrassed expression. Regardless, Celine desperately groped Asel's body. The scene was strange, but Celine's expression was very serious.

"You, you. Your stomach skin literally flew away. I, I was so…"

"Ahem."

Ermina, who was lying next to them, coughed and turned her head. Hearing that sound, Celine glared at Ermina with a venomous look.

"You senile crazy old woman! How could you use high-level magic so much in a duel?"

"…I'm sorry."

"I know! I know you adjusted it to the very last moment so as not to kill him! But still, you should have done it moderately!"

Ermina groaned, unable to do anything.

An old woman being scolded by a young girl. The scene was quite strange, but Ermina had nothing to say. People usually lose their words when they are hit with facts.

Celine continued to criticize Ermina while examining Asel's body. After a while, she confirmed that Asel's body was completely healed and let out a sigh of relief.

Soon, she collapsed into Asel's arms. Then she said.

"I'll take responsibility and make sure you get compensated. I know a lot about what items are in the Magic Tower's warehouse. I'll squeeze out as much as I can. It's because I suggested we come here."

"No, there's no need to go that far—"

"No, I will."

Celine raised her head and sobbed with a tearful face.

"Otherwise, I'll feel too sorry…"

"……."

"And… and otherwise, you might hate me and our Magic Tower…"

I don't want that.

Celine added that and buried her face in Asel's chest.

Asel hesitated for a moment, then sighed and stroked her hair.

"…No, I was going to get compensation too, but…"

He ignored the muttering coming from the side.

# 94 - The Reason for Living

Fortunately, Asel's body did not complain of pain even after leaving the recovery room. His limbs moved perfectly well, and his organs were intact.

“Phew.”

He unwrapped all the bandages that were smeared with blood and threw them into the trash can. After that, he quickly washed himself in the shower room provided inside the Magic Tower and put on the clothes that had been cleaned with Clean magic.

A refreshing feeling enveloped him, as if he had become a new person.

Asel roughly dried his dripping hair with some heat and followed the Magic Tower staff member who was waiting in front of the shower room.

“This way, please.”

Interestingly, the Magic Tower was not inhabited solely by wizards. There were also a few servants or employees who took care of their chores.

Though not many, they were not rare either. Looking around, one could see 'ordinary people' wandering about with various reagents.

It was a curious sight.

As a wizard, Asel thought that it was not easy for ordinary people to blend in among wizards.

Their cynical personalities and logical speech, which prioritized reason over emotion, along with their irritable attitudes, were toxic to ordinary people.

Being exposed carelessly would leave deep emotional scars.

However, these individuals seemed unconcerned, their faces only displaying tranquility.

The attendant guiding Asel was no different. Asel asked her the reason, and he received a satisfactory answer.

“They pay a lot. The salary is several times higher than other jobs.”

“Ah.”

Indeed, the best medicine for mental illness was money. Asel nodded and followed her steps.

“Here we are.”

Before long, they arrived at a quaint room. The attendant bowed her head slightly toward Asel and then turned around to head back the way she came, as if her role ended there.

Asel briefly watched her retreating figure before turning his head and knocking on the door.

“Come in.”

The response came immediately. Without hesitation, Asel swung the door open and stepped inside.

Overall, it was a room similar to an office.

A space for the staff located at the highest level of the tower. With their backs to three pairs of windows, Angelica, sitting in a chair, smiled at Asel as he entered the room.

“Welcome. This is the control room of the Aurora Magic Tower Academy branch. Or we could call it an observatory?”

“An observatory, you say?”

Asel asked back. Angelica sprang up from her chair and seated him next to Celine, who had been sitting on the sofa.

“To put it simply, it’s a place to observe the stars. We communicate through the movements of the stars in our Magic Tower. Thanks to the tower master personally exerting their power.”

“……You mean manipulating the night sky at will?”

“Yes. It’s not an easy task, but if the tower master exerts their full strength to manifest extreme magic, it’s not impossible. Though, as a cost, their combat abilities become nonexistent, the position of the tower master isn’t determined solely by power.”

“…….”

“It’s determined by how much they have contributed to the tower and how much they can develop it. The current tower master of the Aurora Magic Tower is an extraordinary individual, decided by unanimous agreement.”

Slurp.

Angelica poured lemon tea from a kettle into Asel’s teacup. Just as his throat felt dry, Asel took a sip of the tea and continued speaking.

“You seem to hold them in high regard.”

“Indeed. Despite their young age, they have taken on the role of tower master and are diligently doing their work. How could I not respect them?”

“Young age?”

At Asel’s muttering, Celine whispered in his ear.

“They’re 79 years old. Young by my master’s standards, but old, very old.”

“I can hear you, Celine.”

“Eek.”

At the sudden chill in Angelica’s voice, Celine immediately straightened her posture. Asel put down his teacup with a wry smile.

To say that 79 years is young. Just how old could Angelica be to make such a statement?

He knew that many among the great sorcerers were elderly. They could defy the passage of time, but still, it took time to reach that level.

Angelica must have undergone long years of rigorous training to achieve her current state.

Though not as much as Ena, she too might have an unusually high age compared to her appearance.

However, he refrained from asking. He was curious, but Asel was not foolish enough to risk his life over mere curiosity.

Asking a female great sorcerer over 50 about her age was akin to committing suicide.

Even Ena, who was infinitely merciful to Asel, had changed her face to that of a demon the moment he inquired about her age. Would Angelica be any different?

“Anyway, let’s get to the main point.”

She shifted the topic.

“First of all, Asel. The reason I called you here is, of course, for compensation. No matter how much one prepares for a duel, Ermina exerted herself excessively. This is entirely our fault.”

“…….”

“So, with Ermina’s request, Celine’s plea, and my will combined, we have decided to grant you appropriate compensation.”

“There’s no need for that.”

“No, this is related to the honor of the tower. Please don’t feel burdened and accept it comfortably. It would actually be beneficial for us.”

Angelica spoke with a serious expression. Celine nodded vigorously beside her.

With that much insistence, Asel could ease some of his burdens.

To have been utterly defeated in a duel he wanted and to receive compensation for it. It was a matter that could spin the triangle of conscience around and around, but the fact that they were desperately offering it made him feel more at ease than before.

Yes, it would be strange to refuse when they were offering. For their sake, accepting it was the right thing to do.

Asel nodded, thinking that way.

Seeing his positive attitude, Angelica immediately pulled out a piece of paper from her pocket.

[Items]

Those words were written at the top of the paper. Below that, various pictures, names, and descriptions of magical items were lined up.

“These are items in the tower’s storage. Choose one you want, and I’ll have it delivered to you as soon as possible.”

“Hmm….”

Asel let out a hum as he scanned the items.

Most of them were not particularly helpful to him. Since they were items for Stellar Rank Sorcerers, the focus was on them.

However, there were also items that were not entirely useless. After a moment of contemplation, Asel chose a potion that would increase his Mana.

“I’ll take this one.”

“The Tears of the Star Sea. A good choice. If you maximize its efficiency, you could nearly double your Mana capacity.”

“Are there any considerations before consumption?”

“Not really. It would be good to have someone assist you to fully enjoy the potion’s effects, but….”

Angelica recalled Asel’s Mana management skills seen during the duel and smiled faintly.

“I don’t think you’ll need that. Feel free to take it.”

“Understood.”

Asel nodded.

With that, the discussion about compensation came to an end. After chatting with Angelica a bit more, Asel tilted his head as he confirmed that the sun was rising outside.

The duel had taken place around 5 PM, and now, a little over 12 hours later, it was indeed time for the sun to rise. Asel took a sip of his tea while briefly gazing at the rising sun.

Saturday had passed, and Sunday had dawned. From tomorrow, academy classes would resume, and by Wednesday, joint duels would officially begin.

‘Next week is going to be quite busy.’

Asel thought that as he set down his teacup.

“……?”

Suddenly feeling a sense of unease, he tilted his head. As he thought about it being Sunday, a sense of urgency inexplicably arose within him. Asel frowned as he searched for the cause of this feeling.

Before long, he recalled the promise he had made a few days ago.

* Separate from this, go on a date with me this Sunday!

“Gasp.”

The conversation he had with Grace outside the building on the day he visited the Monster Research Club flashed through Asel’s mind. He broke into a cold sweat and sprang up from his seat. Celine, who had been chattering beside him, was startled by his sudden movement, but Asel couldn’t pay her any mind.

“No, it’s today.”

Twelve hours had passed since yesterday, and the new dawn had arrived.

The sun rose on the day he had promised Grace.

“Hmm-hmm.”

Grace stood in front of the mirror, humming a tune. It was for the final check before going out.

Her neatly arranged hair, perfectly applied makeup, and the carefully chosen outfit.

After more than ten hours of preparation, it was a perfect combination. A short skirt and knee-high stockings. A white wool sweater that accentuated her ample bosom, slightly rising around her abdomen, and finally, a black beret that added a touch of flair.

It was the perfect outfit for a lover, prepared for this day. Grace drew her sword from her waist for the first time in a long while and slapped her cheeks with both hands.

“You can do it, Grace! Let’s make as many memories as possible today!”

Memories that had all vanished upon her return. Today was a golden opportunity to rebuild some of them. Grace was determined not to miss this hard-won chance and to make the most of it until the very end. She wanted to leave a good impression and memory with Asel.

“Fighting!”

After giving herself one last pep talk, Grace grabbed her wallet from the table and left her dorm room. She then stood directly in front of Asel’s room without wandering elsewhere.

“Hmm-hmm.”

Just in case, she cleared her throat and knocked on Asel’s door.

“Asel! It’s me, Grace. You know we have a date today, right?”

No answer came back. Grace wondered if Asel was still asleep, so she knocked on the door again, this time with more force.

“Asel?”

……Still no answer.

Only then did Grace realize that something was off and narrowed her eyes. Just as she was trying to sense any presence inside the room.

“Miss Baidel?”

At that moment, Lacey, who had come up to the second floor, tilted her head upon seeing Grace. Carrying a pile of laundry, she immediately understood why Grace was standing in front of Asel’s door, given her perfectly made-up appearance.

“Are you perhaps looking for Young Master Asel?”

“Yes. I have an appointment today.”

Grace scratched her cheek as she replied.

Lacey’s expression changed subtly.

“……I see. But, um….”

“……? What’s wrong?”

As Grace blinked in confusion at Lacey’s strange demeanor.

“……Young Master Asel hasn’t returned since going out with Miss Celine yesterday.”

“Eh.”

At the following response, Grace’s face crumbled.

# 95 - The Reason for Living (2)

Asel burst out of the Magic Tower as if he were fleeing. Celine tried to grab him, but Asel shouted that he had an urgent appointment and pushed her away. Fortunately, Celine did not chase after him any further.

‘What time is it now?’

Trying not to show his anxiety, he had just finished his conversation with Angelica. The moment he stepped outside the Magic Tower, he started running, but it was impossible to know the exact time right now.

There was no clock inside the Aurora Magic Tower. To be precise, there was only a sundial. This damn tower was an extreme level of celestial enthusiast, using only celestial objects for timekeeping.

Thanks to that, Asel could only know the current time after he had run all the way to the plaza.

[07:30 AM]

The Sunday morning plaza was bustling with people, just as one would expect on a weekend. Asel blended into the crowd, quickly checked the time, gritted his teeth, and dashed toward the dormitory.

Not only that, but he also wrapped himself in wind magic and physical enhancement, unleashing a Flame Spell to accelerate his body with the recoil.

“Ahhh! What, what’s going on?”

“What kind of crazy guy is making a fuss this early in the morning? Who is that?”

“Hey, you there! Using unauthorized magic within the academy grounds is illegal—oh, wait? He’s coming this way! Everyone, get out of the way!”

People muttered below, but Asel paid no mind and continued to cast spells in succession. On top of that, he wrapped himself in a perception-inhibiting formula and stealth magic, swiftly cutting through the sky.

‘If I had known this would happen, I should have bought a wristwatch in advance…!’

He had always thought about buying one but had postponed it out of laziness. If he had known a situation like this would arise, he would have bought one and worn it long ago. He had relied too much on his biological clock.

In fact, thinking back, forgetting the appointment was a bigger mistake than the lack of a wristwatch.

It was unfair for Asel, who hadn’t expected to faint for twelve hours, but still, fainting and forgetting were not the same. He should have been conscious of his promise with Grace from the moment he regained consciousness, but he had failed.

So, Asel stopped blaming anything and reduced air resistance to the extreme, gliding through the sky.

And at that moment.

“Asel!”

Boom!

Elena suddenly appeared beside the flying Asel, spreading her blood-red wings. Asel widened his eyes and turned to look at her.

“Elena?”

“Hi!”

Normally, speaking would be impossible at such high speeds, but thanks to the reduced air resistance, it was perfectly feasible to talk. It seemed Elena was also managing her blood energy well, flapping her wings as she continued.

“I was passing by, and your scent led me here!”

“...Scent?”

“Yeah! It’s a sweet and exciting kind of smell? It’s a fragrance I love! I could smell it all day long!”

“...Uh, thanks?”

Asel didn’t know how to respond to Elena’s sudden compliment, so he simply expressed his gratitude. Elena then approached Asel slowly, giggling.

The distance between them shrank to the point where they could feel each other’s breath. Asel thought Elena’s gaze looked somewhat beast-like and made a hesitant expression.

“But I don’t have much time right now. I need to hurry back to the dormitory to prepare for my appointment. I can’t afford to chat like this.”

“Oh, really? Do you want me to help?”

“Help me?”

There was no time to ask how. Elena approached Asel from behind, tightly hugging him, and pressed her lips close to his ear to whisper.

“I’m going!”

“Hey, wait...!”

Asel was taken aback by the soft sensation against his back and the alluring scent typical of a vampire.

Boom!

Elena doubled the size of her wings and used her blood energy. With a speed close to the speed of sound, the two flew toward the dormitory. Asel looked down at the ground passing by like an afterimage and let out a hollow laugh.

‘Her control over blood energy has improved significantly compared to a few months ago.’

During the entrance exam, Elena’s strength was at best at the beginning of the 6th tier. Just seeing her smash a golem like tofu showed she was definitely not weak. But… now she seemed to have grown much more than back then.

Unless there was a special schedule, they did morning runs every day. And through her sparring with Ellen, she must be growing as well.

As he moved forward, others were also growing. Whether in skill or character. Asel felt that fact deeply and experienced a very strange feeling.

It wasn’t a negative feeling. Rather, it was warm—

“Ugh.”

“...!”

The moment he thought that, Elena suddenly bit Asel’s ear. Asel was startled by the damp warmth, the sensation of sharp fangs, and the tip of her long tongue, turning his head to the side.

At that moment, his temporarily dulled hearing returned.

Asel looked up at Elena with a bewildered expression and asked.

“What was that all of a sudden?!”

“Oh, um... it just looked delicious...”

“...You’re not into cannibalism, are you?”

“No! I didn’t mean it like that! I meant it looked delicious in a vampire way!”

“...In a vampire way?”

“Uh, yeah. As a True Ancestor vampire, I can absorb nutrients not just from blood but also from bodily fluids. But, um, there was a bit of sweat on your ear...”

“Oh.”

Asel understood the meaning behind Elena’s words and nodded.

Indeed. If that was her intention, it wasn’t hard to comprehend.

It had been over a week since he had given Elena a large amount of his blood. During that time, it was entirely possible that she had been craving his blood and unconsciously reached out her tongue when she saw the ‘sweat’ instead.

‘...Does it exist?’

Asel briefly questioned his thoughts but dismissed it as not particularly important. If she felt that way, then so be it.

However, it was still surprising that she had licked his ear out of the blue. If it was an impulsive act, there was a high possibility that such things would happen again in the future without her feeding.

‘What can I do?’

Was it a mistake to have let her drink blood in the first place?

Asel sighed deeply as he thought that.

It was too late to regret now. The water had already been spilled, and Elena’s impulses would only grow stronger with time. If that period extended, it would reach a point of no return.

Prevention was necessary before that happened. And there was only one way to do that.

He looked up at Elena and opened his mouth.

“Once a week.”

“...Huh?”

“I’ll let you drink my blood once a week. Then you can hold out, right?”

“...! R-Really? You’ll really do that?”

Elena’s eyes widened as she asked. Asel answered with a bitter smile.

“It was because I let you drink too much of my blood on top of the clock tower that this happened. So I have to take responsibility.”

“Y-You’re serious? Can I trust you?”

“Yeah.”

“Yay! I love you, Asel!”

Elena tightly hugged Asel. Asel felt her rough breath against his neck and chuckled.

“Just don’t drink too much. You got anemic last time.”

“Okay! I’ll control it as much as I can! Just enough for me to be satisfied!”

Elena declared with a spirited voice, then suddenly seemed to remember something and awkwardly rolled her eyes.

“B-But... once a week seems too little, doesn’t it?”

“...”

“Shouldn’t it be twice... no, three times?”

“...Let’s just pretend we never had this conversation.”

“No! Since it’s come to this, I’m using my wish ticket! From now on, I allow you to drink bodily fluids three times a week!”

“Ugh...”

Asel sighed in disbelief, not expecting Elena to use the last remaining wish ticket right here.

Although they had slowed down for a moment to talk, thanks to their full-speed flight afterward, Asel was able to arrive at the dormitory in less than five minutes after leaving the Magic Tower.

He landed on the dormitory rooftop and thanked Elena.

“Thanks for the ride. I’ll repay you later.”

“Okay! See you tomorrow! I’ll drink from you at the academy!”

“...That sounds really weird, but I understand for now.”

“This time, I’ll drink without hurting you!”

“You do it on purpose.”

Elena giggled and flew back to where she came from. Asel waved his hand at her as she slowly disappeared, then quickly jumped off the rooftop and slipped into his room through the window.

‘I’ll skip washing since I did that at the Magic Tower. I just need to change clothes quickly and head out.’

Asel tossed his coat onto the sofa and changed into new clothes for his top and bottom. They were the clothes Ena had given him as a gift.

Not too flashy, not too plain—just right for going out. Asel stood in front of the mirror for a moment to check his appearance, then styled his hair with magic and tossed Aleph into the lab.

[Master?]

As soon as the warmth Asel had been enjoying disappeared, Aleph called him in a flustered voice.

Surprisingly, through telepathic magic, Aleph could now convey her voice instead of just text. As a result, her emotions were directly transmitted to Asel.

Confusion, surprise, and a sense of dread hit Asel’s mind.

Asel responded to Aleph’s call with an apologetic expression.

“Wait here today. It would be quite troublesome if Grace finds out I have a devil’s item.”

[I’m good at hiding my presence. I haven’t been caught until now, have I?]

“Grace is a reincarnator who died fighting a devil. There’s a good chance she’ll notice your energy.”

[Where in the world are there reincarnators! Prepare a more plausible lie! No, just take me with you! I’ve been stuck to you until now, and suddenly you want me to drop off? This is discrimination against books! Aren’t you afraid of the time when you find a human body later?]

“Sorry.”

[Master!!!!]

From behind, Aleph’s pitiful cries reached him, but Asel, with tears in his eyes, ignored her. An overwhelming resentment struck Asel’s head.

‘I’m sorry…!’

[Take me with you!!!]

Thud.

Asel forcibly cut off the telepathic magic connecting him to Aleph. At the same time, the negative emotions and voice vanished. Asel slammed the lab door shut and opened the dormitory door without hesitation, stepping outside.

And.

“...Asel?”

He locked eyes with Grace, who was crouched by the door. She stared at Asel with a dazed expression as he emerged from his room, then suddenly burst into laughter, tears streaming down her face.

“...Was your outing fun? How far did you go with Celine? That lipstick mark on your ear is definitely from Celine, right? You smell like a female. Hehe. It seems this round is doomed. I’ll just commit suicide and aim for the next round. Will you date me then?”

A barrage of sentences that made his mind spin.

Asel gazed into her nearly deranged black eyes and sighed inwardly.

‘Why am I so disoriented today…!’

With a level of confusion that made his head spin, Asel clenched his jaw tightly.

# 96 - The Reason for Living (3)

Fortunately, Grace's misunderstanding was quickly resolved.

It wasn't that Asel had spent the night out with Celine, but that he had collapsed for 12 hours after a fierce duel at the Aurora Magic Tower. He had met Elena on the way back and received help, and so on.

Asel conveyed all the information as quickly as possible before Grace lost it. Grace sniffled and nodded.

"I understand the situation."

In Asel's room. Sitting on the sofa with the open window behind her, Grace pressed down on her scattering hair with her hand. Asel fixed her hair with magic and wore a bitter smile.

"I'm sorry. I tried to come as soon as possible, but it seems I was late."

"Uh-huh. It's okay. We didn't set a specific time to meet in the first place. Thinking about it, I was stupid. I should have at least set a time to meet."

"We both knew we would see each other in the morning. Don't blame yourself."

"Yeah. Thank you, Asel."

Grace covered Asel's hand, which gently wrapped around her hair, with one of her hands and brought it to her cheek. Then, she lightly leaned her face against his hand.

"But Asel."

"Yeah?"

Grace rubbed her cheek against Asel's hand and said.

"Whose lipstick stain is on your ear?"

"Uh..."

"Sniff, sniff. The smell on your hand... it's similar to the perfume Elena usually wears. So, did you get a kiss on the ear while flying with Elena's help?"

"...Similar, right?"

Asel readily admitted it instead of making pathetic excuses. He had no excuses to make in the first place. There was also the possibility that the situation would worsen if he told a clumsy lie.

"Is that so?"

Squeeze.

Hearing Asel's words, Grace tightened her grip on Asel's hand.

"I don't like it."

"..."

"Let me leave a mark too."

"...A mark?"

"I won't do anything without permission. So... will you allow me?"

Instead of answering immediately, Asel hesitated for a moment before nodding with a reluctant expression.

"As long as it's not too much..."

"Thank you."

Grace smiled and held Asel's left hand with both of her hands.

"It won't be that much..."

And she brought that hand to her mouth. As Asel went, "Uh, uh," his left ring finger slipped into Grace's mouth. At the same time, a slippery tongue wrapped around his finger like a snake.

"Heup."

"Ugh?!"

The constricting force, hard to believe it was a tongue, fixed Asel's finger in place. It wouldn't be difficult to forcibly pull it out using magic, but that would literally destroy Grace's oral cavity. Not only her teeth but also her respiratory organs would be torn and crushed.

However, it was impossible to escape from her embrace with his weak physical abilities without using magic. Still, Asel pulled his finger back and spoke in a flustered voice.

"Hey, hey. This is too sudden... Ugh!"

The moment he opened his mouth, Grace lunged at Asel, knocking him down on the sofa and straddling his waist. Then, she leaned her upper body down, pressed her chest against his, brought her face close enough to feel each other's breath, and sucked on the finger in her mouth.

"Chuuup... Heueu... Uuup..."

His ring finger went in so deep that it was no longer visible. The slippery sensation of the wrapping tongue and the hot breath were conveyed directly through his skin. It was as if his entire ring finger was being massaged by the pressure of the tongue, which felt like it was wrapped in Aura.

A strange feeling crawled out from deep within his chest.

At that moment, Grace released the tongue that had been wrapped around Asel's finger and opened her mouth, pushing the tip of her tongue between his fingernail as if poking it.

"Beeh..."

Sticky saliva was smeared all over the released finger. The cool sensation from the blowing wind struck his brain, and the silver thread that had been attached to Grace's lips and the tip of Asel's fingernail stretched out and snapped.

"Heuh..."

Asel chuckled and looked down at Grace, who was wiping her lips. She smiled brightly and pointed to the round, pink lipstick mark on the tip of Asel's ring finger.

"Don't erase this today. Keep it with you."

"..."

"And make a tooth-shaped ring for my left ring finger."

"...Are you serious?"

Asel asked with a face that seemed to say, 'Is this right?' Grace nodded without hesitation.

"Asel, my attitude towards you has been sincere from beginning to end."

"...No, but it would hurt to be bitten hard enough to leave a mark."

"The pain you give me is a reward."

"...I don't know what to say. The situation is too strange."

"There's no need to see it as strange."

Grace brought her ring finger to Asel's lips.

"Just think of it as marking you."

"..."

"That's the punishment for leaving me and kissing Elena."

"...It wasn't exactly a kiss, though."

"Anyway!"

Grace wriggled and moved up a little higher. At a distance where their faces were clearly visible, where their lips would touch if either of them moved their head, she whispered.

"Or... we could do it on your lips. Or your neck, or your upper chest..."

"I'll do it on your finger."

"...Phee."

Grace openly showed her disappointment. But Asel looked at her finger and opened his mouth, making a face that doubted whether this was really right. Then, finally, he sighed as if resigned and opened his mouth.

"With this, we're even."

"Of course."

Okay, that's enough.

Asel put her finger between his teeth and bit down with considerable force.

"Ahht!"

Then Grace let out a moan mixed with pleasure. Not only that, but she trembled her waist whenever Asel's teeth tightened more and more. Asel was horrified by the blatant reaction and immediately released her finger.

"Heeh... Heeh..."

Grace gasped for breath and checked the clear tooth marks on her left ring finger, wearing a satisfied smile.

And Asel grabbed Grace's trembling waist with both hands and frowned.

'Why is she shaking so much...'

Could she have a masochistic tendency to enjoy pain? There's no other explanation.

'I hope her clothes didn't get wet.'

He sighed and waited for Grace to calm down.

Before long, Grace returned to her cheerful self as if she had never been excited. However, she went back to the dormitory in the middle to change her underwear. Asel didn't bother asking why.

It was around 9 a.m. when they left the dormitory.

The two of them headed not to the bustling academy downtown, but to a small shelter village in the north.

This was also part of the academy grounds, but there were not many commercial or entertainment buildings, so it was not crowded with people even on weekends. There were just enough people walking around.

It was literally a shelter village. The buildings were not very tall, and there were lakes, parks, small restaurants, and cafes, making it a large-scale resting place. Asel walked side by side with Grace under the trees, smelling the strong scent of cherry blossoms.

It was early April. The flowers symbolizing spring had not yet fallen, and the sweet scent of flowers wafted from the parks and flower gardens. Asel smiled faintly and savored the scent of flowers.

"When it's spring, quite a few outsiders come here as tourists."

Grace said next to Asel.

"Of course, only verified nobles can enter. And they have to pay a fortune."

"Is it really necessary to go that far to get in?"

"Well, maybe they want to show off their authority. Like, 'I'm a noble who can enter the academy's shelter village!' Or something like that?"

"Nobles."

"I'm a noble too, you know."

Grace giggled and hugged Asel's arm.

Asel didn't bother pushing her away.

"You're a bit too... shy to be a noble."

"I'm only like this in front of you. You have no idea how noble I act in front of other people."

"Then show me."

Asel chuckled and said.

"I'll evaluate you as a lower-class person from the slums."

"...I feel like whatever I say here will be trash."

Grace said that, but she cleared her throat and spoke to Asel as she would to others.

"I'm usually like this."

The cheerful and bright girl she had shown until now was nowhere to be seen. A cold, cynical woman had taken over Grace's skin. She looked up at Asel with lifeless eyes and wore a cold smile.

"The world is black and white to me. Only when I'm with you does color return."

"..."

"When I talk to you, see your face, smell your scent, my world gains color one by one. That's how a picture that only had a base becomes beautiful. Only because of you. So..."

Grace trailed off and leaned her head on Asel's shoulder, returning to her usual self.

"Don't make me do things like this. I want to be a pretty and cute person in front of you."

"You weren't very pretty a few hours ago when you were talking about suicide."

Asel blurted out jokingly. Grace blushed and grumbled.

"T-that can't be helped. I have a strong possessive and obsessive personality, so I feel like throwing up just seeing you with another woman."

"........"

"How could I... watch you end up with another woman? I can't. I'd rather die."

"Your love is deep."

Asel sighed and muttered. Grace retorted passively to that reaction.

"It's your fault."

"Huh?"

"Y-you made me someone who can't live without you. So you have to take responsibility!"

"...Strictly speaking, the me before the regression isn't me."

"It's a matter of perspective. I don't think so."

Grace looked up at Asel and said with a serious expression.

"I am me, and you are you. That doesn't change just because you regressed. There's only a difference in memories, but the soul is the same."

"..."

"To put it simply, it's like starting over with a husband who has amnesia? At least that's how it looks to me. And... I love the current you as much as the you before the regression. Asel the magician is intelligent and cool."

Saying that, Grace smiled brightly.

A heartfelt confession of love. Asel smiled bitterly and stroked her hair. Grace rubbed her head against his hand like a puppy, wearing a happy smile. Then, before Asel could open his mouth, she took the initiative.

"You don't have to answer my feelings right away. Someday, when you truly love me, when I realize that, I'll approach you first. And I'll ask you."

"..."

"Do you love me?"

"Isn't that romantic?"

Grace added that and kissed Asel's left ring finger, the round lipstick mark that remained like a ring.

"Hoping that one day there will be a real ring in this place."

"..."

"I love you. Sincerely."

"...Grace."

"And one more thing!"

Grace smiled brightly and stepped away from Asel's arms, taking a few steps forward.

Spin.

She turned around and looked at Asel.

"I'll work hard until you call me Glen!"

"..."

"Be prepared! I always achieve what I set my mind to! Today is the first step of that plan!"

"...Haha."

Asel let out a faint laugh.

Grace held his hand tightly and shouted energetically.

"Let's go! For our first memory together!"

"Yeah."

Asel took Grace's hand in return.

"Let's go."

# 99 - Uninvited Guest (2)

“From the looks of it, you seem to know what kind of guy I am.”

The man chuckled.

“But you still came alone?”

“Why would I need a crowd to catch a single demon worshiper?”

“Are you brave, or just arrogant? You think you can take me down all by yourself, even though you’re still just a student, while I’ve been in the field for years?”

The man tapped his shoulder with his staff.

The dense energy of dark magic rippled through the air, approaching. Asel made a nonchalant expression at the prickling mana against his skin.

‘Not that strong, after all.’

The level of the dark magician, detectable from the mana, was roughly at the upper tier of level 5 and the beginning of level 6.

Objectively, he couldn’t be considered weak. A magician capable of holding their own in battle would at least be level 4, and those at levels 5 and 6 could easily handle more than ten opponents alone. Even a single tier difference could create a gap as vast as heaven and earth.

That magician was likely a dark magician who had accumulated several achievements in real combat.

So, it was understandable that he was overflowing with confidence. However, in Asel’s eyes, he honestly didn’t seem impressive. Perhaps it was because he had only faced truly formidable spellcasters until now. If he were a physical powerhouse, it might be different, but as a fellow spellcaster, the same tier didn’t evoke any tension.

In this case, coming alone turned out to be the better choice.

The current time was night. Even if he claimed that a demon worshiper had infiltrated the academy without any evidence, they wouldn’t take action until at least tomorrow morning.

In the meantime, it was impossible to know what the demon worshiper might do, so he came alone for now. If the demon worshiper was strong, he could create a commotion that would force the academy to act, and if they were weak, he could handle it by himself.

Fortunately, he could choose immediately. Asel stretched his stiff shoulders and placed his foot against the building wall, slowly descending.

A bizarre sight as if defying gravity. He supported his body with telekinesis and fixed his feet to the wall using mana threads. It was a marvelous trick that created solid ground beneath him.

There was no need to go down this way, but it certainly added pressure on his opponent. Asel felt the man’s mana, which had grown more vigilant than before, and let out a small laugh.

Seeing his relaxed demeanor, the man tapped the ground with his staff and said,

“……Your mana manipulation skills are not at the level of an academy student. Are you perhaps a professor?”

“Asel.”

“……What?”

“That’s my name.”

The Electrification Art was flashy every time it was used, making stealthy maneuvers difficult. It was also quite loud, rendering it nearly impossible to use for assassination or quiet battles.

In the first place, Asel was the only one capable of using the Electrification Art within the academy grounds, so using it here would essentially announce to everyone what he was doing. Erasing traces of mana wouldn’t be enough.

But that was fine.

Asel could use more than just the Electrification Art.

“What’s the purpose of the demon worshiper coming to the academy?”

“……It’s Asel.”

Instead of answering Asel’s question, the man smiled lowly and drew a spell in the air.

“How convenient. How could the candidate for the sacrifice I need appear right in front of me?”

“Candidate for sacrifice?”

“I’m completely changing my plan. I’ll forget about the academy terror and kidnap you here to contact Gorsel. That way, I won’t have to go through the trouble.”

“Gorsel, huh.”

Asel rolled his stiff wrist while mulling over the name.

That Gorsel must be the new student who survived alone while his entire group perished during the group project.

“Was he also a demon worshiper?”

The pieces of the puzzle fell into place.

If his survival wasn’t just luck but an intended outcome, then it was a plan to sacrifice all the other group members.

“You have a lot to spill.”

With a flick of his fingers, cold air began to rise. The man grinned as he completed the spell.

“That won’t happen.”

Grrr!!

Darkness surged beneath the man’s feet. The darkness writhed like a living creature, rushing toward Asel as if to devour his legs. Asel stared at the scene blankly before casually uttering,

“Aleph.”

[Intercepting.]

Understanding Asel’s intent, Aleph activated the spell inscribed on the page. A beam of light shot forth, tearing through the darkness. The man squinted at the suddenly brightened scene, and in that brief moment, Asel charged forward.

[Step Forward]

Flames erupted from the trajectory of his foot striking the ground.

A speed-focused Flame Spell, copied and revised from the magic used by Pascal. Flames surged from the trajectory, rapidly accelerating Asel’s body. The man gasped as he saw Asel reach him in the blink of an eye.

“Damn it!”

Thud!

He leaped back, tapping the tip of his staff with his fingers. At that moment, two of his fingers twisted, shattering the bones and flesh.

A self-harming spell activated through injury. Condensed mana transformed into a projectile, flying toward Asel. Asel stared at the black bullet filling his vision with a cold, unfeeling gaze and flicked his fingers.

[Heavenly Freeze]

Boom!!

The rapidly dropping temperature froze even the dark magician’s magic. The bullet, now simply ice, plummeted downward, and the dark magician gritted his teeth, muttering.

“……They said you were a great magician’s disciple. You’re not going down easily, are you?”

“You’re mistaken.”

Asel sneered, tearing apart the dark magician’s assumptions.

“I have no intention of going down.”

[Coldness]

Asel waved his hand. The air cooled along the trajectory, infiltrating the dark magician’s respiratory system, slicing through his throat and windpipe. The sudden intangible attack twisted the dark magician’s face in agony as he coughed up blood.

Asel stepped on that blood.

[Blood Flow Shaping]

The power he wielded was that of a vampire’s Authority. It was a unique Blood Magic that Asel had mimicked.

[Blood Burst]

Boom!!!

The droplets of blood that fell to the ground exploded, creating a red blast. The dark magician, who reflexively activated a defensive spell, couldn’t escape the explosion. His left arm, torn apart in the spreading blood mist, rolled on the ground.

“Gah…!”

With a hot pain searing his brain, the dark magician gritted his teeth. He immediately staunched the pouring blood and chanted a spell, paying the price with all ten of his toes.

Crack!!

With a noise as if the space were distorting, the darkness filling the alley responded. The darkness, imbued with life, writhed like a monster that had been starving for thousands of years, opening hundreds of mouths to tear apart Asel’s limbs.

Asel quelled all the darkness with a single spell.

[Crimson Gem of Annihilation]

Whoosh!

The rising scarlet fireball consumed the darkness as fuel, growing larger. A unique spell that treated darkness as kindling. Thanks to this, all attacks threatening Asel returned to nothingness, forming a small sun in the alley.

Despite the horrific pain he felt in his feet, the man looked at Asel and let out a hollow laugh.

“……What are you?”

“That’s my question.”

After Asel extinguished the sun, he unleashed a cutting spell at a speed beyond comprehension, slicing through the man’s defensive spell and severing his legs entirely.

The dark magician, losing his balance, stumbled and fell. Asel didn’t stop there; he chanted the cutting spell two more times, obliterating all of the man’s limbs.

With only his shoulders and thighs remaining, blood gushed wildly from the severed surfaces of his upper and lower body.

“Gah… Khaak…!”

Though he looked like a mere puppet, the man only let out pained groans. He didn’t scream. That alone showed how formidable his mental strength was.

But that was all. A magician without limbs could no longer chant spells. Unless he was a magician like Asel, who could cast spells without incantation, losing his hands meant his magic was effectively sealed from that moment on.

Look at the evidence. The dark magician lay panting on the ground. Even as Asel approached, he couldn’t muster any resistance.

He merely stared blankly at Asel with the eyes behind his mask.

“I’ll give you a choice.”

Asel crouched beside the dark magician, sealing his severed surfaces. The smell of burning flesh filled the air as the bleeding stopped.

“Tell me the purpose of your infiltration into the academy. Then I’ll either let you live and hand you over to the church or grant you a quick death.”

“……This is absurd.”

The man muttered with a bloodstained smile.

“Are you saying that a mere academy student is stronger than me, who has roamed the battlefield? Damn, this world is unreasonably unfair.”

“I won’t ask twice.”

“Fuck off.”

The man glared at Asel with eyes wide behind the mask, lifting his head defiantly.

“We have no camaraderie, but I’m not stupid enough to spill information to others.”

The moment he spat those words, a cracking sound echoed as the man’s cervical vertebrae shattered.

A spell activated through self-harm, triggering a condition that turned the tables.

Grrr!!

His entire body trembled violently, and black waves poured out from every orifice. Asel looked down at the scene, sighed deeply, and reversed all the spells. Instantly, the waves that had been flowing out evaporated, and the trembling body of the dark magician settled.

Though it was a condition used at the cost of his life, it was utterly useless against Asel’s talent.

He looked down at the dark magician’s body, now a simple corpse, and asked Aleph,

“Is that it? No other detected demon worshipers?”

[None. This is the end.]

“Hmm….”

Asel let out a hum at Aleph’s confirmation and rummaged through the dark magician’s belongings.

Given that he had been holding some papers when first discovered, there must be orders or directives present. Asel searched for them and soon found a pile of papers stacked together.

He quickly sorted through the ones he deemed important and began to read them on the spot.

“A list of candidates for sacrifice. The meeting place with Gorsel and the topics to discuss are all written here. There was no need to hear it through words from the start.”

Leaning against the wall, he summoned a fireball and read the contents written on the papers.

“So, you came to the academy to obtain the bodies and souls of young magicians or warriors needed for the demon’s descent. Gorsel was a contaminant sent in advance by the demon worshipers.”

Asel folded one of the papers and tucked it into his pocket, then asked Aleph,

“Is it impossible to detect Gorsel’s energy or location?”

[The energies I can detect are limited to those who have received direct power from the demon or have made contracts. It seems that the demon worshiper named Gorsel has not yet established a direct connection with the demon.]

“Hmm.”

[Given that the term ‘descent’ was used, it seems that a structure is in place for contracting with the demon only after the demon has descended. Only high-ranking demons prefer this method of contract. They could devastate the surroundings with just their descent, rather than manifestation.]

“So, Gorsel and the dark magician are not comrades serving the same demon.”

[Correct. They likely serve different demons but were coincidentally aligned in their intentions to act together.]

“Coincidentally aligned, huh.”

Though it was due to a pact, Asel was unaware of any pact between Gorsel and the dark magician. He let out a hum and pulled out a letter-like piece of paper.

The letter detailed the meeting place, time, and physical descriptions in great detail.

And below that, a sentence caught Asel’s eye.

[I know you never show your face. I don’t know your face either. But just wearing a mask should be enough for me to recognize you. I hope you will appear at the promised place and time while wearing your mask.]

‘Doesn’t know my face.’

Asel mulled over that sentence.

Honestly, extracting Gorsel would be very easy. Just informing the academy’s dean about what had happened here and the letter would allow them to detain or execute him, freeing the academy from the demon worshipers’ plot.

The quickest and most effective method. But Asel pondered a more beneficial approach.

‘There might be professors in the academy who are helping Gorsel. Given the number of corrupt individuals, including the practical staff, it wouldn’t be surprising if they were receiving bribes from demon worshipers.’

Erasing Gorsel from the academy wouldn’t solve everything. A considerable amount of time would be needed to uncover and filter out any remaining contaminants.

It was impossible to just grab anyone and interrogate them, and the moment the fact that there were demon worshipers in the academy became public knowledge, the heresy inquisitors would undoubtedly storm in. That would complicate matters immensely. Asel was well aware of the tenacity and ruthlessness of the heresy inquisitors.

So, what should he do? Should he inform the dean about Gorsel and let the academy take direct action, despite the drawbacks?

Or…

‘Pretending to be a dark magician and approaching Gorsel wouldn’t be a bad idea either.’

Asel stroked the corners of his mouth and subtly lifted the mask that covered the dark magician’s face.

A simple black mask with no distinctive features. By bestowing various spells upon it, hiding his identity from others wouldn’t be difficult.

Thanks to recently acquiring a grimoire, he could use dark magic to some extent, so disguising himself as a dark magician wasn’t impossible.

‘There are definite advantages to be gained when contacting Gorsel.’

First, he could infiltrate among the demon worshipers. Then, obtaining information about the potential demons would become much easier. Acting like a lunatic among them would be challenging, but considering the future, it was a flaw he could endure.

The possibility of being influenced by demons was ruled out. Asel’s mental strength was not weak enough to be swayed by the temptations of demons.

This was not arrogance. It was certainty. Asel knew his limits better than anyone else.

‘By acting as a demon worshiper, I could also uncover their movements and hideouts. It would be possible to gather information about the demons and find their weaknesses or countermeasures. This would yield far more than simply killing Gorsel.’

Asel tapped the mask with his fingertips, deep in thought.

‘What should I do….’

Weighing the options of infiltrating among the demon worshipers versus directly confronting and tearing Gorsel apart.

Which would be more beneficial for him?

“Phew….”

After standing there for quite some time in contemplation, Asel seemed to make a decision and incinerated the dark magician’s corpse, which was beginning to attract flies, down to the bones. Immediately afterward, he collected all the remnants of mana filling the alley, erasing any evidence.

Not a trace left of the dark magician’s body.

In the ashes scattered by the wind, there was not a single trace of the mask.