Episode 242.

I ended up doing my early morning workouts alone.

I could have done it with Ellen, but I didn't.

They say you don't know what someone means until they're gone.

We'd always trained together without saying much since I'd gotten stronger, so the void was pretty big when he was gone.

It made me realize that Adriana was important to me.

I realized that I should take Redina to see her.

The people in Club Grace and a few of the sophomores seemed to be reeling from Adriana's sudden departure, but I didn't care what they did.

Are they going to meet Adriana, and will she meet them?

It was out of my hands, so I decided not to think about it.

I thought about catching the people who were spreading malicious rumors about Adriana and making them pay, but I didn't.

Adriana wouldn't want that.

Doing nothing about this would be the last thing I would do out of respect for Adriana.

There.

How did the Archduke's misunderstanding get resolved?

So it was back to workouts, training, and classes as usual.

I don't know what's going on with the Orbis class issue, but the emergency school closures were getting pretty long.

To fix the problem at the root, we'd have to uproot it, which would effectively deconstruct and reconstruct the Orbis class.

Many would be expelled, and many teachers would be fired.

And.

"Are you ready, Reinhard? You don't have to come, I can do this alone."

Olivia was a bit reluctant, but I couldn't let her go alone.

She kept insisting on going alone, I kept insisting on going with her, and eventually I won.

Thank you.

I could tell that Olivia was troubled by Adriana's dropping out, but after all, she cares about my work.

"I don't know what to expect, but I'm ready."

"Hmmm, I believe you."

Olivia Ranze.

Dress mode.

"Oh my gosh, look how they can't even make eye contact. Am I that pretty?"

"Yes, she's beautiful."

"......Uh-oh. I never thought you'd say that."

The flirtatious man is usually shy when it comes to flirting, but Olivia Lanze, in an off-the-shoulder dress, was even more radiant than usual.

My shameless compliment, followed by the main dish, made Olivia blush and flutter her hands.

Olivia is in a dress. I'm just in my royal class uniform.

Sponsorships.

A very strong opportunity for donations to the Magic Society budget.

I go to a party. Olivia offers me her hand.

"Will you escort me?"

"Just this once."

I took Olivia's hand in mine.

"Eh, that's not how escorts work!"

-vaginal

Of course, it wasn't an escort, but a hand-holded dragging, which freaked Olivia out.

\* \* \*

Basically, it's a sponsorship meeting that only students in the 4th grade and above can attend. It takes the form of a party, where they talk about sponsorship in a subtle tone while farting and laughing.

The Patronage is an official event of the Temple and is held in the ballroom of the Temple General Headquarters.

Normally, anyone without a temple pass would not be able to enter, but in this case, access is limited to sponsored event attendees.

I thought about bringing some of the Magical Research Society, especially Harriet. She's the Grand Duchess of the Duchy of St. Thuan, and she's so talented, it should be easy to get her sponsorship.

But after much deliberation, I came to the sponsorship event alone.

I didn't want to put Harriet in this position, as it was something I could explain to the members of the Magic Society.

It's not a bad position, but it's a whining position for money. I didn't want to subject Herriot to that experience.

I was on my way to a sponsorship event with Ceres and Olivia.

"Normally, we're a special class sponsor, so we should have an Orbis class, but with the way things are going, we're going to have to......."

"Only royal class, huh?"

"Yeah, I think so."

Normally, we would compare the two special classes and back the one that looks more promising, but the Orbis class is closed.

Ceres van Owen also wore a dress, and while she was quite impressive, Olivia Lanchester stole the show.

"Now, don't keep looking......."

When I continue to stare, she averts her gaze as if embarrassed. Olivia crosses her fingers, unable to look at me.

This guy.

I wonder who the hell she is. She has the audacity to stare. Ceres stares at Olivia, who stares back.

Normally, I would have looked up to you immensely.

Since then, I've noticed that Ceres sometimes feels sorry for Olivia.

Well.

I know the feeling. I can't believe how ridiculous he is sometimes, although he was nice enough to offer to take donations for an underclassmen's club that had nothing to do with him called the Magical Research Society.

In the end, Olivia Ranze is the one who has me to thank.

Olivia doesn't go to sponsorship events because she doesn't need sponsorship, but she's making an exception this time.

And, of course, Ceres Van Owen, who doesn't have to go to sponsorship meetings, but should because she's student body president.

She flips through the list she's holding.

"Patrons come from all walks of life, from nobles and giants to knights and templars and magic councils."

"I suppose so."

"If there's one organization that might be willing to sponsor your magical research group, it would be the Magical Society, right?"

"Maybe."

"It doesn't necessarily have to be magic-related, don't the Templars have mages in their ranks?"

Olivia had a different take on Ceres' comment, and it made sense. It wouldn't be the only group that would be interested in a magical society.

"So let's just name the four biggest names in the room."

"Crusader Knight Commander Elayon Bolton."

"Sangtriden, Vice President of the Magic Society."

"Captain of Shanapell, 1st Knights of the Empire. Saviolin Tana."

"Merchant Guild Guildmaster Owen de Getmora."

The previous Crusader Grand Master, Revereer Ranze, has been deposed, and the next Grand Master of the Crusade is in attendance. Mr. Elayon Bolton, whoever he may be. Olivia's reluctance is palpable.

Her stepfather, Crusader Master Revere Lance, is one thing, but Olivia hates the Crusade itself. Even if she were to succeed him, she wouldn't want to be in his presence.

"I can go by myself."

I said, but Olivia shook her head.

"It's okay, it's not like I wasn't expecting you."

Olivia Ranze is a real sweetheart.

Crusader Knightmaster, Vice President of the Magic Society, 1st Knightmaster of the Empire. Guildmaster of the Merchants' Guild.

It's clear that even if we could get just one of those four to sponsor us, it would be a huge amount of money.

But I don't like the Crusaders, and the Merchant Guilds are kind of creepy.

I don't know about the Wizarding Society, but they might be able to sponsor it.

What about the Imperial 1st Knights?

I don't know everything, but there was one name I recognized.

Captain of the Knights of Shanapelle, 1st Knights of the Empire.

Saviolin Tana.

Naturally, Swordmaster.

No, it's more than that.

\* \* \*

While Temple students have been called into battle in the wake of the Gate Crisis, there are other combatants as well. Chief among them are the Templars, and the Shanapels, the continent's premier knightly order, have also seen their fair share of action.

Because of their unfamiliarity with combat, many Templars take students to teach them to fight and battle in the field.

Along the way, Violin Tana teaches Ludwig many lessons. At that point, Ludwig has the Alsbringer and is treated as a very important person.

Ludwig and Ellen Artorius.

The two are incorporated into Saviolin Tana's immediate unit and fight.

It's only fitting that the Empire's greatest knight should be teaching Master Alsbringer and Master Rament, who are still new to combat.

She is cold and distant, and she treats Ludwig very harshly. She whips Ludwig by comparing him to Ellen, who is good at everything.

With the world at stake, Saviorin Tana had no choice but to treat Ludwig more harshly than he deserved.

It's better to be alive than dead, and with a weak body and mind, death is the worst possible outcome.

Ellen, the savant of all things, had nothing to teach Tana, the violinist, but Ludwig had a lot to teach her.

Throughout the battle, Savior Tana teaches Ludwig many things, and she dies saving his life near the end.

Ludwig becomes a Swordmaster in the process.

Saviolin Tana, a very important post-Gate character.

I never thought I'd see him in this position.

"Okay, let's go in, shall we?"

I didn't expect to see Ludwig and Ellen, and I didn't expect to see Olivia Ranze.

\* \* \*

"That's a lot of people."

"Right?"

There are about a half-dozen Royal Class students in fourth grade and above, and not all of them attend.

But it seemed like there were over a hundred non-students.

"If everyone who actually wanted to come came, it would be over a thousand people."

And that's just the tip of the iceberg, Ceres added. As the Empire's premier educational institution, Temple's best students are the future of the Empire.

There are so many people who want to invest in them or line them up. Or scout them after they graduate. Promising knights, entrepreneurial talents.

All that talent has to be used somewhere.

Students greeted supporters they already knew, some for the first time and others for the first time.

And all eyes were on us for appearing there.

To Olivia Ranze, to be precise.

A person who renounced her faith but was famous as a saint of Eredian.

The mere fact that she'd dropped everything to be in the presence of the Crusaders' leader was sobering.

Honestly, there are times when I'd rather ignore all that and just look at Olivia Lanchester in a dress.

Olivia smiled thinly, as if she was used to that kind of stare.

What the hell, I'm not pecking at this again.

He's a weird guy to look at.

"Do we need to do anything official?"

"Hmm, not really, just relax and go with it."

I was worried that I was going to have to get up on a podium and be like, "Who am I, give me some money?

But if you don't have that, how do you start the conversation with your backers?

However, contrary to my fears, someone approached me first.

"I can't believe you're here."

"You're not in a place you shouldn't be, are you?"

"Sure."

I didn't recognize his face, but his robes gave me an idea of his identity.

Current Crusader Knightmaster Elayon Bolton.

Olivia picked up a glass of champagne from her tray and took a light sip, smiling.

Alcohol?

Correct.

Olivia was an adult.

"Can't you change your mind?"

"Sure."

The Crusader leader still seemed to lament Olivia Lance's departure, but he knew her resolve was too firmly established for any further prodding, so he left with a brief bow.

Olivia Ranze would be too good to pass up. Leverier Lance says Olivia ticks all the boxes.

The people you pick and choose to lead your next crusade.

But Olivia can't go back.

Ceres looked at Olivia with pity; she, too, lived by faith in the Great Gods.

Ceres seemed to be saddened by Olivia's abandonment of her faith.

"Some things are more solidified over time."

"It's ......."

Olivia smiled as she told Ceres that.

It's not just that I'm disappointed in the Crusaders.

Since the Tiamata incident, Olivia has learned about faith and the reality of God. That demons don't exist, and that the gods and demons are actually the same thing.

That the way you believe only determines your power.

Knowing that God's face had no expression, Olivia Ranze could not have faith again.

I decided to abandon my faith because of the human problem, but I realized that God has just as much of a problem.

Olivia would never return to her faith and allegiance to God. As such, she would never consider joining the Crusaders.

The unknown seniors in the royal class were chatting with various patrons.

Ceres was the student council president, so she went off to do something else, leaving me with Olivia.

"I'm guessing most of the seniors here are magic majors who need money?"

Olivia nodded at my words.

"That's one thing, but we also have kids coming in to decide what they want to do after graduation."

"Hmmm....... Are you waiting for someone to come up with a better offer?"

"Yes. Children from commoner backgrounds are sometimes promised knighthoods."

The Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan was right.

Some places will even promise you a knighthood to get you to join their royal class.

For current students, it's a place to network for sponsorships, and for those who are nearing graduation and don't plan on going to graduate school, it's a place to find work.

We don't know what the ransom for a Royal Class graduate is, but we do know it's a lot.

How's my ransom.

I don't actually think so, but Mr. Effinghauser once said that I was the best person at Temple.

"......."

In the back of the ballroom, scarily enough, I could see a cold-looking man talking to someone.

Dr. Effinghauser.

A royal class teacher attending a sponsorship event. I mean, I know it's not unheard of, but seeing him at a party is.

I couldn't hear what they were talking about, but I could tell by the stern look on his face that it wasn't a pleasant conversation. I can't imagine him having a pleasant conversation either.

"Okay. Shall we go fishing for money then?"

Olivia says, smiling brightly.

"Maybe you shouldn't say ...... like that."

When you say it like that, it sounds like you're here to rip them off.

......Although the results are similar.

"Don't be too disappointed. Reinhardt."

What?

I thought we were supposed to be able to make money here?

Episode 243.

I'm pretty sure it wouldn't have worked as well if I had come alone.

Everyone here knew about Olivia Lanze.

"Oh, this is Reinhardt, a freshman who is a superpowered junior with a very exciting future."

"Psychic?"

"This junior had a vision and created a place called the Magical Research Society."

"Ho-ho, what are they working on?"

"Ms. Olivia, it's an honor to meet you."

"Haha, hello. I'm Reinhardt, a freshman......."

People wanted to get a word in with Olivia Lanchester, who was now famous in a different sense, and Olivia introduced me like a sales pitch. I emphasized my magical research organization and the need for substantial funding.

While the attendance from the four major organizations was stellar, the competition was just as strong.

They were high-ranking nobles from the imperial states, as well as members of the imperial aristocracy and other organizations.

Olivia talked to them all, and introduced me to them.

But as Olivia expected, the results weren't great.

"Oh, that's great, I'm rooting for you, Reinhardt."

"Then maybe you could donate to......."

"Ah, but more than that, Ms. Olivia. What are you thinking about after graduation?"

He'd rather have Olivia on board than sponsor the Magical Research Society, which Olivia had brought up.

Olivia Ranze was a star in the sky when she was supposed to join the Crusaders. But now that she's not joining the Crusaders, she's a huge commodity on the free agent market.

The magical society took a backseat, and it was clear that everyone was trying to get Olivia involved in some way.

But when I realized that Olivia's intention was not to find a career, but to get sponsorship for a club her juniors had started, I stopped paying attention.

Even though I coveted the super-sized property, I knew that the intention of the sale was to help a kid build a ridiculous invention.

The vice-president of the Magic Association, a man named Sangtriden, was baffled.

"Mmmm....... It's good to dream big, Mr. Reinhardt."

I felt a little sorry for them. There was no point in telling me that my teammate was an untapped genius.

"That's not working."

Olivia scratched her cheek, a little embarrassed.

"It's not that they can't come, it's that they have no reason to come."

"Yeah, that's right......."

Being here has made me realize something.

It's a scouting ground and a place to sponsor talent that's close to graduation.

Obviously, the shorter the sponsorship period, the better. It's more cost-effective to sponsor a student closer to graduation than it is to sponsor a first-year student until they graduate.

Therefore, the best candidates for sponsorship are grades 5 and 6. For younger grades, it's inefficient to be here for too long to sponsor.

Their purpose is to create a connection in the name of sponsorship, to scout or solicit.

I'm a freshman, and I'm trying to build something that sounds silly.

Graduation is a long way off, and plans are unclear.

People aren't going to sponsor you.

Similar to investments, sponsorships were hard to come by.

Still, I didn't expect to be treated so poorly, and I'm lucky that Olivia is the only one who can talk to me.

"But I'll take it as far as I can."

Even if people's interest waned, I decided to keep moving, because one of them might get it.

The only one who wasn't interested in us from the start.

Olivia and I went to the Merchant Guild Master, Owen de Getmora.

When I thought of the Merchant Alliance Guildmaster, I envisioned a middle-aged man who had aged quite nicely. I wonder if he'd be as dignified in this position.

In a corner of the ballroom, he was alone, sipping champagne and observing the proceedings.

He didn't talk to anyone.

He didn't look like a merchant.

"Hmmm, you sound like you're dreaming up some really great invention."

It was clear that he didn't think my research work was worth talking about.

"By the way, I didn't expect to see Mr. Reinhardt here."

He seemed more interested in me than in the magical society.

I had some idea why he was doing it. A business that opens a store in each subway station. The Merchants Guild is a major investor in the project. With the way things are going, he's bound to know about me and the Rotary Club.

There was a connection between the Merchant Guild Master and myself that was completely separate from the Magical Research Society.

Olivia shook her head, not quite sure why, but it didn't make the mood any less odd.

He had no interest in Olivia. He didn't run a group that required force.

"Mr. Reinhardt, may I ask you a question?"

"Yes."

So he sees me.

It seems to be interested in me.

I'm the only one who cares about me, a condition that everyone else in this room has no choice but to ignore.

"Why do you think I'm here?"

"Are you asking me to guess the intent of ......?"

"Yes."

He sees me.

Out-of-the-blue questions.

What the heck is the point of getting this right?

The stranger tests me.

The Merchant Guild Master, Owen de Getmora, is qualitatively different from the Thieves Guild Master. While the Merchants' Guild has dabbled in a few illegal businesses, they are ultimately a benign organization.

He is the leader of a group whose very existence is at odds with that of the Thieves' Guild, which is being eradicated. Perhaps that's why he's able to take a seat at such a prestigious table.

Money is the envy of no other group.

"Here's a hint: I'm not looking to scout anyone, and I'm not looking to sponsor anyone."

It's like he's testing my insight. Passing this test is not a guarantee that he will sponsor me.

I just want to know.

Who your critical business partners are.

But at some point you're going to have to be able to talk to someone who doesn't look down on you for your age.

I'm not interested in scouting, I'm not interested in sponsorship.

So why is it here?

If they just want to come, there's no reason to ask this question. It's an inferential question, of course.

Let's think about the results.

The role of a Merchant Guild Master is all about making money.

You're saying that attending a sponsored event is a paycheck in itself.

When I thought about it, it wasn't a hard question.

This is where the big names come together.

"I can't think of a better place to get a feel for the state of the continent."

"A little more?"

"I can see the need, and consequently, I can see what they're lacking."

People come from all over the world, from all over the empire.

And they make moves to include talent. When you know their needs, you know their deficiencies.

The Knights need to replenish their arsenal, so look for strong people.

The money they invest is a reflection of their deficiencies and needs. What do they need over there, what do they lack over there.

You can tell what they want by reading the back and forth conversations.

This gives us some idea of the strength, needs, and finances of the group.

Owen de Getmora is a merchant.

One who prepares things to fulfill people's needs and desires.

He heard my short answer and smiled.

"That's great."

"Maybe, but I don't know what the Merchant Guild is going to do with the information that comes out of it."

Owen said it was great, but Olivia was looking at me with her mouth hanging open.

No.

What are you so impressed with this?

"Then we should probably talk about the next one."

"If you're talking about......."

"I wasn't going to sponsor, but I didn't expect Mr. Reinhardt to come."

He sees me.

"I have to sponsor Mr. Reinhardt, and I have to do it now, and can you guess why?"

The backers here prefer to give to upperclassmen.

However, the Merchant Guild Master feels that he should sponsor me because I'm a lower ranked player.

That wasn't a hard problem either.

"I think you're looking for my value while I'm at Temple, not after I graduate."

"That's even better."

Owen sipped his champagne with a satisfied smile.

Owen de Getmora realizes that his magic train shop business is backed by the imperial family.

You want to put your foot down on my imperial ties.

I don't want Reinhardt, I want a classmate of the prince and princess.

If so, my value arises now while I'm at Temple, not after I graduate, so he wants to create a connection to the imperial family by sponsoring me.

I'm the kind of guy who could win an imperial franchise.

"Mr. Reinhardt, how much do you need?"

It asks for a price tag engraved with my name.

Too much and you'll look ridiculous, too little and you'll look shallow.

I'm dealing with an older man I've never met before today. I don't know how to do that.

But you have to do it.

You don't say it, but you're trading ties to the imperial family. Mentioning it is blasphemy.

"Well, I don't think that's up to me."

He's asking for my price list, but I change the product to something I'd describe as an edginess.

You're trading relationships with the imperial family, and I can't put a price on that.

So you weigh in, how much do you think your ties to the imperial family are worth?

Owen de Getmora smirked at me.

"Well, you've hit the nail on the head, and we'll send you the right amount of money in a timely manner."

He is a trader.

In the end, he didn't say how much he was going to pay.

But if the amount is ridiculously low, the Merchant Guild will get a kick out of it.

A deal that promises intangible consideration.

Gave nothing and received something.

But it was also pretty scary.

There would come a time when I would have to give them something, and I wouldn't know what to give them.

You can go and say, "I don't know," but these are traders.

If you're a merchant, you're going to get paid somehow.

Episode 244.

"Reinhard, what the hell is going on?"

Olivia didn't seem to understand that I was sponsored at all.

"She seems to know you, and you seem to know something....... She doesn't know what's what."

All of a sudden, we're trading like a bunch of pretzels, paraphrasing things that only we know.

What is the unique value of being a student at Temple, and why would Owen want to buy it?

"That's about right. What do you want to know?"

"To the West Winds!"

Olivia pretended to cry when I cut her off. I'd been on the sponsorship circuit for quite some time, but it wasn't because of the Institute of Magic or Olivia that I was sponsored, it was because of my work with the Rotary Club.

I didn't expect the Merchant Guild Master to be interested either, so I was basically stuck with it.

The problem.

I have a pledge of support, but I don't know how much. No matter how much I have, it's not enough. The more the merrier.

"After all, we need more, right?"

Olivia must have read those feelings in my expression.

"You never know how much you're going to get, and more is always better."

"Hmm....... Yeah. I knew it was going to be like this......."

Olivia seemed to have an idea.

I know it's going to be hard to get sponsored, but since you're here, it sounds like you have a plan.

What did Olivia come up with?

Owen sat alone again, and we sat at a secluded table and ate our food. There were many covetous eyes on Olivia, but no one approached her, knowing that she was an iron wall.

While Olivia was deep in thought, someone approached us.

"Number 11."

"Ah, sir."

Dr. Effinghauser approached.

"Greetings. Captain Shanapelle of the First Knights of the Empire. This is Lord Saviolin Tana."

Beside him was a knight with a sword-like stance, dressed in the regalia of the Imperial Knights.

Looking at her calm but piercing expression, I felt myself freezing under her gaze.

It's definitely while. I'm sure he's a lot older than you.

Of course, I've set it up so that superhumans who reach a certain level of enlightenment will age slower, and even rejuvenate.

In martial arts terms, it's a reincarnation. Violinist Tana is one of those people.

It was weird to see someone who was about to turn 60 looking like he could be a freshman at Temple right now.

"This is Reinhardt, A-11, first year, Temple Royal class."

"This is Olivia Ranze, A-0, fifth grade, Temple Royal class."

Olivia is number 0, right?

I was struck by a strange place.

She was paid, so she should have gotten her number back.

It should have gotten the last number, but given the talent ranking, that's not possible, so it got the number 0, which is not there.

Or not, Savior Tana stares at me.

"Are you the future of the empire?"

"......Yes?"

No.

EpinHauser What is he talking about?!

Mr. Effinghauser, who goes around saying I'm the future of the empire.

It's crazy in more ways than one.

\* \* \*

Shanapelle's grooming. The best knight in the Empire. Saviolin Tana.

She held out her hand to me, and I took it. It was a hard, rough hand.

The Empire's strongest knight and defender of the imperial family. Saviolin Tana.

All the talent in the world pales in comparison to Ellen Artorius, but this man in front of her is a monster.

Right now, he's also the continental champion in Melee.

Saviolin Tana is a Temple senior at EpinHauser.

"I don't doubt your judgment, but I'm not so sure."

"I'm still in first grade."

An unfamiliar nickname for the future of the empire.

That's just Dr. Effinghauser's idea. Saviolin Tana seems to have gotten the quote from shaking my hand.

Still.

You're so dismissive of people right in front of you, is that all you are, a continental powerhouse?

I'm the strongest.

Still, it's a bit much when a young-looking Savior Tana talks back to an older-looking Mr. Effinghauser.

It feels weird.

Actually, Saviolin Tana is a cranky senior.

"I think this is the future of the empire."

Saviolin Tana looked at Olivia Ranze.

"......."

Olivia nodded in greeting, but looked at Xavier with a bit of wariness.

I kind of figured out that they were spheres.

The view that Olivia Lanchester is the future of empire. I'm not so sure.

Maybe, maybe not. In the original, Olivia Lanchester is someone who disappears into the margins of the story, so is she more than just Ellen or Ludwig in the second half?

Saviolin Tana looks at Olivia with a stern demeanor.

"Your offer is still valid. Olivia."

"......."

"If you won't take your place in the Crusaders, join the Shanapels."

The future of empires.

Saviolin Tana weighs in on Olivia Lanze. I can't help but feel the same way. She's got a lot to prove.

Olivia was once offered a place in the First Knights of the Empire, and by the looks of it, she declined. Olivia stares at Tana, the violinist.

He looks like he's made up his mind about something.

"How much can you give me?"

"...... money?"

"Yes."

Saviolin Tana narrowed her eyes slightly at that.

And then he looks at me.

"Oh, I see."

I felt like my brain was shutting down.

"If you promise to join, I can pay up to 10,000 platinum coins."

10,000 platinum coins.

One million in gold coins.

A trillion in today's dollars.

Superhuman is a tactical weapon.

As it is, it is already subject to asymmetric power treatment.

Are you saying that Olivia is already at that level, or do you think she can get there?

"I can invest that much in the future of the empire."

Olivia Ranze's ransom was more than a fighter in modern terms.

I realized I hadn't realized the value of Olivia Ranze.

A trillion is a lot of money, but isn't it a bargain when you can buy the next great empire, a tactical weapon they can't handle?

If a superhuman like that were to enter the Imperium instead of the Empire itself, that would be a problem. The Empire would want to stop that at all costs.

I realized why Olivia Lance said she knew it was going to be hard to get sponsored, but she said it would be easy once she got there.

She already knew who was going to buy her the most.

"Yes, that would be......."

"Wait. Wait."

But. I grabbed Olivia Ranze's arm.

"What are you trying to do?"

Olivia lowered her eyes, as if she'd known I'd come out like this.

"I thought you might be like this....... I didn't want to come with you."

For some reason, he didn't want me to come, and here's why.

\* \* \*

I dragged Olivia out of the patronage hall. I didn't care about Dr. Effinghauser or the best knight in the empire.

"You said you were going alone for this?"

"......."

Olivia has her head down, not meeting my eyes. Olivia speaks without looking at me.

"Why, I'll have nothing to do when I graduate anyway, and they're paying me a lot of money, and I have nothing to spend it on, and you need the money, Reinhard, and that's that."

"I thought you weren't going to go?"

"......."

I'm sure she's gotten tons of offers here and there, but she's turned them all down. But when I told her I needed money, she suddenly wanted to pay me to join Chanapelle.

And he wants to give me the money.

"What am I supposed to do, save his life once? I mean, he paid me back last time, so why would he risk the rest of his life to do this?"

"......just. You can do it."

Olivia looked at me with difficulty. Her eyes are shaking.

"I don't know any other way to live."

It was the look of a man who had only learned to sacrifice, who had never known how to live for himself.

"If I can do something for the person who saved my life, I think I should, so I do, and it's not a bad thing."

I was thinking Olivia was a weirdo.

However, she was a really weird person. More like bizarre than weird.

She's the kind of person who thinks harder about other people's work than her own. She was weird the whole time, it's just that no one else thought it was weird.

Because Olivia Ranze is that kind of person.

For that reason, no one knew about her weirdness, not even me.

Raised to be the leader of the Crusader Knights and the symbol of the next High Priestess of the Five Kingdoms, it's unlikely she had an ordinary upbringing. Whatever her upbringing may have been, Olivia Ranze has been forced to live for the salvation of others rather than her own desires.

So I became that person.

The faith that underpinned it was gone, but the way of life remained.

Olivia Ranze was never good at living for herself.

Somehow, more like Lagan Artorius than Ellen. No, more than that.

If he had to die for the world, he would do it without a second thought.

There's only one reason.

Because you can.

Olivia looks at me with shaky eyes.

"I don't know what I want to do anymore, I don't have anything to do, I don't know what to live for, I could do anything, and if I can help you with it, I'm happy, that's all that matters."

Olivia Ranze, a human being, not a saint, was a broken human being.

In her life as a saint, she was flawless and had everything that was asked of her.

But Olivia Ranze, no longer a saint, has no idea how to live her life as an ordinary person.

10,000 platinum coins is an unimaginable amount of money.

That would solve all the funding problems.

But Olivia Lance didn't want to sell her future for the money.

"That's....... It's weird, you live your life first, and then there's everyone else. Why would you want to pay with your life for something so insignificant?"

"......."

"If it's just because I'm about to die, I can understand that. I mean, I know the grant is important, but it's not something you should have to do."

The real problem is this.

This is not something Olivia should be doing at all.

It's bizarre that he's willing to sell his future for something like that.

Olivia looks at me with a sad smile.

"So, you're going to tell me?"

"Is that ......?"

"How to live for yourself. Can you teach me?"

My tongue was stuck in my cheek.

"Are you living for yourself?"

"......."

"You, too, don't know the first thing about magic, and you're running around like this for the Hufflepuffs."

Olivia's words seemed to stab me in the heart.

"What's the difference between you and me?"

For the future. I'm not like you.

I wanted to say that, but my mouth wouldn't drop.

In the end, Olivia and I were both devoting our time and energy to a cause that had little to do with our own gain.

"I'm not as good as you."

"Yeah, I guess so."

Olivia looks up at the night sky, which seems to be bursting with stars.

"You're just as weird as I am."

There's no way I could argue with that. Olivia looks up at the night sky, then at me, her eyes slightly reddened.

"How to live for yourself....... with me?"

"......."

Looking into Olivia Ranze's eyes, which looked like they could burst into tears at any moment, I thought long and hard about what to say.

The answer was one.

"No dirty stuff."

"Gee, seriously, what do you think I am!"

Olivia blushed bright red at my ramblings and squealed.

"You reap what you sow, now what."

"Now, I was just kidding, I'm not me, I'm not me, I'm not that person!"

"What is such a person?"

"Hey, profit, I think I know why the kids hate you!"

Olivia sulked for a moment, genuinely upset.

\* \* \*

Once we realized what Olivia's plan was, we didn't need to go back to the sponsor.

But nonetheless, we returned to the sponsorship venue.

If you're rude in front of the world's most powerful person and your homeroom teacher and don't apologize, it's going to come back to haunt you.

Of course, I'm not sure if I'm reading Xavier Tana's mind or Dr. Effinghauser's.

"Uh, excuse me."

Dr. Effinghauser didn't seem to mind, and Saviolin Tana just looked at me the way she had the first time.

But that first feeling was scary because it made me feel like I was being judged.

I can't tell if she's angry or not. Olivia stares at the World's Strongest, her eyes cold.

"Thanks for the suggestion, but I still think....... I think I'll have to give it some more thought."

"Okay, you have a lot of time, so take your time."

I'm sure Olivia Lance's demeanor has changed because of me.

Scary. How much would it hurt to get hit by the strongest person in the world?

She's got her eye on Olivia Lanchester, and she's probably got the imperial green light to spend unimaginable amounts of money.

Olivia Ranze.

He's a nice guy to me, but he's usually just a nosy senior who sticks around to the point of annoyance, so I'm not sure how powerful he is. When you're told you're the future of the empire by the strongest person in the world, you're pretty much done.

I can see why saving Olivia's life was a turning point in history.

Saviolin Tana stares at me.

"Did I mention I need a grant to study magic?"

"Yes."

"You're supposed to be a psychic, so why are you dabbling in magic?"

"You can think of it as letting my classmates focus on their research, while I do this outside work for them."

Savior Tana looked at me, then at Olivia, then back at me, and so on.

You seem to be very thoughtful.

I'm just making faces.

You look like a grown-up Ellen, man.

Someone who's a douchebag but actually has a cute side to them.

I don't think it's going to read, but I feel like I'm being a dick.

It's kind of like Dr. Unknowable Effinghauser, but not quite.

"Olivia said she's going to get him a grant so he'll join the organization.

"It's clear that Olivia takes Reinhardt very seriously.

"But she retracted her comments after Reinhardt took her out, so clearly Olivia is weak to Reinhardt.

'um.......'

'ugh.......'

"Then.

"If we sponsor Reinhardt, who has influence over Olivia, might it improve Chanapelle's impression of Olivia?

"So, as a result, isn't your support for Reinhardt a way to increase your influence over Olivia?

"Reinhard will have a positive attitude toward Schanapelle, and that will surely rub off on Olivia.

"I'm sure.

'Maybe.......'

'Oh dear me.......'

"Maybe a genius?

I've never met anyone more deceitful than Adelia.

I've gotten used to Ellen, and I can detect her emotional changes in her facial expressions and eyes, which go from blank to slightly changed.

Am I getting into the realm of solipsism here?

Saviolin Tana, deep in thought alone, sees me.

"I'll sponsor you."

"Gee, thanks!"

Again, I felt like I had a good idea of what I was thinking, if not all of it.

In the end, the presence of Olivia Ranze was enough to secure the sponsorship of the First Knights of the Empire.

Two of the core groups that participated in the fundraiser pledged their support.

It's more than I could have imagined.

Episode 245.

Like the Merchant Guild, Shanafel says it makes its donations after internal discussions.

The 1 trillion won to pay Olivia Ranze to sign with the team was agreed upon.

In this case, it's obviously not as much as it would have been to get Olivia.

Olivia was overwhelmed with gratitude for Chanapelle's decision to sponsor her.

Saviolin Tana seemed to be satisfied with Olivia's attitude already.

Apparently, they realized that backing me for influence over Olivia was the right move.

Sponsorship from two megacorps was determined.

Merchant Guild, and Shanapelle.

That alone made things a little weird.

"I'd like to talk to you in more detail about sponsorship......."

"Mr. Reinhardt, may I speak to you for a moment?"

"I was in a hurry earlier, so I didn't hear you properly......."

The atmosphere suddenly got weird.

There's only one reason.

Owen de Getmora, the Merchant's Guild Guildmaster, still sitting in the corner watching me, smiled at me.

Everyone thought my plan was ridiculous, and it took a magician to figure that out.

But results matter.

The "fact" that the Merchant's Guild had pledged sponsorship, and that Shanapelle had pledged sponsorship, was spread around the sponsorship hall.

The Merchant's Guild wouldn't sponsor an unproven cause, and the Knights of Shanapelle wouldn't sponsor magical research for nothing.

I can't help but think there's something to what I'm planning.

The Merchant Guild's patronage is for ties to the Empire.

Chanapelle's sponsorship was meant to appease Olivia Lanchester.

But they have no idea what's going on.

However, the fact that two non-magical groups have pledged their support to the seemingly impossible task of magical research is significant.

I've literally gone from being the "weirdo" in the room to the "bad guy" in the sponsorship room.

Because of a sponsorship pledge received for a completely different reason.

Sponsorship is not an investment.

So they don't get rewarded. They just trust the Merchant Guild and Shanapelle's judgment.

While you won't be able to exercise your stake if the ridiculous things I'm talking about are made, there are benefits to just having the fact that you've backed them.

And for the simple reason that it's crowded.

So I've been promised sponsorships by as many as a third of the people here.

This is probably the behavior of Owen de Getmora.

He's created an environment where people can't help but be interested in backing him.

"......what."

"I'm a little confused, too."

"A good thing is a good thing, right?"

"Right?"

In the end, neither my expectations nor Olivia's were met, and I ended up with a ton of backers.

It was even more ridiculous when I realized it wasn't my fault, it was a misunderstanding.

\* \* \*

Toward the end of the campaign.

Saviolin Tana came to me again.

This time, he seemed to have a purpose for me. He pulled me away from Olivia, saying he wanted to talk to me in private.

What is personal.

"I heard about the Orbis class."

"Oh, yeah......."

At Saviolin Tana's words, I looked at Dr. Effinghauser in the distance. She's really told him everything about me.

This sponsorship was originally intended to be attended by Royal and Orbis Class members. However, not a single member of the Orbis class attended this event.

"You should know that you have made many enemies."

She lowered her voice to an inaudible whisper and said.

"I know that."

The Orbis class incident was an inflection point in history, so I made enemies of both the students who would be expelled and the teachers who would be fired.

Of course, there's no point in hating me, but there are plenty of people out there with a vendetta against me.

That's what I meant when I said I knew, but Saviolin Tana shook her head.

"Don't think your enemy is the Orbis class."

"......."

"How many people do you think were supporting Orbis Class at this sponsorship event, or how many people didn't show up at all when they heard that Orbis Class wasn't coming?"

My whole body felt like it was freezing.

"If the students in your sponsored Orbis class are put on trial, jailed, or expelled, you have incurred the wrath of their sponsors."

Sponsored students are expelled. An investment made with an eye to the future is wasted. Of course, talent doesn't go anywhere, but the difference between an Orbis class graduate and an expelled student is huge.

If they are even facing jail time, it may be impossible to accept them.

I have turned against not only the Orbis class, but also their backers. They may not all hate me, but each and every one of them is a big shot.

Saviolin Tana was telling me things I didn't know.

"The price of one fight is too high."

"They don't say don't use your fists for nothing."

I was stunned, as I never expected to hear such advice from the world's most powerful person.

"But that's weird."

Saviolin Tana sees me.

"Rather a fellow like you, who didn't die an oddly early death."

She walked out of the patronage hall with a faint smile.

Saviolin Tana, the current reigning world champion.

Maybe it's because I feel like Ellen.

I had a good feeling about him.

Bottom line.

With a huge amount of backers, we achieved our goal.

I also realized that I could die at any time and it wouldn't matter.

\* \* \*

Olivia and I went back to the dorm. I didn't mention that we were in danger of making too many enemies.

Then I'd be stuck with this personality all day long.

That's even scarier.

"Well, I'm glad it worked out somehow."

"Yes, and it's all because of you."

It was Olivia who introduced me to the sponsorship, and it was Olivia who made the connection with Saviolin Tana.

So it's all thanks to her that the Magical Research Society has a fully funded budget. Olivia looks at me and smiles wryly.

"Thank you?"

You're going to bullshit me again. You're going to ask me to kiss you.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Uh, huh?"

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

What the heck.

It's nighttime and no one's watching, so I'm just going to do it.

Olivia stumbled back, her face still recognizable in the middle of the night. I looked at her and clicked my tongue.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk, you're paying lip service to the topic."

"What?! I can do it! I can do it! I can do it!"

"No, no, no, no, no, no!"

There's no one around, but there might be a listening ear somewhere!

"You do realize that you're the only person in the Temple, nay, in the whole world, who disrespects me like this, Reinhardt?"

Come to think of it, yes.

She was called a saint everywhere she went and was coveted by everyone in the sponsorship hall, but I feel like I was treated badly.

Olivia huffed and puffed, clearly annoyed with my attitude.

-side!

"!"

And then, out of nowhere, he kissed me on the cheek.

No.

This guy.

Suddenly?

I usually do this on a whim, but this one was a little too out of the blue for me, so I had to play it safe.

So, was it all a concept after all?

"Don't support me, don't worship me, don't force me to be anything, don't want me to be anything. Just treat me as I am."

Olivia says, looking at me with the ice cube.

"So good."

She smiled dazzlingly.

Olivia must have thought I was going to shit myself if I came to my senses, because she was out of my line of sight in a flash.

I can't believe I can run that fast in a dress and shoes.

I could see why Saviolin Tana was so coveted.

-Beep!

-Ack!

But then I broke my heel and fell.

-Mo, mo, pretend you didn't see it!

Even without looking, I could see Olivia's expression.

\* \* \*

Ellen sat dazedly on the couch in the foyer of her dorm, the entrance to the hall.

I don't know why I was sitting in the lobby, I just couldn't help myself.

After seeing Reinhardt grab Olivia Ranze's dressed hand and drag her somewhere, I couldn't get my hands on the dueling swords.

I heard we're going to a benefit or something today, so that's why I'm wearing a dress, or so I thought.

I don't need to get upset.

I sat there dumbfounded, unable to do anything.

He was close to Reinhardt.

The senior, dressed in a dress and makeup, was too beautiful for her own good.

I was told it was because of the Magical Research Society.

Nothing's going to happen, it's just a public thing, or so I thought.

Ellen sat idly in the lobby, feeling uneasy for some reason.

You don't even know why you're sitting there.

Not knowing what to expect. I just couldn't bear to not do it.

I wonder how many hours I'll be sitting there.

The sun had long since set and night was falling. Few students came and went from the lobby, and you were the only one sitting in the huge hall.

-This is embarrassing....... What an embarrassment.......

Soon, a voice sounded familiar from the entrance.

She's still hard to miss in her off-the-shoulder dress, but she's stumbling in with a broken heel in her hand.

Reinhardt wasn't around.

Olivia walked in and made eye contact with Ellen, who was sitting idly on a couch near the hall.

"...... Ah, our Reinhardt friend, how are you?"

"It's ......."

"What are you doing here at this hour?"

Olivia scratched her head. I don't know why he's walking in with a broken heel.

Why didn't Reinhardt come back with him.

It doesn't know that either.

What am I doing here?

That too.

I'm not sure.

However, it feels a little weird.

Our Reinhardt friend.

The wording is a bit.

It's strangely unpleasant.

"Our" Reinhardt friend.

It's not a we, it actually sounds like a "my".

No, this is too far-fetched. But the other person stares at Ellen and gives her a strange smile of understanding.

"...... Reinhardt waiting?"

"It's ......."

Unable to say no, Ellen nodded.

"Why are you waiting?"

"......?"

Why.

Ellen hadn't thought about it. She was waiting for Reinhardt, that's true. But why she was waiting, she doesn't know. Olivia stares at Ellen, unable to find an answer.

"You know what?"

"......What?"

"You, a little annoyed?"

"Is that ......?"

The bluntness of the statement caught Ellen off guard.

I don't have any contact with him, he's just a guy I bump into from time to time. He's the one who saved Reinhardt's life, he's the one who's been helping him with this and that.

Your loved ones' loved ones.

Then you must be important to me, too.

For some reason, Ellen can't do that with this person. Olivia says that Ellen is annoying, and stares at her.

"Don't you know?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

The other person's snarky response triggers Ellen's snarky response.

Always the calm one, Ellen was embarrassed that she was going out like this.

"If you don't know, stay ignorant. Keep being this vague for the rest of your life. I like it."

As Olivia walks past Ellen, she whispers in her ear.

"In the future, take care of our Reinhard."

"......."

I wasn't mistaken.

The other person is trying to piss her off on purpose. Ellen stares at the back of Olivia Ranze's head as she walks away barefoot.

Also.

Reinhardt's benefactor, anyway.

I don't like that person.

After a while, Reinhardt returned.

"Why is your face rotten? What happened?"

"......No."

"Are you angry?"

"Nope. I'm not mad."

"Have you ever....... did I....... did something wrong?"

"No, I didn't do anything wrong."

Reinhardt hadn't done anything wrong.

But.

Somehow, a sense of regret stirred in me.

Ellen hated herself for it.

Reinhardt kept hovering over him, asking if he was okay, what was wrong, and offering to get him something to eat.

For some reason, Ellen ended up feeling better.

Episode 246.

A few days later, a meeting of the Magical Research Society.

"This....... What's all this?"

"It's a donation."

I was able to show them the sponsorship certificates that arrived on the Royal Class Student Council flight.

[Imperial 1st Knight Shanapelle] - 400 Platinum Coins

[Merchant Guild] - 300 Platinum Coins

[Magic Society] - 100 Platinum Coins

[Count Kreuzen] - 50 platinum coins

[Knights of Rathran] - 10 Platinum Coins

Donations were coming in from the fastest movers.

A platinum coin is worth one hundred gold coins. One platinum coin is worth 100 million won.

That's about 40 billion from Shanapelle and 30 billion from the Merchant Guild.

Chanapelle is the price to buy Olivia Lanchester's favor.

Merchant Guilds are the price of buying friendly relations with the Empire.

It turned out to be a lot more than we thought.

Student government support has yet to be determined. However, it's time to move forward with or without student government support.

"This is not the end, there will be more."

We've raised nearly $100 billion in pledges in a single campaign, which wouldn't have happened if it weren't for the Merchant Guild and Shanapelle.

A number of unusual circumstances overlapped and overlapped, resulting in an enormous amount of money that far exceeded our expectations.

Everyone was looking at me like I was a god for accepting this kind of money just to go to one fundraiser.

I don't believe it either, but I don't see how they can easily believe it.

First and foremost, Louis Ankton, the bookkeeper, was appalled.

"Not enough?"

"No....... That can't be right."

You say one thing, but you don't know what will happen later. Money, and especially a budget, is something you never know when or where it's going to leak.

Herriot, in particular, was gaping and unable to speak.

"I know you're not going to do this, but we need to be transparent about how we spend the money, because our supporters might be curious about what we're doing, and we need to report on a regular basis how we're spending our budget and what our balance is, do you understand me?"

"Uh, okay."

His previous budget was huge, but now he had a budget that was even bigger, and he was a little nervous and scared. After all, if he made a mistake in his books, he could be in trouble.

It's fun to watch Herriot not be able to speak properly.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into when I started the Magic Society.

I told them to just create and run it on their own, but I ended up joining them, becoming president, and then responding to Harriet's prank to get money, which led to a whole bunch of unexpected things.

They say people don't know what they're doing.

As it turns out, if I hadn't become president of the Magical Research Society, I'm pretty sure it wouldn't have worked out.

"Good work, Reinhard."

Adelia said that. She looked genuinely grateful.

One by one, the others thanked her as she spoke.

Herriot still looked a little dazed.

"I mean, really....... save......."

This is the guy who thought I flunked my midterm because he asked for too much.

But I've been creating results that are beyond my wildest dreams.

Of course, I wouldn't have gotten this far without Olivia, but after all, my connection to her is one of my powers.

"I....... I really don't know what's what anymore."

Herriot sighs and looks at me.

"Nice work, thanks."

When Herriot sincerely thanks me like that, I feel a little weird.

"Do what you're told, assholes, and don't use the no money excuse anymore."

Work!

"Well then......."

We all sighed heavily, as if we knew this was how it was going to end.

\* \* \*

The Magical Research Society is on track. Of course, the groundwork has been laid to make things happen.

In time, we'll probably hear about the lack of budget, but at least not this year.

I told him that if he needed money, he shouldn't worry about it and spend whatever it was. It would be ridiculous if they couldn't do their research because of money.

But seriously, you're not going to blow through a $100 billion budget in a month, are you?

And the work of setting up shops at each station of the horsepower train was well underway. We had the space, we had the permits, we had the investment.

I was delighted to see a shop set up at the station near the temple.

That's what happened with my one word.

I realized that people in business get fulfillment from things other than money.

The goods sold in these stores weren't much different from modern convenience stores. It was a place for people who had skipped breakfast to grab a quick bite to eat, or for things they needed on a whim.

It's not packed, but there's a steady stream of people coming and going.

I'm reminded of the saying that people don't know what they want.

Until now, people never felt the need to buy anything at the station.

But now people will be inconvenienced by the disappearance of shops from the station.

It's like people who used to be fine without their smartphones suddenly become anxious without them.

Just like the wizards in the original movie, who could only do their magic at the rate of their power when they didn't have power cartridges, but later couldn't even fight a battle without them.

Something that people want but don't know they want.

That's where the value comes from.

"I mean, what else is that?"

"Hmmm......."

So I asked Elise.

Eleris's ring. It smells a little bit like she's been cleaning up after herself.

He told me that he had created this thing called the Magical Research Society, and that they were going to build this and that, and that they had a huge budget.

Eleris said she didn't know I had that ability.

My reaction to what I was trying to build was similar to everyone else's.

"Something that people don't even realize is uncomfortable....... Mmm......."

Nothing seemed to sparkle.

"I don't know the business, and I don't know why he's doing it."

He didn't even suspect that making his classmates stronger had anything to do with rebuilding the demon world.

"Still, if it's my specialty, I'd recommend....... It's magic, but it's not a paid inconvenience."

"That's okay, I'm just asking you to say something, not to come up with an alternative."

Eleris seemed to concentrate, and soon summoned a flame above her right hand.

"It's an incendiary spell."

"I guess so."

The lowest magic of the lowest. It was only used to set something on fire.

"I can multicast a spell like this dozens of times, even with salt. It's almost like there's no casting, it's just something I'm so used to doing."

"......, right?"

"Well, this time we cast."

I couldn't understand what she was saying because I'm not a native speaker.

"It's a lesser spell that doesn't require casting, but you did cast it?"

"Yes."

"Why did you need to cast?"

"Because this incendiary spell I used used the mana in my surroundings, not the mana in my body."

"What......?"

In this world, mages use mana in their bodies. Therefore, the magic rank of a stat represents the amount of mana in the body.

But magic with atmospheric mana, the stuff of fantasy novels from my rental store days, was possible in this world?

"Isn't your method of using external mana like internal mana a way to overcome the lack of internal mana?"

"Right."

"But what I'm saying is that the magic of today was also created to solve a certain pain point at the time."

"If it's inconvenient......."

"Yes, manifesting magic using external mana is dozens of times more difficult than using internal mana. You have to measure and calculate energy that is always in flux."

It's like a car that doesn't have a fuel tank and has to get gasoline from outside.

I didn't understand exactly what it was, but I got the idea.

"Long, long ago, in ancient times, this is how magic was, and it was a special power reserved for the few, even more so than now. There were only a hundred or so wizards on the entire continent, and even then, they weren't very powerful. If I were to manifest my magic this way, I wouldn't be able to do anything great."

"......So, the current way of using magic was created to eliminate the inconvenience of casting magic while controlling external mana flow?"

"Yes."

Just as power cartridges were a way to push the limits of what magic is now, magic was a way to push the limits of what it could be.

"People have found it easier to manipulate the magic in their bodies, so different ways to increase the amount of magic in the body have been studied. Over the course of history, this form of magic has become more common, so access to it is much better than it used to be."

There is a way to use natural mana.

It's just that it's very difficult, so it's a very old way of doing things.

"I'm only saying this because I don't know what people are uncomfortable with, and I remember this is what it looks like when something uncomfortable becomes comfortable....... I don't know how this is going to help you."

I'm just saying this off the top of my head.

I chuckled.

"No, it was a big help."

Difficult doesn't mean impossible.

Herriot de Saint-Étienne gains access to nature's mana.

The God of Destruction himself, perhaps?

It's scary to think about.

Of course.

"You, you, you! Why do you only do it to me? Why do you only give me the hardest things? Why do you only do it to me?"

She actually cried when I told her to research ways to manipulate atmospheric mana to create magic.

\* \* \*

Enchantments that manipulate atmospheric mana.

Perhaps it was too much to ask that she try something that even Elise, despite her immense talent, would struggle with. Herriot cried when she was asked to order dimensional magic and then something that didn't even make sense.

He seemed to think I was doing weird things just to annoy him.

After he calmed down a bit, I looked at him and said.

"No, I'm just saying that because I genuinely think you can do it. I'm not doing it on purpose to harass you, am I crazy?"

"You're crazy!"

Uh.

You're right.

They say bullshit on purpose to harass you, but not in this case!

"No, but you don't say no without trying, do you?"

"Do you think people don't use it because they're stupid? It's a modern theory of magic that people smarter and better than you used chi to create it......."

"What if they're all stupid?"

"......?"

I cut him off and walked in, and a wide-eyed Harriet blinked.

"What if they're all dumber than you, and they're the ones who invented the current theory of magic?"

"What, what....... What the hell are you talking about?"

"It's possible that every wizard in history is dumber than you."

You're just following the path the idiots made for you.

Sure, they're smarter than me, but Herriot could be smarter than them.

She is the greatest talent not only in House Saint-Thuan, but in the history of magic. Heriot will be able to make the impossible possible.

She seemed genuinely flustered by my outrageous compliment.

I don't even blush.

"Are you....... Are you serious?"

"Sure, I mean it."

Herriot sees me.

It's like they're trying to find something in my eyes to tease me, or suspicion, or doubt.

But there is no such thing. I believe that Herriot had the talent and brains to be the greatest wizard that ever existed.

"You....... How much of a genius do you think I am? What makes you think that......."

"You will be the greatest wizard of all time, regardless of race, and you know what I can do."

"Uh, yeah......."

Self-implication.

I stare at it, ready to hand it to Harriet, my eyes unwavering.

"I believe that."

I know I'm being self-serving, but it's true.

"So, you're going to trust me and shut up and do what I say."

"You always finish like this!"

Episode 247.

A system of magic that uses atmospheric mana following dimensional magic.

Herriot seemed to be willing to try after all. I really think he can make it work.

I feel a little bad for you, though, because I really do believe in you, but I'm asking you to do too much, even for me.

I decided it was time to take a break, so I cut back on my visits to the Magical Research Society and focused my time on personal training.

I've been taking enchantment classes, and while I feel better than I used to, I still don't have a good feel for it.

Ellen's use of magic enhancements to roll snowballs was already well established.

"You are so weird."

"Well."

When I snapped in the middle of class with a sudden burst of irritation, Ellen shot me a fat look.

"Let's use the word special instead of strange, Mr. Reinhardt."

The yoga master patted me on the shoulder as if to tell me not to fight.

"The Reinhardts aren't invincible either, I can see them realizing the power of horsepower."

"Is ...... real?"

"Sure."

I have no idea, so what are you basing that on?

I'm assuming that's the case if you are, but I'm still not sure.......

In my enchantment classes with Ellen, she was learning so fast that she was being taught the finer points and details of the operation, while I was being taught the basics.

I guess you could say I'm a genius.

It's just that there's always someone next to you who's too embarrassed to be called a genius.

No matter what I do, it's backwards compatible with Ellen.

No swordsmanship, no enchantment.

No, backwards compatibility is too strong a word.

I wonder if the magic majors around Heriot feel this way.

My yoga master tends to spend the whole class telling me that Ellen is so good, and that I shouldn't be disappointed because I'm definitely achieving too.

So.

When you hear that dozens of times throughout a class, it's not uplifting, it's disheartening.

Enchantment classes are like extra classes, so there are no tests and no grading.

So normally I'm done by 3:00, but on the days I'm in the enchantment class, I'm done by 5:00.

Interestingly enough, I feel a slight increase in horsepower just by taking the Enchantment class, as if I were taking the Enchantment Sensitization class. Of course, it's not significant.

The Magic Dominance talent will bloom when you hit Rank A, but that's a long way off.

That's something we can only dream about after Moonshine is built.

Walking back to your dorm after class.

Since it was fall, it was still dark at this time of day.

"Where are you going?"

Ellen exited the building where her class was held and headed in the opposite direction of her dorm.

"I'm going to go see the gray-haired lady."

"...... is it?"

Ellen would still visit Loyar from time to time, but she seemed to have gotten away from him lately.

Now that you've enchanted yourself, you want to see how you'd fare against Loyaar.

"Come with me."

I know the business is doing well, but I'd love to see them fight.

"Yes."

Ellen nodded and led the way.

The skirt of Ellen's school uniform swayed quietly in the fall breeze.

\* \* \*

Your combat power will skyrocket from the moment the Enchantment becomes available.

If you don't have access to enchantments, it's very difficult for you to engage in multiplayer combat, no matter how good you are.

To do so, you'd have to armor yourself with heavy armor like plate armor, but you'd lose mobility.

However, while Enchantment is a physical enhancement, it also protects the body with the energy it releases.

No longer needing to rely on heavy armor for protection, their physical abilities are greatly increased, and their mobility far exceeds that of normal humans, and their bodies are such that no ordinary sword can fit through their teeth.

-Bang! Pow! thud!

I was thinking about that as I watched Ellen and Loyar duke it out in the woods with their respective enchantments.

This is ridiculous.

The sun had already set, so I could only see a blue ball of flame and Loyaar colliding furiously.

The stereotypical relationship between mages and warriors in this genre is that the warrior has the upper hand.

I couldn't help but notice.

A human chariot covered in blue flames is charging at you at breakneck speed, and you can't stay calm and use your magic.

Then there's the concept of antihorsepower. Even at Temple, you're trained in antimagic starting in the second grade.

Lesser spells don't work, and higher spells that do require casting time.

I'll have the tip of a knife at my throat in a second, but can I cast?

In hindsight, Redina's talent for no-casting makes even less sense than Herriot's.

It took a while, ending with Ellen breathing heavily and disengaging her enchantment.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

Loyaar released his own enchantment and dusted off his hands.

Despite having gotten used to the enchantments, Loyar still had the upper hand on Ellen.

Still, it was Loyar who was fed up.

"Monstrous bastard."

This is because Ellen's growth has been faster than she expected.

Obviously, the guy who didn't even know how to use Enchantment a few months ago is now a master of it.

"What's the problem?"

Ellen cleared her throat and looked at Loyar as if to ask for clarification. Loyar seemed to hesitate, then slowly opened his mouth.

"You're too rough."

"Rough?"

"You have too much power output. It's amazing that you can do it, but that's beside the point. You use your power so explosively that you burn out easily. If a normal person used your power, they wouldn't last ten seconds. You're only able to do this because you have a ridiculous amount of natural horsepower."

"......."

"You put your first button in the wrong place. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes."

Ellen realized the power of enchantment in a real-life situation. She needed to be explosive and powerful, so she started by fighting with a burst of power.

"But I hear it's hard to fix."

"...... Of course, because you didn't learn to write it. You're going to have to work for it."

Enchantments are like magic, after all. It's not a school of thought, but there are ways of doing things that are passed down like arcana. Each knightly order will be different, and there will be imperial and royal ways.

We had to learn Temple's enchantment vision, which is also a very good one.

Start slow. One step at a time.

But Ellen had created her own path, and there was no room for other visions.

I've heard it before, just as Ellen has heard it from her yoga master teacher.

Ellen's magical enhancement had become something that had to be done her way.

It's very powerful for explosive force, but has poor sustain.

Once you realize your own enchantments, you can't help but use them in your own way.

Like Ellen, I'm the same way.

I don't yet know what my enchantments will be like. But it will have its own characteristics, and they will be very different from those taught in the Temple.

The yoga master teacher was teaching an energizing class in a format that allowed him to assist us.

"Your output is more than enough, it's too much. So train to increase your endurance."

"Yeah, I'll do that."

But it's going to be very difficult, Loyard says.

It would be nice if Ellen could control her output.

It can produce ridiculous output, and it can be tightened up very little.

"I have a question."

"What. I'm not going to answer that."

"Is she a masterclass?"

Masterclass.

If you wield a spear, you're a Lancemaster, and if you wield a sword, you're a Swordmaster.

Those who reach mastery are called masterclasses.

Someone like the viola tana I saw the other day is a swordmaster. A yoga master teacher is probably a masterclass. I don't know what he's a master of.

It seemed that Ellen had been wondering all along if Loyar was a master.

Masterclasses are the next step in disenchantment.

If you can use enchantments on the weapon you're using, it's a masterclass.

For example, when you become a sword master or sword instructor, it's a master class, and there are very few of them.

Saviolin Tana has earned her status as one of the best in a very small number of masterclasses.

If the criteria for enchanting objects beyond in vitro emissions is that they can be handled, then shouldn't people who use fists already be in the master class when they can enchant them? Probably not, but I wonder if there's another criteria?

Loyar chuckled at Ellen's question.

"From now on, when I call her sister, she will answer me."

At that, Ellen looked at Loyar with a fatalistic expression, then shook her head.

"......That's it."

"You really need to get your ass kicked."

Ellen was literally beaten to a pulp.

\* \* \*

Return to the temple.

Ellen is on my back.

"I'm sick......."

If this is coming from an unruly child, they're really, really sick.

Ellen is particularly nasty to Loyar, who has a nasty temper. I don't know why, but maybe it's because she finds it amusing.

"So why did you say something you shouldn't have?"

"......I don't want to hear that from you."

"......Yes."

I'm the guy who always gets in trouble for saying things I shouldn't, but this.

Ellen clung to my back, sagging helplessly.

"Why are you doing this to me, but not to your sister?"

I wondered again. Of course, I'd lost to Loyar, and I've been losing ever since, and even with my enchantments, I'm still no match for him. But even though I know he doesn't want to hear it, I teasingly call him auntie, and he does.

I used to have to do that, but now I don't have to.

She said she'd let me know if I called her sister, and my eyeballs nearly popped out of my head when she said no.

How much do you really want to tease?

He's a quick thinker, so when I provoke him, he always gets beaten back and ends up like this.

"You're giving me ......."

"......what?"

"When I do, you pick me up."

If you're hit from behind, you'll be immobilized.

Then I'll give you a hand or pick you up.

So you're deliberately provocative?

"Is this ......?"

I was a little confused.

I'm not the kind of kid to say this.

Ellen remained still, her hand tightening around the nape of my neck. It was weak enough to break free at the slightest touch.

But I definitely felt empowered.

Ellen's breath on the nape of my neck made me feel a little weird.

"......."

Ellen had no answer.

I, too, had nothing to say.

I was walking along in silence.

['Preview' is enabled].

I stopped in my tracks as a message suddenly popped up in front of me.

I've only used it once so far. It was activated when Olivia Lance was taken away, so I tried it out.

I don't know the context, but it seems to signal that something important is happening.

[Preview - 100 points].

Nor is it showing multiple like last time.

Only one preview.

"......What's wrong?"

Ellen asked, squirming.

"No, nothing."

Your current achievement score is 5,730 points.

There's no reason not to.

[Use achievement points].

The world stops, and a point in time in this world is projected into my eyes.

Tuesday, October 23, 323 imperial year.

The date is today.

It probably means it's about to happen.

It was me in front of me.

I'm down.

A stab wound to the stomach.

I was lying in a pool of blood.

Next to me, Ellen leaned back against the wall, her back to the wall, with a similarly deep scar across her chest. Ellen's eyes were unfocused.

Me and Ellen are.

It's about to die.

I had goosebumps all over my body, scared to get back to reality.

Ellen and I are about to be killed by someone. Ellen, on my back, seems unharmed, but now I can barely lift a finger.

We don't really know what's going on, but we know that Ellen can't move her hands. It's not even a fight.

Who is killing me, why, and under what circumstances?

"......What's wrong? Are you sick? Are you heavy?"

"No."

Is the target me? Or is it both me and Ellen, killing me and eliminating Ellen as a witness?

I'm not sure, but it's a strong possibility that I'm the target.

We don't know anything yet.

With Ellen incapacitated, an assassin is targeting us.

Should I go back to the Rotary Club? No, this place is off the beaten path. No one flocked to my body in the scene I just saw.

You may be ambushed on your way back to the Rotary Club.

There was no sign of a fight on my fallen body.

I would not have recognized the attack.

Then ambush. We were attacked by assassins in this uninhabited neighborhood.

Go to a crowded place.

The Rotary Club's headquarters is located in the southern ecliptic, off the beaten path, making it a perfect target for assassins.

We don't know exactly where it is, but we do know this.

This is about to happen.

Return to the Rotary Club and be protected by Loyar, or make it as fast as possible to the last station and board the magic train.

You have to make a choice.

My heart was beating like crazy. I felt like I was going to lose my composure, knowing so suddenly that I was going to die.

I die, Ellen dies.

You have to think fast.

Should I take the scribe's advice?

No, the situation is about to happen and I don't have time to take the scribe's advice and think about it. I need to trust my intuition now.

Thankfully, this fucking asshole doesn't want me to die in vain. That's why he brought this to my attention.

"Reinhard, calm down."

"......."

"What's wrong. What's going on?"

Ellen whispered softly, concerned when I suddenly broke out in a cold sweat.

But I didn't have the presence of mind to answer.

It's off the beaten path, but that doesn't mean there aren't any passersby.

Is that him?

Or that one?

Or all of them?

You never know who's going to attack you and when, so you're forced to suspect everyone around you of being an assassin.

I don't feel alive. I don't even know what it is.

The wound was clearly penetrating, and a sword-like weapon was used.

It's unlikely that you'll be subjected to long-range sniping.

Going back to the Rotary Club is rather dangerous; you might get attacked on the way back.

"I'm going to run. Hold on tight."

"Yes."

I squeezed the hand holding Ellen and started running toward the Napa station.

I can't kill you.

That was all I could think about.

Episode 248.

Fortunately, there was no attack until I ran with all my might, carrying Ellen, and reached the station.

Assassination is literally assassination, not fighting, so it's possible that he realized I noticed and backed off.

Even when I got to the station and boarded the magic train, I didn't stop to look around.

The upcoming assassination had been averted. But it was just as likely to happen elsewhere, just in a different location.

"Come on, Reinhard, come on."

As we boarded the magical train and I continued to break out in a cold sweat and keep my eyes on my surroundings, Ellen scanned my complexion with concern.

Ellen had been up and now she was down. The horse-drawn train wasn't full, so there were a few empty seats, but I was standing.

Without a word, I grabbed Ellen by the nape of her neck and pulled her into my arms.

"All of a sudden why......."

"Hold still, hold still, hold still."

Ellen seemed taken aback by my sudden hug.

He's weakened now. He can't fight right now.

It should be kept closest to you. If anyone tries to use it, summon Tiamata immediately. None of the passengers were paying attention to me and Ellen.

It's just that the kids in Temple uniforms get a few stares from the outside world, like they're trying to get laid.

I kept my distance from the passengers, pulling Ellen into my arms and watching the surroundings.

Ellen did as I asked and stayed quiet, asking no questions.

It was a cool day.

I was breaking out in a cold sweat all over.

"It stinks......."

Ellen, her nose buried in my chest, grumbled softly.

"Be still."

"......Yes."

In response to my confrontation, Ellen replied in a slightly croaky voice: "I'm sorry.

\* \* \*

Nothing happened on the train until we got off at Temple Station.

Unlike the Rotary Club, Temple Station is a very high-traffic area. In a crowd, you never know when you might get a knife in the side.

So I waited for the crowd to clear out. Ellen knew I was serious and stuck close, not asking any questions.

Slowly, keeping your eyes peeled in all directions, you make your way out of the station. The assassin could be following.

Night was already falling, but there was a lot of foot traffic near the temple.

You shouldn't be lulled into a false sense of security, though.

A madman killing two people on the sidewalk. It's entirely possible that if he decides he can't kill them, he'll just run them over without looking back.

I slowly made my way to the temple entrance with Ellen at my side.

You don't know if your temple is safe, but you should hope so. If the assassin is an outsider, they won't be able to enter the temple.

Just like eliminating a possibility, it's the right choice to go back to the template, even if it's not reassuring.

I slowly but surely made my way to the temple, ready to summon Tiamata at any time if anyone tried to get more than a little too close in the milling crowds.

It was too long.

As I passed through the temple entrance, I was greeted with a familiar view.

Only a few faculty and students come and go. No one looks suspicious.

But from the outside, no one looked suspicious.

Have you given up?

They seem to have noticed, so did they go back?

Even on the tram ride back to the Royal Class dormitory, I didn't let go of the last string of nerves.

Once we arrived at the royal class dorm, I was able to relax.

My heart pounded even louder.

Saved.

The assassin never came. For now, you've escaped the death that was scheduled for today.

My legs gave out.

"And now....... Are you okay?"

Ellen didn't know, so when she saw the relief on my face, she asked anxiously.

I pulled Ellen into a wordless hug.

"Why, why are you doing this......."

Ellen didn't say anything, just held me still as I shivered. As if to tell me to calm down.

I couldn't say anything.

I couldn't say anything.

I didn't know if I was afraid of my own death or of Ellen's.

But that fear is gone now.

That's it.

\* \* \*

After being healed by the on-call priest, Ellen regained her strength.

In the middle of the night, in the rehearsal hall, I explained the situation to Ellen. I couldn't tell her the whole story.

"Who tried to kill us?"

"I don't know exactly, but it just felt like it."

"Shouldn't you be consulting ......?"

Ellen can't help but think I'm just being neurotic.

I can't even explain the preview, so I don't know what to say.

If an assassin attacked you, you'd know what I'm saying is true, but since nothing happened, you'd never know.

"Technically, he was trying to kill me, not you."

"......you? Why?"

"You went to the sponsorship meeting for the Magic Research Society grant last time."

"Yeah. I told you so."

"Because that's where I met someone named Saviolin Tana."

"I know, Chief Chanapelle."

Ellen nodded as if she recognized the name, which she rarely does.

"He said, 'You know, I've got a lot of enemies because of that whole Orbis class thing.'"

The mass measles the Orbis class would suffer, the damage it would cause. The displeasure the patrons would feel. The number of people who would hate me, the cause of it all, would be very high, Saviolin Tana said.

But I never thought they would go so far as to try to kill me. Of course, they're not the only suspects. They could be trying to kill me for some other reason I don't know.

"I'm not sure......."

Ellen still didn't seem to understand why I would suddenly do something like that under the circumstances.

"Still, if it's dangerous, don't go outside the temple anymore."

"......I should."

Ellen doesn't know if there really was an assassination attempt today or not. But she seems to agree that I'm in danger.

Ellen stares at me, still.

I messed up and ended up making a lot of enemies, enemies I couldn't handle.

"Don't die."

"I'm not dying."

"If you die, I die."

"What do you mean, all of a sudden?"

"I'm going to kill the person who killed you, and I'm going to die."

Ellen shrugged it off with a nonchalant expression.

"So, please, don't do anything dangerous."

Apparently, that was the point, and Ellen said so and squeezed my hand.

"I don't know about anything else, but....... I thought someone was going to kill me, too, so I thought....... Is that what you did?"

Ellen seemed to think I was trying to protect her the whole time.

"......Yes."

"If you're in the way, leave. I'm fine......."

"Bullshit."

With that, I pulled Ellen out of his arms and looked into his eyes.

"You're not the only one."

Ellen said she would die for me.

Just as Ellen was convicted in the Darklands, I had an epiphany upon returning to the Temple.

"I would die for you, too."

I, for one, could now return the favor.

Ellen's eyes widened at my words. She stared at me, then suddenly raised her hand.

-Bam!

"Eek!"

"Do you want to be an asshole?"

She laughed as she gave me the same answer I had given her back then, and the same chestnuts.

"Give me some food. I'm hungry."

I couldn't look at Ellen's smiling face properly.

\* \* \*

Just because nothing happened doesn't mean it's over.

[Event Occurred - Assassination Threat].

[Explanation: someone is trying to kill you; crush or subdue the source of the provocation].

[Reward: One related trait].

The event occurred a long time ago.

Rewards are abstract. However, trait-giving events have usually had powerful rewards.

But it's an event, it's a fluke, and lives are at stake, and we can't put a price on it. This is work that needs to be done without reward.

In addition to making me dodge death, the preview created a problem that I had to solve.

Someone, or some group, is trying to kill me. I need to determine their identity. They may be a group, or they may be a vengeful individual.

But who the hell is trying to kill me and for what reason.

The biggest one is the Orbis class. But in that case, killing me would be simple revenge. Killing me wouldn't solve anything.

Above all.

I don't know anything else, but I want to make sure I find the assassin.

It didn't happen, but he killed not only me, but Ellen as well.

Make sure you find it.

I don't know if it's right to seek revenge for something that didn't happen or not.

Anyone who does that for a living deserves to die.

He didn't kill me, he didn't kill Ellen, but he tried to.

It must be found and killed.

And I'm going to find out who's behind it and make them pay.

It was the first time I'd ever been so cruel, but in my mind, it wasn't a rejection.

I am not reassured. I don't take it for granted that my enemies are only outside the temple. There could be people inside the Temple who want to kill me, too.

Don't let go of the tension.

I wore disposable protection bracelets all the time.

While listening to the lecture and walking around the temple, I was paying attention to everything around me.

You never know if it'll give you one more preview when another threat is coming. You can't rely on a dirty trickster.

I felt like I was being drained alive.

The only place you can be sure is in the royal class dorms.

Unfortunately, it's hard to use connections in this situation.

Even Ellen, who was with me, thought I was being neurotic when I said there was an assassin.

If nothing happens and I go running around looking for help saying someone is trying to kill me, I have no proof.

You'll mess up here and there and end up looking like you've lost your mind.

I felt dirty.

If someone is trying to kill you, it's true, but to others it sounds like bullshit.

I need proof, and that would require me to actually be attacked by an assassin. And it's unclear whether or not I'll survive the process.

Of course, you could try to force Bertus, Charlotte, or the Temple to somehow protect you or help you, but they will probably take steps to prevent you from leaving the Temple.

In such a situation, I would rather not play my most important card.

Because I have allies that only I can handle.

I sent the letter outside the temple. Going out myself would be dangerous now that nothing is known.

\* \* \*

A few days later.

Someone knocked on my window.

One bird.

It pecks at the window as if it has something to say.

I opened the window and the little bird flew into my room in a flurry of shrieks, and I drew the curtains.

Last time it was Maid, this time it's Sara.

The little bird chirped and took on the form of a dainty user in a maid's outfit.

"Jae-hyung, it's been a while."

It was Sarkegar.

I wrote to Loyar at the Rotary Club and relayed the message in our own code word, "Send Sarkegar to the Temple," and he arrived shortly thereafter.

I don't think I'm a good leader.

I tend to favor my subordinates, not for work-related reasons, but for personal reasons.

He's the epitome of a boss in reverse.

I tend to visit Elise for no particular reason, just to chat about Temple life. She's a good listener.

Loyar tends to visit for work-related reasons.

Sarkozy, on the other hand, who goes by the pseudonym Count Argonne Pontheus, is rarely seen. I don't even know where he lives.

And then there's the part where I feel like the tension is always a little bit too high, and I feel like if you've been through me, you'll know that I'm not really interested in rebuilding the Demon Realm, so I kind of stay away from it.

I hadn't seen Sarkhegar in a very long time. Of course, it was in my private room, but it was a temple, so he didn't say anything unnecessary.

"I knew you were on the rise. Not to mention that you've already taken control of the transportation network of the Yellow Road......."

"Never mind."

"Yep."

Cancel.

I hadn't seen him in a long time and he started talking nonsense. He was obviously thrilled that I had called him.

"God, I would enter the fires of hell for degradation. Whatever you command."

I wish you'd stop saying such horrible things in your beautiful, soothing voice.

"I'm not asking you to go to the fires of hell, but I think I'm going to go to the fires of hell now."

"......What do you mean, degradation?"

"I think someone is trying to kill me."

"What kind of lowly horde of chewing, killing fiends would plot such a thing!"

They say that what you see is what you get, and Sarkegar, dressed as a maid, looked cute.

"If you say the word, I will tear them limb from limb and hang them on the cross for daring to try to kill the demonic enemy......."

"Why do they do that in the ecliptic?"

I told Sarkeghar, who was quite excited to hear that my life was in danger, the details of the incident. What had happened, and how it had made me many enemies.

"Um, so you're saying we don't know who's trying to degrade it yet?"

"Yeah, but I'm sure there is, I have a pretty strong gut feeling."

"Intuition, a great monarch must have great intuition. Your instincts are unmistakable. We will find this assassin and those behind him, Zhao Hai."

I love the idea of infinite trust.

It wasn't that they needed Sarkhegar's power. The only way to reach these creatures outside the Temple was to use Sarkhegar as a messenger.

Count Argonne Pontheus is recognizable in his own right, but there are other groups as well.

"Tell Elise about this, tell Loyaar, and tell the Thieves' Guild."

"Yes, let's all work together to stamp out those nefarious forces that seek to degrade us."

Well.

By human standards, if they're trying to kill a demon prince, they're not cruel, they're heroes and saviors of humanity.

Sarkozy is on my side, so I guess I can say that.

\* \* \*

My Temple connections won't believe me because they think I'm not credible. So I have to do what I can.

I wish an assassin had attacked me that day, it would have made things easier.

I'm not sure I've ever had such a bizarre thought.

If I did, many of my allies would have risen up and tried to find the assassin.

It's entirely possible that the assassin is not an organization, but an individual with a vendetta against you, in which case it would be extremely difficult to catch them.

I don't have a list of suspects in my head.

However, it's too much.

There's a lot of people out there who have a grudge against me.

So we'll just have to take it one day at a time.

It's an erasure method, eliminating possibilities.

Episode 249.

I closed my mouth to keep from scratching.

Ellen is the only one who knows I'm under assassination threat. And even she doesn't really believe it.

I had no choice but to continue my temple life with my nerves on edge.

"Are you feeling weird lately?"

On the way home from psychic class, Riana looked at me and said.

On days when I have psychic classes, I tend to go with Riana. Heinrich is also a psychic, but he feels like Riana hasn't played with him since he got the ugly hairs.

"What."

"You always look like shit, but you look even worse now. Did something happen? Did you have a fight with Ellen? It didn't look like it."

"Not really."

I've been walking around nervously, and it looks like I'm wearing a sign on my face that says, "Something's been going on with me lately.

......If you're breathing hard, you can't tell.

I made a short tongue-in-cheek comment.

"I think I've been making too many enemies lately."

I'm not going to lie, I didn't believe it if I told you, so I just kind of blurted it out.

"What do you mean, all of a sudden?"

"The whole Orbis class thing made me realize that there are a lot more people who have a grudge against me than I ever imagined, and there are probably as many of them inside the Temple as there are outside. So I'm a little hesitant, in case something happens."

"Wow, you care about that stuff, I'm surprised you're thinking about it."

My sister....... I'm not in the mood to deal with my sister right now.

Wait, this guy can do near-instantaneous auto-interception of any threat, right?

Should I stick around for a while?

......No, if I tried to stick around, she'd call me a nuisance and I'd be intercepted. Riana smiled coyly and patted my side.

"Why, do you think anyone would kill you?"

"Maybe."

"......?"

"No, I'm not saying it is, I'm saying it might be. You don't know people."

"......Are you taking this too seriously?"

Riana's reaction isn't much different than Ellen's.

"If the Orbis class is shut down because of this, there are a lot of people who will be hurt, and a lot of people who will resent me for causing it."

"Umm....... I guess."

But at my words, Riana shook her head.

"By the way, I don't think Orvis's class will be closed."

Riana seemed convinced.

"Based on what?"

"Specialized classes were created to produce great people, not to produce results. Even if problems within the class fester and burst, as long as the goal of producing great people is achieved, everything else is just noise."

It was exactly what Mr. Epinhauser had said to the disciplinary committee.

Dr. Epinhauser said that even if I had a temper tantrum, I was still a good person and should be tolerated. That's what the temple is for.

Therefore, in the same vein, it is true that Orbis Class is producing excellent talent as a result, even if there was violence between seniors and juniors and subordination of teachers.

So, the Orbis class is not going away.

Maybe pruning doesn't even happen.

Vice Chancellor Temple. The Assyrian Walcons also seemed to be aware of the problems with the Orbis class.

Contrary to my expectations, there may not be much going on with the Orbis class.

Students might actually be punished, and faculty might be kicked out. Riana seemed to think that the decision to close Orbis classes was unlikely.

It sounded like he had a point.

"So stop worrying so much and start smiling, asshole, I'm making you uncomfortable."

She said she could only say that because she didn't know what was going on, but when Riana smiled and said it, I felt a little reassured.

I mean trustworthy in a different way than Ellen.

Then, as soon as I got back to my royal class dorm, I heard something shocking.

"Orbis class is being closed!"

Herriot's words made Liana and I stare at each other in confusion.

"......."

"Uh, um. Is that how it works......?"

Riana scratched her cheek with her index finger with a dumbfounded expression.

\* \* \*

Closed.

One of the Temple's twin specialty classes, the Orbis class is said to have been created on purpose to encourage the Royal class to improve, but the Orbis class has also produced some very talented individuals over the generations.

As Riana says, it's a group that is serving its purpose well, regardless of its internal issues.

No matter how serious the problem of internalized violence, Riana's words convinced me that Orbis Class would not be closed.

"The school is closing? Are you sure?"

At Riana's question, Herriot nodded vigorously. He looked bewildered, as if he hadn't seen this coming either.

"I think it was decided at a meeting with the president. I don't know the details, but the school is closed."

An inflection point in history has occurred, so it's no surprise that Orbis Classes is closing. Were there a number of issues that festered to the point of closure?

While denying the absolute goal of developing and producing great people?

The Orbis class is, to put it mildly, an accessory to the Royal class.

The loss of the Orbis class will obviously have an impact on the Royal class.

"What happens to the kids who used to go there?"

"Well, I don't know about that, but....... Maybe you'll end up in a different class?"

We don't know the details yet.

Closing the Orbis class.

What I did was taken to an extreme.

"Hey....... I think you're in real trouble."

I don't want anyone to take it out on me and tell me what to do.

"You, tell me if you need to go somewhere."

Riana looks at me nervously.

At this point, I was seriously considering that my life might be in danger.

-Physics!

Sparks flew from the tip of Riana's index finger.

"With this, I can take out the bad guys with one shot."

Riana seemed to be willing to escort me at any time.

An escort to the Duchess.

That feels good.

\* \* \*

The closure of Orbis Class means that there must be enemies. It could be your fellow Orbis Classmates, or it could be your teachers.

Now that you've stung the hive and destroyed the hive itself, the homeless bees will focus their hatred.

So I was a little more cautious in my behavior.

I didn't go anywhere by myself. I never left my dorm after class. I always had Ellen with me or Riana by my side, because they knew I was in danger.

While Ellen's skills were reliable, Riana's security was a bit more assured.

Riana could react to unexpected surprises as long as she was in range.

Even so, the decision to close the school was surprising.

"I need to talk to you for a minute, Reinhard."

Then, out of the blue, Bertus called me over.

\* \* \*

"Don't be a brat for a while."

Bertus, who had summoned me, sipped his black tea and spoke casually.

Bertus started with that, even though I hadn't said anything.

"Now that the school is closed, there are a lot of people who have been harmed by you, individually and collectively. And even if all of them know that you weren't the actual cause, they know that you were the trigger, so if you go any further, you're not just going to trip over a rock, you're going to trip over a rock and fall off a cliff."

"......."

While trying to get rid of the Ender Wilton case and fix the Orbis class issue, things got out of hand.

"You're in a royal class dorm, and if you don't do anything, you'll be fine."

Don't mess with me. Obviously, I didn't want to get into any trouble either.

But Bertus' words sounded a little strange.

I'll be fine.

The word itself is cringe-worthy.

Bertus smiled, as if sensing that I had realized something.

"People tend to hate their internal enemies a little more than their external enemies."

Whistleblowers.

"Rilka Aaron......?"

"I don't know about you, but I don't think he's going to get disfellowshipped."

The Orbis collapse started with me, but it was Lilka Ehren's whistleblowing that was crucial.

I can be protected by princes and princesses and countless others, but Rilka Aaron cannot.

He's more dangerous than I am.

I took a risk and blew the whistle to end the injustice.

As a result, the Orbis class uncovered so many problems that it sank with them rather than fixing them.

Someone has to take the blame for all the damage done, all the anger that comes with it. People would come after me, but first they would not let Rilka Ern, who was Orbis class and had betrayed them, so to speak.

"What's going on with......?"

"The Temple is protecting me now, but it won't be forever. I'll probably be assigned to a different class, and the Orbis will split up, but there will be a gap at some point, and no one can be safe forever."

"......."

"Didn't we have a kidnapping of a princess in Emperor Emperatos?"

Nothing is absolutely safe.

Like Sarkozy kidnapping the princess.

By the way, if you want to kill Rilka Aaron, you can kill her.

Bertus's cold expression, especially cold today.

\* \* \*

I have enough to worry about with my own life, I can't possibly be responsible for Rilka Aaron's. Even I don't know who's after my life right now.

The Orbis first-years took collective action, even if it took a whistleblower in the form of Rilka Aaron.

Maybe they're all in danger.

The damage is done, and the members of the Orbis class will be scattered. Not all of them will have the Temple's protection forever.

Bertus will help me, but he won't help Lilka Aaron, and he has no reason to.

Back in the private room, I sat down at my desk.

It was past my bedtime, but I couldn't fall asleep.

Things don't always work out the way you think they should.

It doesn't remove the absurdity of the Orbis class, but it does make me scream about the absurdity.

I actually screamed, and the absurdity of the Orbis class was revealed.

Therefore, the class is closed.

But I didn't anticipate the amount of anger it would generate. I didn't realize it would lead to people trying to kill me and others.

I didn't realize that the Orbis class was more rotten than I thought.

If I stay still, I'll be safe in my royal class dorm room.

But until when?

I can't trust that the people who are after me will stop caring after a day or two.

This is how Rilka Aaron becomes dangerous.

If he dies, it won't be because of me, but it will be because of my actions.

I thought it was just a matter of identifying who was behind the assassination. It's a serious problem, but I didn't think it was unsolvable.

However, there are too many candidates at this point.

I don't know who the hell is trying to kill me, and I'm sure there are many more who would feel the same way.

What the heck am I supposed to do with this?

I can't figure it out. I think my head is blocked.

[Scribe's Advice] - 150 points

An ability I'd forgotten about for a while.

Like the preview suddenly foreshadowed my death and I was able to avoid it.

His advice completely changed my life.

It all started when I took the scribe's advice and met Elyse.

When you don't know what to do, a scribe's advice is unpredictable in its outcome, but clear in its instructions for action.

Clear advice and vague advice.

Clear advice dictates precise behavior.

Vague advice is abstract.

Vague advice is hard to understand, but if you do, it's likely to be safe.

Clear advice is likely to come at a cost.

It's possible that both outcomes are entirely good, and it's possible that only very bad outcomes will occur. Most likely, you'll see a combination of good and bad outcomes.

Last time, I didn't understand the vague advice at all. I only realized what it meant after the fact.

However, the scribe's advice is still worth 150 points.

You can afford to listen to both vague and solid advice, as long as you can afford the achievement points.

[advice from an obscure scribe].

[Why did the Orbis class close?]

As usual.......

Again, I'm not sure what you're talking about.

The decision to close the Orbis class was made at a meeting chaired by the Chancellor. It is entirely possible that there is an imperial hand in it.

It was closed because the problems with the Orbis class outweighed the purpose of the temple, which was to produce great people. There must be more to it than that.

We don't know at this point.

Bertus or Charlotte would know the details.

I was looking for some solid advice anyway.

[Solid scribe's advice].

[Meet Oscar de Gradias, alone].

Oscar de Gradias.

I kind of intuitively knew this name was coming.

Episode 250.

Meet Oscar de Gradias on your own.

Let's start with the bottom line.

If this is advice with both good and bad outcomes, then meeting Oscar is both the right answer and a risk.

He's bound to have some sort of connection to the assassin.

Apparently, he thought the situation was funny, rather than embarrassing, when he saw Rilka Aaron blowing the whistle while the disciplinary committee was in session.

He realized that we might be threatened with assassination, or actually die.

Did Oscar personally order the assassination?

I don't think so.

Is he connected to the person behind the assassination?

There's a pretty good chance it will.

Did Oscar know at the time of the disciplinary committee that Orvis's class would be closed?

We don't know that.

But it's clear that the way out of this situation is to meet Oscar.

It was never a good thing, and if we ever met again, we wouldn't have anything good to say about each other.

Nonetheless, you must meet him if you want to somehow resolve this assassination threat.

But he's objectively much stronger than me, and if he's serious, he could beat me to death with his bare hands.

I can see the danger in this advice, even though I haven't experienced it myself.

The obvious scribe even added the qualifier "alone.

If Ellen, or Riana, or anyone else is there, it means that Oscar won't be able to have a proper conversation with her.

If this is bad advice, it means I'm going to get killed by Oscar the moment I see him.

This advice from an obvious scribe was a test of courage, not reasoning.

I have to go where I might die. I don't know how Oscar will treat me.

Let's start with the vague advice.

Closing the Orbis class.

You need to know the real reason.

\* \* \*

The next day.

I had gotten advice from Bertus once, so this time I went to Charlotte.

After waiting for Charlotte and Scarlett to finish their early morning training, I found Scarlett in a park in Temple.

"Ah, Reinhard. Hello."

Scarlett looked at me and ducked her head.

"Uh, hi. And Charlotte?"

I'm not close to Scarlett, but I've gotten used to his stern demeanor since we've been taking swordsmanship classes together.

But Scarlett wasn't at her side.

Weren't we always working out together at dawn? Not always, but I seem to recall seeing you occasionally.

"Ah. If you're talking about the Empress, ....... She's not here."

"Yeah, they're giving up?"

Despite her lack of stamina, she seemed to be working hard, though she didn't seem to be gaining any. It was clear that Charlotte had a physical ailment, not a demonic aftereffect, so to speak.

"No, he's been going to school in Huangsheng lately, so he can't join us for early morning training."

School in the Yellow Castle?

That was another new one. It's been a while since I've seen Charlotte in the dorms, though we're in different classes and rarely run into each other.

"Suddenly?"

"It's only been a few days, he's got a lot on his plate......."

"Well....... I guess. I guess."

There would be the Orbis class issue, and Bertus and Charlotte would often go to school at the imperial castle rather than the dormitories if something happened to the imperial family, so it wasn't too strange.

This meant that Charlotte would still be in Huangshan, and fortunately, I had a class with her today, so we could meet up after class to talk.

Luckily, today is Thursday.

It was an integrated class day, so Charlotte was in the next class over.

After class, I caught up with Charlotte as she was heading out of the temple, not the dorms.

"Yes, Reinhard."

Charlotte stopped walking at my call.

But somehow, he seemed to be in a bit of a rush.

You're busy.

But when I asked if she had a few minutes, Charlotte nodded, saying that was fine.

"I won't be back until tea time, but I can talk to you for a minute."

Charlotte and I sat side by side on a nearby park bench.

Charlotte shook her head at my question.

"You want to know why the Orbis class was closed?"

"Uh."

"Why is that?"

"I thought you weren't going to leave until after school. I was wondering if there was a reason other than this incident."

Charlotte stares at me.

"Oh no. I see you're digging up something again, so you're trying to pull a fast one."

The shepherd boy's lament.

I'm actually doing this because I need to do something, but I'm not even going to tell you.

"Stay in your dorm, you know it's a dangerous time to get into trouble."

Charlotte says the same thing as Bertus.

These two, they pretend they're not, but when you look closely, they look so much alike. Sometimes I think they're twins.

He's actually a different kind of guy.

"It's no big deal, I'm just really curious, and it's something I'm involved in."

"Hmmm......."

Charlotte stared at me, then crossed her arms as if that was possible.

"It's not a complicated reason, it's just that I was being a jerk."

"Presumptuous?"

"There's been a mass resignation of teachers, and a lot of seniors have dropped out. They fled before they were punished, so to speak. More than half the teachers and students were gone."

"...... looks like a protest?"

"......Yes."

Charlotte smiled thinly.

"It's an act of solidarity, like if you mess with me, you'll have to face the destruction of the entire Orbis class. I'll make it like it never happened, so please come back," I thought you'd say something like that."

"......."

Pushed to extremes, the seniors and teachers of the Orbis class took collective action. The class itself might collapse, so why do more?" kind of thing.

It must have been a bluff. Charlotte's eyes were cold as she told the story.

"It's a challenge to the empire."

"......."

"They're supported by the empire, they're fed by the empire, they're housed by the empire, they're educated by the empire, and they dare to negotiate such insolence with the empire?"

The collective action of the Orbis Class faculty and seniors offended the imperial family, not Temple headquarters.

"That's why the decision was made to destroy it, because it's cheeky. There is no Orbis class, and there never will be."

Cornered, the mouse bit the cat. But the cat tore the mouse to pieces. Rather than be changed or punished, he risked the entire Orbis class, and the imperial court took it as a challenge.

So the Orbis class disappeared by imperial decree.

I'm stuck at a dead end, and I'm getting carried away. The Orbis class touched something that shouldn't have been touched.

"But they won't be punished because they didn't actually commit a crime per se, but I don't think they'll be punished for the numerous acts of coercion, assault, etc. that we're going to find out about within the Orbis class."

Yes, if you don't want to work, quit; if you don't want to learn, get out.

The closure of the Orbis class was, after all, a result of fighting something that shouldn't have been fought.

Originally, the Temple did not consider closing the Orbis class, but offending the imperial family led to extreme measures.

We know why the Orbis class was closed.

But then I thought, what's the point?

What does finding out who's behind the assassination have to do with the Orbis class being self-absorbed?

-Bang!

"Eek!"

Suddenly, Charlotte slapped me on the back.

"You look like you're about to do it again. Huh?"

"No, because I didn't say anything?"

"If I see you thinking so hard, you're going to try to do something else, I know it. I don't want you to stay in your temple. No, I don't want you to leave your dorm."

"Well, I still have to go to class!"

"Who told you to leave class? Don't go hanging out in weird places outside of class! Look at you catching pods, even though you understand everything! I'm serious."

She said there was no time. Charlotte grabbed me and launched into an almost speech-like rant.

A person who is nagged by an empress.

This is a unique position, isn't it?

I glared at the nag, thinking about how Charlotte would give me another slap on the back if she knew what I was thinking.

After firing at it for a while, Charlotte sighed heavily.

"Reinhardt."

"...... I think I've already been scolded enough, what else is there here?"

It was a different, more subtle look than the one I'd been nagging him with.

"Don't get into trouble. I'm genuinely worried about you, and I always have been."

For some reason, Charlotte's face looked sad.

You say you're busy, what's going on?

"Okay?"

Charlotte chimed in.

"......Okay."

"I gotta go. I'm sorry. I'd love to talk to you more, but I'm busy."

"......When will you be back in the dorms?"

The words that came out of my mouth when I was hanging on for dear life were pretty, well, pathetic.

"Well, ....... If you don't mess up, he might be here soon."

Charlotte narrowed her eyes and said.

I couldn't take my eyes off Charlotte's back as she walked out of the room.

For good.

\* \* \*

Once again, the vague scribe's advice didn't make sense right away.

So what we're left with is solid advice.

You must meet Oscar alone.

But this is too risky an option. You could meet with Oscar and get a clue, but there's too much chance that it could turn out to be a bad thing.

The stakes are too high. Can I win a real fight against Oscar, who can be enchanted even if I stab him with a protective bracelet in the flames of a fire?

Rilka Aaron's problem is one thing, but we can't hold our breath.

We can't stay in the temple forever.

For now, let's wait for information. There may be information I don't know yet.

\* \* \*

A few days later, Sarkegar came to visit.

"We were given a list of organizations whose business is assassinations."

The only way to get information about the Shadowlands is through the Thieves' Guild. Sarkegar scribbled down the names of several organizations in my notebook. All of them were new to me.

"Naturally, this is not an exhaustive list of all assassination groups, and there are hidden ones, and our infiltration has confirmed that there are no assassination orders for the Zodiac's inner circle."

I couldn't help but panic when he said that.

There are a total of five organizations in the ecliptic whose business is murder for hire, and in that short amount of time, Sarkegar has already infiltrated them.

How competent is this guy, if I didn't know any better?

In fact, he even kidnapped a princess from the Yellow Castle. Just as Loyaar and Eleris excel in their abilities, Sarkegaard is bound to excel in this area.

By the way, there are five organizations in the ecliptic whose business is murder.

I feel like I'm going to die.

"You mean ...... isn't going to get an organization-wide assassination attempt?"

"Yes, degradation."

If that's the case, then it's either a direct hit from a place that was after me, or an individual trying to stab me out of spite, and this is it.......

I wish I could have seen the beast's face in the preview, but I'm already grateful that he saved me from certain death.

Now I'm on my own.

Looks like we're going to have to meet Oscar after all.......

It's dangerous to do this alone.......

"Lowly, I'm going to go back to work."

"Uh, yeah. Good job."

Sarkegar changed from his maid form to a sparrow, just as he had when he entered the room.

"Hey, wait, wait!"

He gestured to Sarkegar, who flew away.

-tweet?

Sarkegar is in a sparrow state, scratching his head as if wondering what's going on.

"I need you to go somewhere with me for a while."

-Tweet!

Sarkhegar can change into any number of non-human forms.

So, it's possible to go alone, but not alone, and meet Oscar.

A sparrow is hopping around, expressing its joy with its whole body. Is my need for her so exciting in and of itself?

When it comes to loyalty, not purpose, there's no one like him.

I didn't do anything.

I feel sorry for myself.

Episode 251.

The decision has been made to close the Orbis class, but it will take time and process.

Students who submit a withdrawal form will be expelled from Temple for disruption, while those who do not will remain in Temple and be reassigned to another class.

It is my understanding that first years live in the General Quarters after being summoned there to protect them from retaliation by their seniors.

Seniors and juniors are all being investigated anyway, so the seniors are probably living in the Orbis class dorms.

If Oscar had dropped out, would I have to travel to Imperial Emperor to meet him? I'm pretty sure he didn't drop out, regardless of whether or not I could get in.

And he won't be punished.

because it didn't look like he'd ever touched a junior himself.

It is unlikely that the gnome, who does not directly ask for it, but indirectly expresses it, would have joined the active opposition of collective action. Even the imperial family wouldn't do that.

I walked out of the royal class dormitory like I was on some kind of covert operation.

If I tried to do anything else on my own, I'd have a bunch of kids to stop me.

Still, I have to clean up my own shit somehow.

I'm not actually going alone.

It flitted about, following me as far as I walked, keeping an eye on Sarkegar, who was perched on a branch nearby, watching me.

If it looks like it's going to get serious, Sarkegar will come in. I don't know what else to say, but it's insurance.

No matter what, it's better than dying.

Oscar killing me in the middle of the temple means his head is off, so I'm not going to try it anyway.

I only visited the Orbis class once and it was closed.

At this point, it's kind of like a cataclysmic entity, and since it's the devil, it's actually kind of right.

There's not a single one of the Orbis class guys that looks at me favorably.

Are we sure we're allowed to go to this one? I'm not sure if Oscar's the problem or if he's going to get stabbed by someone else.

\* \* \*

The Orbis class dormitory was designated as a controlled area. The Royal Class dormitories were also off-limits, but so was this one.

But now it's a cordoned-off area, meaning there are guards at the entrance to the building 24/7. Obviously, I couldn't get in.

In the dorms, I could see people dragging trunks around.

Seniors who have withdrawn and have been told to leave the Temple because of it.

All of them had a bad look on their faces.

But strangely enough, rather than being offended, the look on his face is one of determination.

The expressions on the faces of the seniors in the Orbis class were a bit odd, as they were seriously frozen.

Sarkegar, in the form of a sparrow, watches me from nearby.

"This is a cordoned-off area."

The guard guarding the entrance told me to back off, and I pointed to the back of the dorm.

"I don't want to go in, but I'd like to see someone, I need to talk to you."

Luckily, it wasn't an inflexible situation, and the guard asked who he was here to see.

When I told him I was here to see Oscar de Gradias, he nodded and another guard led me into the dormitory.

How much time has passed.

I see a blond young man walking down the hall toward the entrance.

"What do you want me to do with ......?"

After all, he didn't drop out.

\* \* \*

Oscar de Gradias seemed surprised to see me. Surely he had nothing to do with the assassination attempt?

He asks to talk, and just to make sure we're not completely grounded, we sit on a bench in a secluded spot near the dormitory. Sarkegar sits on a nearby tree branch and watches me.

He's just a sparrow now, but when he's in danger, he turns into a dragon.

Reassuring.

Contrary to my fears, Oscar didn't seem to have any animosity toward me. But you can never be too careful.

"Isn't it funny, you've only been in one fight, and the venerable Orbis class has been shut down."

"......That's not funny."

"Really? I'm having fun."

Oscar was just laughing his ass off. I don't know what he's thinking, but on the outside, he's just having fun.

This guy's demeanor at the disciplinary committee was weird, too.

He didn't try to defend himself, he didn't blame me, and he was briefly taken aback by Rilka Aaron's bombshell comment, but he found the whole situation amusing.

Even now, he doesn't seem to have much of a grudge against me. He hides his emotions well, and there's no reason for me to like him personally.

"Are you afraid of retaliation?"

He even knew exactly why I was here, even though I hadn't said anything.

"To be honest, yes."

"It's a silly worry. Of course, after that incident, most of Orbis's class hates you, and a lot of other people are bound to dislike you as well, but what good could come of touching you? All that's left is the fact that you hurt a classmate of the prince and princess."

Why are they so kind to tell me all this?

I thought I might be in for a fight with this guy, but the mood was getting weirder and weirder.

"Don't assume that everyone in the world is as emotional as you are."

I couldn't and didn't want to deny it because it was true.

No one touches me directly because it's too risky.

But there must have been some emotional asshole who tried to poke and prod me and Ellen!

"Well....... I don't think I have any ideas, and I don't think anyone else would touch you if they had any, except, of course, for those who would take it personally, so be careful if you run into anyone from Orvis's class on Main Street, that's all."

Oscar chuckled and patted me on the shoulder.

"So just relax, behave, and go to class."

Why is he in such a good mood, and why doesn't he have any feelings left for me. He says something and then stares at me.

"Hmmm. Nope. Go ahead."

What the hell was he thinking, Oscar could only say.

Oscar de Gradias was the first to stand up, telling me to go.

There was no sign of what I was worried about. There was nothing I could see, nothing I could understand.

I felt possessed. If I'm not mistaken, Oscar didn't really feel anything for me, and he even seemed to be grateful.

Oscar returned, and Sparrow perched on my shoulder.

"Something sucks."

-Tweet!

The sparrow chirps in response.

"So is Oscar, so is the Orbis class, so it's weird."

That's weird.

I'm not sure what's going on here.

I'm sure there are people who want to kill me for the Orbis class incident. But Oscar tries to reassure me that it won't happen.

Of course, it's entirely possible that it's a lie. Maybe it's just trying to catch me off guard and poke me.

Assassination attempts on me are not happening....... It's just a burdensome thing to do.

He's right.

They're right on the money.

But Oscar is having fun.

I found that so strange.

It's not the closing of the Orbis class that's the problem, it's something else that's going on in real time that's suspicious and disturbing.

What was that assassination attempt on me all about? Was it a vengeful individual after all?

Instead of solving the problem, it just made it more complicated.

However, Oscar is hiding something.

That's all I could feel.

"This, figure out what it is."

-Yes, degradation.

"Whoa, surprise!"

The sparrow spoke out of the blue, and I couldn't help but be startled.

\* \* \*

There is a demon called a doppelganger. These demons are common in many myths and legends, so they are well known to humans.

Doppelgangers are very few in number and are not a native race to the Darklands, so they are more often found in the world of humans.

A type of demon that shapeshifts into the form of someone and pretends to be that person.

Doppelgangers can be portrayed as evil or just plain mischievous.

A doppelganger that takes on the appearance of someone else.

Dreadfind, a fleshy shape-shifter.

Dreadlocks are the perfect backward compatible counterpart to doppelgangers.

As a member of the Dreadfind clan, the easiest thing for Sarkegar to do is to eavesdrop on someone's conversation.

They don't get to the size of a mosquito, but they can get to the size of a cockroach. And being cockroaches, they're pretty good at hiding.

Sarkhegars do not naturally favor becoming small. Due to the durability issues of their transformed form, if they die in that state, they actually die.

Sarkegar does what he does best: eavesdrop.

Two, uncovering secrets.

Everyone has a confidante.

If you pose as one of those beings, the answer is easy to get. Of course, this is a risky approach because you'll have a memory of meeting and talking to someone you've never met.

For now, Sarkegaard uses the first method, which is the easiest.

Sarkhegar can infiltrate temples that are surrounded by numerous bonds. This makes it easy to infiltrate the Orbis class dormitories, where guards stand at the entrance.

Gaps in doors, inside closets, under furniture.

There are many places to hide and many ways to infiltrate.

Sarkegar entered the dormitory in the form of a bird and followed Oscar de Gradias. When he opened the door to his private room, he transformed into a tiny wheel and flew through the doorway, ducking into a crack behind a closet.

Eavesdropping with magic or Familiars can be broken and prevented, but Sarkhegar is alive and well.

When you become a cockroach, you really become a cockroach. You're just a cockroach with the soul and intellect of a Dreadfind.

The polymorph equivalent of a polymorph is the ability to transform.

The only thing that can stop Sarkegar in this state is insecticide, not anti-eavesdropping magic.

The only places Sarkegar hasn't been able to get into are a few palaces in the imperial city of Emperatos, where security and chains have been tightened since the kidnapping. There are places where not even a bug can get close.

One of them was the Imperial Palace, where Charlotte de Gradias was staying.

Luckily, the Orbis Class dorms, with their excellent hygiene, didn't have a bug problem, so I didn't find myself spraying insecticide everywhere.

There's no reason to worry about not having one.

So Sarkozy stayed put in Oscar de Gradias's private room.

I've canceled all my errands as Count Argon Ponteus, so there's nothing to keep me busy. My lord needs me first.

Cockroach Mode Sarkegar scales the wall and looks down on Oscar's private room from the top of the closet.

A few trunks that look like they're packed. Oscar hasn't withdrawn, so if he's moved to a different class, he's probably packing to go there.

It's a room that's ready to go, but there's nothing special in it. It looks like you've already packed up your books and everything else.

Oscar was sitting at his desk. You can't see his expression because he's looking down from above.

I'm not writing or doing anything.

He just crosses his arms and seems to be thinking about something.

For a while.

There's no reason to talk to yourself, so just sit still.

Sarkegaard moves to a position where he can see Oscar's expression. If the cockroach comes out, he's going to make a mess, so be careful not to get spotted.

Oscar's unseen expression was a smile.

Oscar smiled and seemed to think about what was so funny, over and over again.

-Smart

A sudden knock on the door.

Oscar gets up and opens the door.

"Oscar, your letter has arrived."

"Yes. Thank you."

A letter addressed to you.

Oscar unfolds the letter and reads it. Sarkegaard switches positions once again, strengthening his eyesight to read the contents of the distant letter together.

[This is in response to your last question about the theory of magic algebras.

I've looked into the theory, and it does work, but I suspect there are some prerequisites to properly theorize it].

Sarkozy was full of stories of incomprehensible expertise. Was he writing to a research institution somewhere with a question about his specialty or a new theory?

Sarkeghar skims the contents of the letter in silence.

The letter is full of incomprehensible jargon, but Sarkozy realizes that it doesn't matter what it says.

There's something about a letter full of academic jargon that gives me that look.

The content of the letter probably doesn't bring much scholarly joy.

Oscar's expression is one of jubilation. Sarkozy is convinced by Oscar's reaction, which does not match the content of the letter.

Although the details are unknown.

That's a cipher letter.

Oscar is exchanging cryptic correspondence with someone.

I realized I was reading something completely different from what it said at face value.

That alone was enough of a harvest.

This time, Sarkeghar sees an envelope, not a letter.

[Outgoing - Imperial Second Magickal Research Institute].

You have a specific place to go next.

Infiltration and information gathering.

Sarkegaard specializes in that more than anyone else.

\* \* \*

Once Sarkegaard figured it out, he passed it on to me first.

"You appear to be exchanging encrypted correspondence with someone......."

"Yes degradation."

It wasn't just a feeling, Oscar was actually feeling good. The encrypted letters, the students dropping out, the closing of Orvis's class.

That makes a lot of guesswork possible. But at this point, they're all guesses, and we can't be sure of anything.

Is Oscar really not behind my assassination?

I was becoming increasingly convinced that a mass assassination attempt was not going to happen.

I feel like what's going on with Oscar is completely separate and unrelated to me.

I'll have to look into that, but right now I'm more concerned with who's trying to kill me.

The most likely suspects were the patrons and seniors of the Orbis class, the powers that be, and Oscar de Gradias. But I have a feeling, and I have a feeling that it's not you.

I smell an organization there. I don't know what kind of organization, but they have taken organized action, a collective boycott.

It's clear that the Orbis class is organized, and their interests are not mine.

So what was the scribe trying to tell us?

I took a risk and met with Oscar, and while I don't have any solid information, I've gotten the scoop that he doesn't care about me at all.

If so, it goes down to the next highest priority.

Clear a bunch of dragons out of your head.

I've got a feeling about this one.

If the Orbis class is organized, he can never be organized.

If he was there, he was sure it was a front.

Of all the guys who would have a personal grudge against me, the one who might actually try to kill me.

However, we don't yet know if it's him or not.

He was going to do something about it later, so I already knew his identity.

He's a character, but he's a one-off villain, and I have a laughable memory of forgetting his name and then remembering it again while flipping through the instructor roster.

"There's a guy named Aaron Medeiros who teaches at Temple."

"Yes."

Alchemist and one of the Temple's dedicated alchemy teachers.

He is not a member of the Orbis class.

"Look into him. Report back as soon as you find anything."

The one who gave Ender Wilton a black magic enhancement.

"Yes, degradation."

A wizard who is actually a member of a magical order called the Black order.

He's probably very resentful that his lab, Orbis Class, has been shut down.

It's entirely possible that it's not him.

If not, move on to the next highest suspect.

Because I have Sarkegar.

Sarkegaard didn't ask how they identified him.

It just does what it's told.

Loyalty.

So good.......

\* \* \*

That night.

Inside the Yellow Star Emperatos.

The Palace of Spring, the Empress's bedchamber.

The imperial family has been in a state of emergency for some time.

Few knew the details of the situation, but those who did knew that the mood in the imperial court was uneasy.

It's not a problem with the Orbis class.

Even though the Temple is one of the Empire's most important businesses, it is, after all, a business.

The imperial family was now plagued by internal problems.

Some may have rejoiced in this anxiety, but in the grand scheme of things, the imperial family could not afford to be concerned with external affairs right now.

"Your Majesty, you must now go to bed."

At Dyrus' words, Charlotte smiled bitterly from her rocking chair.

"......I know it's pointless, but I can't sleep."

At his side was not only Dyrus, but also Xaviorin Tana, the leader of the Imperial First Knights of Shanapelle.

"You might get better if you keep your stamina up."

Despite Savior Tana's words, Charlotte remained still in the rocking chair, rocking.

Late at night.

There was no one else in the palace that housed the queen's bedchamber but the two of them. In the deserted Palace of Spring, Charlotte sat dazedly in her rocking chair.

"The reward, what happened?"

"You might as well not bother with that......."

"Reward."

Charlotte looks at Saviolin Tana.

"How did it go?"

"We've taken steps to ensure that ...... is not disturbing."

"I don't feel bad......."

Charlotte covers her face with both hands, mumbling incoherently.

"How much money is enough to make you not feel bad for the life of someone you wouldn't trade for anything, and is it even worth it in the first place......."

"Your Highness......."

At Dyrus's words, Charlotte uncovered her face with both hands.

The Empress's right pupil had turned pitch-black.

"That's funny, I killed him and you're saying that."

At Charlotte's melancholy tone, Dyrus shook his head resolutely.

"Your Highness did not kill him."

"If I didn't do it, then what did I do? With my own hands, with my own abilities, I killed a maid who had worked in my palace for many years, and if it wasn't me, then who did it?"

This time, it was Saviolin Tana.

"You're unconscious, you've just been knocked unconscious for a moment by something, and that's why you don't even remember what happened, so it can't have been you, and you'll get better soon."

Charlotte's expression didn't improve at Saviolin Tana's worried and hopeful outlook.

It gets better.

How can we trust that things will get better when they're only getting worse?

Now, every now and then, consciousness is stolen by an unidentified entity.

"I am here by edict, Your Majesty, just in case, and nothing will happen to me now."

Saviolin Tana's stay at the Palace of Spring was ordered by the Emperor.

Concentrating, Charlotte slowly pushed back the force that had taken over her right eye.

Now even this isn't working. Tana comforts her, and Charlotte looks at her.

"Lord Tana, you don't have to tell me anything too obvious."

"......."

"You're here to deal with me, just in case."

"Sire, that will never happen, not even as long as I take my own life!"

Charlotte smiled sadly as she watched Saviolin Tana's complexion turn white.

"I don't say this to chastise you, Lord Tana."

Charlotte closes her eyes and murmurs to herself.

"I'm just trying to ask you, when the time comes, not to hesitate."

"......."

"Can you promise me that you won't hesitate?"

After a moment of silence, Saviolin Tana answered.

"I can't promise you that, ever."

"......."

Charlotte was leaning back in her rocking chair with a sad smile on her face.

The sleepwalking that started at the end of our second semester group mission.

Standing barefoot in the hallway of the mansion in the middle of the night, Charlotte thought she was dreaming.

It wasn't until he saw Reinhardt's face that he realized it wasn't a dream and that he had moved in his sleep.

Charlotte hoped it was sleepwalking, but by the time she decided not to stay in the dorm anymore, she knew it wasn't.

Even though I knew it wasn't. I vaguely wanted to believe it.

But now I know it's not that simple.

The things that happened to him made him realize that what was happening to him wasn't just a disease.

Still, as long as I didn't fall asleep, I was fine.

I couldn't be conscious of anything without falling asleep.

But now, even if I didn't fall asleep, my body was being taken over at some point.

Every time she thought the end was near, Charlotte's eyes would flicker to someone's face.

The two.

Charlotte was sad that she couldn't tell them both.

"I'm afraid of the night."

Charlotte could only mumble, helplessly.

Episode 252.

Someone is trying to kill Reinhardt.

Ellen still didn't believe it. But she also didn't think it was mindless paranoia. She'd done enough to earn Reinhardt's grudge here and there, and this whole Orbis Class thing had made it even worse.

Reinhardt was definitely weird back then.

He suddenly broke out in a cold sweat and became wary of his surroundings.

Then she returned to the temple, tense as if she had never left his arms.

Obviously, she didn't feel anything. Ellen knows her senses are highly developed. She could sense Loyar's murderous intent.

Reinhardt felt a killing intent that he did not.

It seems unlikely, but Reinhardt is convinced.

So he's been having a hard time lately. I could tell he was nervous.

For the sake of staying fit, I try to keep my training moderate, and only take a few steps back.

You can take care of yourself.

Reinhardt wants to help.

I don't see that it's already helping enough.

Reinhardt is dangerous.

I want to do something about it.

I want to reassure him that there is no such thing as an assassin and put Reinhardt back in his place.

If I had an assassin, I'd do something about it with my own hands.

Weekend.

Ellen had told Reinhardt not to do anything dangerous, and was outside the temple.

This would be dangerous if it were Reinhardt, but it's Ellen, so she's not doing anything too risky.

Ellen is already a superhuman, far above the ordinary. She can slice through dozens of clumsy assassins.

However.

You don't know what to do, and you don't know where to start.

I wanted to ease Reinhardt's anxiety somehow.

I want to reassure you that there is no such thing as an assassin.

So Ellen walked out of the temple.

Ellen believes there are no assassins. Better that there aren't. It's better for Reinhardt's sake that he's neurotic.

But now Ellen has gone outside the temple to find the assassin.

Not knowing what to do, Ellen is now convinced that there is an assassin, or a group of assassins, trying to kill her.

Someone wants Reinhardt dead.

It's a little creepy, but I can't help but think about it.

How do I kill Reinhardt?

The condition is two.

Is the person inside the temple. Is the person outside the temple?

For now, you're right to think of it as external.

Reinhardt wasn't behaving as strangely inside the temple as he had last time.

If so, it's more likely to be outside the temple.

Though he didn't feel it, Reinhardt felt alive then. Assuming the assassin was there, why didn't he strike?

He would execute the assassination under optimal circumstances, and this was the perfect time. Ellen was exhausted and Reinhardt was carrying her.

But Reinhardt noticed.

This suggests that the assassin is a cautious person.

An unwitnessed assassination in a deserted area. As soon as he was surrounded by a crowd, the assassin disappeared.

The optimal conditions for assassinating Reinhardt do not exist after that day. Reinhardt hasn't left the Temple.

Is this not possible inside a temple?

Standing at the entrance to the temple, Ellen looks around.

"......."

If you don't have a pass, you won't even get past the checkpoint inside the temple. It's a system similar to entering a station on a maglev train, but much more rigorous.

Convinced that there is an assassin, Ellen tries to follow the footsteps.

Ellen didn't hesitate to enter the Temple's access control.

"This is Ellen, number A-2, first year Royal Class."

Ellen walks into the administration office and shows her student ID. Even though she's wearing her school uniform, she doesn't want to raise any unnecessary suspicions.

"Oh, what's going on?"

"Can someone who is not authorized to enter the temple enter the temple?"

"......?"

The custodial staff shook their heads at the question from the out-of-the-blue Royal Class student.

"Of course not, right?"

"Never?"

"Why is that, are you worried about the security of the temple?"

"I'm just curious."

There's no reason for me to answer a student who comes to me and asks me this, but he's a Royal Class student.

The employee kindly pointed to the temple entrance gate, albeit with a bit of embarrassment.

"You seem to be worried that they might try to climb over the fence or something, but that's not going to happen. First of all, the fence is high enough that a normal person can't jump over it, and there's a barrier circle on top of it. If you try, you'll set off alarms, and then you'll be hit with a stun-type automatic defense spell that will immobilize you until help arrives. Likewise, I'm not dropping any birds, but the Temple's defenses are dome-shaped and impossible to penetrate from the air, though technically they can detect flying objects and deal with them if necessary."

"What about fake IDs?"

"Impossible. They're magically treated, so each one is unique."

"Couldn't I use someone else's credentials?"

"Hmmm....... I see what you're worried about."

A student who drops by unannounced and asks about security issues at the temple.

We don't know why, but it seems very serious.

"If you steal a pass and use a disguise or camouflage spell, we won't recognize you, but the moment you walk through the gate, we'll check you with Dispel. Your disguise will be unraveled then, and we'll be checking you with a biosignal analyzer the whole time, so you'll still be detected if you disguise yourself in any other way."

"There's more than just faculty and students at Temple, isn't there?"

"Hmm. Not everyone can be considered safe, but the same standards are applied when selecting employees to work within the Temple or those who open stores within the Temple as when selecting those who work for the Imperial Household. Of course, problems will inevitably arise, but the safety of our students is our top priority in this matter."

Temples have very few holes.

Ellen confirms it.

When I say rarely, I mean there are. Checking for camouflage magic with Dispel means that if the person is wearing a camouflage cloth over their face, you won't recognize them.

A biosignal analyzer might be able to identify it, but magic tools are not foolproof. Ellen knows that someone who is very skilled with a machete can disrupt it.

You can also buy someone from the staff and students. You can also buy someone from among the many people in the temple.

It is not impossible for an outside organization to assassinate Reinhardt from within the Temple.

Absolute safety guarantees are inherently impossible in temples, which are overcrowded places.

That's more of an inevitability than a failure of the temple.

"Yes, thank you."

With that, Ellen walked out of the gate.

Ellen realizes that while the Temple is safe compared to other places in the ecliptic, it is not absolutely safe.

Ellen doesn't have the immense power of her classmates, and all she has is strength and brains.

Thoughts and actions, that's all she can do.

Imagine you're the leader of an assassin organization, and you've been hired to kill a Temple student.

I had one chance, but my opponent saw it coming.

The target of the detected assassination threat is not leaving the temple.

If so, there are two ways to do it.

You must either assassinate your opponent inside the temple or wait for them to leave the temple.

To assassinate someone inside a temple, you'll need someone with a temple pass, and you can bribe them or somehow steal their pass, then disguise yourself as them and enter the temple.

In this case, there is the issue of having to pass a biosignal analyzer, which is difficult but not impossible.

Of course, getting inside the temple isn't the end of the story. You'll also need to infiltrate the royal class dormitories.

Royal class dormitories are not guarded, but there are teachers on duty. It's not impossible, but it does put everyone on alert when a stranger suddenly shows up.

Royal Class is for the elite.

Infiltrating and assassinating every single student in a place where they might have some sort of power is a bit of a stretch. The chances of getting away with it are very slim.

While it's not impossible to get into the Temple, it's very difficult to get out safely after killing Reinhardt there.

They want to assassinate Reinhardt without being found out.

If you can't assassinate in a temple, you're left with only one option.

Waiting for Reinhardt to come out of the temple.

"......."

If there are assassins, Ellen realizes one thing that should be obvious.

The entrance to the temple is currently under constant watch by assassins.

You never know when Reinhardt is going to show up, and you want to take advantage of that.

For them, perseverance is easier than eating.

Standing in odokani at the entrance to the temple, where faculty and students come and go, Ellen looks around.

Somewhere out there, the assassin's eyes are on Reinhardt.

And if it's true that an assassination attempt was about to take place then.

The assassin's eyes would have already caught sight of him on Reinhardt's back.

If so. your information is probably already being shared among assassins.

In the name of Reinhardt's friend.

Soon.

If the assassin is here.

He must be looking at himself right now.

Surely Ellen had read the life in Loyar's eyes when he tried to kill her. It wasn't in the expression, the momentum, or anything else.

It just felt instinctive.

Like an animal instinct, like you were born to feel things like that.

Read the animosity toward me.

Read the murderous intent toward Reinhardt.

It's a different world from magickal sensitivity.

Ellen tries to feel. Who is watching her, is there really an assassin in this room?

I wonder if this is how Reinhardt felt when he tried to enchant.

I feel nothing. Reading life is instinctive, but I don't know how to actively feel it.

I don't know.

That sense of not knowing what to do.

That moment when I wondered if I had gone too far, because I felt like I knew how Reinhardt felt.

"......."

Ellen feels.

A gaze that is not directed at you.

It was the first time Ellen had ever been surprised by her own voice.

I can't believe this is possible.

I wouldn't call it murderous, but I do feel like I'm being watched.

I wondered, how far can I go?

Why in the world would they do this?

Ellen walks somewhere, afraid of herself, but also feeling eyes on her without looking.

There is only one "eye" that feels right.

Ellen walks somewhere.

The watcher is not on the sidewalk, but in a nearby cafe. You're not looking, but you're being looked at.

Ellen didn't look at him, either, but she 'eyed' him and moved away from the temple entrance.

"Reinhardt.

As expected, when Ellen moves, the observer moves with her.

"I'm sorry I didn't believe you.

I'm afraid that I was born something other than human.

"Still, I'll protect you.

I would do anything for Reinhardt.

Whatever you were born as, you will become anything. I can be more than a monster.

Ellen thinks so.

When I heard Reinhardt say that you can die for yourself.

If only I could feel that feeling again, like I had the world at my feet.

That you can be a monster and endure anything.

Ellen believes so.

An alley in the Eredian District.

The wait wasn't long.

-Bang!

"Boom!"

Ellen held her breath as the Watcher followed her into the alley, and then promptly pounced on him from behind.

Her eyes are as still as Ellen's lake.

But the behavior was never calm.

"Kook! Kook!"

Ellen held the fallen Watcher's mouth open and shoved a rag that had been rolling around on the floor to stop him from blabbering.

"Oof! Oof!"

Ellen's calm eyes look down at him.

"Who you are."

"Who made you do it."

"Why."

Ellen looks at him with an eerie expression.

"Say these three words and I'll let you live."

"Boom!"

"Nod your head if you understand."

Ellen's face was expressionless, but there was murder in her eyes now.

But Ellen's eyes widened at the bizarre phenomenon unfolding before her.

-Pooh-pooh!

An eerily thick line of blood begins to emerge from the man's face.

-Puck! Billion!

"!"

The vein burst, splattering with blood. Ellen immediately activated her magical enhancement to shield herself from the blood, but the damage was done.

"Woo, woo, woo, woo, woo, woo!"

-Puddle! Quack!

Suddenly, the man's veins bulged and his eyes rolled back in his head.

Before your eyes, a man flips over and dies.

Ellen stared blankly at the dead body.

-Push! Push!

Then, something comes out of the corpse's swollen veins.

'worm......?'

Grotesque, black, wormlike insects crawled out of the man's veins, crumbling to dust and disappearing.

I don't know.

Not sure.

The dead man's blood had long since dried up.

Even the wound where the worm-like insect had pierced him had healed. The man was suddenly like a dead body.

Ellen couldn't understand what was happening in front of her, but she knew what was coming.

As it is, you'll be mistaken for killing it.

Ellen looks down at the body of the man who died so suddenly and contemplates.

Should I go to security? If I explain that I'm a Temple student, I'm likely to be investigated and released.

But time.

It's going to take time.

I don't know much about magic, but I'm pretty sure it has something to do with it.

With the body in front of her, Ellen contemplates.

The dead man appears to have been controlled by a bug.

Is this magic?

Can the temple detect this magic?

Can someone being controlled by a bug enter a temple?

Probably not.

Otherwise, the worms would already be in the temple, trying to kill Reinhardt.

Someone controlling people with a bug is behind the assassination. However, those who are controlled by these bugs are not allowed to enter the temple.

The inside of the temple is still safe.

Ellen knew there was an assassin, and she had one very big clue.

And now you have to make a choice.

If so, you will have to spend countless hours trying to figure out why this person died and deny the charges against you.

Days.

Be prepared to be interrogated for days. It's a murder case.

Those few days are precious time.

Ellen looks down at the dead man.

In an alleyway, with no witnesses.

You didn't kill it.

The person was being manipulated and is most likely innocent by nature.

"I'm sorry.

Your bitterness.

I can't take responsibility for you right now, but I'm going to find out who did this to you, Ellen vowed to herself as she rose from her seat.

For now, we need to get to Reinhardt.

You need to make sure you're okay.

As Ellen ran toward the temple with the body out of sight, guilt rose in her heart.

\* \* \*

"Reinhardt!"

"Uh, why."

Reinhardt was practicing with Klippmann in the Royal Class dormitory, on the practice range.

I was a little nervous, as if something was going on, but nothing happened.

"What are you doing, why are you sweating like this, where have you been?"

"Huh? Ah....... No. Just."

There was a real person trying to kill you.

I don't know what it was, but the guy died of his own accord.

I left that dead body alone, and I ran here because I was worried about you.

Ellen started to say that, but then stopped.

If you tell him, he'll try to do something on his own again. If he gets a clue, he'll definitely try to do something dangerous on his own.

He's that kind of guy. He's going to put himself in danger again.

"Want to train?"

Reinhardt tries to hand you his training sword.

Normally I would have accepted, but not this time.

Not as much as today.

Reinhardt knows nothing.

But she knows she's in danger. So he doesn't venture outside the temple.

"No, I have work to do today."

It's better to be safe, to know nothing. Leaving the rehearsal hall, Ellen walks down the hall.

I will find it.

Make sure you find it.

'Find and.......'

My head was spinning.

"I'm going to kill you.

Ellen flies into a rage.

Episode 253.

Ellen doesn't know much about magic beyond basic common sense.

But I'm not convinced that the bugs that control people are magical.

If it's a normal creature, there's no way the person it's planted on can't enter the temple.

The clue is magic.

So Ellen went to see Herriot.

It's the weekend.

Herriot is pursuing his research in a new club called the Magical Research Society.

So Ellen went to the Hufflepuff house.

Herriot was intrigued by Ellen's visit, but followed her outside anyway.

"What's going on?"

Herriot was curious that Ellen had come to a place she had no reason to be, but he was even more curious about her purpose.

"A bug that can host and control humans?"

"Yeah, is there such a thing?"

"Is there a ......?"

Herriot shook his head.

"Why do you want to know that?"

Ellen wondered if she should tell Harriet this story.

It would be foolish not to enlist the help of a magic student.

But I just can't bring myself to say it.

If you tell the truth, you're telling Reinhardt that you're about to do something dangerous.

Herriot would definitely discourage that.

Even if you are convinced. I can't do anything dangerous with Harriet. You can risk your own life, but you can't risk your friend's life.

"I can't tell you why, I'm sorry, but it's important."

Ellen is a flimsy liar, so let's just be honest.

"Can you find out?"

"......."

Herriot stares at Ellen.

What matters.

It's Reinhardt's job, Harriet can guess. If it's not Reinhardt's job to make Ellen look like that, I don't know what is.

I don't know Reinhardt's work.

I've been having a bad day lately, and I wonder if it has something to do with it.

Herriot feels defeated again by Ellen.

"Yeah, I'll look into it."

Nevertheless, Herriot nodded.

\* \* \*

Ellen didn't enter the Magical Research Society mansion.

I said it was okay to come in, but Ellen said she would wait outside.

Herriot doesn't know much about manipulative bugs or the magic that goes with them. She has some knowledge of magic, but nothing of the sort.

A parasite that can manipulate and even kill people would be of the black magic variety, and a good wizard would not be interested in such things.

Of course, that doesn't mean that Anna de Guerna, a black magic major, is an undesirable sorceress.

The magic is always in the application.

While Pain-type curses that cause horrific pain are banned, a fireball dropped in the middle of a crowded plaza is even worse.

Herriot knows nothing about the supposedly black magic, so he returns to the Magic Institute to find Anna.

Herriot says Anna is a bit of a prude.

It's not because of a slightly sullen tone or tone of voice.

Every time I look at Reinhardt, I feel a little weird.

Stare at it with a sticky feeling.

I have no idea why, but it's weird.

It's a bit risky, I keep thinking.

It's not that she's a black magic major, it's just that she's dangerous. Reinhardt can sense that Anna's constant stares are making her feel uncomfortable.

So Harriet is a little leery of Anna.

Still, it was Ellen's request, so Harriet found Anna.

Anna hasn't been told what to do by Reinhard.

He can usually be found helping his classmate Christina with her research, or learning from Louis Ankton how to better cast spells and manipulate magic.

"Bugs that control people?"

"Hmm. Is there such a thing? I'm guessing it's a Parasite type of magic."

"Hmmm......."

Anna tilts her head, her eyes cloudy and troubled.

Left, then right, then left again, then right again.

After a long pause, Anna opens her pale complexion and freakishly red lips to speak.

"Like most black magic, ....... parasites were also forbidden."

"You mean not now?"

"For specific purposes only."

"For what?"

"Parasite is....... It is magic that causes disease or plague through parasitic infection."

"Ah....... Yeah. I know."

Anna points to Herriot.

To be precise, the chest girth.

"Uh, uh....... Why......?"

What is this? Why is he doing this?

Are we comparing now?

Anna says what she has to say, even when Herriot tries to interrupt.

"It means that the parasite that carries the disease can be used to eliminate the disease, or rather....... For example, if you have a parasite in your body, you can eat it and....... in the form of fecal matter......."

"......a."

Was that what you meant?

Herriot still found the language a bit overwhelming.

"You can't manipulate people and do that?"

"I don't know....... Because there are so many different kinds of magic....... But, I don't know....... Mind control is a very high level of magic, even in the mental realm............. If that's the kind of magic a bug can do,......."

"......No, that doesn't make sense."

Mind-based magic is difficult in itself, but the difficulty level goes up endlessly when you start interfering directly with the mind itself, from simple spells like hallucinations.

The only spells that are comparable to mind control, which is the ultimate in mind-based magic, are mass teleportation in the spatial class and firestorm in the destructive class. This is not to say that a mage who can use mind control can't also use mass teleport and firestorm, as they are different classes.

Worms replace magic that you can only use if you're an Archmage?

It doesn't make sense.

Why would Ellen ask such an important question?

"What are you talking about?"

As Harriet and Anna were talking, Christina, who was working on something in the lab, approached with her goggles on.

Synthesizing reagents and materials for Moonshine would have been a head-scratcher, if not an eye-opener.

I left the lab to catch my breath.

"Harriet asked....... asked me if there was a black magic that made bugs that could control people, so I went to......."

"Bugs that control people?"

She is curious and energetic.

His eyes lit up as he realized he had come up with something interesting.

"Why is that?"

"Hmm, I've heard there's such a thing. I'm wondering what kind of magic, if any, it is, and if it's black magic, but I don't think it is."

"Ugh....... Bugs controlling people. That's horrible."

Christina shuddered. But only for a moment, as she took off her goggles, wiped the sweat from her face, and looked up as if she'd remembered something.

"That's right!"

"Do you get it?"

"Is it like a soft poem?"

"Yan Gashi......? What is that?"

Herriot had never heard the word before. There's no reason for a pampered princess to be exposed to such things, and while there are insects in the temple, they're not the kind of monstrosities that Herriot, who freaks out at the sight of grasshoppers, only occasionally sees.

"That's....... what?"

Anna, from Gerna, a city known for producing wizards of equal, if not greater, caliber than Herriot's, was no stranger to ode poetry.

"Well, it's a parasite that lives in the guts of insects. It goes in as an egg, grows inside, and when it's an adult, it maneuvers the insect to the water's edge, drowns it, then rips open its stomach and crawls out. It looks like a thread, and it's really long."

"!"

"......!"

Herriot and Anna are stunned by the naked description, surprised by Christina who laughs at it, and appalled that such a vicious creature exists.

"If you're not sure, do you want me to draw you a picture?"

"Oh, no, it's okay!"

"......I want to throw up......."

Aside from being horrified, they both seemed surprised that life, the very essence of such evil, could exist.

"So, it's not like a kite that controls people, is it?"

"Is there such a thing as a bug?!"

"......where is that?"

Harriet was surprised, but Anna looked at Christina with interest, having just said she wanted to throw up.

If you have such a thing, you probably want to use it somewhere.

Herriot began to worry about Reinhardt.

I don't know what's going on now, but I'm sure something will happen later!

"There is no such thing, not that I know of."

"Phew. That's good."

"......Oops."

Herriot tries to ignore the small voice, which is almost inaudible. Christina looks at her.

"But that's not all we know, because what if there really is such a thing and we just don't know about it?"

"Do you think that's a real possibility?"

"If you don't have it, you can make it."

At Christina's dangerous words, a thought flashed through Harriet's mind.

If you don't have it, you make it. Herriot doesn't have a specific specialization in magic. Christina, however, specializes in alchemy.

Alchemy majors think alchemically.

If it doesn't exist, create it.

There is definitely such a concept in alchemy.

"Are you talking about Chimera or Homunculus?"

"It's a forbidden magic that's immediately punishable by death if it's discovered that you've both been experimenting with it, but you know that, right?"

Christina smiles brightly.

"The percentage of crazy mages is higher for alchemists than warlocks."

Herriot knows.

Warlocks are socially shunned, but that's just the way the world looks at them.

In a society of wizards, it's more alchemists who are hunted down and purged for doing really crazy things.

In reality, there are no publicly known warlocks and alchemists.

Because everyone who majored in both is already dead. Doing crazy things.

"It could be a chimera created to enhance the function of something like a kite so it could dominate humans, or it could be a homunculus created from nothing to do just that."

Chimeras are created by synthesizing existing creatures.

Homunculus is not a creature weaver, it creates creatures from noncreatures.

It's not like a golem.

Golems are just machines, just as a horse-drawn train is not a living thing.

The homunculus is life.

Bugs controlling humans can be the result of one of two things.

"Is it possible to make something like that?"

"I don't know if it's possible or not, but we can think about it, right?"

Alchemists are explorers of possibility. They are not the same as most mages.

"And alchemy has a recipe and you just follow it, so as long as you don't have to use mana to make it, a normal person can make it."

"That's right....... No way......!"

Herriot's eyes widened as he listened to Christina and realized a possibility.

"You don't have to be an archmage to make a homunculus or chimera recipe from an archmage, as long as the details are satisfactory."

She was laughing, but it was eerie.

"Of course, I don't know if such a thing really exists or not. But, you know, it can't be! It can't exist! I mean, it's not the same thing. I don't know if there are any absolutes in the world."

Herriot realized that Christina was right.

There are already natural, non-magical life forms that control things at the insect level. It's not impossible.

Magic makes the impossible possible.

Making what's already possible even more possible is the easy part of the magic.

"Hmm? Come to think of it, do I have a recipe? A recipe? Something I can make?"

Herriot was convinced.

Anna is a big deal, but he's a serious asshole, and I don't think he is either.

"Can we....... ?"

"Please, guys......."

Herriot was genuinely worried about the B kids.

'Reinhard....... Be careful.......'

Whatever happened this time, Herriot vowed to protect Reinhardt from the shenanigans of this magical society.

\* \* \*

Herriot exited the mansion and approached Ellen, who had been waiting outside for some time.

"I don't know if it actually exists or not, but I think it's more likely to be alchemy than black magic."

After hearing the details of what was said, Ellen nodded in agreement.

"Thanks, Harriet."

"What's going on....... you're not going to tell me?"

Ellen lowered her eyes at Herriot's words.

"It's Reinhardt, right......?"

"......."

Ellen can't answer.

That alone should answer the question.

"You know me....... Really, really....... sometimes."

Harriet says, struggling, looking at Ellen, who can't even look at her.

"I think you're really, really mean......."

Herriot couldn't see the expression on Ellen's face as she kept her head down.

But I think I know his expression without seeing it.

It's a pathetic look.

I said to my friend, I'm finally saying this.

"......I'm sorry."

"No, I'm sorry, I said something stupid."

Herriot stole a glance. There were no tears, but she did it anyway.

"Well, give me something else. I can't tell you this, so tell me something else."

"......what?"

"Who is it?"

At that, Ellen's head snapped up.

With reddened eyes, Harriet asks what she's been wondering all along, but hasn't asked out of respect for Ellen.

"Who are you?"

"......."

Ellen could tell by the look on his face how long he'd been wondering about this.

Ellen is no ordinary person.

She knows she can't be normal. She just hasn't asked until now because she doesn't think he'll answer.

"Ellen."

"That one......."

"Ellen Artorius."

"......!"

The words froze Herriot in place.

Ellen didn't explain anything further.

The last name Artorius says it all.

It's not like they just happen to have the same last name.

Herriot felt like a million questions were answered once and for all.

Why it's so strong.

Why he's so determined.

Why.

You don't hesitate to do risky things.

Herriot knew all about it.

"Reinhardt is....... Do you know?"

"......Yes."

I see.

Secrets you're only now telling me, secrets no one else in the Temple knows.

The two have a long history of sharing.

"......I thought there was at least one thing I could do better than you."

Herriot laughs a little. With a sense of desolation and self-pity.

Background.

I didn't want to hang on to that old thing.

But the truth is, she's behind. So Herriot laughs at himself.

She doesn't hate Ellen, she despises herself.

"Sorry......."

"Don't say you're sorry."

The corner of her mouth quirks up as she looks at Ellen, who ducks her head again.

I wanted to cry, but the tears wouldn't come.

I couldn't even cry.

"It makes me....... How miserable it makes me....... You don't know......."

If someone who is always walking a few steps ahead of you apologizes for getting ahead of you, do you know how painful it is to hear yourself say that?

Ellen finally realizes what it must be like for Harriet to hear her apology.

"......."

Ellen pushes down on the apple that is about to come out again and swallows it.

I wonder if my apology came from a place of superiority.

Ellen sees a bad part of herself in her apology. She thinks she didn't, but did she?

Did he really have no sense of superiority over Herriot de Saint-Hilaire?

Even now, he says he doesn't want to put her in danger, but his insistence on taking over Reinhardt's job is hurting her.

Whether it's right for you to judge Herriot's choices.

I tried not to say it.

But Herriot's words forced Ellen to speak up.

If your behavior is a petty sense of superiority.

You have to throw it away.

"There's someone trying to kill Reinhardt."

"......?"

Looking at Herriot, who is flustered, Ellen calms down and looks at Herriot properly.

"I'm going to kill him."

Unless you choose to hide it, Ellen doesn't choose her expression.

"Do you want to come with me?"

Herriot froze at the suddenness of Ellen's words.

But as blunt as Ellen's words were, they were all true.

The weight of those words is not light.

"Yeah. I'll be there."

Herriot's worries didn't last long, however.

It was a short decision, but not one I made lightly.

Episode 254.

Ellen filled Harriet in on everything that had happened so far. From Reinhardt's strange behavior, to the assassination attempt that began, to the confirmation of it today.

Herriot was horrified that Ellen had seen with her own eyes a bug controlling a man.

"I can't believe there's a real human kite......."

"Are you going away?"

Ellen scratched her head, wondering if she'd ever heard of kite poetry.

"I mean, in the guts of an insect....... Ugh. Ugh......."

Herriot's face turned white as he tried to put the explanation he'd heard from Christina into his own words.

"Anyway, there's a bug like that......."

"Is that magic too?"

"No, it's just the way it is......."

"That's interesting."

It's a bizarre logic that if there are bugs that control insects, there can't be bugs that control people with magic, but it's not entirely unconvincing, as long as they exist.

The strand was caught by alchemy, not black magic.

Of course, it's not that it can't be black magic, but if the alchemy uses a black magic form, it could be a black magic type of alchemy, so it's not completely unrelated.

The first clue, what the heck is the magic in the parasite, will tell us something.

There are no guarantees. But that's all we can do for now.

"Let's go see Mr. Mustang."

"Yes."

Ellen and Harriet decide to go see the teacher first, since they're still students and might not know what they're talking about.

\* \* \*

Royal Class teachers don't have dedicated classes. They focus on the protection and care of their classmates. In addition, they are highly skilled and can act immediately in case of an emergency.

These are teachers who can teach a class, but are more focused on managing a royal class.

So, while the preceptors live in the dormitory, the classroom teachers live in the temple, so when there is an incident, they are called to the dormitory, even if it's a weekend.

"He's funny."

"Really?"

On the way to the faculty's living quarters, Herriot had this to say about Ms. Mustang.

Mr. Mustang is not an alchemist, but he is an advisor to the Magical Research Society. He occasionally drops by to watch the children work and offer a word or two of advice.

But the research assignments are overwhelming, and she finds herself hugging her problems and cringing for hours next to her kids.

And with a look of defeat on my face, I'm an incompetent teacher....... with a defeated look on his face.

Mr. Mustang's self-esteem has been at an all-time low lately.

After visiting the faculty housing complex inside the Temple, she went to Ms. Mustang's address and called her.

Then I told him what I wanted.

Bugs that control people, can you make something like that with alchemy?

"Guys, you can't build that, eh eh eh!"

Mr. Mustang, a nervous wreck, sagged, holding onto Herriot.

Ellen could see why Harriet had described Ms. Mustang as funny.

Mr. Mustang calmed down when I told him I didn't know the details, but I was just curious.

After ordering drinks at a nearby cafe, they sat down to eat.

"A manipulative homunculus or chimera....... Why do you want to know that?"

Mr. Mustang looked concerned.

"I just thought I heard somewhere that there was such a thing."

"Is there such a thing?"

"Well....... If there is such a thing, it's probably forbidden to use any kind of magic, and there's very little information about it. We don't even know if it's there or not."

Being a teacher was no different.

"Even though....... It's a bug that can control people....... I don't think anyone's ever tried to build something like that."

Still, Mr. Mustang knew the madness of mages better than his students. There are those whose pursuit of knowledge has degenerated into madness, those who dabble in sobriety. There are more unknowns than knowns.

"I trust you guys aren't trying to do this, but you must never touch the old woman when she's talking to you. Understand? It makes it harder for us to protect you."

"Of course not, and Ellen here isn't even a magic major."

"Sure, but......."

Mr. Mustang was a nervous wreck, and he was very worried that the children were having strange thoughts. Ms. Mustang saw the expressions on Ellen and Harriet's faces and smiled at them.

"He's fine. I don't know what he's worried about, but if he is, the sobriety hunters won't leave him alone."

Bounty Hunter.

At that, Ellen and Harriet shook their heads.

This is because they are both new to me.

"Sobriety hunters?"

"What is that?"

"Oh, sure. No wonder you don't know. It's no good knowing, and it's no good......."

Mr. Mustang lowered his voice.

"Have you ever heard of a magic coven?"

"Yes, I know there is such a thing."

Neither Harriet nor Ellen knew the specifics, but they knew there were such groups.

"It's one of those magical societies, hunters of mages who use sobriety."

"......Mr. Mustang, please do not pass on unclear information to your students."

Ellen and Harriet turned around at the sudden sound of a familiar voice behind them.

"Eh, Dr. Effinghauser?!"

As always, the cold-faced Effinghauser stared down at the three of them. He was dressed in casual clothes, not his usual suit. Ellen and Harriet were staring at him like he was some kind of strange animal.

Of course, the attire was different, but the attitude was the same.

Mr. Mustang blushed, as if he'd been caught in the act of a naughty prank.

"Well, there are sobriety hunters!"

But the look on his face is that of a child believing in a legend.

In fact, stories about sobriety hunters are the stuff of legend. Mr. Mustang just likes to tell these stories. He's the polar opposite of Mr. Effinghauser.

"It should be ......."

"Is that ......?"

"But don't go around talking about it. You're not even a known entity."

Dr. Effinghauser bought a drink and walked away.

"...... You're being unexpectedly verbose."

Herriot said the experience of meeting Effinghauser in passing and becoming acquainted was exciting.

"Ha, ha, ha....... Actually, he doesn't talk to me at all after work except for work. I think today is the first time this year......."

To say he's cordial would be an understatement; he doesn't seem to share his personal life with anyone except for professional reasons.

Still, it's almost the end of the year.

When I told her that this was the first time I'd spoken to her outside of work, she was stunned.

Shouldn't the construction be that thorough?

Herriot thought to himself.

"What's so great about being a sobriety hunter?"

Ellen's question made Ms. Mustang break out in a cold sweat.

"Well, I don't know....... Actually, I don't know much about it either....... I mean, it's not like they're known for anything bad, like the Black Order."

"I've heard of that."

Herriot nodded.

"They only do bad things with magic."

"They're sociopaths."

Unusually for Mr. Mustang, he used such harsh language. While all magical societies are secretive, and there are rumors and exaggerations about the few that are known, the Black Order has something in common.

They're all full of examples of how they've harmed the world. From assassinations, to using entire villages as their testing grounds, to a local lord's wizard actually working for the Black Order and trying to wipe out his entire estate.

Their purpose is unknown, but they do harm to the world.

However, as with any magical organization, neither the Sobriety Hunters nor the Black Order are fully fleshed out.

"Anyway, if you guys want to learn more here, you're going to have to see someone who majored in alchemy rather than me."

She pulled out a notepad and wrote down the address and name of the classroom.

[Aaron Mede].

"He teaches alchemy at the Temple. He teaches a class of advanced students, so I'm sure he knows how to do it, and if he doesn't, there's no such magic. He's a dedicated teacher, so he's probably not at Temple right now, since it's the weekend."

An alchemist recommended by Mr. Mustang. That would be enough knowledge. Normally, they would have waited for a weekday, but now Ellen and Harriet were in a hurry.

Information is urgent.

Herriot said urgently.

"Can I come to your home address and see you?"

"Mmmm....... I don't know if you'll see me, but....... Try not to be rude. He's a nice guy, but it's still not polite to show up on a weekend, you know?"

At Ms. Mustang's concerned gaze, Ellen and Harriet nodded.

\* \* \*

"That's for sure."

"We may not know for sure, but we do know that you tampered with the liquor, even if you didn't intend to degrade it. If we find out, there's no escaping the penalty."

I nodded, listening to Sarkhegar's report. In my private room in Temple Dormitory, Sarkegar relayed his findings to me.

"Wizards can do a lot in a short amount of time, so running away shouldn't be a problem."

The mansion of Aaron Mede, the Temple's alchemy teacher, is not very large, but the grounds are.

I wouldn't call the mansion itself rustic, but it's more than a match for other mansions.

Rather, there are substantial underground facilities. Facilities for the study of many forbidden arts. I saw something that resembled an earthworm wriggling before my eyes.

Gross.

It looks a lot like a lotus, but it's chic.

The sparrow bit some kind of earthworm, and I wondered if it wasn't a sarkegar.

"You planted this on people to try to kill me with your hands......."

"It's a homunculus."

"Yes, magical creatures. Fortunately, they don't seem to be able to get through the temple entrance....... It can get through the air."

It takes one dispel to cross the temple entrance. Homunculi are magical creatures, and the best way to deal with them is with dispel, not swords.

But Sarkhegar has taken to the air. The homunculus is still alive because it's unaffected by the dispel.

Apart from trying to kill me, Aaron Mede is a man whose death would be good for the world. Perhaps it was not Aaron Mede himself who was the assassin that day, but the man possessed by the worm.

Maybe they saw that I noticed and decided to be cautious for now.

He is not a teacher in the Orbis class, which is why he is still in the Temple.

But killing me directly inside the temple is a lot of work.

So there I was, outside the temple, with someone else trying to kill me.

"What do you want to do, I can take care of it myself, degradation."

I told him to investigate, but not to take action, so he reported it. If I had said nothing, he would have killed Aaron Mede on the spot.

"I'll have to go there myself."

"I don't see why you need to, you can use my hands, or Elise's, or Loyar's."

The beast has been identified.

So there's no need to squeeze.

"No, I'd like to ask you a few questions in person."

I found the one who tried to kill me.

Killing it was a no-brainer, but I had a few questions before I did.

I jumped out of my seat.

"Come on, Sparrow."

"......."

Sarkeghar looked a little pouty, but then meekly turned into a sparrow.

255

The Temple's dedicated alchemy teacher. Aaron Mede is in a bad mood.

There are classes among teachers. He was a teacher who taught only the elite among his students, and as such, the students who attended his lectures were among the best in the Orbis class, or even in the general class.

Personally, I don't like Royal Class. I've seen too much arrogance based on talent alone.

Technically, I don't dislike the Royal class, but I do like the Orbis class.

I like their desperation.

I love that attitude that you can do anything to achieve something better than what you have now.

That kind of desperation clouds insight, and when you gently reach out to them through that clouded insight, they usually fall for it.

The best minds in the empire, where you can get your hands on the possibilities.

A replenished living lab where you can test your performance in real time.

The Temple is the only one on the continent.

However, the cradle disappeared in one fell swoop.

A royal class madman named Reinhardt's sudden rampage has led to this.

Technically, the real culprit is a bunch of students and teachers in Orbis' class who got together and did something weird, but even so, the real culprit is a guy named Reinhardt.

The place that supplied him with his test subjects, especially his most capable ones, had suddenly disappeared.

Whoever messed with my experiment.

You can't do anything about the mass mayhem caused by the Orbis class.

So, it was lighthearted.

I wanted to do it outside of the temple, as there was a risk that dying inside the temple would cause too much trouble.

I used Order's sobriety there because I was confident I wouldn't get caught.

No matter how strong a knight you are, if you get stabbed in your sleep, you're going to die.

No matter how good you are, you're still a student. It's not easy to kill them, they're cheap.

It also made sense because if he died, it would be the Orbis class that would be suspected, not him.

I am invisible.

But somehow, the gnome recognized the presence of his worm-planted assassin. As he watched his target flee in panic, he felt the need to hold his breath.

Sensing danger, he never stepped out of the temple.

He could have killed Reinhardt inside the Temple, since he was not banned from the Temple like the teachers of Orbis' class. But he was extremely reluctant to put himself in harm's way.

You don't have to take the risk.

As long as he remains in the Temple, Reinhardt is within his reach.

You can't stay in a temple forever.

The moment you so much as crawled out of the temple, you were dead.

However, things have gotten weird.

Another student, who was with Reinhardt at the time, saw an opportunity when he stepped outside the temple.

Sneak up behind him, subdue him, and use him as a hostage to drag Reinhardt out of the temple.

Royal class, but first grade at best, I thought, stunning and kidnapping would be no problem.

Plus, he'd only use the hosts he was using, so he wouldn't have to reveal his presence.

But what the heck.

It seemed to know it was being followed, and even encouraged it.

Turns out she's the greatest monster the Temple has ever seen, though we don't know the details.

Being a wizard, I had neglected the student information for melee majors.

Luckily, the sobriety Insector he used is an Order-only trick, unknown to the rest of the world.

You can't use that to find yourself. The evidence is already gone.

An alcoholic beverage used by the Order when they secretly want to kill people.

My anger and irritation kept me from being calm.

How could I have predicted that a first-year Royal Class student would have eyes in the back of his head?

He therefore sought to find a way to kill Reinhardt that would be more certain and methodical.

By the way.

"......Bugs that control people?"

"Yeah, can you alchemize something like that?"

Having captured his host, he comes to his mansion with another student in tow.

What the hell.

Aaron Mede couldn't believe how well things were working out.

\* \* \*

Aaron Mede didn't know about Ellen today, but he did know about magic student Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

I was more interested in Herriot than Ellen.

The famous St. Thuan family, the greatest genius in their history. Nay, perhaps the greatest genius on the entire continent.

A child with a talent for "magic" that has never been seen before in history.

He may not realize it, but Herriot de Saint-Hilaire is the center of attention among those who know him.

Of course, there's nothing close to a crush on Aaron Mede.

They are arrogant by nature.

Like the Orbis class, he loves the struggle of the unborn. He believes that the viciousness and nastiness of those who will do anything to be strong is what puts them at the top of the heap.

That's why Herriot de Sainte-Anne seems to be a human being who was born beautiful, never lacking, and therefore never desperate to improve.

He doesn't experiment on his students with power because people are evil.

Very seriously, he considers his experiment a gift.

He gives nothing to those who are not desperate. That's why Herriot is said to be the best, but he doesn't care.

It's just curious.

How this coincidence happens.

The two lures to lure Reinhardt had come to me of their own accord.

They came in royal class, introduced by Mr. Mustang.

The student in front of me, Ellen, is here after a day of running around trying to get to the bottom of a worm that has crawled out of its host.

Unaware that this is the one place you shouldn't be.

Unaware that there were hundreds of these bugs swarming in the basement of the mansion, the two students had the look of students who just wanted to ask a question.

Two students who are taking an active role in the assassination attempt on Reinhardt.

These two would be very dear friends of Reinhardt's.

It's great for bait.

The pleasure of trampling on arrogant buds of the royal class is a bonus.

"Hmmm....... I don't see anything that doesn't make sense, and if I do say so myself, alchemists are the kind of people who like to experiment whenever possible."

Not so fast right now.

When two of his students go missing after being introduced by Mr. Mustang, it is highly likely that he will be framed.

"I think I've heard of some guys using something like that......."

"Me, really?"

"......."

Harriet's expression changes dramatically at the suggestion that she might have a meaningful clue. Ellen's eyes widen slightly as well.

"It's going to take me a while to research the material, so I'll send a message to Royal Class."

"Thank you, sir, thank you!"

Send it back for now. It would be very foolish to try to do anything with it now.

"Since you're here, have a cup of tea and scratch your itch."

He pours a cup of hot tea, one for each of his two unsuspecting students.

Send it back, but insure it.

Alchemy is sometimes magical, sometimes not.

In this case, it is not added.

In other words. Dispel doesn't work.

Aaron Mede was poisoning them both.

A slowly developing poison. Symptoms will appear over a month. The cardiovascular system slowly deteriorates, and eventually the heart stops beating and the person dies.

Without an antidote, you'll die.

It's already been proven that it's a poison that not even divine power can restore.

If you're in a pinch, you can use the antidote as an excuse to lure Reinhardt in.

Insurance for that.

"Ah, yes....... Thank you."

Herriot cautiously reaches for the glass.

Drink.

Aaron Mede smiled faintly at the thought of receiving the corpse of the cocky lunatic who had ruined all his experiments in a month or so.

You have an antidote.

So he sipped the poisoned tea he'd poured without a care in the world.

Tasteless and odorless poisons cannot be detected by taste.

Ellen didn't touch the car. As if she didn't care.

Harriet took a sip of her tea, then set it down with a slight shake of her head.

"By the way, I have a question."

Aaron Mede noticed the green earrings dangling from Harriet's ears.

If it's jewelry, it's not really prohibited.

It was a pair of earrings that didn't look very classy for the Grand Duchess of the Duchy of Saint-Thuan to be wearing.

Herriot set his teacup down.

"Why do you want to know that, why don't you ask?"

Herriot felt uncomfortable.

Everyone wanted to know.

I started with myself.

When Ellen told me about it, I wondered why anyone would care about such a thing. It's a dangerous and bizarre story, even for her.

Also, from the Magical Research Society. From Mr. Mustang.

I've been asked why I'm curious about the bugs that control people.

Aaron Mede didn't ask.

That little twinge.

It's not really a problem. Aaron Mede smiled softly at Herriot's question.

"Wizards, especially students, want to know everything, so you'd be surprised how many outlandish questions I get. So now, I'm more inclined to answer whatever they ask."

"Oh, I see."

Aron Mede's answer was plausible. Aaron realized that the children in front of him hadn't even touched their teacups, and he knew they were wary.

They're not just kids and they're talented, but they're also insightful.

Aaron Mede knows that trying to force him to drink tea will backfire. Harriet looks around the manor, not at Aaron Mede, but at the manor itself.

"Also, this place....... That's weird."

Herriot looks around with a calm expression.

It's not that they see their surroundings, it's that they seem to sense the space itself.

"I don't feel any of the energy from the veins."

"Zimac? What does that mean?"

Herriot keeps getting orders from Reinhard to do ridiculous things.

They ask you to study dimensional magic, or to cast spells with mana from outside your body instead of inside.

I haven't succeeded in all of them, but I'm working on it.

Using it for magic would come later, but she had become very used to feeling and analyzing the mana in the atmosphere. It's something other mages can do, of course, but focusing on it has made her more sensitive to it.

There is always mana everywhere, just in different concentrations. Even in the same space, the density varies. It's doubtful that it's possible to use magic with uniform control over such irregularly distributed mana.

It doesn't quite reach its true goal, but the quirkiness of the place is well documented.

At the bottom of the mansion, I can't feel any mana in the veins.

It's like a giant hole in the middle of a blue ocean.

You don't know what's underground.

However, the fact that the accounts are organized to avoid exposure already speaks for itself.

"I know that this is what an arrangement created to avoid detection usually looks like."

Whatever the reason, there is a place in the basement of the mansion that is magically made so that the outside cannot see in.

"Wizards, especially alchemists, are sensitive to this sort of thing, so it's not surprising that something like this would be made, and I'm an alchemist."

Aaron Mede is an alchemist.

Alchemists need to be especially careful about security, and rightly so. You don't want just anyone to be able to peek into your laboratory. Actually, this isn't that suspicious. Herriot knows that.

What Herriot finds suspicious is the scale.

The size of the settlement is too large.

Although he is an accomplished alchemist, he has a laboratory in the basement of his mansion that goes down to a depth of about six stories.

"This is a little uncomfortable. I think you guys are here to ask questions, but is it just me or does it feel like you're interrogating me?"

Aaron Mede didn't hide his displeasure.

When I let him in, I had a feeling something was wrong and started to doubt myself.

We can't afford to let this happen.

You need to export it.

You can use it if you want to, but in that moment, all the foundation you've laid in your temple is blown away.

I tried to mess with the wrong guy and things went horribly wrong.

Herriot seemed to hesitate a bit in front of the displeased Aaron Mede.

However, Ellen, who had been silent until now, spoke up.

"Does the homunculus disappear when it is dispelled?"

"...... What a rude bunch of kids. Okay, let me answer that. The homunculus is a magical creature. If it is dispelled, it will disappear."

"...... So, if someone is possessed by the homunculus we were talking about, what happens to them when you cast Dispel on them?"

"......."

Aaron Mede's mind seemed to freeze up.

What is this guy talking about?

"Yeah....... I don't know the details, but the homunculus' parasite will either disappear or die."

Aaron Mede knows it's the latter. The homunculus' domination of its host is irreversible. If the homunculus dies, so does the dominated.

No, the moment you're dominated, you're dead.

"Why are you asking me that?"

Ellen says calmly.

"I'm going to deploy an anti-magic field all over this mansion from now on."

"......What?!"

"If anyone in this mansion is possessed by that homunculus, they're all going to be dead. If nothing happens, I apologize, I'll be disciplined, and if I have to pay damages for property damage, I will."

Anti-Magic Fields.

It is a large-scale enchantment that goes beyond area dispel to deter magic use.

A student is capable of that level of witchcraft?

Aaron Mede's eyes widened.

Herriot de Saint-Etienne was the greatest genius in the history of magic, if that's even possible.

Big deal.

These kids are about to do something crazy.

No wonder so many of the slaves in the mansion would be turned into corpses once the anti-magic field was unleashed. His expression calmed down.

"There are only assholes in royal class."

I don't like this one or that one.

Unmask or risk losing everything.

He had to resort to extreme measures.

"Die."

-Quack!

The fireball from Aaron Mede's wand was intercepted by the force field Herriot unleashed.

"......I can't believe it's really you."

"Told you so, Harriet."

Aaron Mede stares in awe at the silver sword that suddenly appears in Ellen's right hand.

"Threats work better than questions."

"Right......."

They had been suspicious of Aaron Mede from the beginning.

256

Aaron Mede was primarily surprised by the ease with which Herriot blocked his surprise offensive spell.

But the real shock came from the sword Ellen suddenly summoned.

"......?"

How is a student subject holding a holy relic of God? Aaron Mede watches in horror as one unbelievable thing after another happens.

Herriot looks at him with his force field unfurled.

"There's no way I'm already using an anti-magic field or something."

He looked like he'd been hit in the head with a hammer.

I fell for the kid's trick. No student would use such magic.

I overestimated Herriot and got nervous about the ridiculous threats, so I took matters into my own hands.

It had already happened. Aaron Mede was unmasked.

"Yeah, I don't know what you guys found me based on, but I don't think you realize you made a mistake yet."

Annuities are some of the easiest magic to steal. It can even be stolen and used by those who don't have access to magic.

That's why mages' private workshops are so secure. High-risk facilities known as dungeons are also the work of paranoid archmages.

If you want to protect something that's easy to steal, you need to make sure it's secure.

"What happens when you trespass in the 'Alchemist's House'. I'll show you."

The alchemist's workshop is the most heavily defended of all the mage's workshops.

-Bam!

"!"

"This is......!"

In a flash, Aaron Mede's body slipped behind the wall, and the door through which Ellen and Harriet had entered disappeared.

The windows were all blocked by an opaque protective crystal.

-Crack! Crack!

Numerous magical crossbows summoned from thin air were pointed at them, and violet smoke drifted from the blue magic stones embedded throughout.

Physical attacks.

Poison Fog.

Changes in the room itself.

The Alchemist's House is a dungeon, and walking into it is suicide.

Herriot laughs.

The mystery has been revealed. So there's no need to hold back now.

"I mean, you said I can't use it, not that you don't have something I can use?"

Herriot pulls the scrollbook out of her arms. At her gesture, the pages automatically open, and the scroll that slipped out of it begins to glow.

Herriot is a wizard.

Before that, it's fabulously rich.

-Flash!

Anti-magic, Anti magic field scroll triggered.

\* \* \*

Before Harriet and Ellen enter Aaron Mede's mansion.

"I think it's over there."

"I guess so."

Ellen pointed to a mansion in the distance.

Aaron Mede's mansion was on the outskirts of the ecliptic. It wasn't quite a no-man's land with no buildings, but it was a mansion in a place where people were rarely seen.

It was a mansion that wasn't all that fancy, but it wasn't all that unassuming either.

Someone that Mr. Mustang recommended because he's an alchemist and pretty good at it, if not an introduction.

Mr. Mustang had only mentioned Aaron Mede out of academic curiosity, not because he knew there was a homunculus that actually ruled over people.

The Temple's alchemist is the one to go to in such situations.

Both Ellen and Harriet had the idea that they might be facing an uncomfortable truth.

It was odd to be so suspicious of Ms. Temple, but there was no reason not to be. They weren't playing child's play detective here; they were on a mission to find the assassin and kill him.

"What do you think?"

In response to Ellen's question, Harriet shrugged.

"It's suspicious, but....... There's no such thing as a wizard without secrets, and when you think about it, it's weirder to see a wizard who doesn't have a workshop or laboratory in the basement of his house. Granted, it's a bit large."

Herriot commented, feeling the massive magical shielding underground.

"Can't you see through it?"

"I don't know how to forcibly unlock a system of that size, but the mere fact that I'm trying to do it will be detected, and if it's not a big deal, it's a big deal. You're tampering with someone else's property."

The person you're about to meet is probably just your average teacher.

Just being cautious. Ellen assured her that everything would be fine, but that she would be prepared, and she also brought the scroll her father had given her to use in case something happened.

The magic contained in this scrollbook, which can only be opened with your biometric information, is beyond imagination. To put it mildly, the scrollbook itself contains the destructive power of an entire army of mages.

The value is priceless.

"Let's take a peek and apologize if it's not."

At Ellen's suggestion that she try an all-or-nothing approach, Harriet got fed up and put the earrings Reinhardt had given her on both sides of her head.

Herriot sighed, feeling slightly calmer.

"Can this end with an apology......."

"What if it doesn't end with an apology?"

Herriot is convinced by the nonchalant way Ellen says it.

Somewhere along the way, Ellen is becoming a little more like Reinhardt.

\* \* \*

It's a monster.

Aaron Mede couldn't get it out of his head.

Anti-magic fields neutralized magically-activated traps and facilities.

It's not omnipotent magic in the first place. An anti-magic field can't neutralize all magical devices. But the level of magic used was too high. This scroll was used by the Grand Duchess of St. Thuan, a duchy known for its magic.

The magic was not the same as normal scrolling.

Okay, let's say that's a possibility.

But Aaron Mede's mansion is not without its mechanized traps.

They still work.

-Bang!

-Bang!

-Bang! Quack!

A monster advances, taking traps in its stride and smashing anything in its path.

He found himself in the bizarre situation of being on the run from his mansion.

A student, bathed in enchanted blue flames, crashes through the wall and rushes forward.

Just bumping into it with your body will shatter the wall.

If it doesn't break, cut it off with the sword.

Shingon Ramen.

A holy relic of the moon god Mensis, said to have a blade as cold and sharp as moonlight.

Aaron Mede was about to realize the power of the Relic in a way he didn't want to experience.

How is that different from a Swordmaster? His attacks don't work on magically enhanced flesh, and a holy object replaces the Swordmaster's proprietary Auror Blade.

-Thump! Thump!

Aaron Mede runs away from Ellen, who bursts in when she can't see the door.

And even though he couldn't see where he'd run off to, he seemed to sense it and follow in the right direction.

You could use the teleportation scroll to escape, but the anti-magic field the damned Archduchess has cast is blocking you from using magic. So she can't use magic either, but what's following you now is a monster that has nothing to do with magic.

The users of the mansion may not have been Swordmasters, but they should have been able to stall for time. They were all down before the anti-magic field activated.

Before he knew it, Aaron Mede was in his basement workshop.

The same goes for the underground workshop: all of the homunculi being studied are either gone or have ceased to function.

Aaron Mede walked into the underground workshop.

The homunculus wasn't the only one there.

"......."

After smashing open the locked reinforced door to the underground workshop, Ellen watches as her body emerges from the blue flames of her own flesh.

Lots of weird experiments in the port.

Chimeras are still alive. Things that are made from life, things that inspire awe at the mere sight of them.

Some of them included humans. There were chimeras that were created by splicing together the human and the non-human.

There are humans, and other parts that look like, well, demons.

"You."

Ellen looks at Aaron Mede in a spark of magic.

"He deserves to die."

Apart from this, Ellen is determined to kill Aaron Mede.

"Hmph, hmph......."

Aaron Mede's underground workshop was built beneath the mansion's sprawling grounds.

It's very large, and there are many experiments.

An experiment that is unaffected by the anti-magic field.

Chimera.

-Bam!

Aaron Mede pulls the lever to open the port and release the Chimera.

-Crack....... Krrrr!

Some have great combat skills, some don't.

But it's enough to buy you some time.

Ellen sees creatures writhing and screaming in front of her, their lives mangled by other people.

Ellen looked pitifully at the hopeless creatures.

Aaron Mede runs his underground workshop.

As long as it is out of the anti-magic field, it will teleport away.

He ran toward the secret exit of the underground workshop.

“캬아아아악!”

Ellen stared at the dozens of chimeras closing in on her.

That, too, for a while.

-skuck!

"......."

Ellen began to chop up the chimeras without hesitation.

\* \* \*

Beside me was Sarkegar, in sparrow form, and Eleris, hiding behind her invisibility spell.

I'm not sure what's going to happen, so I've brought in all the available power except for Loyar. Aaron Mede is an alchemist, but I don't know what he'll do.

The way in is not the front door.

"This is a secret passageway?"

-Yes, degradation.

Sarkegar, in the form of a sparrow perched on my shoulder, said.

It's really weird because it sounds like a bird when it's chirping cute, but when it's talking, it has an unidentifiable, dark voice.

What is.

A great dark being, but a sparrow.

I feel like I'm walking around with something like that.

It was a mansion built on a sparsely populated estate on the outskirts of the ecliptic, and the secret passage was in the middle of a forest even more remote than that.

In the lush vines of the hillside, hidden by the fallen leaves, you can see what looks like an iron gate if you look closely enough.

Enter this location and catch Aaron Mede unawares inside the mansion.

-The atmosphere is a little weird, like something is going on.......

Just as she was about to say that, Elyse, who is hiding behind an invisibility spell.

-Grrrr

The immovable iron gates opened, and out of them leaped a man with an urgent look on his face.

"......?"

"!"

He looked at me, standing there nonchalantly outside, and his heart literally stopped.

"Yeah, how could you!"

"......What is it?"

I don't know Aaron Mede's face because I've never actually seen him.

-Aaron Medeiros.

So, it was Sarkozy's explanation that made me realize that.

That goofy-looking middle-aged guy is Aaron Mederanda.

"......Why is he coming out of here?"

-Don't know.

I don't know what it was, but Aaron Mede was in front of me.

And Aaron Mededo was like, why did you get out of here?

He looked at the talking sparrow, at me waiting at the exit of the secret passage, and pondered. He seemed to have given up thinking.

He puts his hand in yours.

"Where."

-Bam!

I drove my fist into his abdomen as he tried to pull a fast one.

"Off you go!"

"I don't know what it is, but it's an asshole."

I grabbed him by the hair as he lay limp on the floor.

"You're going to be responsible for what you do from now on, aren't you?"

"Blah blah blah!"

Me and Ellen.

You didn't kill it, but you'll get what you came for.

Very expensive.

And.

-Bang!

The sound of harsh spurs on the iron gate, and someone else popped out.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

With a ragged gasp, Ellen emerged, flesh and blood splattered all over her body. Looking desperate, Ellen looked back and forth between Aaron Mede, who had fallen and was holding her head, and me, and then froze.

"...... Reinhardt?"

"......Why are you coming out of there again?"

What the heck is going on?

Not Ellen, not me, not even Aaron Mede.

Even Sarkegar and Elise, though they can't speak.

We were all confused by the situation.

Episode 257.

I don't know when or where this started.

But you get the idea. Ellen attacked Aaron Mede, and he tried to escape through a secret passage, but I was just about to enter.

But that's not all.

Eleris knows Ellen, but Sarkegaard doesn't know Ellen.

Ellen is holding a bowl of ramen in her right hand, and Sarkegar is not as ignorant as Loyaar.

We need to get Ellen out of here quickly.

Before Sarkeghar could figure something out.

"We'll talk about that later."

"......Yes."

For now, the priority was to take action against Aaron Mede.

I immediately ripped off his robes and shook off all the scrolls in his arms.

He can't use teleportation on his own. We don't know the details of his condition, but we've been told the basics.

"You came with Harriet?"

"Yes."

"Bring him over here."

"It's dangerous, I'll be here......."

"Bring him in."

At my commanding words, Ellen stares at me.

It's not about bringing in Herriot.

I'm sending what I'm about to say because I don't want Ellen to hear it.

"Yeah. Be careful."

Ellen has gone back into the secret passage, and I'm alone with Aaron Mede. I can't see him, of course, but Elise and Sarkegar are near me.

"Oh, you're wrong. This is....... I don't know what's going on, but it's all wrong."

Aaron Mede thought he'd gotten it all wrong and was going to say some bullshit I wouldn't believe.

"What if I'm wrong?"

I grab him by the scruff of the neck and laugh.

"Whether you tried to kill me or not, it doesn't change the fact that you're a scumbag who deserves to die."

Aaron Mede is definitely the killer, and even if he's not, he deserves to die. I made sure Ellen was far enough away.

He sends Ellen away because he thinks she might get annoyed if he tells her about the talking sparrow.

I also had a question to ask.

It's a good thing Aaron Mede ran away in desperation.

If Ellen had gotten the drop on me, I wouldn't have gotten the important information.

"I don't know about anything else, but I need to know how to contact the Black Order."

"......what?"

"Speak quickly, or I will kill you in the most painful way in the world until my friend returns."

Black order.

Since magic is the most likely cause of the Gate, we need to determine the whereabouts and intentions of the Secret Magic Society. Their freak accident may have been the cause of the Gate.

There are bound to be magical covenants that you don't have set up, and you should be aware of the ones you do.

I don't know everything, either, as the magic coven makes an appearance but isn't a major part of the story.

The Black Order is the first of these.

The good news is that I know a bit more about the Black Order than I do about other magical organizations.

He was horrified that I was already waiting for him at the escape site and that he knew I was Black Order.

"You....... Who art thou?"

I began to think that I was beyond his comprehension, that I was some kind of freak.

He's got a point.

"That's none of your business."

I turn to face him and give him a wicked grin.

"Do you think I'm going to kill you? No, I'm not."

One of the few things we know about the Black Order.

"I'm going to hand it over to the cantus magna."

A magical order known to the world as the Sobriety Hunters.

Their real name is Cantus magna.

Cantus Magna, a sobriety hunter, and the Black Order, which has a lot of sobriety.

The Black Order and Cantus Magna are eternal enemies.

If you hand him over to the Cantus Magna, he will live in a state where he would have been better off dead.

His complexion was haggard.

The average person might know the word "sobriety hunter" but not the name of the organization, Cantus Magna.

The fact that I know that is already a surprise.

If you know the connection between the Black Order and the Cantus Magna, you'll think me even weirder.

"Me, if you let me go, I'll put you in touch with the Black Order! I'll introduce you to the Order! I'll do anything for you! I'll even let you become a member of the Order if you want......!"

-Puck!

And.

With a sudden explosion, Aaron Mede's head exploded.

Literally, with no foreshadowing.

"......."

In an instant, I was a decapitated corpse, staring blankly at the sight of blood gushing from my throat toward the sky.

Live, live, live.

You're really seeing things, aren't you?

I had a general idea of what was going on.

I turn around. There, a wizard in black robes stares back at me.

I couldn't see anything inside the black robe.

I was expecting it to show up. No, I was also thinking it would be watching. If not intervene.

But we intervened.

If you don't know about orders, you won't care, but I've made it clear.

Neither Elise nor Sarkegaard were doing anything right now. But they must be on edge.

Someone in a black robe watched me from the shadowy depths of the hood.

"......."

"If you showed up out of the blue, at least say something."

"......."

Aaron Mede is a settlement agent, but a lowly one.

But his opponent summarily eliminated Aaron Mede. At least he's not a minion.

We don't know who it is.

"No, talk to me, why are you just staring at me?"

"Do you have any information on Cantus Magna?"

I smiled to myself as he spoke up after a long moment of silence.

I didn't think that Aaron Mede would have the means to contact the Black Order.

However, I knew that if I mentioned Cantus Magna in front of the Black Order, they would contact me.

I can make up the details as I go along, but I only know what I know, and this is part of that knowledge.

The two magical orders hate each other the most.

They are not interested in anything else, and exterminating each other is also a very important goal.

So it makes sense that they'd be hungry for each other's information.

A Temple student mentions Cantus Magna.

There are secret magical societies that the average person shouldn't even know the name of.

That alone gets them to reach out to me.

"Shouldn't there be some kind of quid pro quo? You can't give it away for free."

"......what you want."

I look at the black wizard in the hood.

"Your knowledge."

This week.

The Black Order's large stockpile of gold.

Maybe that's where the gate debacle came from.

To prevent the gate from happening, I had to start walking a dangerous tightrope again.

He seemed unmoved by the execution of a lowly minion.

He showed up not because I threatened Aaron Mede, but because I mentioned Cantus Magna.

"It better be solid information."

"Do you know enough to tell if you're not sure or not?"

"......."

The Black Order are bad guys, but they're not evil.

They have their own principles, and they're different from the rest of the world.

Therefore, he didn't respond to my sarcastic remarks.

"I'll get back to you in due course."

"......template?"

"That shouldn't be hard."

These guys can come directly to Temple Road. I realized I was starting to touch things I shouldn't have. My skin tingled with tension.

But you have to do what you have to do.

"If you're a boy with a Lord Vampire as a minion, you don't tell flimsy lies."

Of course, he had already identified Eleris, who was waiting by my side with an invisibility spell.

If so, you already know the talking sparrow.

The fact that he's an unknown entity already lends him an uncanny amount of credibility.

The Black Order wizard had vanished like a mirage.

The realization that you're about to cross a truly dangerous river runs down your spine.

You have to get somewhere.

You have to go, even if it means going backwards.

\* \* \*

Ellen, thinking I might be in danger, hurried back with Harriet.

The Black Order mage left, and I put Aaron Mede's body away. Herriot's face was grim from what he'd seen.

"How did you do it?"

"Do I need to say ......?"

I tried to stifle the urge to say I killed him, but I didn't.

The blood from the dead Aaron Mede's body was all over the place, so you get the idea.

She hadn't seen the body, but she was at a loss for words when I told her that I had casually killed a man.

Rather than being angry or scared, I felt sad.

The very fact that I became that person.

"We'll talk about what happened later."

I save talking to Ellen or Harriet about how they got here, or why I'm here alone.

"I need to fix this first."

We've just murdered Ms. Temple.

This was the first thing I needed to fix.

\* \* \*

I sent Ellen and Harriet back first.

with the words I'll do something about it.

Both Ellen and Harriet seemed to have a lot to talk to me about, and they were anxious, but I was too stubborn to force them to go back with me.

I was angry, first of all, that they were in this position.

Outside the mansion of Aaron Mede, outside the ecliptic.

Elise unraveled her invisibility, and Sarkegardo Sparrow returned to his normal human form. But she was no longer Count Argonne Pontheus; she was a normal, ubiquitous adult woman.

Both Ellis and Sarkegaard seemed to have a lot to say.

She would want to know why I would want to contact the Black Order. Her demeanor turned sour as she realized my intentions could never be good.

And it was worse for Sarkegar.

"Jae-hyun, if my eyes aren't mistaken, I think I saw one of the two kids who came to help Jae-hyun grab a bowl of ramen."

Sarkeghar couldn't help but ask about Ellen. The look in Sarkegar's eyes, which had always been submissive and compliant to my every word, was different.

Sarkegar's eyes stare at me, expressionless.

The impression was that of a normal person, but it was eerie to see it.

Dreadfiend.

Dread Demon.

Sarkegaard doesn't go into a lot of detail.

Laments, the new sword of the moon, is said to be the sword of Lagan Artorius, along with Alsbringer.

And it hasn't been used in the Demon Wars.

And the girl holding it.

A girl with powers beyond her years.

Sarkozy is making a guess, and it's probably close to the truth.

Sarkegar looks at me.

Sarkegar's eyes, with their eerie expressionlessness and wide-open whites, made me feel numb just looking at him.

"Even if you don't tell me, there are plenty of ways to figure it out. Please, tell me everything now."

It's not money, it's not praise, it's not any reward that the ever-loyal Sarkegar needs.

Willingness to rebuild the Demon Realm.

For that alone, Sarkhegar will give me his life, and if I don't have it, he will do whatever it takes to make me feel that way.

Ellen is in danger.

If we say nothing here, Sarkhegar will figure out on his own that Ellen is Artorius.

Sarkegar's greatest hatred in the world is, of course, Ragan Artorius, the warrior who killed the demon.

Her sister is becoming a monster in the Temple, and I can't let that happen.

If I don't say it here, if I don't convince Sarkozy.

Ellen dies.

If Sarkegar wants to kill Ellen, I can't stop him.

"Yep. Ramen is right."

"......."

"And her name is Ellen Artorius. She is the younger sister of Ragan Artorius."

Sarkegar's eyes widened at my words.

"May the gods wonder why thee, thou, dost, commune, with, the, flesh and blood, of, such, a, chewing, slayer."

Sarkegar's eyes were bloodshot, and the color of his skin was turning blue and red.

Her anger was causing her to lose control of her body. Elise twitched her fingers nervously.

Elise is now suspicious of my intentions to contact the Black Order.

Sarkegar, who wants war, and Eleris, who wants peace.

I was now giving them both the benefit of the doubt.

But first, an excited Sarkegaard had to be convinced.

He was now angry at me for not telling him about Ellen, and angry that he was close enough to try to save my life.

One word.

If I say the wrong thing, it's not me who dies, it's Ellen. I could end up worse than dead.

Just as Elise is ultimately on my side, but dangerous, Sarkeghar is on my side, but ultimately dangerous.

I was feeling it in my skin right now.

"Isn't that obvious?"

"What's natural?"

"She's Ragan Artorius' sister, why the hell shouldn't we be friendly?"

"......."

"You, is the rebuilding of the Demon Realm a matter of emotion, of simple vengeance?"

Sarkegar's expression didn't improve.

"Weren't you the one who made me go to the Temple, to take down the humans the way they do, with their weapons?"

"......."

'Enter the Temple and learn the ways of the humans thoroughly; to strike them down with their weapons is true revenge!'

Sarkegar was the first to suggest sending me to the temple.

After all, isn't it an extension of him?

"The sister of a warrior who was about to become the most powerful weapon man has ever known risks her life to save me, and you're upset about this?"

"......."

"This situation today is not what I intended, but I thought you'd like to know this."

Sarkegar shook his head.

"You're using the flesh and blood of a fucking warrior. Is that what you're saying?"

"Yeah."

Sarkeghar watches me steadily.

He took a step forward and brought his face to mine.

We were almost nose to nose.

"You're a terrible liar."

"......."

Sarkegar's three hundred eyes stare at me as if trying to see through me.

"Do you think I don't know that you are genuinely concerned about that child?"

When Ellen appeared out of nowhere, I lost my composure.

I was genuinely flustered. It was so unexpected, and Sarkozy read my mood.

I will use Ellen. I will make it my side and use it.

I can't believe he would say such a cold thing in the first place. By my reaction, Sarkozy has already realized that Ellen is important to me.

Just as Ellen values me, I value her.

It's already been read.

Sarkegar's eyes meet mine, and I stare back.

I was scared, but I couldn't back down.

"Why not?"

"......Yes?"

Sarkeghar was rather taken aback by my bold statement, and Elise seemed bewildered, as if she hadn't expected me to say that.

"Fuck, it was Ragan Artorius who killed my father, the Ancestor Demon, not Ellen."

"Yes?"

"No shit, can't I like humans a little bit, is that such a big deal, huh?"

At my sudden outburst, Sarkegar's eyes widened with a meaning unlike any other.

"Lowly! Ragan Artorius is the enemy of the Undying Sky, the one who killed the Ancestral Demon King, and you have not even managed to dry up the seed of the Artorius clan. How can you treat someone with such disgusting, foul blood as precious? This is not acceptable!"

"I don't know asshole, I know I'm trying to use her and I know she's important to me, so what?"

"Degradation!"

"Ugh, come on. Dude, are you supposed to be telling me what to do with the devil?"

"......."

I rolled my eyes, and Sarkegar took a step back. I looked at Sarkhegar as he backed away and shook my head.

"Dude, this isn't working."

"Oh, no, what do you mean......."

"You're the devil."

"Yes?"

"You should be the devil, asshole. I see you're puking all over what I'm doing, so maybe you should be the devil. Yeah or no, just do it, motherfucker. Turn into an Archdemon and do it, motherfucker."

"Lowly, you know that's not my intention, I don't covet the position and I can't have it!"

"Really?"

"Yes, degradation!"

I approach Sarkegar. As I approach, Sarkhegar takes a few steps back.

"Well, shut up and do what I tell you to do. What if I'm being an asshole, what if I'm doing something I don't understand, what if I'm friends with your warrior sister, what if I'm dead or alive, what if you don't understand?"

"......."

"I am the only Archdemon, whether you doubt my qualifications or my intentions, whatever!"

I say, shoving my face into Sarkegar's.

"You have no other choice but me."

"......."

"Ellen, don't touch it."

Sarkegar's eyes were wavering.

"If you don't want to see the corpse of an Archdemon. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

I could die for you.

I hadn't thought about realizing it in a place like this.

I was now threatening a subordinate with my life in a place where Ellen was not. I could see Sarkegar's eyes fill with fear, anger, and sadness.

"......Lower, no."

Eventually, tears welled up in Sarkegar's furious eyes.

"He doesn't know anything, does he?"

"......."

"I don't understand, but even if you can accept him, he won't."

Sarkegar's tears were, after all, tears of genuine concern for me.

"Degradation, this is dangerous. It's too, too risky, and it's a gamble that shouldn't be taken."

Sarkegar cries and begs.

Elise had said. I don't want our relationship to have a sad ending.

Just because I can value the blood of my father's killer doesn't mean that Ellen can accept the blood of her brother's killer.

It's not just an enemy, either.

I am the blood of the enemy and the seed of a great war.

It's impossible for Ellen to accept me.

I understand Sarkozy's tears, his worry, his anxiety, and his words. It's impossible not to understand.

But understanding didn't mean I could accept it.

"Shut up. I don't know about anything else, but if you touch a hair on Ellen's head, I'm going to kill you and fuck you and everything."

"......."

"You, you just have to remember that one thing."

"Degrade....... Please."

"Answer."

"No, no, no. Please. Just this, if nothing else, this......."

"Answer."

Sarkegar nodded, furious.

"Yes....... Degraded."

That didn't convince Sarkegar.

However, we did succeed in getting it to give in.

Episode 258.

I didn't convince Sarkegar.

It was just a threat. I can't hide the fact that I care about Ellen, so the only way I can do that is to threaten Sarkegar with my life.

Sarkhegar will not be able to touch Ellen.

He won't be the kind of guy who wants to test whether my threats are true or not.

But eventually, Ellen was exposed.

While Sarkegar is unlikely to do anything about it, Ellen can be watched and tracked by Sarkegar at any time.

Sarkhegar would now keep a close eye on Ellen. It was entirely possible that Sarkhegar would be the first to act if Ellen realized my identity and tried to do something to me.

Elise didn't ask me anything at first because it seemed complicated enough.

Sarkegar returned home with anxiety and fear, and so did Elise.

This is not the end of the story.

Back to the original topic, we need to solve Aaron Mede's problem.

Technically, I'm not the one who caused the accident this time, Ellen and Harriet are.

In fact, they did battle in Aaron Mede's house. Of course, it was Ellen who deployed the anti-magic field and physically ran.

I didn't actually kill Aaron Mede, so I didn't have to admit it.

But I'm even more reluctant to tell them that I've been in contact with a Black Order wizard. Of course they'd think I was crazy.

And they don't even know that Aaron Mede was a member of the Black Order.

It felt a little weird to hear Ellen's detailed reasons for getting to this point.

You could cover up Aaron Mede's death, but that would bring Harriet and Ellen under suspicion.

Mr. Mustang's introduction to these two leads to Aaron Mede's death, so there's a fairly obvious connection between Aaron Mede's death and their involvement.

You can't hide it.

If so, it should be exposed.

Fortunately or unfortunately, there were no living users in Aaron Mede's house. They were all controlled by the homunculus in the first place.

Ellen and Harriet visited Aaron Mede's house and saw many inhumane experiments in sobriety being performed there, and Aaron Mede tried to kill them, but was repelled.

That way.

"You want me to do that?"

"I said that, not that you should."

Bertus crossed his arms and smirked at my request.

"I don't know where you went wrong, but one minute you're a chimera, the next you're a homunculus. Your life has taken a turn for the worse, that's for sure, and now I'm kind of tired of being a part of it."

"It's not my fault this time, he tried to kill me."

"I mean, rightly or wrongly, I'm already disenchanted with the idea of getting involved in that."

"......Yes."

Only Bertus or Charlotte could have framed the issue that way. The facts weren't all that different. In reality, Aaron Mede tried to kill Ellen and Harriet, and before that, he tried to kill me.

I was going to say something about the Black Order, but I stopped myself. The Imperials can make their own assumptions about Aaron Mede's membership in the Black Order based on his underground workshop.

"That's disgusting. I can't believe Ms. Temple was doing that. What are wizards......."

Bertus clicked his tongue in disdain; he was obviously annoyed that there was such a thing as a Temple teacher.

"It would have been handled just fine without your request, so don't bother."

"What about the kids?"

"I'm not going to get investigated, because there's no good that can come of it."

The mere fact that Dr. Temple's dabbling in human experimentation and other forms of sobriety is a blow to his image.

The case will be buried. Aaron Mede will be dealt with one way or another, and the issues surrounding it, including the assassination attempt, will sink below the surface.

Those in power don't want to have to deal with headaches, so some things don't even get addressed in the first place.

In any world, it's all the same.

Regardless of my needs, this incident will fizzle out.

[Event Complete - Assassination Threat].

[You have acquired the trait "Qi Sense"].

With that, the assassination event that had my blood running dry for quite some time came to an end.

Trait: Chi Sense

Description: A talent for detecting small, life-threatening to long-term threats. It can be used to aid in combat, or to sense life force. It allows you to feel and recognize danger in advance.

However, this is an abstract sense, not an absolute.

Events that give attributes.

They usually paid off big time.

That was the case again.

\* \* \*

The case is closed. No, it's not completely resolved, but it's now in Bertus' hands. He will put it to rest.

There are no witnesses to the incident, as it is outside the ecliptic and inside the mansion. So there's no commotion.

So I had to clean up the mess.

I had heard the story of how Ellen and Harriet found Aaron Mede. I knew about it, but I hadn't organized it.

I first looked for Herriot.

He was locked in his room, not in the magical society, not in the magical lab in his dormitory.

"Hey."

"......."

Herriot had a very bad complexion.

"We need to talk."

"Yes......."

Herriot cautiously opened the door.

"Do you want to come in?"

Normally, I would have never let him in, but he looked pretty bad right now.

You didn't actually kill anyone, but you saw something horrible.

Whatever you saw, it must have been more than you could have imagined. It's not the same as seeing something you've only imagined or heard about.

Sitting across from him at the table, Harriet stared blankly at the table.

Normally, I would have been angry at them for doing such a dangerous thing. Just as these guys had a lot to say to me, I had a lot to say to them.

"Why on earth would....... that far?"

"......."

"You don't have to make that, you don't have to make bugs that control people, or mix people and beasts, why do you have to make that?"

Chimera.

Herriot looked at them as Ellen sliced them up and seemed to have a mental breakdown.

I'm tired of the wizard's malice.

"Reinhardt......."

"Uh."

"This time, I know you didn't mean to....... I know you didn't do it on purpose......."

Harriet trembles, and gingerly takes my hand.

"Can I not get involved in something like this? I'm so scared....... I don't understand....... I don't know what else....... Fighting with kids, that's all fine and good....... But this kind of thing....... Can't I stay away from things like this?"

Herriot trembles and eventually cries.

"I'm afraid you're going to go too far. No, I'm so scared because I think you've already gone......."

In the midst of it all, I was overly complacent.

Herriot seemed to be afraid of that, too.

"I'd love to, too."

Harriet's hand was breaking out in a cold sweat as she squeezed mine.

"I'll try to do that."

That's a lie.

A lie that could only be a lie, a lie that even Harriet would recognize.

I had no choice but to do it for now.

\* \* \*

In the middle of the night, I went to find Ellen.

Herriot blew away the bloodstains with a cleansing spell, so he wouldn't arouse suspicion when he returned to the temple.

It's just Ellen and me in the rehearsal hall. Ellen looks at me without saying a word.

-Chulkuk

Without another word, Ellen locked the door to the training room.

I could see why it would do that.

"Summon."

"......what?"

"Tiamata."

-Cheating.......

Ellen held a bowl of ramen in her right hand.

"Why."

"If."

Ellen stares at me with dark eyes.

"Do it."

I summoned Tiamata in my right hand.

Ellen lunges at me, her body engulfed in blue flames.

-Bam!

I pushed my physical enhancements to the limit, but in a single blow, Tiamata was out of my grasp and Ellen's ramen was at my throat.

Overwhelming skill differential.

I wonder if they wanted to show that.

"......."

Ellen's eyes burned with anger.

"If it weren't for Herriot, I might be dead."

Even the enchanted Ellen might have died in the alchemist's house without Herriot's anti-magic field. Ellen was saying that with a straight face.

"You, you shouldn't have come."

Ellen, not realizing that I had brought Sarkegar and Eleris with me, was bound to be upset.

-Kang!

Unable to control her anger, Ellen threw the ramen on the floor of the training center.

The holy relics of the gods littered the ground like trash.

"I told you not to do anything dangerous!"

Ellen screamed.

"How many times have I....... How. many. times. have. I. said. that. You. say. that. you. said...... but. what. the. hell. Why the hell....... Why the hell......."

Ellen is going to play.

Tears were falling from the corners of her eyes.

"What the hell is wrong with....... Why the hell......."

She thinks that if she and Harriet hadn't gotten there first, I'd be dead, and she's right.

I would have surely died if I had gone alone.

Ellen was frustrated because she couldn't tell me about herself.

I can't help but think I'm just a vindictive lunatic.

Ellen cried and grabbed my hand.

"Might as well take that gray-haired lady with you. Why on earth would you go alone....... Why on earth....... Why are you trying to do this all by yourself?"

Not bringing Loyar with us was a mistake.

Ellen felt like I was going crazy just dabbling in dangerous things.

That seemed to be too much to bear.

"Are you angry?"

"Ugh. I'm angry."

Ellen looks at me with red, bloodshot eyes.

"And I, you don't think I'm angry?"

"......."

Ellen's right.

If it weren't for Harriet's presence, Ellen would have died in the Alchemist's Mansion. Unable to fight, unable to deal with the many traps, she would have died.

If you think I'm lucky to be alive, you're mistaken.

Ellen is the only one lucky enough to be alive.

Sarkhegar realizes that Ellen exists.

If I hadn't threatened him with my life, Sarkegar would have done it immediately.

And she's not safe now. Ellen is at long-term risk.

Just as Ellen is upset, I am upset. I can't even blame Ellen for this, because she's in danger because of what she did for me.

Still.

I could have done it myself.

Why.

When I saw Ellen emerge from the secret entrance to Aaron Mede's mansion, I thought my heart would drop.

Why.

It's still alive, though.

How did we get here?

What if he dies?

Then, Sarkegaard sees Ellen.

What to do.

What to do.

So many thoughts raced through my head that I almost lost my mind.

But I couldn't tell Ellen all of this.

You were dangerous, and you were going to be dangerous, and I couldn't say that.

"I'm stronger than you."

Ellen glares at me and says

"Then I won't die?"

"I won't die, but I can protect myself better than you can."

That's true.

But.......

Even if we exclude Sarkeghar's acquaintance with Ellen, Ellen and Harriet were out of line.

No matter how strong Ellen is at this point, she's still under Loyaar. No matter how strong Herriot is at this point, he's still under Elise.

They were outnumbered. They fought for their lives without knowing their opponent's capabilities.

I have a bad case of the narrows.

I'm allowed to do it, but they're not allowed to do it.

We may all have to be thrown into the fire at some point, but why go through it beforehand?

But I had a more fundamental question.

If Ellen becomes a Swordmaster and Herriot becomes an Archmage.

Am I willing for them to take a risk for me?

Apparently, that wasn't the case.

"I appreciate your willingness to risk your life for me, but you really don't have to."

So I couldn't help but say that in a harsh way.

"So, you want me to watch you die? At least. What you're thinking. You could have told me what you were going to do, and then we could have talked, and then....... I could have gone with you......."

Ellen wasn't about to back down. She couldn't talk about it. If she couldn't tell Sarkegar what made Aaron Mede tick, there was no way she could convince Ellen.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"......."

Just as I didn't tell Ellen anything, she figured it out on her own without telling me.

After all, me and Ellen are the same.

If we told each other this story, we wouldn't be able to tell each other because we'd be afraid they'd take over.

I didn't tell them because I knew it would put them in danger, and I thought they would jump in knowing it was dangerous.

I could lie and say I'm not going to do anything dangerous now, but Ellen wouldn't believe me. In reality, I'm going to do something even more dangerous.

"Yeah, it's not going to matter what I say."

Ellen had given up.

You can't convince me. Because if I did, I wouldn't be living like this.

"If you die, I die."

Ellen says warningly.

"If you take your life for granted, I'm going to think you're taking mine for granted, and I'm going to think that."

Warning or threat.

It was a warning, a threat, but ultimately nothing.

In the end, it was all talk.

But that's what life is all about.

"That's what I wanted to say."

I return the words verbatim. Ellen glared at me. When I didn't say a word, she seemed angry in a different way than before.

Ellen sent the ramen back, raised her training sword, and threw one at me.

"Listen."

Ellen points her dueling sword at me.

"If you're going to push yourself on a topic you're weak in, you should at least practice more."

I didn't feel anything for Ellen's provocation.

Because I'm actually weak.

"Yeah."

-Ka-ching!

Ellen lunged, and I parried the sword.

I could see a lot of emotions swirling in Ellen's eyes as she tried to find my gaps.

In the end, the exercise didn't work out that day.

It wasn't a practice, it was a fight.

-Kang!

"Boom!"

That the words we say to each other will scar each other's hearts indelibly. That something will never be taken back.

Rather than break each other's hearts, we chose to break each other's bodies.

Not surprisingly, I was the one who was sicker.

Episode 259.

I spoke with Harriet and Ellen.

That wasn't the end of it.

I had to explain to Elise why I knew about the Black Order and how I knew about Cantus Magna.

They acted as if they knew things they shouldn't know.

Sarkeghar saw Ellen as a problem, but not the Black Order. You can speculate all you want about why I'm dabbling in new powers.

However, while Sarkegar may be fine, Eleris is not.

He's been doing this and that, and now he's trying to get to the Black Order.

Beyond the danger, it's a rather odd situation if I don't dream of rebuilding the demon world.

Sarkeghar seems rather pleased, so there's no need to convince him.

So, I had to do something about this situation where Elise, who had always been my greatest ally, might become my enemy.

The next day.

I left the Temple and found myself in the lower chambers of Elerith's Ring.

Elise's mood was much different than usual.

Unlike the usual cheerful face that greeted me, Eleris was staring at me with a stern expression.

If Elise wants to kill me, I can't stop her.

"That's scary."

"You're trying to contact the Black Order, and you come to me in person in this situation, and you speak of your fears for me, and they can't be real."

"That's really scary."

"......."

Eleris stares at me, still.

"I thought you'd bring Loyaar or Sarkegar, but you're coming alone......."

Darkened ring.

It may not be night, but her powers are at their peak. If she can kill me in broad daylight, there's no way she can't kill me in this environment.

"As for you, sir, you are a strange man."

Her eyes were fluttering.

"The two sides of you, trying to work with a dangerous group called the Black Order, and then trying to protect a child named Ellen with your life. I don't think I'll ever understand it."

It didn't seem to understand me at all.

"Jae-hyun, whatever you're dreaming about, I think you're putting too much faith in me....... You shouldn't. If you dream of rebuilding the Demon Realm, you should stay away from me. Even if you're not dreaming of becoming a Demon Realm Rebuilder, you're putting too much faith in me. Instead....... Why do you have so much faith in me, you don't even know me."

Eleris said pleadingly. She looks like she's about to burst into tears.

Sarkegar and I had some friction this time, but he could never kill me. In the end, I'm forced to comply, and while I can't stand Ellen's presence, I can't touch her for now.

But not Eleris.

Eleris kept doubting and worrying that I was dreaming of war and rebuilding the demon world.

Eleris is an unwieldy load.

A subordinate who can kill me at any time if my intentions don't align with his values.

There's no reason to keep such a subordinate around, and I've been favoring Elise. She can't understand me like that.

The trust between me and Elise has been broken.

Eleris will never believe me when I say I want peace, because I tried to reach out to the Magic Covenant.

Therefore, at a time when you are wondering what to do with me, I appear alone, as if to kill you, and you are confused.

When I was dropped into this world, I was psychologically overwhelmed.

I was relieved to see Charlotte, but I didn't know what to do with the ecliptic.

I met Elise at a time when I was worried about today, not years from now.

In a world full of human beings, I met someone who must be on my side.

It's like finding an oasis in the desert, and meeting Eleris was like a circle of salvation for me.

So I couldn't help but be drawn to her, no matter what she actually was.

"I never lied."

I stare at Eleris.

"I'm not interested in rebuilding the demon world, and I'm not interested in war."

Eleris looked disbelieving. Yeah, I can't believe it either. This whole pacifist thing has gotten out of hand.

When I took Elise to Aaron Mede's house, I already knew this was going to happen.

It was a moment that had to come at some point.

Now Elise has a very important job to do.

"If I told you I knew the future, would you believe me?"

"......Yes?"

I was going to tell her about the future, at least.

\* \* \*

Know the future.

Elise was flustered, not sure how to react, as she hadn't expected me to say such an outlandish thing.

I wanted to tell others, but I couldn't.

It would require explaining too many other things, including things that could never be said.

But I could only tell one person, and that person was Elise.

To be more precise, I wanted to remove the last bit of doubt about me from Elise's mind.

I wanted to make Eleris, now truly on my side.

On my side, unsuspecting no matter what I do.

"Degrading....... What....... What in the world are you talking about?"

"I don't know the whole future. All I know are some of the big events that will happen in the future, and I can't predict the future as it changes in real time."

It's hard to explain the details. I couldn't and didn't want to believe that I was the creator of the world.

This is a place I do not know. It is a house built by others on the ground I have cleared. I know the foundation, but the finished world is a place I don't know.

"The information about the Black Order and Cantus Magna is just stuff I already knew. You know, there's no reason or way for me to know that stuff."

"Lower....... I don't understand what you're saying. Are you saying, Mr. Zhao, that you're a person from the future?"

"Not quite, but it's close."

I'm pretty sure that's what they mean when they say "peepers. Elise looked like she was convinced there was something really wrong with my head.

"You won't believe it, you won't believe it, but hear me out."

It's too long a story to answer every single question that comes to mind as she listens to me. For now, she is silent at my words.

"There's not a lot we can prove. What matters is that in two years, warp gates on every continent are going to be connected to the Otherworld, and a lot of people are going to die because of it."

"I've come up with my own name for it, 'The Gate Crisis,' and I don't know the exact reason it's happening. But I do know that if we leave it alone, it's going to kill a billion humans."

"The only thing I can think of right now that could do that is magic, and I'm trying to get a clue from magic. It could be the Black Order or the Cantus Magna, or some other magical organization, and I'm trying to contact them because they might know the solution."

"I'm expanding my power now, so that if things get out of hand later, I might have to put in a precipitation that destroys the warp gates of an entire continent."

"There's a lot more I could do. Because in the end, I need to be able to do a lot of things."

"Yeah, I know, it's hard to believe, and you're probably wondering why the hell I know that."

"Okay, now ask."

I'm not free.

Therefore, she needs to be moved instead. Elyse can use teleportation.

It's the only thing around me that can carry out my most important instructions immediately and accurately.

She must either believe that I am very much out of my mind, or that I am telling the truth. Eleris was silent for a very long time.

"All of a sudden you said this to me....... I didn't know what to do......."

In the end, she didn't seem to believe me.

"Yeah, you can't trust me, but I want you to know that I'm not wishing for war or the end of the world."

It was more likely to be disbelief.

With the Orbis class gone, I can't even point to the minutiae of the Temple as evidence.

But I do know a few things about the future that are certain.

"You made a club, remember?"

"Yes, he founded a magical society and is even the president......."

"Something amazing is about to be made there."

"......!"

Eleris had told me about the Magical Research Society beforehand. I was surprised that she was president without knowing magic.

And I'd already heard about the stuff they were going to build there. Like everyone else, Elise was negative.

That's why Eleris told me about the manifestation of magic using atmospheric mana.

"No way......."

"Yeah, I knew they were going to make that stuff, that's why I had them make it ahead of time."

Power Cartridge and Moonshine.

If those two objects were made by students, she would have some faith that I knew the future.

"Also, the future has changed so much, I don't know what's going to happen......."

Another solid future.

"Alsbringer will choose a master, and that master is my classmate, Ludwig."

Ludwig. This is the first time Eleris has heard the name Ludwig in her life.

"Ellen....... Are you saying that's not her?"

"Uh."

Knowing about Ellen's identity, Eleris naturally couldn't believe that if the next owner of Alsbringer was to be found, it wouldn't be Ellen.

"Time will tell if I really know the future or not."

You may not believe it now, but I'm sure she'll agree with me when she sees what I'm saying come to fruition.

Eleris seemed to sense something in my uncanny confidence.

That what I'm saying is true, or at least that I'm not in a lying mood.

"I don't know if you're a trustee or something, but....... but I'm not sure I can believe it for now......."

"That's exactly how I thought you'd react, which is why I didn't tell you until now. I'd be looked at like a crazy person."

"......."

I don't know how long it will take for the future to come. But she will wait until she sees that my words are true.

Soon, or at least until then, it will be my ally.

"You telling me this means....... It must mean I have a role to play after all."

Eleris looks at me with determination in her eyes.

"What do I need to do?"

She didn't seem intent on turning away from me for now.

"Don't get me wrong, listen."

"Yes."

Here's the kicker.

"We need to rebuild the demon world."

"......neh?!"

Eleris made an uncharacteristically new sound.

After saying that she wouldn't dream of rebuilding the Demon Realm, the sudden sound of rebuilding the Demon Realm caused Eleris to be stunned.

It was more than just bringing the whole story full circle. Eleris looked at me, startled, and then stared back.

He looks at me like I said all those crazy things to get to this point.

"Technically, we're not rebuilding the Demon Realm, but we need to make the humans believe that the Demon Realm has been rebuilt."

"I don't know what you mean....... I'm not sure."

"Now that Ragan Artorius is dead, if word gets out that the Demon Realm has been rebuilt, the humans will panic, right?"

"......Yes."

This was the reaction of a young senior, Redina, the other day.

If Artorius dies and the demon is resurrected, who the hell is going to kill it?

Fear of the Devil.

In the absence of Artorius, the only real opponent, the devil has returned.

Humans panic.

"We don't have much time. Only two years. No, not even two years."

At the beginning of the first semester of the third year, the gate crisis erupts.

It's not two years, it's a year and a bit.

"If we don't fix what's causing the gates in those two years, we're going to have to do the next best thing and smash all the warp gates on the entire continent, which might cause something else to happen, but we'll have to do it for now."

"......I don't think you can do that."

"Right."

It's impossible to break all the warp gates on a continent in one fell swoop. Unless I become the Empire itself.

But I can't be the empire itself, but I can be its arch-enemy.

Becoming someone's enemy means gaining influence over them.

"If we make them believe that a demonic force is invading the lands of men through a warp gate, what do you think will happen?"

Elise's eyes widened at my words.

"By ourselves....... I'm going to seal the warp gate....... Is that what you're saying?"

"It will do that, if not destroy it. Even if we don't destroy it, we'll do enough to defend it."

It won't solve everything, but it will mitigate the initial damage considerably.

"That's why it's insurance, just in case. So we don't have to rebuild the Demon World for real. Just enough to keep the humans on their toes. Just enough to make them realize that it's happening here and there, and when it comes down to it, I'm going to step up, or someone else is going to step up, and we're going to raid their land through the warp gate."

It won't be demons that actually come out, but otherworldly monsters, but that's probably a good thing. Humans will be prepared.

This is a backup plan in case I don't accomplish anything in the end. Humans must believe that the Demon Realm is being reorganized, and they must fear it.

Eleris looks at me with a stony expression.

"That role is....... Are you saying I should take that role?"

"Yeah."

Sarkegaard and Loyaar have a job to do here.

Eleris, however, was not given a job. As a wizard, her mobility is unparalleled, as she can move from continent to continent in an instant.

The rebuilding of the Demon Realm should be left to those who want it least. Of course, it's not really rebuilding, it's just an ulterior motive under the guise of rebuilding.

I think Elise knew she was going to do this somehow.

"......Yes. Degradation."

Elise also.

He looked like he was accepting a fate he couldn't fight.

"Great, but all of this would be....... false."

If all this is just a lie, will you kill me?

"I'm....... I'm going to be very sad."

Even when she didn't know whether or not to trust me, it seemed like she couldn't choose between hating me or harming me in the end.

When she first saw me on the ecliptic, she looked like she was going to kill me.

Maybe it was just my imagination.

Eleris seemed like someone who couldn't do a hair's breadth of harm to my body.

The big story was over, but there was still more to tell.

"But....... Speaking of rebuilding the Demon Realm, what on earth should I do and how should I start......."

Rumors spread through the human world that the rebuilding of the Demon Realm has begun.

That meant something had to be done, but Elise didn't seem to have a clue.

"The demonic core has been decimated, and I told you, some of them don't get it."

"Oh....... Yes."

Demonic forces on the fringes who have not answered the call.

"Let's eat them first."

You must actually have power. Even if it's just a sham of a reconstruction, you must have power itself. You must subjugate the demonic forces that still exist and crush them underfoot.

That first batter.

"Vampire Council."

"......Yes?"

Something that wasn't even a demonic force in the first place.

"Round them up."

I'm going to have that first.

"Lock the door, point the holy sword at the mother tree, make a blood oath or something."

"!"

I don't know if I can crush the pride of a long-lived vampire, but maybe a holy sword can force their closed minds open?

It's the best weapon on earth for undead only, and Elysse would get a kick out of Tiamata.

History proves it.

There's nothing like violence to open a closed door.

Episode 260.

I don't know if Elise believes that I know the future.

But Eleris has the most important job to do, so she has no choice but to share her most important secret.

Time will tell if what I say is true.

It seemed to convince him that I was trying to make contact with a magical coven, and that I was weird.

This made me feel more comfortable discussing the details with Elise.

It prevents a really big crisis in the future.

With that premise in place, there's nothing to say.

But problem.

"......Don't know?"

"It is."

"Didn't you say you know the future?"

"I don't know everything, there's more I don't know."

"No, but you're right, I'm not going to lie to the Black Order!"

Elise exclaimed in disbelief.

Uh, how come.......

I feel like I'm getting yelled at by my mom for having an accident.......

"All I know is that Aaron Mede is a member of the Black Order, not that I know where to find them, and I'm just throwing it out there because I don't think I'll ever get involved with them if I miss it."

"Hah....... Maybe....... Then of course you don't know much about cantus magna, do you?"

"It is."

"Hah......."

As I was writing, I realized that this is a very long post.

When you start a long-running series, there are certain things that you can't control because human memory is limited and your abilities are limited.

You forget the rice cakes you sowed.

It becomes untouchable and you can't collect rice cakes at all.

The Magic Coven are those 'unclaimed' rice cakes for me. It's not that I've forgotten, but I'm afraid it's gotten too big for me, so I've forgotten ah....... that I don't know what to do with.

A product of my own irresponsibility.

The Black Order makes one appearance in Aaron Mede's Gun, and there's a mention of the Sobriety Hunters, but that's about it.

I wrote about them in a way that made me feel like they were great, and I had the setup in my head, but it never came out. When the whole Gate thing blew up, all the little things got sucked up or forgotten.

They never talked about what they did during the Gate debacle.

The only thing that sticks in my mind is what I had in mind when I set up the magic circle.

The Magical Order acts and operates by its own standards, independent of the morals of the world. This is as true of the Black Order as it is of the Sobriety Hunters, the Cantus Magna.

The Black Order has only made one appearance.

Cantus Magna is mentioned, but not shown.

At the end of the day, this is my cheap shit, so I have to jump in and figure it out somehow.

If the gate debacle was caused by the Covenant, you should definitely know about them.

The problem now is that I've pretended to have information that would appeal to the Black Order, but I don't have any.

So she's looking at me pathetically once she's done it.

"Um, ....... I don't know much about Cantus Magna, but I know how to get to them."

"Is there a way to do that?"

a.

But if I say this again.

I'm going to get in trouble for this.......

No, but it's not complicated, it's super easy.

It's hard to beat that.

"They're bounty hunters, those guys."

"Yes."

"Then, of course, you're going to use the forbidden word, right?"

"......."

Eleris's expression turned sour. It feels similar to the way Ellen sometimes glares at me with a cheap look.

It's kind of cool, though, because Ellen's the one with the expressionless face, and that's what Elise, who's always smiling, looks like.

Real.

I feel a sense of crisis.

To call in a sobriety hunter, you can use forbidden magic.

I mean, it makes sense!

"Do I really want this burn!"

Elise eventually screeched and grabbed my head.

-Bam!

"Eek!"

"What did I do......!"

He was surprised at himself for what he had done, so he patted me on the head and apologized.

My suggestion to use sobriety to invoke the cantus magna was rightly dismissed.

"Elise, calm down and think about it. After all, if the Black Order finds out I lied to you, you'll end up fighting them anyway, right?"

"It's loud!"

Eleris sighed in frustration.

"The council might know something. We'll look there for clues for now, there are some families with deep ties to Inse."

"Really?"

"A vampire who lives long enough inevitably becomes a wizard. For there is nothing like hard study to appease the freeing of time."

Let's set aside the very risky method and take a cue from the Vampire Council.

For now, my next move would be determined there. It would be crucial to determine whether or not I could bring them under my control.

\* \* \*

Aside from life in the Temple, I've given Elise instructions on what to do outside.

We don't have a lead on the Black Order yet, but it's highly unlikely we'll be fighting them. If they do, I might use alcohol to call them out. If the Black Order doesn't use that method, well, they'll have their own reasons.

Aaron Mede's job has been put on hold, and he's sharing his only secret with Elise.

Issue.

"......."

"You know, you guys are kind of obvious, right?"

"What."

We're quietly eating breakfast and Riana is chewing the tines of her fork through her teeth, alternately looking at me and Ellen.

"Did you fight or not?"

"No? And or what?"

"I didn't fight."

But the look on everyone's face says, "We fought.

"They don't talk much anyway, but I can see if they've been fighting or not."

Adelia giggled at Riana's comment and scratched her head. It's probably because she thinks I'm going to lose my shit if she says anything.

After the last incident, Ellen and I became strangely silent, as if we hadn't had a subtle fight.

Ellen was mad at me, and I was mad at her.

They do it because they care about each other, but the end result is that they only make each other worse.

What to say.

Temples externally and internally.

My head was spinning.

It's not just Ellen. Riana asked, this time looking to the side.

"And what's up with you lately?"

"......No, it's okay."

Herriot shook his head in dismay as he woke up.

Herriot was suffering from something akin to PTSD due to the traumatic sights he saw at Aaron Mede's mansion.

Herriot didn't do the fighting himself. Ellen took care of the anti-magic field.

However, I've seen humans being controlled by homunculi who have fallen victim to my anti-magic spells.

It wasn't murder, but Herriot seemed to think it was.

And the horrible chimeras I saw in the underground workshop.

That would be a direct source of trauma. I didn't see it because I didn't go in, but it seemed like something Ellen didn't want to think about ever again.

It's inevitable.

I had nightmares for a while after seeing a zombie horde, too.

In a way, it's a good thing Harriet grew up with nightmares and trauma from what she saw. No, I'm glad she's able to live a normal life.

What happened there was a secret, and very few people knew about it.

So, except for Bertus, no one knew why we looked the way we did.

"Do you want to cheer yourself up?"

I can't stand to see this happen again," Riana said, her voice rising in tension.

"I hear there are lots of fall flowers along the Irene River. Let's go see them after class."

If we didn't go, they would give us an electric massage with a big smile on their face, so we nodded, even though they didn't seem to like it.

\* \* \*

After class, myself, Ellen, Harriet, Liana, and Adelia left the Temple.

Ellen walked some distance away from me, and Herriot stayed with Adelia.

Naturally, Riana and I were leading the way.

"Hey, how'd that work out for you?"

"......Roughly."

Riana is a weird one, because she seems to have it all figured out, and then she doesn't.

"I think that's why it looks like this again......."

He's also assuming that it happened somewhere he doesn't know about, but he doesn't ask.

And then, out of nowhere, flowers.

I don't have a hobby for that. Come to think of it, I don't think Ellen or Adelia would have anything to do with flowers, except maybe dabbling in magic, though I'm sure Harriet lived in a palace with a garden.

I don't think Ellen will be much different.

"Do you like flowers?"

Riana shook her head at my question.

"Not really, unless it's clothes."

After all, he's trying to cheer himself up, and he's clearly not interested in the flowers themselves.

I wonder who this is for.

\* \* \*

Come here, Daeha.

Namely, along the Han River in Seoul, Korea, called the Zodiac Gradient.

The Rotary Club used to stop by when they were here, but not much has happened since the headquarters moved.

Autumn flowers bloomed everywhere, and many people took a walk. The world after the Demon King's death. A peaceful world.

I see people there enjoying the flowers without a care in the world.

We were one of them.

Everyone had come to see the flowers without much thought, and Riana was no different.

But we were there, so we walked the trails and watched the flowers bloom.

Riana grabbed my arm and pointed to a type of flower that was everywhere.

The most blooming flower.

"What kind of flower is that?"

"It's Cosmos."

"......what. Why do you know?"

"No....... It's common sense."

Cosmos doesn't know what he's talking about, and you want to go flower watching?

But Riana wasn't the only one who noticed. The way they looked at me seemed to have changed.

All of a sudden, this is where the otherworldly stuff happens.

"You guys didn't know either?"

Adelia scratched her cheek at my question.

"It's not that I don't know it's Cosmos......."

"......Is the very fact that I know flowers a mystery?"

Ellen, Harriet, Adelia, and Riana all nodded.

Then yes.

It's amazing that a gachaban like me knows the name of a flower, no matter how common it is.

Sickness.

I don't really care, but I do know enough to get by.

Of course, I've also done the foolish thing of memorizing flowers and flower words in an attempt to expand my vocabulary. It didn't help my writing at all.

However, I did manage to memorize the common flowers and the flower names of some of them.

For those flowers that everyone else knows about.

"Hey, what's that?"

"Chrysanthemum."

"That one?"

"......that's a chrysanthemum."

"They're different colors, that one is white and that one is yellow."

"Oh bitter, don't you know that red roses and white roses are both roses, are you really this ignorant?"

"Oh, right. They do look the same."

It's not a big deal, but people look at me like I'm crazy.

What the hell is I in your heads?

I don't think I need to ask, but for some reason Riana asked me if that sounded funny when the unnamed flower was in bloom.

Even as I picked up the names of these flowers, there were still many I didn't recognize.

There were many flowers that I wasn't sure if they were unique to this world, or if they were in the original world but I just didn't know the name.

In the end, I didn't know everything. Of course, there was always more we didn't know.

But as the sun was setting. The looks on everyone's faces got a little weird.

The looks on their faces were like they had never seen a different side of me before.

"Oh, really, what's the big deal, is it so amazing that I know so much about flowers?"

"Of course."

Riana speaks for herself.

"You know, the more I look at you, the more I don't get it."

In the end, the different version of me didn't seem to be a bad thing.

Harriet was blushing, though she didn't know why.

You guys, I think this misunderstanding has gotten out of hand.

Let's set the tone.

"But I'm a flower girl, which is kind of weird."

"Why?"

Everyone was curious to see what it would sound like this time.

"Aren't flowers technically the genitals of plants?"

Technically, it's pistils and surgery.

"Don't you think it's kind of funny that we gather like this to look at genitalia?"

"ah......."

"......."

"......."

"You're a nutcase after all."

You've successfully set the tone.

\* \* \*

I don't know if I really felt better after that one flower viewing. We all turned to leave, but Ellen grabbed me.

"A little."

"......?"

Ellen winks at me.

"Let's stay a little longer."

She wanted to be alone. Everyone was like, "If you want to do it, do it.

As if they thought we should be left alone to talk, even if it was because of a misunderstanding, not because we were fighting. Everyone left us alone without another word.

It was a fall evening, just after sunset.

We sat at the foot of the stairs, close to the Irine River.

"......."

"......."

We were angry at each other.

I will dabble in more dangerous things, most of which I can't even tell Ellen about. I don't even want to ask for help.

It's too risky.

I don't want Ellen to know anything about what I'm going to do, and if she does, it won't be that I'm doing something dangerous, but that she'll know my secret.

If that happens, I don't know what happens after that.

I didn't want to imagine it.

"I think it's weird."

Ellen said as she finished.

"What."

"If someone is important to you, you should say nice things, do nice things, and be nice to them."

"......."

"I think it's more like if you care about someone too much, you're going to say things you don't like about them, and you're going to hurt them."

Ellen stays still, watching the calm surface of the river with its red ripples.

"It's stupid."

"......Yes."

Foolishly, I tossed a rock into the river. I watched it sink below the surface in small ripples.

Under a searing fall sunset.

"I'm sorry."

"Me too. I'm sorry."

We apologized to each other.

Ellen leaned her head toward me.

It's been a while since I've done that.

"Reinhardt."

"Uh."

"Aaron Mede, you didn't kill him."

"......."

Ellen already knew.

I can't help but notice.

It's a lie, but Aaron Mede's head exploded and he died. There is no way I could have left such a scar.

You may have hidden the body, but Ellen could have seen it.

"Uh."

Ellen didn't ask any questions.

"When you become Swordmaster, will you tell me your secret?"

"......."

I couldn't tell you if I was more than a Swordmaster.

I had no answer.

There comes a moment when Ellen learns my secret.

It felt like an inevitability now.

It seemed like we could avoid the gate, but not by much.

Episode 261.

I didn't make peace with Ellen. We weren't even fighting in the first place.

We exchanged some unspoken hurt, and we ended up apologizing to each other for it.

Herriot's problems remained.

That night, I summoned Harriet to the teatime terrace where Bertus and I would occasionally chat.

"It's okay, I'm getting better."

When I asked her if she was okay, she forced a smile and said, "I'm not. You just have to get through it. It's a different kind of horror than seeing a dead body.

"I just don't get it, I don't see why I would have to do such a terrible thing."

Magic, by its very nature, makes the impossible possible. But I don't see why it should have to do anything as bizarre as mixing races or creating life.

Harriet has a bad complexion, but it's getting better. Still, she seems to be getting better, so she drinks some black tea.

"With Ellen?"

"Well said, in moderation."

"Good."

Herriot smiled wryly.

"You said you fought a horde of zombies in ......Darklands."

"I did."

"If it's so hard for me to watch something like that, how hard must it be for you and Ellen?"

We've fought terrible things ourselves, and Ellen is the one who dealt with the Chimera.

Herriot was having a hard time even seeing the traces of the fight.

I wanted to tell her that this was a different kind of worry, but she seemed to be thinking about her own weakness in this moment of struggle.

"Without you, Ellen would be dead."

"......All I did was use a single scroll."

"But that doesn't make me wrong."

Herriot stares at me.

Without Herriot, Ellen might not have chosen to fight right then and there. But once she chose to fight, Herriot's role was essential.

It doesn't matter how insignificant you think it was to you, it still made a difference.

"More, harder."

Herriot says, looking out into the dark fall night.

"You're already working hard."

Herriot sees me.

"Still, you could try a little harder."

I'm not sure since when.

There was a hint of sadness in all of Herriot's laughter.

"On vacation, I'll be here."

Magic Society activities.

Herriot seemed intent on continuing his research there rather than returning home.

Herriot's expression showed a desire for strength. This time, she felt something in the sight of Ellen fighting back.

I'm the only one who thinks I don't have time.

I wonder if it's my influence.

Ellen and Harriet were fidgeting.

\* \* \*

I need to get information from the Magic Covenant. I must also use my status as the Last Demon to my advantage when the inevitable happens.

You should at least fake your way to the next Demon King. The heir to the realm of nothing is good game, not something to be feared.

People need to know that the next devil exists.

This requires a minimal amount of force.

Vampire Council.

I'm going to crush them under my feet against their will.

But I don't know whether the old vampires will fear the holy sword or me.

The Lord Vampires seem to be almost all mages, and it's possible that we'll get some clues about the Magic Covenant from them.

The Black Order is supposed to approach me, and I'm supposed to give them information about Cantus Magna, but I don't expect them to approach in the near future.

And they may have blown Aaron Mede's head off, but they're not going to kill me for giving them false information.

You already know I'm a badass with a road vampire as my minion.

There's no way they're going to rat me out to the Empire. It's like a bad guy snitching on a bad guy.

So.

There's still time before the Vampire Council convenes.

Finals are coming up.

After finals, there will be festivals, and after those festivals, there will be winter break.

The busier you are, the harder it is to feel the seasons, and that's exactly what I did.

The short fall is coming to an end.

It's not because I'm busy, it's just the way fall and spring are.

It's that time of year again, and before you know it, it's gone.

-Sarak

The sound of crunching leaves could be heard across the campus.

"What is this."

I brushed a fallen leaf from Ellen's hair. He stood still, his back to the dorm entrance.

There's a big leaf sitting there like a hat, and he doesn't care. Ellen was staring at me, whether she should or not.

Not me, to be precise, but the person next to me.

"You have that look on your face when you see your sister?"

"......what."

He's glaring at Olivia Ranze.

"Do you have a problem with me?"

"No."

"Do you hate it so much that I'm like Reinhardt and all that?"

"Oh, what are you talking about, if you're going to talk bullshit, go away!"

On her way back from running errands with Olivia Ranze, Ellen ran into her in front of her dorm. Olivia's eyes widen as she sees Ellen, who is giving her a fat and somewhat hostile stare.

I've run into Olivia a few times lately when she's running errands.

Ellen and Olivia have a very bad relationship.

By the way.......

The thing about bad relationships is that there is such a thing as a relationship.

Did you two even realize there was such a thing in the first place, I'm not sure?

"You wouldn't even be next to Reinhardt if I were five years younger, because I can teach you all sorts of things."

At Olivia's comment, one corner of Ellen's mouth quirked up.

What is.

I've never seen him look like this before.

With an obvious sneer, Ellen spits it out.

"It must be nice to be older."

"Hey, hey, hey! I'm only twenty-two! I'm young! I'm in my prime!"

"After all, you're older than me and Reinhardt, by five years."

"Hey, profit, Reinhardt, can I hit him?"

Olivia looked at me with a grimace as if she'd finally lost the match.

"......Why are you asking my permission to do that?"

"Look at me."

Ellen cocked her head confidently.

Ellen.......

Come on, you. You're not like this!

Olivia scowled and turned her head away.

"Heh, she's just putting up with it because she hates violence, you know!"

Olivia stuck her tongue out and disappeared back into the dorm.

Him.

That's good. That's really good.

Sometimes she picks out things I hate so much I want to punch her. Ellen glanced at Olivia, who was walking away, then turned to me.

"Can't you just not be friends with him?"

"...... Come on."

"No. That person."

Ellen was furious as hell.

"Why, what happened?"

"I don't know. I hate it. It sucks."

It was the first time I'd ever heard Ellen express her emotions so openly.

"That....... He's helped me with a lot of things and....... I still have some things I need to do that I can't help but......."

"......Is this important?"

"Uh, a lot."

I know it's not good for people to see Olivia Lanchester flirting with me, but it's really necessary, so I couldn't help myself this time.

When I told her there was nothing she could do about it, she looked very uncomfortable.

"Make it clear."

"Nothing....... what......."

"He keeps doing that because you're not being firm."

Ellen's anger is directed at me this time. I feel my body freeze under his cold gaze.

"Or, he's doing this, okay?"

"No, not at all. No, no. Not good."

"I think you like it, you're just pretending you don't."

"No, I don't want to, I really don't want to!"

What it is.

This is.......

Why do you sound like you're scolding a boyfriend who can't manage his girlfriend?

It's a weird situation and I don't know what to say.

What are you?

I felt like I was going to get my tongue cut out or my head cut off if I said anything close to that.

It's really fucking scary.

"Then don't let me."

"Uh....... Yeah......."

Eventually, I responded like a boyfriend who couldn't manage his girlfriend.

\* \* \*

Too much to do.

If everything about gates is "work," then I had a lot of work to do.

Dealing with interpersonal issues was also a headache.

As a result, academics took a back seat.

Last place is dangerous, so I'm not going to do it on purpose this time, but last place is a lock.

"So I'm asking you to restrain yourself."

"Hmm, is it wrong to show affection?"

When I finally told Olivia what Ellen had told me to do, Olivia was in the middle of a pouting, huffing, puffing fit.

"...... Seriously, you make it sound like I promised you something, and I have no intention of marrying you!"

Olivia's jaw dropped and her complexion turned white at my sentiment.

"Not....... really......?"

"Why are you panicking!"

I really like you, but didn't I keep telling you that I'm not interested in that kind of thing?

"I thought....... I thought I was bouncing......."

"Oh, I'm dizzy......."

"Well, if it's not now, maybe she'll like me in the future?"

Olivia's dazzling smile was enough to make my head spin.

It doesn't make sense.

"Chet, when you take advantage of me and don't see this, you get really pissed off, and you don't realize how scary that is?"

Olivia has a point.

I've gotten to the point where I'm at a loss for words when I'm asked if I can't use it whenever I need it.

That's how I use it now.

"Do you really like him that much that you'd be that nasty to your sister?"

"That's not the problem."

"If it's not that?"

Olivia's face suddenly hardened, and she started to say something, but stopped.

"Let me tell you something. Did he do something wrong to me, there's no such thing."

Olivia was serious now.

"But I hate her, and I can't help it. Don't tell me not to hate her, don't bully her, don't argue with her. You know?"

Olivia looks at me, biting her lip slightly.

"The more you say that, the more I hate her for no reason."

-Bang!

With that, Olivia slammed the door on the visit.

Why.

I.

It's creepy, but it's all in the name of saving the world.

Why do we have to go through this.......

\* \* \*

"I hate him too."

Herriot nodded in agreement.

"Well, but....... He was such a nice guy before this......."

At Adelia's words, Riana shook her head.

"Well, she's a bitch."

"X years......?"

Adelia seemed fed up with Riana's hyperbole.

-Omnomnomnom

Ellen, the one who brought it up and suggested we go out for dinner, ordered five entrees and ate them all.

This was a little different than usual.

For some reason, I have a strong feeling that I'm eating to relieve stress because I'm angry.

When Riana asks him if he looks bad, he says that he doesn't like Olivia Ranze, the girl who goes to school with Reinhardt.

At this moment, for the first time in her life, Ellen is talking back.

Herriot agreed, Adelia wasn't sure, and Riana said X years.

"Well, Reinhardt's an asshole, so maybe they're kind of a good match?"

Ellen and Harriet glared at Riana at her cheerful words.

"Why or why not?"

"......."

"......."

"Lee, Riana......."

"Why?"

Liana de Granz is blind to the oddities.

Riana ordered a cheese salad, saying she wasn't really hungry.

"She's kind of weirdly flirtatious. Reinhardt says he doesn't like her, but he can't hit on her, so maybe she's interested....... Oh, no. Why am I getting chills, has it gotten that cold?"

Riana shivered at the sudden chill in the air as she continued to speak nonchalantly. Of course, Riana didn't realize it was Ellen's gaze.

"I don't know about anything else, but he's kind of an asshole. He knows you're pretty and he just goes for it. It's not cool."

All four of us have nothing to say about that.

Olivia Ranze.

The title of Saint of Eredian had long since faded, but that didn't change the fact that she was a striking figure wherever she went. Even Reinhardt, as much as he hates it, has seen her get genuinely flustered and blush on occasion.

Watching him cling to Reinhardt so tightly was enough to make even the most unthinking person feel a little uncomfortable.

You're talking out of your ass.

It's natural to think about this.

"So what. What do you want to do?"

"I don't know what I want to do with ......, I just don't like it, and I don't need to see it."

Ellen said, and focused on eating.

I'm always a binge eater, but today I feel like I have to admit that I'm a stress binge eater.

"She's trying to get at you?"

"Yes."

I don't know if I can keep her still, but Olivia scratches unnecessarily when she sees Ellen coming and going.

It's not just recent, it's been around for a while.

Since the last sponsorship, I've been scratching my head every time I see it.

Since we're in the same dorm, we're bound to run into each other from time to time.

"Oh, how are you, Reinhardt's friend?

"Take care of my Reinhardt!

"You can't be too friendly with Reinhardt, you know why?

'Well, you're pretty now, but not as pretty as your sister.'

"I hear you're a good fighter, but don't bully our Reinhardt too much.

'Sorry, my sister is a competitor. That's too bad.'

"Oh, are you mad? Are you mad? Are you mad? If you hit me, I'm going to tell Reinhardt. Are you okay?

Ellen grabbed her fork as she ate.

The more I think about it.

Pissed off.

-Kuuuuuk

Everyone watched, wide-eyed, as the fork bent.

But eventually.

Ellen isn't the type of person to do harm if she doesn't like someone.

It wasn't much different with Herriot, who Olivia didn't like.

In the case of Herriot, this used to be the case, but no longer is.

"Well, ....... But she's kind of obscure."

"What?"

At Adelia's retort, Riana shrugged.

"I'm sure you came in as a divinity major, but if you gave up your faith, what are you graduating as? It would be weird to graduate as a divinity major."

At that point, everyone's faces went blank.

"Sure."

There's no reason to worry about the graduation of someone you don't like, but we're all curious.

How does Olivia Ranze plan to graduate?

"I don't know."

Ellen crunched through five menus in a flash, then took a sip of water and her eyes lit up.

"If you keep doing that, I'm not going to put up with it."

"He, he....... Patience, Ellen......."

Harriet secretly wanted Ellen to do something, but she stopped her for now, fearing something terrible would happen.

Episode 262.

Ellen and Olivia's relationship is a problem, but I have my hands in more dangerous things than that, and I don't have time to worry about it.

The things I've done are enough to make my head spin, but the things that have come out of them are things I should have known about, even if I couldn't do anything about them.

I had left it to Sarkegar to investigate the workings of the Orbis class, even though it wasn't directly related to me.

The last scribe's advice was not a trap.

It was more of a clue than a trap.

Your assassination tells you that the person you suspect didn't do it, but it also tells you that something else is going on.

I was in my room, facing Sarkegar, who had come to see me late at night.

After the Aaron Mede incident, there was no indication that Sarkegaard was not listening to instructions or was up to no good.

He just looked at me and looked very sad.

The fact that there was someone I cared about enough to put my life on the line, and that person was Chulcheon Ji-soo's brother, made it even more so.

It was like he wanted to do something, but he couldn't do anything.

But that didn't stop me from doing my job, and I didn't mention Ellen's case. I knew it would only get on my nerves.

Anyway.

Sarkegaard was investigating what happened after the Orbis class was closed.

To be precise, something involving Oscar de Gradias.

"It's a revolution."

After hearing that simple piece of information, I felt like my head was spinning.

The Orbis class, who must prove everything by ability alone, regardless of status.

A place that instills the idea that you can surpass anything with hard work.

It would be strange if they didn't dream of revolution.

"So, getting the class kicked out for misbehavior was a smokescreen to keep you from being investigated further."

"It appears so."

I didn't just stupidly offend the imperial family, I did it on purpose.

To keep truths that shouldn't be known below the surface.

[Event Complete - Revolutionary Forces].

[Earned 300 achievement points].

And there it is, the event you forgot about.

Charlotte thought it was odd that the Temple didn't have a revolutionary faction, and while I didn't do much research on that, I ended up finding out about it in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The Orbis class was the revolutionary force, not some of them, but most of them.

They didn't assassinate me or retaliate against me because it would be dangerous for them to do so now, when they should be restraining their movements as much as possible.

"The Orbis class appears to have been infiltrated by revolutionary forces for a very long time."

It is the cradle of revolutionary forces.

They've been picking and choosing and secretly recruiting those they think will be sympathetic to their cause.

When they graduate?

The Orbis class is just as important, if not more so, than the Royal class.

Whether it's an empire, an empire, or a territory, they're probably sitting in an important group or position that recognizes their abilities.

"How big?"

"I don't know, I didn't see their meeting, I just inferred it from conversations with people who were clearly members of the organization."

I didn't have a lot of time to investigate, so I'll excuse the lack of detail.

"However, it is clear that the loss of the Orbis class, a key talent generator for the Republican Party, will accelerate the point at which they take action."

"Yeah, that Oscar guy didn't like you for nothing......."

Oscar de Gradias is a member of the revolutionary organization. He will continue to pass imperial information to the organization.

He knew what would happen if there was a major investigation into the Orbis class.

In the original story, the revolutionary forces do not appear.

I mean, it was there, but when the Gate debacle happened, it all got swallowed up in the chaos.

The revolutionary forces had been breeding republicans for a long time after the Orbis class took control.

Of the guys who came to the sponsorship meeting, it's likely that many of the guys sponsoring the Orbis class were Republicans.

Sarkegaard looks at me and says, "Where does it start and where does it end?

"Degradation, take advantage of them."

I knew Sarkozy would say something like this.

"Use them to wreak havoc on the Empire. Destroy both the revolutionary forces and the Empire."

Yes.

If I'm going to be the devil, there's no time like the present.

But I don't care about that.

Revolutionary forces and imperial battles wreak havoc on the Empire.

And that's where the gate bursts open.

......Well, that's a perfect situation for the end of the world.

It just popped up.

It was like hitting the end of the world button.

No, how the hell am I supposed to deduce this?

Butterfly effect.

I shuddered at the words.

There's only one thing I need to do.

I don't think about revolutions.

First, we need to stop the revolution.

Isn't that the position I'm supposed to be in?

It was beyond ridiculous.

Sarkegaard realized this was a golden opportunity.

"Do some more research. Find out how big they are, where they are, who their leaders are, everything. If necessary, you may join their forces."

"Yes, degradation."

We need to know how big they are so we can take action.

Sorry, but we can't do what Sarkozy intended.

Sarkegar smiled happily, oblivious to my inner thoughts.

There is definitely a revolutionary force. And it will be large.

But I couldn't touch them. If we start hacking away at the branches, they'll be cornered and they'll start to react.

If you do, you'll end up with a mess because you messed up.

I didn't realize that one fight would have such consequences, but from now on, anything I do will have a huge ripple effect.

You have to be careful and careful again.

For now, Sarkegar was left to gather information.

I felt like I was trying to figure out what to do with a nuclear bomb that would explode if I mishandled it.

Killing them all is a bad idea, whether it's possible or not.

The best thing to do is to wait until at least next year when they start acting, which will be after the Gate debacle (or lack thereof).

So, assuming I've managed to keep the gates shut, I'm supposed to keep my eyes open for the revolutionary forces?

Even if I manage to stop the gate, is there an inevitable second round of Imperial Civil War waiting in the wings? Where do I stand in that?

It looked like it was going to spin.

It's a minefield everywhere you turn.

"......."

In front of me, Sarkeghar was happy to find a way to blow his nose without being touched, and I was having a headache in front of him.

This is what I mean when I say statue dreams.

"Okay, you can go."

"Yes, degradation."

Sarkegar is about to turn into a sparrow again.

It suddenly occurred to me as I watched the sparrow fly out of the open window, its back to me.

Sarkhegar will only be used by me.

In the end, I am doomed to be used by my unwillingness to rebuild the Demon Realm. I may be wrong in many ways, but the biggest wrong I do is to take advantage of her blind loyalty to the end.

"Sarkegar."

-tweet?

Sarkegar looked back at me and shook his head.

"Last time, I apologized."

-.......

I can't do anything for you, and I'll end up being a worse enemy of yours than Ragan Artorius.

At my selfish apology, Sarkegar stared at me in sparrow form.

-degrade.

"......."

-The gods serve degradation, not archdemons.

You can't help me because there's no Archdemon other than me, and I certainly meant it that way.

You serve me because there is no Archdemon besides me.

I said, something like that.

Then Sarkhegar tells me that I am serving the Age.

I wanted to bite my own tongue for saying that back then.

-Please keep that in mind.

They are not loyal to the Archdemon.

Does that mean you'll serve me even if I'm not an Archdemon? Why? What am I worth to you?

-From the time you made the decision to rescue the demonic prisoners held by the humans, every hair on your head to the last shred of your soul was already yours.

Not because it's an arcdemon.

Sarkegar recognized me as his lord from that moment on.

Seeing my guilty look, Sarkeghar, in his sparrow form, shook his head a few times.

-Sorry, now that I think about it, there's more.

As if he'd remembered something he couldn't say.

"......What is it?"

-Something else. Isn't it strange that the imperial family hasn't noticed this?

"......Yes."

So did Bertus, so did Charlotte, so did the Emperor.

I'm surprised the Imperials didn't recognize the problem. Of course, Sarkeghar's spy skills are excellent, but it's surprising that they didn't recognize the problem at all.

-Wondering if I'm just sitting on the sidelines....... I also did some research on their end.

"What is it?"

-We don't know the details, but it looks like there's a problem with the Imperials.

"What's wrong?"

-Rumor has it that someone died in the Empress Palace.

"......what?"

Something is going on inside the Empire.

I don't know if it's anything else, but it's the Empress Palace.

Speaking of which.......

I was completely distracted by the assassination attempt on my life.

For some time now, Charlotte has been attending school at the palace instead of in her dormitory.

I chalked it up to a lot of internal imperial business, but come to think of it, Bertus was still in his dormitory.

Charlotte's Palace.

That a person died there means.......

Does this mean that the emperor was unsuccessful in controlling the imperial succession?

What else is going on, no. What was going on?

Another complicated problem in a complicated situation.

The sparrow flew away, and I stood at the window, pondering the problem for a while.

Episode 263.

Revolutionary Forces is another one, and it's a completely different problem, so I didn't know where to spend my time.

Charlotte has been staying at the palace instead of her dormitory for a while now, but someone has died in the Empress's palace.

Sarkegaard said he learned about it during his espionage work, so most people probably don't know about it.

Does Bertus know this?

Bertus and I only share an integration class, but Charlotte and I share a psychic class.

Charlotte has no idea what she's doing because she's in a class by herself.

Where is the focus of the problem.

An assassination attempt on Charlotte? Or is it something else entirely?

I could see Charlotte.

But I couldn't read anything in Charlotte's expression.

If Sarkegar hadn't told me that, I would have assumed that Charlotte was fine.

Managing facial expressions is as natural to Bertus and Charlotte as breathing, which is why I never saw any concern, worry, or anxiety in Charlotte's expression.

Wednesday.

After the superpower class.

I caught up with Charlotte as she was heading back to the palace after class.

If I didn't know anything, I wouldn't know, but if I did know something, I couldn't let Charlotte go.

"Yes, Reinhard. Why?"

Charlotte shook her head as I casually slid in next to her.

What's wrong with you.

That's dangerous.

What can I say?

I didn't know what to say to break the ice. Because if you know it's dangerous, there's nothing you can say to the question of how you know.

I didn't know what to say in front of Charlotte's plain face.

So.

I grabbed Charlotte once, but I couldn't say anything, I was just staring at her face.

Eventually.

"Are you busy?"

I said that like I was some kind of manipulative bastard.

Charlotte stared at him for a long moment, then looked dumbfounded when he suddenly said that.

"......?"

"Are you busy?"

I don't know.

Fuck this!

Let's just call it a dump!

Charlotte smiled at the absurdity of it all.

"When you're not busy?"

"Play with me."

"......?"

Charlotte's lips twitched in disbelief.

"He....... He, uh....... um......."

Charlotte rolled her eyes in confusion and gave a short sigh.

He smiled gently.

"......I have a few minutes to spare, anytime."

It was a smile that looked even more slurred than usual.

\* \* \*

We could share our concerns about the revolutionary forces, but for now, while that was urgent, Charlotte's safety was more pressing.

I'm not sure, but I think there's a high probability that Charlotte's life is in danger.

I don't know what else I could do if I knew that, but I didn't want to be in the dark.

We could at least talk about it.

Charlotte would consider me a friend, but her presence is a little more special to me than the word friend.

He was the first person to make me realize that I could risk my life to do something, and Charlotte's survival is the result of that.

So, I want to keep it.

The imperial court is noisy with internal problems, and Charlotte is involved.

That's why they don't realize that the Orbis class issue is actually a very dangerous thing that could lead to the overthrow of the empire.

Of course, it's entirely possible that this is all wrong, and that you're right.

The story Sarkegar heard about the death of a man in the Empress's palace may have been a rumor after all.

But, somehow, I feel strangely confident.

It's not going to happen.

Charlotte's eagerness to play, as if she'd decided to make a big deal out of it.

It gives you that confidence.

I didn't, and couldn't, get to the point.

Charlotte walked me out of the temple. She asked me to hang out, and she was heading somewhere, but what was she going to do?

I don't know about Bertus, but Charlotte didn't seem to have any fear of going outside unescorted.

If she's just walking down the street, I'm sure she'll get into trouble, but Charlotte didn't this time, although she was wearing a hoodie the last time we went out together.

"Don't people just recognize it?"

I don't think Charlotte's face is particularly recognizable.

He shrugged and showed me a bracelet.

"I just picked up a new artifact."

"What is it?"

"It's a cognitive disruption spell. It doesn't make you invisible, but it fades your presence, roughly speaking, so you're less likely to be seen unless you're deliberately approaching."

When I think I might be recognized and bothered, I activate the magic on my bracelet. Of course, since I'm a companion, I'm immune to cognitive impairment.

I thought it was a magical item for celebrities.

"So let's go."

Charlotte triggered the cognitive disruption and led me off somewhere. As if I could take a quick stroll with my classmate in my spare time before returning to the palace.

Upon arrival, I was left speechless.

"......."

"......Why?"

"Oh, no, nothing!"

Charlotte brought me to the shores of the Irine River.

I was here a few days ago with my kids!

But I knew it would disappoint Charlotte, so I didn't say anything about it. I don't know what's going on, but she's giving me her precious time, and she's going to be upset.

You can't trample on the empress's consideration like that. Charlotte looked at me and shook her head.

"Don't you like flowers?"

"I love it! Ugh! I love it!"

Charlotte smirks at me.

"You're lying. You say you like flowers? A dog walking by would laugh."

"Oh, well, maybe I'll like it, whatever!"

Charlotte saw the tension in my voice and patted my arm.

"What are you trying to get at?"

"......."

"He's a friend, be easy on him."

Charlotte said and walked ahead.

I don't know what your situation is, but I know it's serious.

Charlotte's facial expression management was excruciatingly thorough.

\* \* \*

I'm being me, and Charlotte is being Charlotte.

But neither of us gave any indication of that.

So we acted like we were just out at a flower show.

It really wasn't that different.

Charlotte's reaction wasn't much different than the others. She was amazed that I recognized and named some of the flowers.

"What the hell do you guys think I am......."

"You're?"

"Oh, no."

It's funny that you only know about it on the level that everyone else knows about it.

But in some ways, Charlotte was different from the others.

Charlotte knew the name of every flower in the land. I was a little taken aback as she listed the names of flowers I had never heard of before.

"That's a dahlia."

"That's a geranium."

"A petunia. Isn't it pretty? I love seasonal flowers."

"That's a heliotrope."

"That's a big name."

"It smells amazing. Can you smell it?"

"Oh, no."

I recalled that a while back I had described flowers as the genitalia of plants, and I backed away, feeling a bit embarrassed.

Am I crazy?

Why am I thinking about this at this time?

Charlotte is smelling the flowers!

The last time they were here, no one was really interested in flowers. But when Charlotte saw a flower, she would stop and think it was pretty, and she would walk slowly to smell it.

"What do you know so much about?"

"Because I like it."

Charlotte smiles at me.

"If you like it, you get to know it well, and you want to know more."

"Is that why you studied?"

"No?"

Charlotte shook her head.

"It's just something that comes naturally to you."

I love flowers, so I naturally know a lot of flowers without studying them. It was a little strange to hear Charlotte say that.

And smiling like that.

If nothing else, I could tell that Charlotte was really enjoying herself right now. She may not have come here to have fun, but she was definitely enjoying this moment.

Charlotte wears a perfect mask, but what expression lurks beneath that mask I can't penetrate, but.......

I could tell that Charlotte's brightly smiling face was not a mask.

Charlotte loves flowers.

I'm sure it's likeable, but it felt weird to see that "likeability".

This is the first time you've seen it.

"Uh....... This is pretty. It's called....... What the hell. It doesn't say."

Sure enough, there was a flower I didn't recognize.

What does the garden of Charlotte's palace look like?

Suddenly, I was curious.

I realized that you probably have a well-maintained garden with tons of flowers that bloom in every season.

Where you come from is important, but so is who you come with.

I had obviously been here a few days before, but watching Charlotte stop and stare at the flowers, it was as if I had never been here before.

I can't help but stare at the flowers as Charlotte does.

You'll be able to name flowers you know and take a closer look at landscapes you've only seen in passing.

So this is the place.

Next to Charlotte on her flower walk, I could only offer a few comments, as I don't really enjoy flowers.

Just stay out of the way.

"Hmph....... The pansies are already blooming."

Charlotte squatted in front of a flower I recognized.

Charlotte knows her flowers.

If so, do you know anything else?

Luckily, I know the flower, not this one.

From what Charlotte says, it sounds like the flowers aren't all that different from the original world.

"Don't you know your flowers?"

"Flower language?"

"Isn't there such a thing as a flower?"

"Oh, you know."

But regardless of the answer, Charlotte shook her head.

"I don't like that."

"Why?"

"That's someone else's name tag."

Charlotte runs her fingertips across the wide petals of the pansies.

"A rose may say love, but to someone else it may be sadness."

Flowers should mean something to everyone.

That's why I hate flowery language.

Charlotte seemed to think so. Charlotte stared at Pansy for a moment, seemed to consider, and then picked up a fallen flower. It looked like someone had plucked it and thrown it away without taking it with them.

"Do you know the flower language for pansies?"

"How would I know that?"

"Well, it was already a passing grade at Reinhardt's level, I'd be surprised if you knew that."

Charlotte looked up at me, holding the flower.

"Do you want it or do you think it's garbage?"

"Even trash is a gift when you give it to me."

"You have a knack for saying such touching things and not making the listener feel moved at all. That's a skill."

As Charlotte said this, she handed me a pansy.

I don't know what Charlotte labeled her pansies in her mind, but she did.

You wouldn't have given it to me if I said I knew the flower language of Pansy.

I lied to Charlotte.

Once upon a time.

I've memorized flowers and flower words for no reason.

I haven't memorized them all, but there are some that I have.

Pansy.

As in, think of me.

Episode 264.

Flowers are actually a very inconvenient gift.

I couldn't even fit it in my pocket, so I carried a single flower. Charlotte saw me do it and told me to throw it away. I don't know if it was because it looked ugly or for some other reason.

I practically tossed the pansy Charlotte gave me into the flowers.

"Wow....... What a waste."

Charlotte looked a little flustered.

"You said throw away ......?"

"No, you said it was a gift, even if what I gave you was crap."

"I merely prioritized the orders of the Empress."

"......you really. Why would anyone do that?"

"If you feel bad, you carry it back."

"You know what, Reinhard? I told you to throw it away, and when you did, it was over."

"This is a mistake."

"In times like this, can you just recognize that it's better for you to say nothing, and I'd hate to be the one to tell you that you've actually abandoned a topic you asked me to abandon?"

"......."

"You can at least answer that!"

"Yes."

Charlotte shook her head tiredly.

There are other reasons why I abandoned it, but I didn't say them.

Just like Charlotte can't tell me why she gave me Pansy. It's just that it is.

Due to the cognitive dissonance spell, no passerby recognized Charlotte.

I met Charlotte earlier this year. But it felt like a lifetime ago.

A girl dying in prison.

I didn't know who Charlotte was. Turns out she was an empress, and that got me in trouble, but it got me to the ecliptic.

If I hadn't met Charlotte, would I have escaped the demon castle unharmed?

What would I have become if I hadn't come to the ecliptic?

Hypotheticals are pointless, but I don't know what I would have done if that had happened.

I had a vague idea that I would have lived as a nobody, or died wandering in the wilderness.

It all started when I met Charlotte in prison.

Charlotte is my beginning.

"......You have the eyes of an old man. What the hell are you thinking when you look at me?"

"My, my when!"

Charlotte looks at me, wondering if I'm offended. As we walked through the flowers, Charlotte said, "You know what?

"You've always been weird, but I think you're even weirder these days."

"......what."

"I'm feeling vulnerable, anxious, and nervous."

I'm not like Charlotte.

I can't manage my facial expressions. So if something's wrong, they'll know, and if they're worried, they'll try to make you feel better.

"I don't know what's making you so anxious, but why don't you take a little weight off your shoulders?"

Charlotte worries about me.

It's hard enough to mind your own business, I think.

Now is the time for me to care.

You've got something going on.

I was torn between the impulse to ask, and the impulse that I shouldn't say anything.

"Why do I have to exert more effort when I'm told to relax?"

Charlotte sighed heavily. Charlotte was walking a little ahead of me. It hadn't been long after class, so it wasn't quite sunset.

Charlotte's platinum hair glistened in the fall sunlight.

Charlotte looked like she had regained her health. Needless to say, she was much nicer to look at.

"Whoa!"

Then, as we were looking at the flowers, Charlotte suddenly became very excited and grabbed my arm.

"What, what, what?"

"Burr, for bees. Phew......."

-Boooowoong

It was the punishment that made Charlotte gasp.

It wasn't a wasp, it was a bee. The bee flew from flower to flower and disappeared.

"I'm in trouble again......."

"What! You're serious. I seem to forget sometimes, but I grew up in a big house."

Charlotte's eyes widened when she saw my reaction.

It grew nicely.

She's being overly modest by saying that in the first place. It's already cute in and of itself when an empress says, "I grew up fine.

He's a bit of a stretch even to say that. He's had some rough experiences.

"......But you like flowers, are you afraid of bees?"

If you love flowers, you naturally see bees, right?

"...... I don't have anything like that in my garden."

I mean, the gardens of an imperial palace can be maintained to that level.

Still, after all she's been through, punishment shouldn't even be a stub of the toe, should it? Charlotte clicked her tongue.

"You're being real. Bees are a fear of the unknown for me. I've never been stung in my life, and no matter what I've been through, the unknown is scary, okay?"

"Well, at least I know I'm talking a lot."

"Is there really nothing you can't say to an empress?"

Charlotte laughed in disbelief.

He said it, but he seemed to be in a good mood.

Charlotte loves flowers.

But bees are scared.

I learned something else. Charlotte saw many beautiful flowers along the Irine River, but as soon as she realized there were bees, she moved away from them.

Charlotte would have lived in a garden with only butterflies.

Sometimes I forget how precious he is, but this reminds me.

Charlotte laughed at how ridiculous it was that she couldn't get to her favorite flowers because of the bees.

"Reinhard, have you ever been stung by a bee?"

"There should be."

"How much does it hurt?"

"It hurts like hell."

"Is that it?"

Charlotte looked at me, wide-eyed.

"I'm not going to die. Just a little sore."

I've heard of people going into shock, like anaphylaxis or something, and that would be dangerous, but I was just sick.

"Do you want to be stung?"

Charlotte said, and moved closer to the flower.

"Why would you do that on purpose?"

"Is that so?"

Charlotte scratched her cheek and laughed a little silly. Charlotte watched from afar as the bees flitted among the flowers.

"The unknown is scary. Right?"

"......Yes."

It's scary to know, but it's always scarier to not know.

Fearful of the unknown, Charlotte keeps her distance from the bee, lest she get too close to it.

Charlotte was afraid of something.

"Reinhardt."

"......."

"Thanks for playing today."

Charlotte's words were strange.

I'm the one who asked Charlotte to play.

Charlotte offered her time, not asked for it. I was the one who reached out first.

I wonder if it was actually Charlotte who wanted to spend time like this.

Charlotte looks at me with an amused look on her face.

"I have to go now. There will be an uproar in the palace if I come in too late. I live in a place with surprisingly high standards. I've been busy lately."

Charlotte waved her hand as she said that.

"The route to the palace is that way, so I'll go there."

"Uh....... Yeah."

If I wanted to go to the palace, I'd go that way, and if I wanted to go back to the temple, there was no reason for Charlotte to go with me.

It's a bit abrupt, but not unreasonable. If Charlotte is late getting home, it's going to be a real mess.

But.

I ended up saying nothing.

It didn't ask me anything.

In the end, all I got from Charlotte was a single flower with an ominous message that I didn't find acceptable in this situation.

"Hi, Reinhard."

Charlotte's words.

It felt like a goodbye.

I don't know anything.

But.

I felt an overwhelming sense of certainty that if I lost Charlotte now, I would never see her again.

My chi sense says.

If you miss it, it's the last time you'll ever see Charlotte.

Therefore, I grabbed Charlotte's arm as we headed back to the palace.

"Charlotte."

"Huh? Huh? Why?"

"Hey, show me around your house."

"......?"

Play with me, followed by Show me around the house.

I don't know why.

I always wonder if the reasons are sincere, but the results lead to bizarre behavior.

\* \* \*

Naturally.

There was a bit of a scuffle.

Going to a friend's house falls into that category.

But when she's the daughter of an imperial emperor and I'm a lowly peasant, it's a different story.

"No. No. Really no. Why all of a sudden?"

Charlotte wasn't offended by the sudden swarm, but she nailed it.

"Just. I wanted to see what a great palace you live in."

Charlotte seemed stunned by my nakedness.

"Why the hell are you suddenly....... I'll invite you later, on the weekend or whenever you're free."

"Today, absolutely today! I'm the kind of person who has to do it when I think of it, and when I fought the Orbis class, I did it when I thought of it, you know?"

"I know, I know, but what's wrong with you all of a sudden......."

I went wild, as one might expect.

Charlotte looked at me like I'd lost my mind.

I don't know why I thought I could say anything and it wouldn't work.

After saying no a few times, he finally sighed heavily and was on his way to take me.

I was surprised that they listened to me when I insisted.

Has the uproar over a dead man already died down?

"Hah....... Why the hell would I......."

Of course, it wasn't an easy decision, and Charlotte glared at me with an axe-eye.

"Why the imperial palace all of a sudden?"

"I told you, I just want to see what a nice palace my friend lives in."

I don't want to be this rude to an empress, even if we're friends.

However.

He didn't know anything, he couldn't tell me anything, but I couldn't let Charlotte go.

There's even a new trait called Mood.

The strong sense of foreboding it sent was decisive.

You can't miss Charlotte today, or you'll never see her again.

It wasn't a revelation, but it felt like one.

Not only did I not have a clue about the revolutionary forces, but I was on my way to the palace when I realized that Charlotte had gotten herself into another mess.

I wonder if this is an accident.

Or am I approaching it as an accident.

I hope this isn't the wrong choice.

Charlotte looked uneasy, but she was taking me to the palace anyway.

\* \* \*

The scale of the Emperor is larger than the Temple.

In other words, it's well beyond the size of a single ward in Seoul. Charlotte walked me past the entrance to Hwangseong.

Here, the Empress's face was an identity card in itself, and even I, a Temple student, could enter the Imperial City with her approval and endorsement.

The security measures for temples and imperial castles are the same.

Therefore, my true identity will never be discovered. If my cover through the Ring of Sarkegar was going to be blown here, it would have been at the Temple.

Charlotte didn't say if she gave up or if she wanted to go back.

"I'm going to tell the palace that I brought you here by force, so you're only going to serve me. If anyone else finds out, they'll try to kill you."

Charlotte's eyes lit up at me, and I smirked and nodded.

"Of course. I do that with people, you know?"

"......Please, Reinhardt. I really, really dislike you sometimes, and this is one of those times. Can't you at least not tell me that you're being a jerk because I'm a jerk?"

"We're friends."

"Accepting you as a friend may be one of the biggest mistakes of my life......."

I chuckled as I watched Charlotte sigh.

"At least it's not the only mistake."

"Shut up. You're going to make me feel really bad."

"Yes."

I realized that Charlotte was trying to be sincere, so I quickly shut up. As soon as we passed through the main gates of the Imperial Emperor's Palace, Charlotte and I boarded a waiting tram.

"There's a tram here too?"

"Yes, because it's wide."

The tram was ready as soon as the empress's arrival was announced.

There were only two of us on board.

I pretended not to know, but I did.

Ludwig was going to be in the castle, so he had to describe it.

There are three tram lines in the interior of Jupiter.

Routes for royalty, routes for nobles and bureaucrats, and routes for everyone else.

This was supposed to be an imperial route.

Like Temple's tram, there were no handles for standing passengers, and there weren't many seats in the pretentiously luxurious interior design.

Anyway, without anyone suddenly recognizing the Empress and clinging to her, Charlotte and I rode the tram as if we were sightseeing in the Imperial Palace.

Until this morning, I never thought I'd be in the Yellow Castle.

Hwangseong felt different from Temple.

Whereas Temple had a lively feel to it because it was still a predominantly student space, Hwangseong was solemn and serene.

The people coming and going were all solemn, and I couldn't tell if they were aristocrats or bureaucrats, but I was pretty sure they were farting.

Charlotte was happy to have me and gave me a tour.

"See there? That's the Tetra, the imperial palace where His Majesty the Emperor resides."

Where Charlotte pointed, past the vast gardens and fountains, was the Imperial Palace.

It was a stiff palace that felt more solemn than colorful. In terms of opulence, the royal class dormitories were more opulent.

But it also seemed to represent the authority of the empire, with its solemnity and grandeur.

I don't need to be fancy.

It seems to say.

There's a sense of pride that comes from not having to pretend to be a continent.

It was a more elaborate realization of what I had in my head.

The tram circles the Tetra of the Imperial Palace in the center.

"Do you know anything about the planet Huang?"

"I know."

I can't help but notice.

Hwang Sung Emperatos.

The Gradian Empire was committed to the construction of imperial castles as they established the ecliptic.

Hundreds of layers of intricate magical connections were schematized and woven into the veins, not to mention the walls to keep out foreign invaders and impure forces.

"There are four palaces to the east, west, south, and north, centered around the imperial tetra. There are other palaces, but those four are the largest, except for the imperial palace. Starting in the north, they are called the Palace of Spring, the Palace of Summer, the Palace of Fall, and the Palace of Winter."

"I heard that."

"Do you know why it's called that?"

"No? Is there a reason?"

"Yes."

I know.

But Charlotte, who was explaining it to me, seemed to be enjoying it a bit, so I shook my head.

"In the early days of the empire, they were very concerned about the safety of the imperial city, which is why there were hundreds of layers of magical bonds."

"Really?"

"Yeah, so the veins are twisted and the mana around here is unbalanced, causing anomalies."

"So?"

"Suddenly there are four seasons on Jupiter at the same time."

"...... for real?"

"Yeah, really."

A side effect of a lot of magical power.

Except for the center, where the sun was, there were seasons all around: spring, summer, fall, and winter.

"Now, of course, it's been a while, and it's been maintained, and it's gone, but I think they haven't been able to fix it for quite a while. So instead of the original names of the palaces, they are now called Spring Palace, Summer Palace, Fall Palace, and Winter Palace according to the seasons in the area. They've been calling them that for so long that even Hwangseong has renamed them that way."

The tram kept moving, and when a palace came into view, Charlotte pointed it out.

"That's the Winter Palace, where Bertus lives."

It was a straightforward palace. I had heard that it was called the Winter Palace, but it had a cold, bitchy feel to it.

Of course, she's a saint compared to the High Epicurean.

The palace was lonely and somehow strong, perhaps because of the people who lived there.

Bertus plotting in the Winter Palace.

It looks like a good match.

Although the actual seasonal anomaly is gone.

"Isn't that a bit of a waste?"

"What?"

"How I wish Bertus had lived in the Winter Palace, shivering and shaking."

No.

How am I supposed to react if he says something like that out of the blue?

Charlotte covered her mouth and giggled as I panicked.

"Just kidding, otherwise Bertus wouldn't be living in the Winter Palace in the first place."

It was called the Winter Palace, but Bertus's Winter Palace was now in autumn.

However, even though it's fall, it feels like winter, and the reason is not in the palace, but in the garden.

Didn't I mention that?

The expansive garden in front of the Winter Palace.

There were no flowers there. It was planted with brown, withering grass and shrubs, but not a single flower.

That's weird.

It's been a while, so I can't remember, but were the gardens of Bertus' Winter Palace that barren?

I don't think I ever described it that way.

I'm pretty sure I said something about having flowers and flower beds.

But now I'm wondering why.

Charlotte said, sensing my mood.

"It sucks, right?"

"......I don't know, that's kind of a stretch."

Or should I say, Bertus.

It was organized, but not fancy.

"I don't see how it makes sense to not have a flower bed when the color scheme is garden."

Charlotte crosses her arms and clucks her tongue.

"Isn't it like a child to say that because I love flowers, I dug up all the flowers in her garden? When I heard that, I was more stunned than angry."

I didn't think so, but Bertus had a childish side.

Charlotte loves flowers.

Apparently that was enough reason for Bertus to hate flowers.

It turns out my memory wasn't wrong.

If there are no flowers in Bertus' garden, it's because Charlotte, who loves them, is alive.

So the only reason there were flowers in the original Winter Palace garden was because Charlotte, who loves flowers, was dead.

Now that you have no reason to hate flowers, you can have them in your garden.

Or something like that.

When Charlotte dies, Bertus's garden blooms.

It was childish, but also eerie because it spoke to their eventual hatred of each other.

This would also be a setting I was not aware of.

Charlotte gives me a sullen look and laughs.

"The look on her face when I brought the flowers I dug up to my palace and planted them was worth it."

Bertus isn't the only child.

Charlotte was a brat enough.

"Ah, here we are."

The tram has arrived north of the Imperial Palace.

"That's the 'Palace of Spring' where I live."

Spring Palace.

Rather than a spring palace, it should be called a flower palace.

The garden was full of flowers in full bloom.

Not long ago, a man died there.

On the Yellow Planet, where everyone should be safe.

Someone died, especially in a place that should have been safe.

I was more interested in the flowers in full bloom in the garden. I was curious about what lay behind them.

第 265页

The palace's manicured flower beds were filled with unrecognizable flowers. But it didn't look untidy. If the Winter Palace gardens felt like a secluded, manicured park, the Spring Palace gardens looked like a festival in full swing.

Bertus's garden, while stark, was not unkempt.

Charlotte's palace was ornate, but not promiscuous.

A garden full of flowers, or a garden without a single flower.

I felt like this was two things that ended up resembling each other.

Bertus hates flowers because Charlotte loves them.

Charlotte plants more flowers because Bertus hates flowers. She even picked up the flowers that Bertus threw away and planted them.

Both are obsessed with each other's likes and dislikes.

What happens to Charlotte's garden if Bertus dies.

Now that the reason to obsess over flowers is gone, they won't disappear, but they won't be as colorful.

Oh well, they're kindred spirits after all.

I thought to myself.

Charlotte led the way through the flower-filled garden. The gardeners tending to the flowerbeds stood still and bowed when they saw her.

There was no particular conversation.

There were no questions about unannounced guests.

If the Winter Palace left a cold impression, the Spring Palace, whether because of its name or its design, seemed comfortable and cozy.

The palace felt warmer than it looked, surrounded by colorful flowers that seemed to make up for the lack of glamor.

The garden is also part of the palace.

I realized that the Winter Palace was like that, and the Spring Palace was like that.

The same was true for the Imperial Palace Tetra.

"There really are no bees?"

"...... and."

Charlotte's eyes narrowed at my words.

"The flowers are beautiful. They smell good. Well cared for. I don't expect to hear this, but are you still thinking about it?"

No, it's not!

With all the flowers, it's no wonder it's a beehive, but as you say, you can't even see a real bee!

"Of course not. If I get stung by a bee, the gardener's head will fly off."

When Charlotte smiled and said that, I broke out in a cold sweat.

There are no bees in this garden, or they wouldn't come. Pest management is a sure thing.

"No, what's that....... You know that one."

"Moisture (受粉)?"

"Uh, yeah. That."

If there are no bees, there is no pollination, so isn't there a problem?

"You're worried about weird things. You'll figure it out."

"How?"

"...... Reinhardt, you know what, I don't know about that."

Charlotte loves flowers, and that's why she has such a huge flower garden. You don't need or want to know what the gardeners do specifically.

That's what power is.

Charlotte lives a life where that's just the way it is.

I can't help but feel that Charlotte is far away from me.

I don't need to know that stuff. They do it for me.

I'm proud to say this.

Charlotte walked through the gardens and reached the entrance to the palace. Inside the palace was a huge hall, with spiral staircases, statues, and colonnades.

The palace was far too large for Charlotte to live in alone.

No, she wouldn't live alone. There would be maids and servants, people who would do all sorts of things, and a bodyguard.

But.......

Somehow.

Nowhere else in the huge hall did anyone look like a user.

No, I can see it.

I think there should be someone coming out to greet Charlotte.

No one was there to greet Charlotte, and there seemed to be very few people.

Something happened here, and this quiet is a sign of it.

Charlotte brought me along, albeit under duress. There's no way she's going to see anything suspicious about me.

Charlotte was the first to speak in the dingy palace.

"Like I said, don't give me any crap. I'll take care of it."

"Yes."

Keep in mind.

Charlotte had just given herself permission to rub me the wrong way.

That feels good.

"Your Highness."

Then, someone sitting somewhere in the hall got up and came over to greet Charlotte.

I couldn't help but roll my eyes when I saw him approaching.

You're alive.

The cavalry lieutenant who was so crucial in our escape from Demon Castle.

"Are you back?"

"Ah, Dyrus. Say hello. This is my friend Reinhardt. Reinhardt, say hello. This is my bodyguard, Sir Dyrus."

Dyrus, now Charlotte's bodyguard, was in front of me.

\* \* \*

I was assuming that Dyrus might be dead, and I couldn't bring myself to ask Charlotte. There was no reason for me to know about Dyrus.

You have become Charlotte's bodyguard. Charlotte has somehow managed to protect the person who saved her.

Dyrus's skills didn't reach superhuman levels, though, and we don't know how he's progressed since then.

You're safe.

That's it.

However, despite my excitement, Dyrus was looking at me warily.

"Your Majesty, letting outsiders in here is not a good idea......."

"They're friends."

"But......."

Charlotte's words made Darius feel uncomfortable.

The rumors of what happened here are probably true.

That's why outsiders aren't allowed in right now.

Charlotte was on her way out the door, trying to wrap her head around my insistence, and Darius looked troubled.

The princess who forced her friend to come home because she couldn't resist his advances, now has her own advances.

"Your Highness."

And then, through the din of Dyrus' voice, another voice broke through.

A voice you don't recognize, but not a stranger.

"I thought you weren't supposed to let outsiders in here."

Saviolin Tana, the leader of the 1st Imperial Knights of Shanapelle.

Why is he here?

Dressed in her Templar uniform, she walked toward me and Charlotte.

"It's been a while, Reinhardt."

She recognized me, of course.

"I'm sure you were invited, but I'm sorry, I have to leave."

She said that as if Charlotte's opinion didn't matter.

Has Shanatelle been assigned to guard the Palace of Spring?

The impact of Sarkegar's rumor was playing out in real time before my eyes.

What the heck was going on?

Is Charlotte safe?

"Lord Tana, I'm the one who decides that."

"It's temporary, but I'm in charge of the safety of the palace for now."

Suddenly, the current world leader and the first princess were having a nervous breakdown.

"Are you saying Reinhardt is a dangerous man?"

"I think you realize that's not what I'm saying."

I trusted my instincts and decided to go with the installer, but was I pushing Charlotte into a fight she shouldn't be in?

Saviolin Tana looks at me, not Charlotte, as if she's gotten the message.

It was better for me to go away than to get into a nervous breakdown with the Empress, or, if I understood correctly, to go home on my own.

But I can't back down when the world's strongest player is in front of me.

I need to know what's going on with Charlotte here.

I have no intention of stepping down.

She looked back at Charlotte when I glared at her.

"Your Majesty, may I speak with you for a moment?"

It was almost like a command line.

That's how much authority and power Saviolin Tana has.

"Yes, Lord Tana."

Charlotte's momentum wasn't lost either.

\* \* \*

It's strange that my visit is opposed by Darius and Saviolin Tana.

So it's safe to assume that this situation only happens in the Spring Palace.

Savior Tana, Charlotte, and Dyrus went off to talk to someone else.

I couldn't hear their conversation, as they had gone quite a distance.

The Templars were nowhere to be seen, save for their leader.

She seems to be the only one.

I don't know if the other guys are hiding somewhere and guarding or what.

If there's been a murder, shouldn't there be more security?

Why is this so lame?

I had an ominous feeling.

When they returned, Saviolin Tana looked very unhappy.

I felt bad for Charlotte.

I've gotten into a fight I shouldn't have.

"Go eat dinner, it's okay."

Charlotte merely smiled breezily, and the others were speechless.

I was surprised it was through suppression.

This is the kind of request that I'm not sure I'd grant, even if it was an unusual situation.

But in an unusual turn of events, Charlotte complied with my urging.

"Shall we walk?"

Charlotte dragged me around the palace as if to show me the ropes.

Darius or Tana didn't follow.

"What the hell is going on, all of a sudden....... I didn't want to fight Lord Tana."

"Did you fight?"

"Well, not quite, but....... Just know that I had to destroy my reputation to take care of you."

The look in Charlotte's eyes gave me goosebumps. I wonder if I'm just going with my gut and getting into trouble.......

"Anyway, don't give Lord Tana or Lord Dyrus a hard time about it. Understood?"

"Of course, I'm not crazy."

"It's right, or it's weird, now."

Well.

I have a conscience, and I'll admit it.

"Well, yeah. Crazy, yes, but not so crazy that I'm going to start yelling at Mr. Chanapelle. Rest assured."

"But why are you giving me a hard time?"

"Friend......."

"Shut up!"

Charlotte plugged her ears, as if she didn't want to hear it anymore.

-Loud!

The Palace of Spring was silent, until Charlotte's cry became an echo, echoing down the hall.

"It's quiet."

"...... wasn't always like this, we've been downsizing a bit lately."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Let's go."

Charlotte diligently led the way, not wanting to be pampered once she had him.

There were no signs of murder.

Even if it was, I wouldn't recognize it, and there's no reason for it to be left behind.

The first place Charlotte brought me was the gallery.

"Do you like painting?"

"I'm not gonna lie, I don't like ....... I don't like it at all."

"Is it fair to say that I'm not interested in everything about art in general?"

"Right."

"Actually, so am I."

Charlotte walked past the many paintings and sculptures hanging in the large gallery inside the palace.

"I don't know, a picture is a sub-imitation of reality, and then it's just a degraded version of reality, and the function is in the fact that it's left behind. Like taxidermy. But it's odd to see painters still strutting around with their brushes, even though they were rendered irrelevant by the development of dye-based magic."

Charlotte is sometimes cynical to the point of being unrecognizable from Bertus.

When photography developed a similar magic, the value of painting as an imitation of reality plummeted.

So there's no concept of abstract art here yet. I've learned something. Charlotte walked through a gallery of portraits, denying the possibility of painting.

"These are portraits of people who lived in the Palace of Spring, some royalty, some not."

"So you don't have to be royalty to live in a palace?"

"Sure."

It's just a confirmation of what I already know, but Charlotte is eager to explain.

It looked pretty cool, so I purposely feigned curiosity.

"The Summer Palace is the largest, with many subsidiary palaces. It's where the imperial family has lived since time immemorial. The Autumn Palace to the south is where the officials work."

Who lived in the Palace of Spring in the original.

It was Charlotte's home, but she never returned, and it may have had a different owner. I don't know that much. Bertus lived in the Winter Palace in the original, as he does now.

You can't know what you don't know. The imperial family may have gotten a little more spacious.

Because of the two sun candidates, two of the four great palaces now had a member of the imperial family in line for succession.

Charlotte and Bertus, the owners of one of the four great palaces.

Oscar de Gradías in the Summer Palace, an imperial servant's residence in the east.

It made sense to me that Bertus would say that even the same royal family would never be the same.

We walked through the galleries, then the chapel.

It wasn't dusty, but there was a strong sense that the space hadn't been used in a long time.

Where the statues of the Five Gods stand, Charlotte sees me.

"Do you have a god you follow?"

"Not really."

"I thought so."

I may be the master of Tiamata, but of course I have no gods to follow.

The religions of this world are unique. No, not peculiar, but different.

There is no concept of not believing in God.

There is a God.

But do you follow that god.

The followers are the religious. You can't deny God. There is divine power, and there are divine objects.

"You?"

"I'm not exactly......?"

Charlotte shook her head.

"Of course, if Artorius hadn't won, I'd be dead, so shouldn't I be serving Als, the war god....... I did think of that."

Ragan Artorius was not a priest of Als, but he did defeat the demon with Alsbringer, the holy relic of Als.

"Even as I was thinking that it was Artorius who saved me....... but I don't think that's necessarily the case, so I'm going to go to......."

Charlotte smiles wistfully.

She must be thinking of Valier. I wonder if my presence was such a great salvation for Charlotte. Of course, I saved her life, but without Artorius, the war would not have ended.

"How strong was the demon? Even if Artorius had been defeated, wouldn't the allies have been able to kill the demon if they had joined forces?"

"Well......."

I say that, but I know it's true.

Ancestral Demon Balie.

The novel begins with the death of a demon, but what about the power of the demon?

If not for Lagan Artorius, the demon would not have died.

The Allies would have been crushed.

People know that Lagan Artorius defeated the demon, but they don't know how, because the fight took place inside the demon's castle, with no audience.

I'm the only one in the world who knows that.

Without Alsbringer, not even Ragan Artorius would have been able to subdue the demon.

Without Ragan Artorius, the demon would have won, and I would not have had to flee. Charlotte would be dead.

"Funny....... to think about this."

Leaving the chapel, Charlotte and I continued to walk through the palace. There was a music room, but no musicians, and the instrument storage room next to it was empty.

Charlotte showed me all sorts of places. Courtiers' quarters, kitchens, dining rooms, dressing rooms, storerooms, and guest bedrooms.

Even.

"Hey, can I do this?"

"It never ceases to amaze me that there is a line in the sand for rudeness at ....... Why not, you've already been rude enough."

Charlotte even showed me her bedroom.

Episode 266.

Charlotte's bedroom wasn't big enough to play soccer in.

There was a huge canopy bed with elegant silk curtains, a table for meetings, armchairs and a sofa. The furniture, including a bookcase, was arranged in an orderly fashion.

The walk-in closet was also in the bedroom, and there appeared to be a large bathroom.

The royal class dormitories were quite nice, but of course they couldn't compare to the empress's bedroom.

I had to wonder.

Does Charlotte want to dress herself or have her maids dress her? In the dormitory, she'll be on her own.

Well, there are some things that you can't put on and take off by yourself, so in that case, you're going to have to hire someone.

Of course, I didn't ask.

I looked around the bedroom and let out a finished thought.

"Is the bed....... too big?"

"......Truly, I commend you for your perspective."

As if Charlotte knew that, she pointed to the massive bed, which was well over twice the size of a king.

It's even as long vertically as it is horizontally.

"Well, to my horror, you're right, that bed is too wide, and I didn't realize that until I tried my dorm bed that it was uncomfortable."

Dorm beds are big, but not that big.

I've seen some of these guys living in high rise apartments that are smaller than your bed, and this is a little smaller than a studio apartment?

"I thought I had to crawl all over the place to get out of bed, but apparently dorm beds only require one sideways roll?"

Charlotte's comment about how she realized she'd been sleeping in an uncomfortable bed her whole life until she tried a smaller bed was hilarious.

The wording is cute.

I love that I can roll sideways for a lap and get out of bed.

Imagining Charlotte in that situation made me laugh, regardless of the seriousness of the situation.

"Do you want to lie down?"

"......I know you think I'm an asshole, but you know what, I'm not that bad."

I know there's such a thing as good! It's just that other people don't agree with it, but there is! I'm not one of those people who rolls around in the empress's bed and says, "Hmph!

At my reaction, Charlotte covered her mouth and laughed.

"Why, that bed is honestly so big that if I slept on both ends, I wouldn't be able to touch it all night, even if I was a terrible sleeper."

"Oh, why would he do that?"

I'm casting bullshit on Charlotte to see if she's lost her mind. Charlotte didn't give me a tour of her vast bedroom.

There were a few portraits, but I didn't ask about the people in them.

An adult female who resembles Charlotte.

I didn't have to ask. It would have been a painful name for Charlotte.

Then.

Hard to see in human form.

What it is.

I stopped thinking.

"Want to see something fun?"

"What is it?"

Charlotte gave me a meaningful smile and grabbed my arm, leading me somewhere. Charlotte pointed to the wall where the bookshelves were.

"You know how in novels and stuff, royalty and royalty who live in places like this....... and when things get crazy, they go through a secret passageway or something."

"......No?"

"Yes."

Charlotte slipped her necklace into a groove in the wall between the bookshelves, a section of the wall embossed with columns.

-Dalcock

With a sound like that.

The wall rotated, sending me and Charlotte over to the other side.

Before the rotation was over, I panicked.

"......what is this."

"Interesting, huh?"

In front of me was a staircase leading down.

Your bedroom is on the second floor.

However, this staircase seems to be designed to go all the way down to the basement, not the first floor.

"This is the secret passage to the Palace of Spring."

"This....... Isn't that a big secret?"

Charlotte nodded nonchalantly.

"Yes. I think the Emperor is the only one who knows about this besides me, and Dyrus doesn't, and of course Lord Tana doesn't."

Charlotte shook her necklace.

"This is the key."

It would have been handed down from generation to generation by the owners of the Palace of Spring.

"...... Aren't you sure I'm not supposed to see this?"

"Why?"

Charlotte shakes her head.

"We're friends."

Still, it's a bit.......

This is starting to get scary.......

"So, where does this lead to?"

"This is the heart of an empire, and secret passageways are not for the faint of heart."

Charlotte led me down a long flight of stairs and into a room at the end.

That was the end of the secret passage.

It was just one big room. But there was definitely a path.

Rather than length.

Question.

"This is......."

"If it's a place to get away, it should be able to go anywhere."

This one had a warp gate.

\* \* \*

A tiny warp gate. Of course, it is currently disabled.

I don't know how far this could go, but if it led to another warp gate within range, it would be a great way to get away.

"You can use spatial travel magic inside the palace?"

"If we can do it without, why can't we do it in certain areas?"

Charlotte said, as if it were no big deal.

Why bother telling me all this?

Charlotte tells a very important secret just for fun. She doesn't seem to have any other intention.

It's not the kind of space you can brag about like a kid saying, "I have one of these in my house.

I'll have to take this into consideration when the gates open. It's inactive, so I don't know if there will be any monsters here, but it was definitely a place to check.

Once we were out of the bedroom, Charlotte showed me around.

There were tons of spaces, but no or very few people in them.

As a result, the whole thing felt empty.

"It's a big place, and there's not a lot of space, and there are fewer people these days."

The Palace of Spring also seemed deserted, though not as much as the White Palace in Arnaka, which I visited last time.

This is a different kind of emptiness.

The White Palace looked like it was meant to be.

The Palace of Spring doesn't seem like the place to be.

It feels like a place that was never deserted, but is becoming deserted.

Somehow.

Like dying.

It felt like that.

After exploring every inch of the palace. By now it was getting late and the sunset light was pouring in.

"Everything okay?"

I smirked at Charlotte's comment.

I'd say a palace with a tiny warp gate in the basement isn't much, but.......

"I'd say, 'What are you talking about....... To be honest, it is."

In the end, so what.

This is what I was thinking.

"That's honest."

Charlotte seemed to like my answer.

The palace is nothing more than a huge building. It's just a bunch of empty rooms, and Charlotte isn't the owner of this palace, she's just someone who lives in a room in this palace.

The warm glow of the sunset bathed the corridors in red, but the lack of people basking in the light made it all the more lonely.

In such a lonely sunset. Charlotte, who has finished her tour of the palace, looks at me.

"That's weird."

"......what?"

"Actually, I've been meaning to do that for a while."

He had a wistful smile on his face.

"I wanted to bring a friend over and say, 'Hey, I live in a place like this. I wanted to show them around and tell them that it's actually not that great to live in a place like this. Just once."

Charlotte looked like she'd just gotten her wish out of nowhere.

It was a bit of a push, but Charlotte was actually hoping for this.

So I pretended to fit in, but I didn't like it, so he brought me along, even though he knew Charnafel would disapprove.

"You seem to know my mind, Reinhardt. It's strange, really....... I wonder why you know me so well. Why....... to be there for me when I need you."

I felt like I knew what Charlotte needed right now.

Someone who will just be there.

That seemed to be what was needed.

"Actually, I'm leaving Temple soon."

The words seemed to stop me in my tracks.

I don't know what the warning was, but I'm guessing it was trying to get me to realize this.

At this rate, if I spent my time worrying about other things, Charlotte would suddenly disappear.

You'll have a frustrating time, not knowing why she's gone. You won't be able to ask Bertus if Charlotte is okay.

Bertus.

Charlotte said.

Did Bertus lose in the end?

What about the murder in the Palace of Spring? Was Bertus trying to kill Charlotte and failing? If so, that would mean trouble on Bertus' part, but why?

Is the Spring Palace so deserted because of an imperial dispute, and has Saviolin Tana been assigned Charlotte's bodyguard in case something goes wrong?

"Is this about Bertus?"

Charlotte's reaction to my question was odd.

"So, what are you going to do about it?"

"......what?"

"If I lost the throne contest after all, and that's why I look like this, and that's why I'm quitting the Temple....... If that's what it is."

Charlotte looks at me.

"So, what are you going to do?"

"So, what happens?"

You already know the answer.

"It's the end of an imperial family that has lost an imperial succession battle: die now or die a little later."

Charlotte stares out at the palace.

"He could die right away, or he could be banished far away and then die quietly in exile, like he's forced to do because he can't resist the pleas of his subjects to get rid of him, or he could be robbed or attacked on the way to exile....... He won't make it out alive."

Charlotte explains it and then looks at me.

"If I ever get to that point, what are you going to do?"

I didn't have to think long.

No, it wasn't a struggle.

"Let's save him."

"How?"

"Somehow."

"Anyone with a horse can do that."

"No."

I took a step toward Charlotte, ignoring her comment.

"My superpower, did you forget?"

"......."

"If I believe it, it happens."

Charlotte stood still, watching me.

"I'm going to save you, and that's the way it's supposed to be."

"That's ridiculous."

Suppress.

"Yeah, I can't."

I looked at Charlotte.

Okay, that's just a stretch.

"But I forced myself to become a psychic, and I succeeded in enhancing my powers, and I forced myself to be a beggar on the street, and I forced myself to enter this palace of spring."

In my forced life, I am only forced once again. My forcing has always been real.

It's only going to happen again.

I believe so.

"I will save you no matter what, and if I fail to save you, I will kill Bertus."

"!"

Anyone can say they're going to try to save it somehow.

But not just anyone can say they'll kill the next emperor if they don't save you.

Charlotte's jaw dropped in shock as she realized the insanity of what I was saying.

I'm going to do that.

Bertus may be my friend right now, but if he kills Charlotte, he's no longer my friend.

Charlotte tried to understand the meaning of my words, and then let out a hysterical laugh at her own failure.

"You....... What the hell did I do to you to deserve this? No matter how much you think....... why you have to do this to me, say those things. I really don't know......."

"We're friends."

"!"

A phrase I've thought about a few times today.

At the last echo of the words, Charlotte forgot them.

After a long moment of silence, Charlotte swallows hard and looks at me with a weak smile.

"Too bad."

What's missing.

"I know you've been doing this all day, and I know you're worried about me, but this is enough."

The reason for my strange behavior today was, of course, Charlotte.

"It's not because of Bertus, so......."

Charlotte pinched me lightly on the cheek.

"There's no chance of you messing up this time."

I can't change it for anything. I can't make it work for me.......

He looked like he'd been given a death sentence.

"Thanks. Reinhard."

Tears formed in the corners of Charlotte's eyes.

"But I wanted to hear you say you'd buy it for me."

Not my chance.

As if the words weren't enough, Charlotte was crying and laughing.

Episode 267.

Dinner at the Palace of Spring was spectacular.

We ate at a lavishly set table, assisted by maids of honor. As if fewer people weren't enough, I felt uncomfortable, but not awkward, eating with someone else by my side.

I ended up eating a lot of it, and Charlotte watched with amusement as I shoved it down my throat.

In the end, I ate so much more than I expected that Dyrus and Saviorin Tana, who were eating with me, were fed up.

"......No, do you eat that much?"

"When am I going to try this?"

Charlotte quits Temple.

Bertus is irrelevant.

In the end, I didn't know anything about what happened here. Nor would Charlotte tell me why she was leaving Temple.

Charlotte was giving a warning.

If anything happens to me, it won't involve Bertus, so don't do anything stupid and risk a crisis.

Although even that is likely to be false.

It was clear that there was something strange about Charlotte's situation, but she wasn't going to get an answer.

After dinner, we had tea together and talked about things.

If the situation is too serious, people will talk about something lighter.

If you start talking about a heavy topic, you're going to get sucked into that one topic, and you're not going to be able to say anything.

That's exactly what we did.

I had to get back soon, as we were going to have dinner.

I don't want to go back yet, and the idea of sleeping here might work for Charlotte, but not for Savior Tana.

Charlotte said goodnight, saying she would get ready for bed.

"Goodbye, Reinhardt. Lord Tana will see you off."

With that routine greeting.

Soon, Tana, the savior, approached to see me off - not so much to see me off as to make sure I was on track.

"Reinhardt."

"Ah, yes. Lord Saviolin."

Saviolin Tana called me.

"Tana is fine."

I nodded at her stern words.

"Yes, Tana."

"I didn't mean to leave out ......."

"Yes, Lord Tana."

The situation is serious.

This guy is kind of cute.

Ellen is real.

"Follow me. I need to check something out."

Before letting me out of the palace, she seemed to have some business with me.

I wonder if he's seeing me off and not Darius because he has something to check.

She led me off to somewhere in the palace.

What appears to be a smoke screen.

The lights were on, but there were no people anywhere. She suddenly raised her sword.

"Take it."

It was a little creepy, but eventually she grabbed the sword and handed it to me.

"No big deal, let's see how you do."

"......Suddenly?"

"I've been wondering about the future of the Empire you mentioned. We were at a banquet at the time. I thought I'd check it out while I had the chance."

The world's strongest man wants to clash swords. I'm pretty sure she doesn't mean anything by it. But when she hands me her sword, it's bare.

There were no other weapons in the training hall. There's no way Charlotte would be practicing swordsmanship here.

"Oh, I see."

When I glared at her, she looked at her bare hands.

"Don't worry."

-Woof

In her bare hands, blue mana began to coalesce and take the form of a sword.

It's not even an auror blade that projects magic onto a sword and adds to it.

I've gotten to the point where I can make a sword out of nothing but magic.

Superhuman, even beyond superhuman.

Saviolin Tana, the Swordmaster beyond the Swordmaster.

No, but you're giving it to Mr. Sun.

"No, what if we summoned something like that?"

"Don't worry. It's a bit of a hard wooden sword right now."

As if a child could know any better, she summoned an Auror Sword and pointed it at me.

"Oh, that's a different story."

"Do something."

"Yes."

Not knowing what else to do, I approached her with Tana's sword in hand.

Her shoulders, her steps, change in response to my movements, even though I'm not touching her. She reads my movements before I've even taken a defensive stance, as if she's gauging the gap and knows how I'm going to attack.

Feeling like I'm going to get stuck the moment we cross swords, I back off a bit again and gauge the distance.

This has never been possible before.

However, once I realized my 'gut feeling', it became possible.

Mood is the most deceptive of the many traits I've received.

Of course, a warrior's bloodline or divine spirit can be tremendous, but the deceitfulness of Qigong lies in its generality.

It feels like it's always on, and not just for certain situations.

In this situation, your opponent's movements are more visible. Not readable, but more subtle.

By looking at your opponent's prior moves and reacting to yours, you can get a good idea of what to expect.

It's not a special power.

It's just that I can now see what Ellen sees.

After practicing long enough, I can do what I see, aided by the trait.

As I adjust my stance and the trajectory of my sword, she follows suit.

We hadn't even clashed swords once, and it felt like we'd already had five fights.

If I go in, I get blocked. So I try another way, and then they try another way, and then I try again.

In that iteration.

The opponent's shoulder, stride, and sword grip.

It constantly makes small posture changes to anticipate combat.

"......."

"......You're not kidding."

She probably saw what I saw at a much higher level than I did. That's why it's not a battle, it's a competition.

She nods. She looks at me.

I don't know why, but.......

This is Ellen, and she can read people. Ellen often has no idea what she's thinking in the beginning, but this person is just there.

"It's not even close.

'I heard you've been learning the sword for less than a year.'

"Even if you were taught by a genius.

"Is this possible?

"What kind of talent is this?

"I hear you've got some kind of enchantment?

"You said you had superpowers, right?

"What the hell.

"He's scared.

"Why don't we ask them to come to Chanapelle?

"I want it.

"But it's taking so long to graduate.

That seems to be the general idea.

What is it? Why do I feel like I'm the only one who can read minds?

-Snarl

"That's it. I don't think we need to look any further."

In the end, she summoned her Auror Sword back without ever crossing swords with me. I politely returned the sword to her. She looked at me with her mouth set tightly shut, as if her thoughts were complicated by all sorts of things.

I suddenly realize that I want Ellen to be this big.

"I don't know if you're the future of the empire, but I'm beginning to think Effinghauser wasn't wrong."

"Is that a compliment?"

"I'm telling the truth."

This person.

Not only Ellen, but also Effinghauser. Age wise, of course.

She looks at me with her sword sheathed.

"Follow me."

Without another word, she left the performance hall and walked out of the Palace of Spring.

A garden at night, full of flowers. The gardeners were all gone. They must have gone home.

-currrrr

"Looks like it's about to rain."

Suddenly, an ominous thunderclap rumbled in the rainy sky.

I can't believe how long it's been since the sunset, and how suddenly it's faded.

She handed me one of the umbrellas.

But she wasn't wearing an umbrella.

"Don't you use it?"

"Not much."

It looked like it was about to rain, but she walked through the palace gardens as if it didn't matter.

The garden was huge, and it took me three months to get through it.

There were no guards anywhere in these palaces and gardens.

Saviolin Tana's mere presence replaces a large number of guards already in place.

Even some of the non-users of the palace seemed to have already left.

In this vast palace, Charlotte showed me the servants' and maids' quarters, which I didn't go into, but I'm pretty sure were empty.

How many steps you took.

-Tuduk

It's raining.

I opened the umbrella, but she just stood in the rain. I tried to put it on her, but she said enough and walked away from me.

She walked through the rain in silence. It was enough to tell that she was in a bad mood.

She and I walked through the palace gardens on a rainy spring day. The tram stop was still a long way off.

Suddenly, she opened her mouth.

"The king says you are the one who can take his secrets to the grave."

"...... Did you?"

"Yes, and he said he was a benefactor and a friend who had done you a lot of good, so you could tell him a few of your secrets."

Apparently, that's what they said in private.

Your own secrets.

Eventually.

The ending I least wanted.

Bertus, and nothing else. Charlotte's own problems.

"This, then, is highly unusual. You, a complete stranger, are to learn the secrets of the imperial family, but only by the will of the Empress, and it is not for me to decide, so keep what you are about to hear to yourself, for if it is revealed, your life and mine will be in jeopardy."

With ample warning, Saviolin Tana speaks.

"The Palace of Spring is currently closed to all outsiders. And it's not just outsiders, most of the palace's personnel are on standby outside, except for those who can be trusted."

When Charlotte didn't say anything herself, she meant for us to hear it from Savior Tana's mouth.

Charlotte gave me her secret, part of it.

"That is why, when the king brought you to me, I and Ser Dyrus were taken aback. Keep in mind that what was said between me and the King was circumstantial, not political. I have nothing to do with anything that comes from politics."

"......Yes."

Saviolin Tana.

It's only the Emperor's power, and she's not involved in politics at all, as she has a big business card as the head of the Charnapelle. It's not her path, she says.

"You must be a superhero."

"Yes."

"Then you know more than most about the dangers of superpowers, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Your psychic power is one of those dangerous ones. It's the kind of power that's hard to control, and that's why it can't be revealed to the public. Until now, you've been focusing on controlling your powers."

Charlotte's superpower.

My only prediction is that it's an offensive ability, and that it's taking it easy because it's the kind of power that shouldn't be revealed.

"I can't go into details. However, both the Imperial Family and you are having difficulty controlling your powers, which is why it is becoming difficult for you to live in the Temple any longer."

"It's ......."

Dangerous and uncontrollable psychics are removed.

Charlotte's power is that kind of power, and it could end up putting other students at Temple in danger.

So Charlotte can no longer come to the temple.

Charlotte soon quits Temple.

It could be a month from now, it could be next week, it could be today.

If this is true, then Charlotte's statement that Bertus is irrelevant is true.

That said.

The story of the death of a man in the Palace of Spring can be found at.......

In other words, someone died because Charlotte's powers got out of control.

Murder.

It was the reason why Charlotte was returning to the Imperial Palace instead of her dormitory.

"Today was unusual in many ways, and don't think you'll be able to visit the Palace of Spring in the future."

It's not a power struggle, it's Charlotte disappearing from the Temple because she failed to control her powers.

Before that.

What are Charlotte's powers?

Why the hell is Saviolin Tana here.

Why did my mood send me an alert today.

-Flash!

-curl!

In a flash of lightning, a flash of light, and a flash of light, I look up at Tana, the viola.

The raindrops running down her cheeks as she walked aimlessly in the rain were like tears.

"If Charlotte completely fails to control her ability....... what happens?"

"I have no reason to tell you."

Saviolin Tana says without looking at me.

Her expression was as serious as mine.

She looked like she was trying to decide something.

You're committing to something you don't want to commit to.

Saviolin Tana.

Why is the strongest man in the world single-handedly in charge of guarding this palace?

Why you're alone.

As far as I can tell, the only other guard besides her is Dyrus.

"If Charlotte gets out of hand, you're here to take over."

-Flash!

In a flash of light, Savior Tana squinted.

My intuition sent me a strong warning today. I was still feeling those red flags.

That said.

It was going to be about Charlotte dying today.

By the hand of Saviolin Tana.

第 268页

Saviolin Tana is staying at the Palace of Spring to deal with Charlotte in the event of an emergency.

It wasn't about Charlotte's safety, it was about Huang Sheng's safety.

It was clear.

"Save your words, Reinhardt, I don't have much patience."

In the rain, Saviolin Tana said.

Even if you were her friend, it was presumptuous to say that you were tasked with killing her. Was she standing out in the rain because she wanted to torment herself?

I do not know the relationship between Charlotte and Saviolin Tana. But it's a job that requires touching the body of the most noble of men, especially the Emperor.

It's a direct order from the Emperor, and I'm sure Charlotte accepts it.

But if you're in the position of having to do that command yourself, you'll feel like hell.

Something will happen today. But that's just a gut feeling warning, not a guarantee.

Before I knew it, the Palace of Spring was slipping away.

I shouldn't go back to the template.

I can't leave Charlotte behind.

But how.

Neither Charlotte nor Savior Tana would allow me to stay here at The Palace of Spring. I have crossed too many lines. I have already allowed too much by being Charlotte's friend.

We don't know if Bertus knows about this, but if he does, he's probably not paying attention to Charlotte. There's no point in messing with a competitor who'll just fade away.

I was already getting close to my stop.

"I'm sure you know the entrance to the palace, and I'd love to take you there, but I can't be gone for long."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, Lord Tana."

Normally, I'd have to make sure I was leaving the palace properly, but this was a special case.

She drove me to my stop and then headed back to the Palace of Spring.

I am not allowed to stay.

There was no one at the stop. Everyone who was supposed to go home had already gone home. They didn't want anyone to see Charlotte's condition. The Palace of Spring is operating with a minimum of people.

Now, even the least of them have been bitten, except for Dyrus.

I don't want anyone to see Charlotte die at the hands of Chief Chanapelle, just in case.

This means that right now, the Palace of Spring is very poorly defended.

Is it possible to secretly watch what's going on?

The Palace of Spring would be her domain. Is it possible to hide my presence from her senses and infiltrate the Palace of Spring to observe the situation?

Whether you can or not, you should.

Near the palace in the dreary spring that has bitten people far and wide.

Now it was time to mess up again.

Not for me, but for Charlotte.

Just as you did when you first fell into this world.

Just as I had gambled my life away at Demon Castle, I had to gamble my life away at Yellow Castle.

I can't stand by and watch the first life I saved slip away like this.

A fall rainy night in the dark.

Saviolin Tana is a nervous wreck. But not the kind of nerves that make you wary of your surroundings.

She's probably focused solely on Charlotte. The depression and confusion she feels for herself also seems pretty deep.

My self-implication there.

I don't know if it's possible or not to do this after the fact, but I'll try.

Then, one more thing.

Use 'retire'.

Saviolin Tana is unaware of my infiltration of the Palace of Spring.

[It takes 2,000 achievement points to cause that event].

It's not an unlikely event, but it's not cheap either.

In the past, this would have been enough to buy a talent. With this score, I have imprinted the talent of Self-Suggestion.

A combination of circumstances and conditions make it possible to fool the grandmaster's senses, at least for the moment.

Your current achievement score is 5,930 points.

If I could have Charlotte today, I would have spent it, even if I had to spend all of these points, and if I didn't have enough, I would have borrowed it.

[Use 2,000 achievement points].

When Saviolin Tana disappeared beyond the gardens, I left my stop and headed back to the Palace of Spring.

Place the umbrella among the flowers in the garden, and also use self-implication.

No one can feel me.

Strong implication.

My self-implication is even more powerful in these real-world situations.

It responds to my tension and desperation.

I can't let Charlotte die. My sense of urgency that something is going to happen today has allowed me to do things I wouldn't normally be able to do.

I succeed in infiltrating the Palace of Spring.

Confidence I have mixed beliefs.

I don't know if I'm really going away, but the rain actually dampened the noise and I moved very carefully.

I've created a situation where she doesn't notice me by retreating, but if I suddenly lunge and grab her by the hindquarters, she'll definitely notice.

What's hidden is only a pretense.

Don't be lulled into a false sense of security.

I approached the distant Palace of Spring again.

In the cold rain, the petals were falling, battered by raindrops.

-shoot

Tana on her way home in the fall rain.

I followed in the rain.

\* \* \*

Saviolin Tana was not aware of her surroundings.

As I suspected, she appeared to be in a state of mental overload due to the gravity of her assignment.

As we walked, we would stop and stare at the Palace of Spring.

I couldn't tell what he was thinking.

But in front of me, in front of Charlotte, I could feel a deep sadness in her back that she hadn't shown.

I didn't expect to meet Saviolin Tana before the events of the Gate, and I only had a vague idea of her history, but I didn't flesh out the details.

Saviolin Tana did not participate in the Great Demon War. Or, more accurately, she did not participate.

The Emperor has tethered her to the ecliptic in the name of ensuring that the most powerful force remains to defend it.

You didn't use your power where you needed it most.

That's a big part of her sense of debt and guilt.

She trained Ludwig to be a bully, but only because of the special circumstances of the world's peril, not because her heart was evil.

Saviolin Tana dies saving Ludwig.

He apologizes to Ludwig for all his harsh behavior.

On the outside, she's a cold and distant person, but on the inside, she's anything but.

Rather plain.

He's just an ordinary guy who was so strong that he had to carry a lot of weight.

Saviolin Tana is a sassy senior at EpinHauser.

After graduating from the Temple and joining the Chanapelle, she would have been a knight of the Empire for decades. She's even been nicknamed the Protector of the Empire.

As such, she would have had a lot to do with royalty.

What was his relationship with Charlotte like?

I don't know, but I could tell from her hesitant steps that she cared about Charlotte.

As I watched Savior Tana return to the Palace of Spring, I too entered the palace.

As I walked into the palace's entrance, I didn't feel any magical barriers.

I would have thought that if there was such a thing, my gut would have warned me, but I didn't feel it at all.

Even the guards, including magical barriers, have been disarmed or deactivated. Or even the wizarding staff that was in charge of such things has been evicted.

Just like you don't need a lock on your house if you don't have anything to steal.

The Palace of Spring, which even Sarkhegar could not infiltrate, had become all too easy to infiltrate under the shadow of death.

Thanks to Charlotte's guidance, I had a general idea of what was around the palace.

If it's been a few days, I might have forgotten about it, but I just heard about it.

The only people in this huge, empty palace are Savior Tana, Darius, and Charlotte.

The lights were on, but there was no one to see me.

-Rumble

It was an ominous sound, but now the thunder and rain would drown out my footsteps.

What am I supposed to do here. I don't know anything yet.

Vague confidence.

Because of that one unspeakable feeling, I infiltrated the Empress's palace, refusing to be told to go back.

If I'm caught in a bad situation, even with Charlotte's good graces, Savior Tana will not leave me alone.

If you get it wrong, you really die.

I moved in the palace's illumination, ducking into the few dark spots, moving in the shadows.

Strengthens hearing.

-Currrrr!

With enhanced hearing, thunder sounds deafeningly loud, and rain sounds more detailed.

Self-Suggestion is now Rank B. You succeeded in enhancing your magic power and have been training consistently since then, and your rank has increased.

Therefore, its utilization is increasing. Not only is the range of applications expanding, but the methods we've been using are becoming more and more effective.

It was natural to be able to distinguish the sound I wanted to hear from the noise. This had been possible before, but with greater granularity.

In the sound of the rain, I could even distinguish the slightly different texture of the water as it trickled down the ceiling of the palace.

It was easy to distinguish the sound of the viola tana walking in the sound field, and I could somewhat predict its distance from me.

We don't have a floor plan of the entire palace, but we have a general idea of the locations.

On the second floor, in the hallway on the left, Charlotte's bedroom is on that side. Saviolin Tana is heading there now.

I could make out the sound in the dark corner of the first floor hall.

This is probably due to the fact that the palace is completely silent. The only other sounds were thunder and rain.

-Your Highness?

-You're in.

-Yes.

Dyrus's voice cut in.

I heard the door open.

-Electricity, are you okay?

-No, not yet.

I could hear Charlotte's nonchalant voice.

Charlotte's superpower.

How dangerous is this power that the Emperor must kill the Empress, and how has Charlotte come to terms with it herself?

Because your powers went wild and killed people?

-Dalcock

I heard the door close, and I could hear no more sounds from inside.

Probably due to soundproofing.

We need to get a little closer.

Heading upstairs to the second floor, he checked to see if Darius had made it into Charlotte's bedroom, but there was no one in the hallway.

Just in case, I ducked into an alcove in the hallway and crept closer to Charlotte's bedroom.

Don't make a lot of noise.

I've managed to keep Saviolin Tana from detecting my presence, but don't put too much stock in that.

You're fooling people you would never normally fool.

The closer I get, the more I fantasize about Tana the viola suddenly leaping out and grabbing me by the throat.

The rain should have chilled me to the bone, but my nerves made me feel feverish.

I'm breaking out in a cold sweat.

The good news is, they can't work magic.

If I had noise canceling on, I wouldn't have heard it at all. As I got closer to Charlotte's bedroom, I could detect a voice, very faint, coming from inside the room.

-Yet....... Don't remember?

-Ne.......

I could hear Tana's worried question and Charlotte's depressed answer.

What do you mean you don't remember?

-I think the time is coming, and when it does, please don't hesitate. Lord Tana.

-That will not happen. Surely, there must be a way to resolve Your Highness's condition....... The imperial family is searching as best they can.

The imperial family tries to find a way, but I can already hear the hopelessness in Savior Tana's tone.

-I don't think I'll be able to figure it out before my condition becomes more serious.

Charlotte was negative, and Darius and Tana couldn't deny it.

-Sire, we still need to find the child.......

-Please, please. I don't know how many times I've said it, don't talk about him.

Charlotte muttered nervously at Dyrus's words.

If it's him, he's probably referring to me.

Dyrus thinks that if he finds me, I might know how to make Charlotte's condition better? Why on earth?

If Charlotte's superpower is dangerous, what does that have to do with me?

The ominous forebodings and numerous hints were increasingly leading me to imagine things I didn't want to think about.

第 269页

-Your Majesty, I have heard stories about the child, but....... If that child can improve your condition, I must meet him at least once, I promise you. Even if the child knows nothing, I will protect his safety with my honor. Where is the child?

-I don't know, I don't know, the sealer doesn't know, the kid doesn't know where he is in the end, so it's all pointless.

Charlotte had said that she and I were the only ones who had a clue about Bali.

For some reason, you didn't tell the vassals about my whereabouts.

Did it have something to do with what Charlotte was going through, and Charlotte is no longer in contact with Valerie because she thinks I might be in danger?

It is very likely that Charlotte's powers are not superpowers.

If it's just a superpower that's dangerous, there's no reason for it to offer to find me.

-I have made a vow, Lord Tana. If I ever get blood on my hands again, kill me.

......In the end.

When someone died in the Palace of Spring, it was Charlotte's doing.

The power ran wild, and Charlotte killed people.

And you don't remember it.

-......charge.

-Promise.

-......No promises.

-Promise me, please.

Savior Tana gave no answer to Charlotte's begging for death.

The conversation is over.

I quickly hid in the instrument storage room at the end of the hallway on the right, next to the performance room. The door was open, and there were no instruments stored there. The only way I knew it was an instrument room was because it was full of what looked like racks.

The musicians would have taken all the instruments.

I thought about closing the door, but the sound of it might be detected, so I hid myself in the darkness of the room.

There is no use for Charlotte here, no use for Darius and Tana on the viola. The recital hall is empty, and this place is even more empty.

The vault was dark with no lights on, but that's not what I need, and all I need is sound.

This is actually a good thing.

-delay

Charlotte's bedroom door opened, and she heard Darius and Tana's footsteps.

-Wouldn't it be better to watch him sleep?

-to no avail. I've tied myself up and slept, but it was all for naught.

-......So, you're still not out of the palace yet?

-I guess, but....... Maybe it's just that you don't deviate.

-You mean you might show up at Tetra or the Winter Palace?

-I'm just guessing. We can only hope it's not possible.......

It's clear that they're talking about an event that's already happened, but I don't know what that event is, so I can't follow the conversation.

No restrictions on movement.

I only understood that it had something to do with Charlotte's abilities.

-By the way, is your shoulder okay?

-......It's okay, it's not a big deal, I was just caught off guard. I can still handle it.

-Will you not go to the priest?

-......It's dangerous for me to have a record of being treated by a priest. Your Highness could hurt me....... You know what I mean.

-Yes.

-His Majesty may be listening. I shall refrain from such talk.

-I see....... I was careless.

Charlotte's abilities went into overdrive or something, and Saviolin Tana was injured.

To the point of hurting her.

Is Charlotte's power enough to hurt Ms. Chanapelle?

They seem to have kept the very fact that Charlotte attacked Savior Tana a secret.

Charlotte's powers run amok, she loses her cool, and Savior Tana, acting defensively, finally realizes it's too late and kills her.

-um.......

As they neared the palace staircase leading down to the first floor, Savior Tana stopped walking.

-Is something wrong?

I feel it.

She's on guard.

-something.......

I held my breath.

Clear presence.

Saviolin Tana feels nothing. She wonders how much time has passed.

-You didn't sleep well, no big deal.

-Seventh?

-Is it a day....... No. Is it a week, I'm not sure.

-Don't you need to rest during the day?

-This is one thing, but I'm also the head of Chanapelle, and I don't have time for that.

-I see.......

Government by day.

Charlotte's bodyguard at night.

It seems like Saviolin Tana hasn't had a break at all in quite some time.

The two of them moved again, descending the stairs.

I didn't let out the breath I'd been holding.

More.

Get a little further away.

-Well done, Dyrus. Go back.

-Yes, sir....... But are you okay? You look tired.

-That doesn't mean you can't stay.

-I see.......

-Sorry. I didn't mean to be mean. I'm just a bit, well, sensitive.

-No, I didn't think of it that way at all.

-That's great, then. Get some rest, you've been through a lot.

-Well, hopefully nothing happens.

-Yes.

Darius left the Palace of Spring.

I thought the reason for reducing the number of people in the palace was so that no one would see Charlotte killed by Savior Tana, but there were other reasons as well.

It's also to prevent someone from being victimized by a rampaging Charlotte.

There are only three people left in the palace.

Me, Saviolin Tana, and Charlotte.

It would mean that my life could be in danger at any moment. ......

Should I leave the palace? I'm already in danger.

I didn't know if the red flags my gut was throwing up were for Charlotte or for my own safety.

I heard Saviolin Tana slump into a chair in the hall.

It's right to get out of here. Charlotte's powers are powerful, Tana can handle it, and I'm pretty sure I can't.

It's more likely to be you who's at risk.

-Rumble

You can't even get out in the first place.

Saviolin Tana sat in the hall that was now the entrance to the palace. As if to keep an eye on things.

-Pat!

The corridor was getting clearer as Saviolin Tana manipulated something.

No, the magic light also illuminated my instrument vault.

Saviolin Tana suddenly lit up the entire palace.

Any chance of escape under cover of darkness was gone.

If you want to leave, you have to leave while she's away.

As expected, the viola tana did not move.

I couldn't move either.

The die has already been cast.

Hoping that nothing will happen, but knowing that something will.

I held my breath.

\* \* \*

It was a boring time.

However, it was a horribly nerve-wracking time.

I kept focusing on killing him with self-suggestion to avoid being picked up by Savior Tana's senses.

Saviolin Tana was frozen in place.

In a temple, my undo might be a problem.

If nothing happens, what excuse do I have for taking my time leaving the planet?

Secondary issues are starting to surface, but that's all for me and Charlotte to deal with once we get through the day.

It's already late at night.

It must have been past midnight.

Saviolin Tana has somehow managed to illuminate the entire palace, which is deserted.

As if to drive away the darkness.

The instrument closet I'm in is also lit, but it's a blind spot anyway. She didn't notice me.

What a boring time that was.

-pot

The lights in the Instrument Vault have gone out.

That wasn't all.

The light from the hallway also disappeared after a while.

We don't know how they control the lighting in the palace.

Saviolin Tana didn't move. Did she put out the fire?

Why turn off all the lights all of a sudden?

No.

It's not like she put out the fire.

As I cautiously poked my head out into the hallway, I saw a different sight.

The magic lights throughout the palace flickered and flickered, then went out one by one.

-Now....... Until this.......

Saviolin Tana's voice is a small monologue. It was a voice that sounded alarmed and afraid.

I can't think of anything other than Charlotte turning off the lights.

How this is possible.

Why are they doing this.

Unknown.

Saviolin Tana gets up from her seat and moves. The direction she's moving is toward Charlotte's bedroom.

I huffed and puffed, my whole body stiffening to avoid detection.

I don't want her to find me.

Now that I've used it to the point of retirement, a number of coincidences and events have intertwined to ensure that I will not be discovered. It would include the condition that I conceal my presence with all my might.

Going undetected is the future, but if I suddenly start screaming, you'll never know.

I have no intention of testing whether or not I can change a predetermined future.

You can't make a gamble you're already taking more risky.

-Charge!

-If you are awake, please answer!

Saviolin Tana calls out as she walks down the hall.

-Charge!

She heads to Charlotte's bedroom and calls out for her.

A springtime palace in the dark.

-Flash!

-currrrr

It was a rainy night, which made it even darker, and I could barely make things out without the occasional flash of brain light.

No, it's not the light from the lightning that's causing your eyes to adjust to the darkness. The light actually hinders your vision.

-Charge!

There was a cry of desperation from Saviolin Tana.

-delay

I heard Charlotte's bedroom door open.

-.......

There was no sound from Savior Tana, not even the sound of a door opening before she opened it.

If so, Charlotte is sleeping.

-And....... Gone.......

It's gone.

I could hear the tired, despairing voice in my head.

The moment.

-Flash!

"!"

I almost screamed for a moment.

In that moment, as the light bulb went off in my head, I saw something.

Something is in front of you.

was.

-currrrr

There was a moment of silence after the thunderstorm, followed by a clap of thunder that rattled the windows.

What is.

Now.

What's in front of me?

I squinted and stared ahead, but I couldn't make out the shape of the thing watching me in the darkness. I wasn't mistaken.

Something was definitely watching me.

Suddenly, something that wasn't there a moment ago is there.

-Flash!

Once again, the lightning bolt dispelled the darkness for a moment.

A shape appeared before my eyes, for a split second, and then it was gone.

I saw it clearly.

What geometry.

He was smiling at me.

Although she looks like Charlotte.

Something that was never Charlotte was watching me in the pitch blackness.

I couldn't see anything.

But the presence of the thing in front of me was palpable.

-H.

-hmph.

-hhhhh.......

-hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.......

'It's' eerie chuckle brushes the nape of my neck.

-Flash!

In my oblivion, I could see it properly.

Dark hair and eyes as black as the abyss.

And a red pupil with a vertical slit.

Well, more like the devil himself.

Episode 270.

The fact that I didn't scream was purely due to the amount of force I put into my jaw that made my molars clench.

If it weren't for the divine spirit sustaining me, I would have passed out or bitten my tongue long ago.

And.

Comes.

Something.

In the dark, scared for it to reach for me, I rolled to the side.

-Snarl!

You don't know what went by.

I just felt intensely threatened and instinctively rolled away.

Something brushed past where I was. I couldn't tell what it was, but I knew it would have been dangerous.

One thing is clear.

Charlotte attacks me.

"Your Majesty!"

In response to the laughter, Tana, the viola, had already arrived at the instrument storage room.

"......Why are you here?"

As my eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness, I could gradually make out the figure of Saviolin Tana, and then the figure of a being staring at me from the darkness. After a moment of being surprised by my presence, Saviolin Tana's expression turned to one of confusion as she looked at what was in front of her.

"Uh, how did....... I ended up like this......."

It was still staring at me with an eerie smile on its face. Was Charlotte's condition worse than before?

"Step back. I'll ask you questions later."

As if to say that questioning the situation was for later, Savior Tana waved me off.

"Don't move away from me. You will die."

I could finally see what it was that had been creeping up on me.

The darkness, refined to a blade, as if animated, shoots out.

-Quack! Quack!

She drew her sword in a flash, activating her Auror Blade to meet the onrushing darkness.

With a roar, the shadows scattered into the air and shattered.

"Your Majesty, you must come to your senses!"

"......hhhh. Hmph."

It didn't respond to Tana's words.

-Kurrrrrr

The darkness rose, and once again the stagnant blades rushed toward her.

Saviolin Tana stood in front of me, parrying Shadow's blade with her auror blade.

In the blink of an eye, she was parrying blades from four or five directions with ghostly speed. The wind pressure on my skin as sword and shadow collided was a testament to the power involved.

Deals with darkness, or shadows.

That was Charlotte's power.

Charlotte's powers were as powerful as they were creepy.

But Tana had the upper hand. Every attack was blocked, and she even had time to spare.

However, she couldn't hurt Charlotte.

You can't attack, so you're forced to play defense.

But it must be subdued.

Step by step, through the rain of shadows, she approached Charlotte.

Reach.

Savior Tana defies the odds and grabs Charlotte by the scruff of the neck.

-Flash!

Charlotte's figure was nowhere to be seen as the lightning bolt illuminated the window.

"......damn."

She gritted her teeth and stared at the spot where Charlotte had disappeared.

It was a short fight, but one that would have killed a normal man a hundred times over. I wouldn't have lasted three rounds in that attack.

She turned around and looked at me.

Anger burned in her eyes, as palpable as depression.

-Pak!

"Boom!"

She grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and shoved me against the wall.

"You fool! Why didn't you go back? Did you think you could be of any use to the king here? You fool! If I hadn't come, you would have been dead! Don't you realize how precious life is?"

She was spewing honest anger, as if she would blow my head off at any moment. She raised her sword and pointed it at my throat.

"There are things in the world you shouldn't know, things you shouldn't see. You have disregarded the King's considerations, and you have disregarded mine. For that, you will pay with your life."

She was ready to thrust her sword in and kill me at a moment's notice.

Charlotte was a demon to behold.

It would be a huge scandal for the world to know that an imperial family, or the heir to the throne, is like that.

There will be tales of being kidnapped and cursed by a demon castle.

And, in reality, it's probably not much different.

That can't be a superpower.

It's clear that the Devil has done something to Charlotte. Whether she knows it or not, that much is certain.

That's why the imperial family kept it a secret. There was no reason to spare me, who had seen it with my own eyes.

Death was at hand, but strangely enough, I wasn't afraid.

than Saviolin Tana's surging momentum right now. Charlotte's appearance just now was more terrifying.

"Of course I'm not worthy of my life."

"......what?"

My life is not insignificant.

I don't want to die.

However, I was more afraid that Charlotte wouldn't be able to come back after looking like that.

"I'm just here because I care about Charlotte's life as much as I care about my own, and I want to do something about it."

"Arrogant bastard. You're overconfident in your abilities."

Her cold, searing eyes bore into me.

"I'm not being arrogant."

"Then what is this presumptuous behavior of yours, if not arrogance!"

"It's desperation."

Charlotte's life.

That was already a reason in itself for me.

Therefore, I entered the palace with only a strange sense of insecurity, defying the orders of the Empress and the Knights of Shanapelle to infiltrate the Palace of Spring.

For the first time, I risked my life to do something.

I can't stand to see Charlotte's life wasted.

She looks into my eyes. As if to see if there's any suspicion, arrogance, or manipulation in my eyes.

Her sword trembled as she held it to my throat.

How long has it been.

Her sword was carefully lowered.

She cleared her throat, still glaring at me.

"Your disposition will be decided by His Majesty at daybreak tomorrow."

But she had a look in her eyes that assured me no harsh punishment would be meted out.

"May I ask what's going on?"

"No one knows."

"What do you mean you don't know ......?"

"No one knows what's going on, no one knows. No one knows why you have this power, or why you are being consumed by it. Why does it take over your body at night?"

Tana's despairing expression mirrored the state of mind of the imperial family at the moment.

"We know nothing. We can only speculate that something happened to your Majesty in Demon City."

She gripped my shoulders, squinting into the darkness.

"Clearly, things are worse than before. Do not fall away from me. You, or rather, the 'it' that has taken over your body, moves through the darkness, sometimes in front of you, sometimes behind you, sometimes from the ceiling."

As if she couldn't hide more from what I'd already seen, she began to spill the beans about what she knew.

In fact, it appeared out of nowhere in front of me.

Because it moves on darkness.

So there's no point in tying her up, and she'll disappear even if you're watching her.

So she lit up the entire palace. Because if there was no darkness, there would be no darkness to ride in.

Saviolin Tana saw that it worked and continued to bathe the palace in light at night.

But as of today, that method is broken.

It now also turns off the magic light on its own.

Night is its time.

"Does this happen every night?"

"Not every day. But it's getting more frequent. And this is the first time I've ever had to extinguish all the lanterns. Also, your Majesty's eyes....... Last time I looked, it was definitely only one of them......."

Her eyes were shaking with frustration at the situation.

"His aggression is also getting stronger. At first, he wandered around the palace at night like he was sleepwalking....... For some time now......."

She stammered.

She didn't seem to be able to talk about the murders.

"Regardless, you must leave the palace. It's dangerous here, and the punishment I'm about to inflict on you is only possible if you're still alive. If you misbehave again, this time I will truly blow your head off."

"Okay."

Saviolin Tana took one cautious step after another, straining to maximize her senses.

In the dark, I can see through the darkness with enhanced eyesight. I can see in the dark more accurately than most humans. I'm also less prone to distracting brain light.

-shoot

Tana moved cautiously through the corridors of the palace in the spring, the sound of rain echoing in the air. I need to get down to the hall on the first floor and leave the palace. She'll try to send me away first.

"What are you going to do?"

"We'll have to subdue them, because that's what we've been doing."

Inevitably, violent means have been used to subdue them.

You've probably heard of blending into the darkness and stunning them before they can get away.

So far, so good.

Judging by her reaction, my gut reaction to the warning was one.

Today is a starting point.

Where only one pupil was covered, both eyes were now covered.

The force that's been eating away at Charlotte has gotten even stronger today.

Tana ultimately fails to subdue Charlotte and ends up killing her.

So how the hell am I supposed to stop it?

The Devil is involved. Charlotte's power is a byproduct of that.

That's all we know.

Any shenanigans involving the devil.

But now wasn't the time to think about it.

Tana didn't move hastily. She looked forward, left, right, up, and down.

This was despite the fact that we weren't far from the palace entrance.

-Quack! Quack!

The shadowy blades flying out of the darkness were the reason Tana couldn't let her guard down. Those unearthly black blades were aimed at me, and they were aimed at Tana.

She fended off all of that single-handedly.

"Damn......."

In the darkness, I saw her clench her right hand through clenched teeth.

Before the stairs to the first floor, Tana gritted her teeth as she saw the entrance beyond the great hall.

The entrance to the great palace was blocked by a black barrier.

It was shrouded in darkness, to be precise.

And in that darkness, Charlotte, still wearing her creepy smile, watched the two of us.

"I don't think they're going to let me out, let alone you."

"......I think so."

It stood in the doorway, unmoving, as if inviting me to come closer.

A being that can move on darkness, and use that darkness to attack us.

In this dark place, the two of us may be nothing more than toys.

They may be far away, but they may also be right in front of you, riding the darkness.

"Obviously, I was able to take him down without too much trouble. I just got caught off guard and got a little injured."

If it was just a minor injury, I wouldn't even mention it.

So, it's not going to be a shallow injury.

"......."

"But I don't know what that thing is, so I'm not sure I can take it down safely this time."

The continent's strongest player was calmly looking at the possibility of defeat.

The mysterious opponent has the best battlefield and environment. And as of today, its power has only grown stronger.

But then there's Saviolin Tana, who hasn't had a day's rest in over a year, and whose injuries have not been properly treated.

Tana was in the worst shape.

But even a loss due to poor conditioning is still a loss.

When you die, it's all over. You can't even say that if you were at your best, you could have taken him down without a fight.

No way. It's not Charlotte who dies today, it's Saviolin Tana.

Was my intuition warning me that Tana's life was in danger, not Charlotte's?

Saviolin Tana is one of the main players in the second half.

If she dies, that too will be an inflection point in history. In a very negative way.

But just because Saviolin Tana dies today doesn't mean Charlotte will live.

If Charlotte doesn't die today and you kill Savior Tana, Charlotte will die tomorrow.

If it's a dangerous enough power to kill Tana, and I can't control it, I'm going to have to deal with it immediately, even if it's a princess.

Savior Tana dies, and so does Charlotte.

If so, I die today.

There is only one variable, me.

I have to do something about this situation.

But in both of these fights, I was too small a variable.

"Reinhardt, you said you did the enchantment yourself."

"It's ......."

I can't say that it's anything close to practical.

"I will fight to protect you, but there is no guarantee that I will be able to protect you. Remember, my priorities are first to deliver, second to me, and last to you."

She handed me her sword.

"That shadow can't be countered except with enchanted power. You can't enchant a sword, but this one should be able to parry it."

She could summon an Auror Sword, so she seemed to want to fight with it.

Sword of Saviolin Tana.

Not a holy object, but one of the Empire's national treasures.

Tempesta, a windblade.

There before me was Ludwig with the Alsbringer, the sword that Ludwig had claimed as a relic of Tana and made his second sword.

"Okay."

Summoning an Auror Sword will take a lot of stamina.

Don't do anything that will make Tana's condition worse.

"said. It can be difficult to protect......."

-Snarl

I, summoned it.

"I have a black one."

"Soul Binding......?"

Her eyes widened when she saw the milky white sword in my hand.

"This....... This......! Yeah, how could you do this!"

She stared in horror at the Tuan's holy relic, Tiamata, in my hand.

"We'll talk about that later."

I never thought I'd use it in a place like this.

I now have to take my first real test with Tiamata.

It's not a robber, it's not a monster, it's not a villain who deserves to die.

My first friend.

They have to play a real game against Charlotte.

She crumpled all her questions inside for now.

"......Yes."

She and I both knew what we were doing, after all.

Episode 271.

Its face contorted as it watched me. It went from smiling in amusement to displeasure.

You recognize Tiamata.

-Kurung!

From the dark wall that blocked the entrance, waves leapt, not blades.

We realized that it wasn't going full throttle, it was just messing around.

That should convince you.

Dying today. That it was Saviolin Tana.

"Suck!"

-Koo-koo-koo-koo!

You can't stop a wave with a sword.

She wore no sword.

But she counteracted the darkness that surrounded her with a massive burst of energy from the magical shield that surrounded her body.

-curl!

It was enough to shake the palace to its foundations, and even I, watching it from the sidelines, would have been freaking out, regardless of the situation.

With a simple injection of pure magic, he dispelled the waves of darkness.

Even a superhuman can't do this to an S+ ranked Grandmaster level monster with horsepower beyond that of a superhuman.

I couldn't believe that this was the power I was using at my worst.

Darkness swirls around us from all sides. Charlotte is in front of me, blocking our path, but I turn away at the intense sense of discomfort I feel behind me.

The darkness is closing in on me.

While maximizing your physical strength.

Believe.

I'll never be able to do it as well as Saviolin Tana.

I believe I can do it.

No.

It's not even about believing.

I have already succeeded.

The second should be easy.

With a feeling of extreme exaltation coursing through my body, I parried the incoming blade of darkness with a thiamatha.

-Quang!

"Boom!"

I could barely contain my admiration for not coughing up blood.

There was so much power in that thing, I thought it would tear my grip.

-Bang! Quack! Quack!

Savior Tana descended the stairs, inch by inch, closer to Charlotte.

Is this fight worth it?

If you approach, she'll melt into the darkness and disappear, but can you subdue her before she does?

Just because I was able to do it before doesn't mean I can do it now. Charlotte was focusing her attack on Saviolin Tana rather than me.

I just need to be alive.

I just need to stay out of Tana's way. The moment I make her pay attention to me, it's all over.

-shii profit!

-Bam!

"Ugh!"

It is fortunate that Tiamata has a valid response to this darkness. A lesser sword would have been sliced or grazed by this dark blade.

This is not swordplay. I was never taught to fight these things.

But in a fight, you can't pick your opponent.

You don't know how, but you have to do it.

I had no choice but to keep an eye on the attacks coming at me and focus on countering them.

-Quack! Quack!

Savior Tana charges at Charlotte with a monstrous ferocity that makes you wonder if this is a human fight.

When waves of darkness wash in, they are repelled with a blast of magic, and blades are scattered with a single sword pressure.

I had no idea what it was capable of when it was at its best.

Savior Tana rushed in on Charlotte at the last minute and tried to grab her.

-Snarl

It would just fade away into the darkness.

"Damn......!"

It appeared twenty paces to Tana's right.

Around Charlotte, shadows formed like spears.

-Bang, bang, bang!

Once again, she lunges in.

I tried to break through the storm of blades and subdue Charlotte, only to have her vanish into the darkness before I could reach her.

She's a spear that pierces through anything, but the shield she's supposed to pierce doesn't allow her to hit.

If so, you need to be faster. You want to catch it before it dissolves.

However, Xavier Tana, already at full strength, couldn't get any faster.

To be faster, you need to reach for your sword, not your hand.

Soon, inevitably, you will have to kill Charlotte.

With only the option of subjugation, Saviolin Tana could only see a future where she was killed by the Dark One in a war of attrition.

I was already pushed to my limits just trying to keep the incoming shadow blades at bay.

Xavier can't help Tana, and if he does, he'll only endanger her.

"Bam!"

It wasn't just poor conditioning.

I could see that her right shoulder was stained with blood.

Come to think of it, all this time she's been wielding a tempesta with her left hand.

He has no use of his right hand, but when the situation becomes urgent, he grabs his sword with both hands and wields it.

You must be right-handed.

If so, you are now a right-handed person using a sword with your left hand only.

Of course, swords are often wielded with both hands, but losing one arm means that your combat power is reduced by half, or even more.

As such, it was clear that Tana, a viola player who also uses her injured right arm, had an open wound that hadn't been properly treated.

The bloodshot eyes of Akmun Tana stood out.

"Khh...... hhh....... Hehe...... hi. 히힛......."

Charlotte was smiling.

I was enjoying watching Tana push herself to the limit.

Three times since then.

Tana used her injured right arm to get closer to Charlotte.

However, after a moment's hesitation, she reached for her hand, not her sword.

I was able to kill it three times, but it tried to subdue me all three times.

-Quang!

"Boom!"

As such, she was slammed into the wall by the dark blade with her right arm completely destroyed.

-Quack!

She hit a wall, and I could see her incontinence spiderwebbing against the wall she hit, as if she had hit a rock.

"K......!"

-Thump!

She spat up blood and sprawled on the floor.

No way.

It's dead.

Unknown.

If you're not already dead, you will be at this rate.

-shhhh!

For the final blow, it hurled its dark spear at Savior Tana.

I.

That.

It has to be stopped.

No.

Block.

-Bam!

My body, responding to my desperation, transcended the limits of the moment and drew back the spear of darkness that had lunged at Savior Tana.

I stepped in front of the fallen woman.

It looks at me with a creepy smile as I stand in its way.

I can't even tell if I'm being understood or not.

Is it a creature created solely out of malice.

It had only the intention of killing, and there was no dialog, no communication.

Saviolin Tana is unconscious.

Charlotte said that when her powers overwhelm her, she loses her memory.

If so, there's no reason to hesitate.

From the moment it happened. To a certain extent, I was expecting it.

If there's one person in the world who can push the strongest person in the world like this, even when they're at their worst, there's only one.

The Ancestral Demon, Balie.

Use Sarkhegar's Ring.

"I ask you as the rightful ruler of Darklands, the rightful ruler of the demon world."

I, returning to my Valier form, stare at it.

"Thou art, who art."

Unfortunately, I didn't get the reaction I was hoping for.

"hhhhhhhhhhh......."

It was merely chuckling, a deep, low chuckle, just like the first time.

It's not the devil.

I fix my Tiamata and stare at it, which is, after all, a mere shard of the demon's madness.

I didn't expect much from it, but the Demon Domination ability wouldn't work either. I don't know if it's because my abilities are low, or if it's because it's an Archdemon, albeit a dreg, and therefore immune to its effects.

The result is one.

Whether I showed up as Valerie or not, there was no option to avoid the fight.

I'm back to being Reinhardt again.

I didn't want to fight in Valerie's form.

Look at it and say.

"If you are not the devil, then you have not recognized your king, and that will be your sin......."

I fix Tiamata.

"If you're the devil, you don't even recognize your own children, so that's a sin, too."

"Hmph, hmph. Hmph. Heehee. Heehee."

Increasingly driven to madness, it prepares for a wave of darkness.

"But what pisses me off the most. is that you're in Charlotte's body, shaking the shit out of her."

-Woof

Tiamata cries.

The bizarre sensation that the sword itself is howling.

"I mean, if you pissed me off with whatever it was, you deserve it."

A cluster of dark spears rushes toward me.

Tiamata is in bad shape.

Right now, I think it's possible.

I stretched out my Tiamata, facing the window of darkness that was exploding in.

-Flash!

A blast of light centered on Tiamata filled the Palace of Spring in an instant.

Divine Magic, Sanctuary.

“캬아아아악!”

I succeeded in manifesting the magic that Olivia Ranze had planted in me.

\* \* \*

For some time now, I've been doing this.

I share Tiamata with Olivia Ranze. So, I called Olivia up to talk about it.

About Tiamata.

"It's called Tiamata.

"Yes. Why?

"Honestly, what's the point?

'Still, it's a holy object....... Isn't that a bit harsh?

"Well, it's not a god, it's just a bunch of stuff for a god to make, and I didn't say that holy things are useless.

"So what's the point?

"I should say it's not compatible.

Olivia understood what I was talking about.

'Hmm....... 'Yes. Of the holy relics, Tiamata and Alixion have always been used by the Order. Reinhardt, you're the first to become a champion of Tuan without being a priest of Tuan, aren't you?'

I mean, I don't know how to use holy power, but this is a holy power amplifier, what am I supposed to do?

'But the sword itself is not so good, is it? Of course, it is said that if you harm an innocent life with the Tiamata, you will be judged by Tuan.'

"It's superstition.

There's no point in being an innocent bystander to a topic that turns into a dark holy grail in the first place.

'Well, I know that, but....... What if I told you that the official doctrine of the Tuan Order is superstition?'

'If it's not true, it's superstition. You should know better by now, shouldn't you?

'I am me, Reinhardt, but you are so....... You're relentless.......'

Anyway, that's the problem.

Tiamata is a very powerful artifact, but it's basically for priests and paladins, so in my hands it's nothing more than a decent knife.

It doesn't have the divine power of a lament or an alsbringer, but it's not my bread and butter.

Olivia looked at me blankly, as if to say, "So what?

"I mean, you and I co-own this thing, right?

'Heh, so it's like a jointly owned property, which is kind of nice.......'

"......No, why are we talking about that again?

'No, it's not co-owned real estate, it's a soul bond, Reinhardt. You and I are soul mates, aren't we? Ooh, we're already....... Ooh, we're....... You went as far as you could.......'

"Oh, stop it!

"I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!

"Shut up and listen to me.

'Cheat. What is it.'

For Olivia Ranze, who seems to have more and more characters, that's what she wanted.

"Tiamata is a holy power amplifier, so to speak.

"The divine power inherent in it is immense, whether in the form of Tuan or Kier.

"Can't I just drag that in?

"Hmm?

Olivia shook her head.

"So, you're saying you can harness the divine power within the sword itself?

"Yes.

'That's a creative idea. Perhaps I should join the Tuan Sect first? People would love it. A champion has come to me! And so on.'

"You know it's not like that.

I cannot use holy power. However, the holy objects I possess can be used by those with divine power to maximize their effectiveness. The Tiamata in my hand is a fine blade, and an even better one against the undead.

In the hands of a Paladin, however, it turns an otherwise humanoid vehicle into a human killing machine.

I want to do a better job of harnessing the power of Tiamata.

So I turned to Olivia Ranze.

"Why don't you imbue Tiamata with your power, and I can activate it when I need it?

'umm....... 'Well, there is such a concept. Like magical tools and artifacts, there are things that are enchanted with divine magic that non-believers can use.'

"Is there such a thing?

"Yeah, but I don't know if that would work for a holy object, and I'm talking about a very small-scale miracle, not a massive miracle or powerful divine magic.

"This is a unique situation. One object, two owners. Two soul bonds.

I hate to admit it, but at the end of the day, me and Olivia Ranze aren't souls connected, but we're using the same object as a medium.

I wanted to know if it was possible for me to have the kind of impact that Olivia had on Tiamata.

'Hmm. I don't know. I'll have to try and figure it out, but why this?

"It can't hurt to figure out how to make better use of relics, you never know when or where something might come up.

'Hmmm....... Are you trying to do something bad again?

"No, who said that?

'You're right, even if you don't think about it now, I'll definitely use it to do something bad to you later.'

Yes.

It was intentional then.

I didn't mean to write it this way.

When you're having trouble with the vampires of the Vampire Council, a strong divine power will come in handy.

It was a plan to intimidate the vampires, and I couldn't tell Olivia my true intentions.

With that intention, I had been training Olivia Ranze to imprint divine magic on the Tiamata and then draw on it myself.

Not surprisingly, it didn't work out.

I couldn't do that unless I imprinted a new divine power talent, and a divine power built on faith and prayer is incompatible with who I was before I was a demon. I have to believe in something else when it's enough to believe in me.

But for now, I was confident that it would work.

Tiamata cries.

That feeling, as if the sword had awakened, convinced me.

You can do it now.

“키아아아악! 캬악!”

-Currrrrr!

I tightened my grip on Tiamata, watching the light of the Sanctuary and the darkness of the demon's remnants writhing and clashing violently.

Holy Sword Tiamata.

It is responding to my will and exuding divine power.

I was watching the white letters glow in Tiamata's milky sword.

"I will purify the world with my anger.

It's a sudden realization.

Anger.

Tiamata reacts with anger.

My anger at that piece of dross that dared to try to consume Charlotte's soul. I was drawing on the power of Tiamata.

-Kurung! Kuroeung! kurung!

It spread its hands in agony and pushed toward me.

"Cr......gh!"

-Woof!

It's just the intangible force of light and the intangible force of darkness colliding.

But it and I seemed to be in a power struggle, pushing and shoving each other.

As it pushed me away, I was forced to take a step back, as if pushed by a repulsive force.

-Currrrr!

Light and darkness collide, creating a roar. Light and darkness collide, pushing each other out of the way.

The strongest sword for undead only.

But the light emanating from Tiamata.

That in itself was a solid countermeasure against a being that moved through the darkness and used it to attack.

The colliding beams of light were clearly immobilizing it.

It should be pushed out and overwritten.

You need to surround them with light and subdue them.

It's not a power I planted to use here, but I had to use it now.

Guided by the light from my sword, I took a step toward the dark entity that was desperately trying to push me away.

When you take a step forward with all your might, it takes a step back.

Drive them into a wall, bind them with light, and stun them.

-Kurung! kurung! Kwalung!

The fierce flurry of light and darkness was like fire and lightning.

The darkness recedes a little as I walk.

You can swallow the light of a magic lamp, but not the light of divine power.

-Crack!

I screamed at the top of my lungs as if the world was falling apart.

"Give me Charlotte!"

"Keeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!"

It let out a pained scream every time I walked by.

It's definitely having an impact.

I don't know if the answer lies in divine power or light, but it's suffering.

“캬아아아악! 캭!”

With an inhuman scream, the darkness surrounded and tried to consume the sphere of light that had spread around me.

-Koo-koo-koo! Kukukukuk!

The power of Olivia Ranze.

This was further amplified by a mediator called thiamatha.

Not only were they fending off the dark attacks of the mysterious entity, but they were also doing a good job of dispelling the darkness in the area.

Light is sporadic.

The light emanating from the sword, beyond the sanctuary, intertwined with the darkness like a serpent, burning it, and burning it away.

It was a grotesque shape of white and black flames.

It was an unbelievable mess, with beasts of light and beasts of darkness intertwining.

"Ugh!"

But the darkness wasn't going away anytime soon.

It was as if the embodied darkness was pushing the embodied light away, and in turn, pushing me away from holding it.

It was a bizarre sensation, as if Tiamata itself had been hit by the repulsive force of a powerful magnet.

-Kyaaaaaaaaah!

It screamed and reached for me, as if trying to push me away with all its might, and I was pushing my arms through it, trying to get in somehow.

It's exhausting.

-Currrrrrr!

We're not there yet.

-Woof!

And my opponent was stronger than me.

I'm getting pushed out.

Now that I was being pushed back, I had to focus all my energy on not going backwards instead of forwards.

"Salt...... disease....... I don't want to be on crutches again......!"

Strengthen the hand holding Tiamata.

Add.

I add all the power I have.

We're already stretched to the limit, but we have to squeeze it out somehow.

I don't have the confidence to not cough up blood.

Trusting that you won't cough up blood.

Hoping to reach it, and bring Charlotte back.

do.

Enchantment.

With his physical and magical enhancements at full strength, he tries to push back the darkness.

You have to move forward.

-Kurung!

An intensely uplifting feeling, like every cell in your body is waking up from the ends.

-Woof!

With the protection of Olivia Ranze, planted in Tiamata, as well as divine magic, strengthening my flesh.

-puddup. Puddle!

With intense strength training that makes every muscle in your body, every muscle fiber, scream beyond its limits.

I.

Believe.

I, for one, will take a step.

-Thump!

Even as he took a step forward, a boom rang out that shook the entire palace.

I could feel my muscle fibers firing and repairing in real time, my magic circuits burning, even as the divine power granted by Olivia Ranze strengthened my body to keep it from collapsing.

There are more than thirty steps to take.

It's not hard.

You walk away, and that's it.

It couldn't be easier.

It's just that the steps are a little heavier.

-Thump!

Twenty-nine steps to go.

-Currrr!

In the raging battle of darkness and light, there is little power that truly comes from me.

With the exception of magical enhancements and superpowers, all powers are borrowed.

No, even that is not my power; it is borrowed power.

There is one thing I can do.

To take a step through the pain of a body that feels like it's about to break.

Getting through the pain.

Staying sane.

Taking a step.

To keep walking that walk.

That's all there is to it.

I borrowed everything.

Mine has nothing.

All of them, borrowed properties.

I, who wield borrowed and unfair power, must be at least as vicious.

"Ewww......! Ewww!"

"Hmph, hmph! Heeheehee! Heeheeheehee!"

I didn't know if I was going crazy or terrified, but the black thing was screaming at me.

Keep believing.

I don't fall down.

I, take a step.

If we take that one step, now twenty-eight steps.

I can make it through tonight.

You don't know what will happen later, but you can save Charlotte today.

If tomorrow is also at risk.

You can save it for tomorrow.

And then tomorrow, the day after, three days, four days, and beyond.

You'll just have to get through each day.

To Charlotte, the child whose life I saved, beyond survival.......

More than that.

I'll let life happen.

I'll present it to you.

Pushing the boundaries of implication.

Pushing the boundaries of belief.

I dispel the darkness that casts a shadow where spring should be.

Let's put back what belongs here.

You love flowers.

I'll get it back.

Like the one that once saved you.

Again.

Despite.

And the next one after that. To be continued.

"Ugh, ah, ah, ah!"

-Thump!

One step.

-Thump!

Two steps.

-Woof!

Three steps at a time.

-Woody!

-Kyaaak! Kyaaak! Kyaaak!

Ignoring the pain of bones breaking and being put back together.

If you believe you feel, you will feel.

If you believe you don't feel something, you don't feel it.

Self-implication (自己暗示).

We're about to go beyond even that.

The blood from his eyes obscured his vision.

Still, they don't close their eyes.

-Woof!

Taking the next step, I look from the bloodshot vision straight ahead, toward something whose expression is growing increasingly frightened.

Toward the Demon's Remnant.

But at the same time, toward it, which is Charlotte.

Walk away.

-Woof!

-Currrrrrr!

Taking the steps I had broken through once, again and again, I was able to bring the being within my grasp.

"Kaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Its abysmal black hair flailed wildly in the light, and its slit red pupils glowed with awe and terror.

It's right around the corner.

It can't escape. Just as it was finding it hard to bear, I was finding it hard to bear.

In a moment of semi-elasticity that feels like my entire body is exposed to a flesh-tearing gale, I reach out and grab it by the throat.

The nails on his right hand, clutching the nape of Charlotte's neck, were broken and the bones twisted.

-Currrr!

"K....... ugh......! ugh......!"

Self-implication is a force that only works for you.

If you believe it, you become it.

You need to go beyond that.

I'm not the only one.

We need to make sure others do too.

"Go away......!"

"Heh heh heh heh heh heh heh! Heehee! Heeeeeew!"

I don't believe in my power to apply it to others.

must be declared.

It's not something that happens because you believe in it.

The power to make it happen because you say it will.

I want.

Because I want it, I will have it.

"Disappear from Charlotte's body!"

[The rank of self-suggestion increases].

[Reached Rank A in Self-Suggestion].

[Derived Ability Occurrence].

[Awakening of the Verbal Spirit].

-Flash!

I mean.

Moved the world.

\* \* \*

In the dark.

A night in the rain.

-currrrr

In the darkness, Charlotte realized she was being held by someone.

"Uh huh....... Nu, who......."

"...... is up."

She couldn't see it clearly, but Charlotte knew it was Reinhardt's voice.

"Rhine......hard? Rhinehard?"

"......Yes."

He could tell by the crack in her voice that something was wrong: why hadn't she gone back, why was she here, in the halls of the palace, and not in her bedroom?

As her eyes adjusted to the darkness, Charlotte could see.

A fallen chandelier, a palace in disarray as if something had gone on a rampage.

And.

You're so badly injured, you're surprised to be alive.

I saw Reinhardt's face.

Reinhardt was using his lap as a pillow to lay Charlotte down, even though she was hurting so badly that it felt strange to be awake.

Although the circumstances are unknown.

I'm not sure why it didn't work.

Charlotte vaguely realizes.

"Did I....... hurt you......?"

Eventually, he lost his temper again, was possessed by a strange force, and injured Reinhardt.

I don't know anyone else who would do this.

In despair and guilt, Charlotte is about to burst into tears.

-sigh

"No."

Reinhardt, his hands so badly wounded that you could see the bones in them, ran a hand through his hair, trembling.

"It's not that you hurt me......."

Reinhard runs a hand through his hair and looks down.

"I saved you......."

Charlotte couldn't understand what he meant.

"Just so you know......."

It was true that I had hurt him, but Reinhardt said that only to remind me of something more important.

"Moo, what's going on. Reinhard, what's going on....... Something happened."

I would have liked to have gotten an explanation of what was going on, but Reinhardt was in no condition to do so.

"The flowers....... I'm sorry I threw them away."

Reinhardt was completely wrong.

That's just algebra.

He's hurt, and he's suddenly apologizing for saving his life, not looking for gratitude.

"When you receive something like....... In that situation, if you get something that means something like....... that. Because it might be the last gift I get from you....... and I hate that......."

Think of me.

Flowers that make sense.

Reinhardt, for one, knew it.

I knew the flowers were a parting gift.

"So....... I ditched......."

To reject Charlotte's insistent goodbye.

Reinhardt had thrown the flower away.

With those last words, Reinhardt fell unconscious.

Episode 272.

This is an unfamiliar ceiling.

This time it's really a strange ceiling.

No, it's not a ceiling in the first place.

I see something like a silk tent.

What is this.

How is the bed so big?

I pulled myself up and looked around.

That's an unfamiliar ceiling.

The room is not unfamiliar.

"......."

Here, I think this is Charlotte's bedroom?

Once I walked in, the view of the room was instantly recognizable.

I think I was sleeping in Charlotte's giant canopy bed right now.

"Hey, you're up!"

And Charlotte, who had seen me rise from a distance, practically threw herself at me and hugged me.

That's a big bed.

He's been watching me from the edge of my bed, and I've had to jump on the bed to get to him.

"Uh, uh....... Uh, yeah."

"It's okay. Does it hurt anywhere? Are your eyes or hands okay?"

"Uh, uh....... Yeah. Sounds good."

"Thank goodness....... Thank goodness......."

I wasn't worried about being sick, but I wasn't expecting to be, either, and unlike the last time I'd been enchanted, I was in near perfect condition. Charlotte hugged me, then pulled away slightly and looked at me.

Charlotte had tears in her eyes.

"That's good, that's really good, Reinhard."

"Uh....... Um. Uh, yeah. You okay?"

"Yeah. It's okay."

Charlotte hugged me once more, clear tears streaming down her face.

Charlotte didn't criticize or say anything else.

He didn't say anything for a while, just hugged me like he was glad I was okay.

At first I thought it was a bit of a whimper.

"Black....... ugh....... ugh......."

I cried a little, and Charlotte was overcome with emotion. I didn't know what to do, so I patted her on the back.

"Well, by the way....... That's all well and good, but it's not the first time I've done this, is it?"

"Ugh, ugh....... ugh......."

"It's been a few days since I passed out, and I need to know how things are going....... know."

I'm the kind of person who faints at the slightest hint of an unfamiliar ceiling quota, and when I wake up, the first thing I want to know is what's going on.

First of all, waking up in the Empress's bedchamber was a strange experience.

"Okay, wait a minute......."

Charlotte seemed to think she needed to stop crying first, so she took a long, hard breath and pulled away from me. Charlotte's eyes widened, and she covered her own.

"......were you swollen?"

"......would you like to pour it in?"

Uh, honestly, I just poured it in.

She can pour. She can pour. Charlotte lowered the hand that covered her eyes.

"Not much time has passed. Work was yesterday, and it's Friday. You're in my bedroom because....... I don't want anyone else to know you're in my palace."

I passed out on Wednesday, so I skipped Thursday, and then Friday.

"Fortunately, it was raining heavily and there was a severe thunderstorm, so we don't know what happened back then. Only you, me, and Lord Tana know what happened, since everything was bitten, including people and surveillance magic. The palace was pretty badly damaged, but....... That's none of your concern."

Saviolin Tana took the blame for what I did. But neither Charlotte nor Tana will ever know what really happened.

"I thought it would be best to keep it a secret that you were there, so I put you to sleep in my bedroom. The treatment was....... I thought about calling a priest, even though it's a little risky, but then I remembered....... elixir."

"......elixir?"

"Yes."

If it's an elixir, is it the elixir I think it is?

That's a national treasure that I know the empire doesn't have a few bottles of, so it's not like it's just a potion or something?

For some reason, I felt too well.

"Can I use that?"

"Why is this ......?"

I was strangely moved by his words.

"And it was Lord Tana who brought it, not me."

Cancel Impressions.

Chanapelle could have brought a bottle of elixir to use on her own.

I'm fine, by the way, but is he? I think he's fine, based on Charlotte's reaction.

-Your Highness, may I enter?

Too scared to speak, I heard Savior Tana's voice on the other side of the door. Charlotte looked at me.

I think it's a sign that it's okay to let them in.

What is.

She owns the room, but why is she asking for my permission?

I feel weird!

I nodded, and just as Charlotte called out that she could come in, Tana, a savior in full regalia, walked into Charlotte's bedroom.

"...... is up."

"Oh, yeah."

She didn't say much as she watched me sit nonchalantly on Charlotte's bed.

Charlotte, Tana, and I had a lot of questions.

How did Tiamata get there, what happened to her after she passed out, etc.

She pulled up a chair and sat down on the bed.

......Multi.

I'm sitting next to her, but we're far apart. Charlotte, who was sitting next to me, also scratched her cheek.

"......I need to change my bed."

An overly large and uncomfortable bed.

It didn't take long for me to realize why Charlotte was experiencing a new world from her dorm bed.

"I'm not even sick, let's sit around and talk."

I got off the bed and sat down on the couch.

Charlotte sat at the head table, and me and Tana sat across from her.

"First, I want to say thank you, Reinhardt. I don't know the details, but you saved my life and yours that day."

Despite the damage to the palace, Saviolin Tana would not have informed Charlotte that she had been overpowered in battle that day. If she had, Charlotte would not have been in her palace.

She would have made a false report. Tana's words sober Charlotte and she looks at me.

"I didn't say hello properly either. Thank you so much, Reinhard."

Charlotte smiles at me.

It wasn't the grotesque, eerie smile that Charlotte had displayed when she was consumed by power.

Yes.

I wanted Charlotte to keep showing me that smile.

Awakening an Elemental is secondary.

It wasn't about power, it was about Charlotte.

"Before you ask me anything, I'd like to know what's going on."

I stare at Charlotte.

"Your problem, is it solved?"

I awakened the spirit.

It took control of Charlotte's body and ordered her to disappear.

Is it, is it really gone?

I wanted to know something before it was explained to me. Charlotte gave me an ambiguous look.

"I don't know, but I was fine yesterday and....... That....... I have a feeling that's hard to put into words. It's unbearable. It's like something is eating me up. It's like anxiety, it's like a crisis, it's like something that's been bothering me at night, and it's gone, all of a sudden."

"And the ability itself?"

"Remain that."

My anxiety is gone. I don't know if that's enough, but it means Charlotte is safe for now.

The power to manipulate shadows remains. It's a source of anxiety. Charlotte is reluctant to use her powers, so she hasn't demonstrated them.

I finally understand why Charlotte hated her powers. Who likes a power that eats you up?

"Aye. We'll have to wait and see, but it's clear that something has changed in your Majesty. We've tried everything we can think of, both magical and divine. But none of it has worked."

Tana and Charlotte look at me.

"Reinhardt. What the hell did you do?"

Words.

It has already become my strength.

So that will show up in the physical scan.

"Apparently, my superpowers have gotten a little stronger."

I'm sure it will be judged as an overly dangerous power, but since I can't hide it, I had to tell the truth.

\* \* \*

I outlined the situation.

The first thing I explained was Tiamata's case.

A sword of evil power from the Darklands.

For that matter, it was easy to tell Charlotte because she already knew. I told her that a supposedly demonic holy object had incompletely bonded with me, and that I had purified it to see what I could do, and that it had turned into Tiamata.

I left out the part about there being no distinction between demons and gods. It just said that Tiamata had fallen.

Along the way, I couldn't help but bring up Olivia Ranze's story.

Tana and Charlotte both froze at my words.

That Tiamata can be corrupted, and the me that is chosen by it.

"This is....... It's complicated to explain, so we had to keep it a secret."

"...... would have been."

"This is the kind of thing that would turn the religious world upside down......."

It took us both quite a while to recover from the shock.

Either way, the result was the result, and neither of them argued about it. Charlotte was grateful to be told, as if it would put her mind at ease about the sudden disappearance of the demonic artifact.

And superpowers.

I don't want you to have to figure out the concept of a spirit on your own, so I've been a bit vague.

She also explained the fight over something that controlled Charlotte.

I yelled for it to go away, and it did.

There was only one logic.

"Like being able to use self-implication on others?"

"Because otherwise the situation doesn't make sense."

The implications for yourself are now applicable to others.

Unicorns are a concept not unlike that.

I realize that self-suggestion is a power manifested by faith, whereas unction is a slightly different concept, manifested by a command or declaration.

"The answer is....... superpower."

Superpowers are described by the phrase "whatever.

It is inexplicable, and the miracles it creates are manifested in a logic that is out of this world.

That's why solving Charlotte's problem, which could not be solved in any other way, makes sense to me, even if I don't understand it.

It's hard for Tana to accept the fact that this ridiculous situation is now making sense, but she looks like she's been through hell and found the exit.

"That means....... that you are the only one who can heal his condition."

"......Maybe."

Charlotte's condition, which had been creeping up on her, is now under control, but there's no telling what will happen later. I'm the only one prepared for it.

For example, would I be Charlotte's primary care physician?

But Charlotte's expression was serious.

"It's a dangerous ability, just as dangerous as mine, if not more so."

The evolution of self-implication.

It has become so dangerous that it can be applied to others, not just yourself.

Self-insinuation and subtext were not in the original.

So I don't even know what this power is capable of. Right now, it's not absolute, but as the level of power increases. the unthinkable may be possible.

Of course, Charlotte wasn't thinking that my power was dangerous and she needed to get rid of me.

"Yes. I don't know how that ability will be measured, but I'll instruct the Temple to keep your new power a secret."

To protect myself, I was to keep my new powers a closely guarded secret. I would keep Temple's mouth shut, and if anyone knew, it would be Dr. Epinhauser.

It's actually a dangerous ability, and if we're talking about yesterday's fight, I took down Charlotte, who Savior Tana couldn't take down.

If Xavier Tana had a tiara, or a high-ranking paladin, the story might have been different.

In many ways, she was fighting at her worst against a bad matchup.

Keep your new powers a secret. It would be better that way. Tana seemed to have other ideas.

"Why don't we let Reinhardt stay at the Palace of Spring?"

I'm not sure if Charlotte's condition has truly improved. Since we don't know what will happen at any given time, I, the only one who can act on it, stay at the Palace of Spring and live with Charlotte.

It wouldn't look good on the outside, but the emperor wouldn't object if the empress's life depended on it.

"No, you can't. No matter how much you hide it, Reinhardt is in the same class as Bertus, and if you live like that, one day Bertus will find out, and then Reinhardt will be in danger."

"......Yes."

Charlotte was putting my safety first.

The fact that I had saved Charlotte and the battle of the previous day had not been made known, not to mention the reward I would receive if it became known that I had saved Charlotte, was because I thought Bertus might try to get rid of me.

Bertus won't even know I'm in the palace.

"In the first place, does Bertus know your condition?"

"You don't know the details, but you know I'm not going to live long."

It would be rather odd for Bertus to not know about this situation.

There's no need to keep someone who's going to bend over backwards on their own. That's probably why there have been so few arguments between them lately.

But I saved Charlotte's life. I thought she would fall on her own, so I brought her back to life.

I'd be dead to Bertus if he found out.

That's why Charlotte made the pretty bold choice to let me sleep in her bedroom. It would be dangerous for Bertus to know I was here.

"But....... Reinhardt is the only one who can guarantee your safety at this point."

She was forced to admit that she couldn't protect Charlotte, and the imperial family couldn't do anything about it.

There is no place in the world where Charlotte is safe. Only with me by her side can she be safe.

"Back to the templates, again."

"......."

I can't live on Jupiter.

So there was no choice but for Charlotte to come back to Temple and live in the dorms with me.

Savior Tana could only nod in the end, knowing that it was the best choice for me and for Charlotte.

\* \* \*

It's only one day.

Neither Tana nor Charlotte thought that just because it was one day without incident that it would be okay for the rest of their lives.

"Reinhardt."

"Yes, Lord Tana."

"About this, I must keep a secret from everyone else, but I must report to the king."

"......."

"My personal loyalties aside, it is only then that I can convince your highness that your condition has improved. I suggest you write to His Majesty at....... so that you may realize that your actions are no longer necessary."

Charlotte looks at me.

Her face was full of regret. Saviolin Tana is not Charlotte's person, but the Emperor's. She is responsible for the safety of the Empress for now, but in the end, her master is the Emperor.

There shouldn't be any secrets you can't tell the Emperor. After all, this is for Charlotte's own good.

Things have gotten so intertwined that I, a demon prince, now have a contact with the Emperor.

"That's fine."

"I will do my best to keep you out of harm's way. I swear it on my honor."

The oath of the strongest woman on the continent. She will lay down her life for me if it puts me in danger.

Because that's what an oath on her honor is.

"In addition to your Majesty, you saved my life."

She bowed her head abruptly.

"For that, I am truly grateful."

"Uh, what....... I don't think you're going to do this......."

Her head was bowed, and her gratitude was genuine.

Saviolin Tana left, promising to report her findings to the Emperor.

It was just me and Charlotte in the bedroom. Charlotte fetched a tea set, brewed the tea skillfully on her own, and offered me a cup.

"I didn't think about Bertus when I brought you to the Yellow Castle, because I didn't have to."

Charlotte thought she was going to die soon, so she didn't care if Bertus found out she'd brought me to the Palace of Spring. It doesn't matter who you're friends with when you're a worthless rival anyway.

"Reinhardt. To put it bluntly, saving my life is going to reflect poorly on you."

It was your mistake that saved my life.

Charlotte was nonchalant about it. I narrowed my eyes at Charlotte's sad smile.

"I don't need to hear that."

"......."

"I'll do it again the next time it happens."

Charlotte seems taken aback by my comment. I smirk and look at Charlotte, who remains still, clutching her teacup.

"Oh well. I was right after all."

I told Charlotte that I would save you.

When asked how, he said he'd figure it out.

Anyone can say that, Charlotte said pessimistically.

But in the end, I saved Charlotte. Charlotte stared at her teacup in confusion for a moment, then gave a small nod.

"Right....... I'm sorry, I didn't trust you."

"From now on, if I say something, it's just that. I'm not wrong. I'm always right."

At my bullshit, Charlotte grinned at me.

"Yes, I trust you. Always."

I was stumped because I didn't expect this answer.

Charlotte took a sip of her tea, and I took a sip of the milk tea she poured.

"Anyway, I don't know what's going to happen, but now that I'm alive, Bertus will try to find a reason, and even if he can't actually harm me, he'll be wary again, so... don't let it get out that you were in the Palace of Spring. Fortunately, I've expunged your entry and exit records, and very few people have seen you, so Bertus won't know who was here or what happened yet."

"......That's good."

"So. You're not allowed to leave Huangshan."

I couldn't help but be dumbfounded by the sound.

No, you said I shouldn't be living in the Palace of Spring. If I'm not supposed to leave the Yellow City, does that mean I'm supposed to stay here?

Did I lie to Saviolin Tana?

Charlotte smiled wryly, as if she knew what I was talking about.

"Idiot, you know that."

Where Charlotte gestured was the wall of her bedroom.

Secret Passage.

The basement is equipped with a warp gate.

"Go out that way, and you'll be able to get to the gate in the ecliptic, and you know that gates are heavily monitored on the way in, but less so on the way out, right?"

The way out of Huangshan without anyone noticing was in Charlotte's bedroom.

"And this."

Charlotte went somewhere in the room, opened a magical safe, and handed me something.

It was a small golden brooch.

"What is this?"

"Gates are two-way, right?"

"......, right?"

"If you can get out, you can get in, right?"

Charlotte showed me how to operate the brooch. It seemed to work by opening the brooch and pressing a switch or something.

"Activate this brooch, go through any warp gate in the ecliptic, and it will lead you to a warp gate in the basement of the Palace of Spring."

"......."

Charlotte squeezed it into my hand, then took mine.

Charlotte's hands were shaking slightly.

"I....... I'm giving you something that can come into my bedroom right now....... at any time. Without anyone knowing. You can come in......."

Charlotte's face was flushed, and her voice was shaking even more violently.

It's not something you can give to just anyone.

Or is it something you've given to someone?

It was like a secret key to sneaking into the Yellow City without anyone noticing.

"What does this mean....... Do you understand?"

Charlotte couldn't even look at me properly.

"That means you trust me, right?"

"......."

Charlotte glares at me.

His lips were pouting out.

"Yeah, I'll call you whenever I need you, and you can come over and help me out."

Charlotte pouted a little, crossed her arms, and stared out the window for a while.

I could have sworn I saw red water dripping from his face.

"This gift is for....... Don't throw it away."

Charlotte says in a shaky voice. Is she thinking about what I said before I passed out?

I honestly don't remember much of what I said at the time, as I was on the verge of losing consciousness.

"Of course."

In exchange for throwing away the gift Charlotte had given him in anticipation of their breakup.

I was given an item that would allow me to meet Charlotte at any time.

Episode 273.

I woke up sometime in the afternoon.

The temple is glowing today anyway.

Two consecutive days of absence.

Charlotte told me not to worry, she had an excuse for that.

So is deleting my access history.

Instead of rejoicing that she was safe and that the power that threatened to consume her had been quelled. She thought about what she needed to do right now and went about it.

You give up on everything. When things change, you do what you need to do immediately.

It was a pretty bizarre experience.

The people of the Palace of Spring are very tight-lipped, and I was told that my presence here would not be known to the outside world, so I didn't wander around inside.

I was only in Charlotte's bedroom.

I shake my head as Charlotte tells me that I can go back, that I'll be back at the Temple starting tomorrow.

"We'll give it another day, though."

"......."

Charlotte glared at me.

"You mean, you're going to stay in my bedroom for another day?"

"Uh."

"...... Reinhardt. I appreciate you so much, and I'll admit that you mean a lot to me, but are you sure you're not being too shameless?"

Just because you slept in it one night doesn't mean it's yours!

Charlotte looked incredulous.

"Uh-huh, for your own safety."

"Why would you say that!"

I boldly declared that I was going to sleep in your room.

I know it's important, but it's a bit of an asshole.

But I have to go back to the temple today, and all my classes are over. I wanted to keep an eye on Charlotte for another day.

If nothing happened today, I would be able to assume that I was really okay for the time being.

Charlotte didn't kick me out because she knew I had a point. It's just that up until now, I've only put her in my bedroom because she's injured, which is ridiculous because she has the nerve.

"......Okay, I'll go to bed in the guest room then."

"What are you talking about?"

I shook my head at Charlotte's words.

What is he talking about?

"I'm going to stay here for another day to see how you're doing, but what's the point of that if you're sleeping outside, you should be sleeping here."

Charlotte's lips quivered at my words. Her face was getting whiter and whiter.

"Gee, gee....... now. Are you going to sleep with me?"

No!

I don't understand!

"You don't have to say that, I'm just saying that I need to make sure everything is okay when you sleep!"

"That, that....... That is....... I know that, but......."

Charlotte shuddered, never thinking she would dare to make such a request.

"What am I doing, just watching?"

"Why, why are you not sleeping and watching people sleep!"

"No, if you sleep, it's your problem, if you don't sleep, it's your problem, what do you want me to do, is this guy funny?"

"Ooh, funny guy......?"

Charlotte seemed to be shaken by my ramblings.

What to say.

Why am I listening to this?

The response is that Harriet is a luxury item, but so is Charlotte. In fact, Charlotte probably grew up being treated with more respect.

Most importantly, Harriet has gotten used to it, so she'll do it to some extent, while Charlotte is still immune and will react.

"Hey, that's the one....... Give me that. You're scaring me."

Charlotte wanted her brooch back.

He's afraid I'll do something weird like sneak in while he's sleeping to make sure he's okay and then go back out.

"Giving and taking away is the worst thing, and you think I'm going to take away?"

"Oh, no, I want it back, I want it back, I want it back, I didn't give it to you!"

Charlotte and I fooled around in the spacious bedroom for a while.

Eventually, Charlotte got tired and walked away.

"@Huck....... 허억....... ....... This, that. What a waste....... Just to exercise....... I'm only getting fitter......."

An exhausted Charlotte sank to the floor of her bedroom and glared at me.

"Maybe you should work out too."

"This is the worst!"

Charlotte squealed like she was really annoyed.

He's the one who can raise the Empress.

Except for Bertus, I'm the only one in the world.

\* \* \*

Eventually deciding to stay another day, I remained in Charlotte's bedroom.

Charlotte seemed to fidget.

No, I'm going to sleep on the couch, so why be so nervous?

After all, this is probably the first time you've ever been in this situation.

Sure, it was worse in the Demon Castle, but that's not the same as this.

Meals were brought in by the users, and of course I hid. Charlotte said she didn't need the market, and instructed me to bring more.

I thought I'd be able to eat a lot because I'd been starving all day, but I ended up eating less because I was starving.

Charlotte looked at me over the leftover food.

"Can I not eat anymore?"

"If you starve yourself too much, you won't eat as much."

"......Yes."

I'm sure Charlotte knows that.

A sumptuous meal eaten in the Allied command barracks after a long period of starvation.

Charlotte's face became a little wistful and sad as she remembered.

\* \* \*

After dinner.

I was in my bedroom, so I didn't have much to do, and the night fell.

Charlotte was whimpering like a puppy that needed to poop. She seemed to be trying to do something, then she'd get up, then she'd hesitate, then she'd get up, then she'd hesitate again.

What's wrong with him?

Eventually, Charlotte grunted, then stood up, seemingly determined.

"Uh, that....... I'm going to step out for a minute."

"......where?"

"In another room, please......."

"You grow up here, what do you expect me to be around all the time, just checking in today?"

At my words, Charlotte's axe eyes widened.

"No, I mean, I'm going to wash it!"

a.

I'm trying to wash up in the bedroom, but I can see through you.

"......If you wash it, you wash it, why would you need to wash it in another room?"

"Yeah, you're not going to hear me......."

Charlotte's face fell.

What is.

What should I call this sensitivity?

I don't like the idea of someone hearing me wash my face. Shouldn't I?

Is that what you mean by girlie sensibilities at this age, I'm not sure?

Doesn't that have anything to do with the fact that there's someone taking a bath in the first place?

Why bother in the first place?

Me....... I don't know.......

I have no idea what's right and what's wrong with this stuff!

"I don't think I'm going to tell you what to do with ....... You're on your own."

"Me, you can't tell me what to do, I'm supposed to do it, ugh!"

Charlotte stormed out of the bedroom, looking exasperated.

While Charlotte went to wash up, I washed up in the bathroom in my bedroom.

It was big, but it didn't go in the tub.

It was only after I washed up.

A change of clothes.

No.......

The school uniform I was wearing was bloodied and torn in places, and I was wearing a pair of pajamas that I had found somewhere.

I didn't know what to do with myself, but Charlotte came back a few minutes later.

Over the sound of the water, Charlotte's voice came from beyond the bathroom.

-You, are you washing in my bathroom?

"Then you don't wash?"

-u, ugh....... ugh.......

Charlotte seemed to stomp her foot, not sure if she hated it or not.

No, I could use it. Come on, I can't even get out of your bedroom.

"Forget it. I don't have a change of clothes."

-......?

"Get me some clothes."

-......Eh?

Charlotte was silent for a moment, as if she never thought she'd hear that in her life.

No matter how you slice it, I saved Charlotte's life, aren't we going too far now?

Bring her clothes.

Something like this.

I mean, it's not that she's important in the first place, it's just that it's kind of trashy to say something like that while borrowing someone else's bathroom.

I was thinking about that.

-...... before the door.

Charlotte said it in a voice that, even when Charlotte pretended to listen, was full of mixed emotions.

\* \* \*

The Imperial Palace wasn't all about women's clothes.

When I collapsed in the first place, Savior Tana must have grabbed some clothes from somewhere to put on me.

After a bit of a fuss.

Charlotte and I were both in our pajamas.

......, which is already a huge scandal in itself if anyone finds out. Regardless of the details, it's not a prince and a beggar, it's an empress and a beggar.

But we're doing this because of our circumstances.

I was sitting in the rocking chair in Charlotte's bedroom, and she was lying in bed.

"......Are you going to sleep with that?"

"No?"

"Well, then....... Chi, are you going to sleep in the bed?"

Charlotte says in a clearly panicked voice.

I have a feeling that if I blindly ask to sleep in their bed, they'll be forced to give it up.

"Oh, come on, you're acting like it's okay that we're going to sleep in the same bed and never touch."

"Well, that's what you said, and you didn't really mean to do that!"

Charlotte exclaims in panic.

By the way, that screaming thing, that's okay, right?

I'm pretty sure it's soundproof. If it weren't for my superpower, I wouldn't be able to overhear conversations in the room.

The Charlotte of yesterday seemed to have let go of everything.

He would tell me things, reveal very important secrets, and say random things.

But now that she's out of harm's way, Charlotte begins to feel embarrassed.

I'll be able to rethink my life.

That made me smile.

"What the....... You gave me a weird look......."

Charlotte blushed and pulled the covers up to half her face.

"Oh, whatever, are you really going to sleep in the bed!"

Is it because I was raised with a precious body that I care so much about this?

"I'm not going to sleep."

"......?"

"I'm just trying to make sure you're okay, and if you want me to sleep with you, don't worry. I'm not going to do that to your face."

Sitting in the rocking chair, arms crossed, I stare blankly at the ceiling of Charlotte's room.

What ulterior motive could I have for doing this?

I just need to make sure you're okay.

I just need to know that it's going to be okay, and that's all I need to know.

"...... aren't you tired?"

"It would be weirder if I ate one of the treasures of the Elixir and it wasn't okay. Never mind. I don't mind leaking for a day or so."

I said that because I thought it would make him feel less sorry for me.

"Well, just....... over there at....... on the other end."

"If I'm going to sleep, I'm going to sleep on the couch, so don't bother."

"......."

Charlotte was silent for a moment.

However, to make room for me, I lay in the center of the bed and then crawled to the edge. so I could sleep on the other end.

Being on the edge also means that it's a little closer to me, sitting in the rocking chair, quite a distance from the bed.

The chairs were facing away from Charlotte, not toward her.

Me sitting, Charlotte lying down.

We were side by side.

I was sitting next to Charlotte.

"Reinhardt."

"Uh."

"......I'm not sure why you're doing this to me."

"Your body deserves to be treated with respect, doesn't it?"

"I'm not doing this because I'm a princess."

"......."

Because Charlotte is a princess, there are plenty of people who would give their lives for her.

But no matter how I look at it, I don't feel like that kind of person.

You're not risking your life to save them because of who you are.

Why.

Why.

Charlotte seemed curious about that.

"Well, I guess so."

I had to say that because you can't explain the unexplainable.

I wasn't looking at Charlotte's face.

Charlotte seems to be watching me.

As if deciding something, Charlotte cautiously opens her mouth.

"The devil, what have you done to me?"

"...... is it?"

It's been a longtime secret.

He'd kept it a secret because if it came out, everything about him would be gone. You wouldn't be able to tell anyone.

Charlotte tells me in her own words what I've been guessing.

"I don't know what it was, but....... I felt so sick, so scared, and I felt like I was sick in my soul, not my body."

"......."

I couldn't help but empathize with Charlotte, so I listened.

"I can't figure out what it is. I'm still....... I don't know what happened to me. But....... I've been locked up in some kind of prison in the Demon Castle ever since. I was kidnapped....... along with everyone else."

"......."

Charlotte's voice was becoming increasingly shaky. It sounded like she was about to say something she was afraid to say.

"Reinhardt."

"Uh."

"Hand....... for me?"

I held out my hand, and Charlotte took it.

Charlotte's palms broke out in a cold sweat.

It pains me to say it. Because of what happened.

Still holding my hand, Charlotte catches her breath.

"I've been starving for too long."

"......."

"Everyone there had been surviving, for too long, on too little to eat and drink, and. By the time the war intensified, they gave us nothing."

"......."

"People, too....... for a long time....... haven't had anything to eat."

"Charlotte."

I stand still and look at Charlotte.

Tears were already welling up in Charlotte's eyes.

"If you can't say it, you don't have to say it."

"......."

"No, don't tell me."

"......."

"You're tired, stop talking."

That's enough to tell you what happened.

Just the sound of Charlotte's voice, full of fear, dread, and guilt, tells us something.

Formless, shattered by something.

Because I remember the sight.

We know that Charlotte is not talking about cannibalism, but about what happens afterward.

When told not to speak, Charlotte instead burst into tears.

"Only me....... If it weren't for me. If it wasn't for me....... I could have bought it all. If only I. If only I. If it weren't for me...... I could have....... I'm everything. If only I...... Uh, Mom....... Uh, mom....... Mom is......."

I say.

Charlotte couldn't have done it for anyone else.

Even if everyone knows the devil has done something to you.

I realize that this is a new story for me right now.

Otherwise, you wouldn't be telling the story with all this sobbing, like you're confessing your sins.

I had no words of comfort, no words of sympathy, no words to rationalize it.

I just squeezed Charlotte's hand.

"Hmph! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph......."

Charlotte cried too, squeezing my hand hard.

For a very long time.

\* \* \*

After calming down, Charlotte told me what had happened so far.

Those who know about Charlotte's abilities are of two minds.

The first are those known for their superpower of manipulating shadows.

The second is those who know they have these abilities because they've been tortured by a demon.

There are only four of the latter: Dyrus, Sabiolin Tana, the Handmaid of the Palace of Spring, and the Emperor.

"And Bertus?"

"I hope you don't know, but....... but I think you do. Or if they do, it's probably recent."

The power to manipulate shadows is already a sinister and grotesque force in and of itself, so you can weave in as much negativity as you want.

Charlotte was looking for a way to control or eliminate the ability, which is why she sought out the Sealer.

But it was all for naught, as Charlotte's power grew and grew, consuming her.

Sleepwalking.

At some point, Charlotte would suddenly wake up in the middle of the night in strange places.

"No way....... you then."

I remembered Charlotte, barefoot in the middle of the night in the hallway of the mansion on a group mission.

"That was the first time."

For some reason, Charlotte's appearance was a little strange.

After that, he said, it didn't happen for a while.

But, once again, it happened to Charlotte in Temple's dormitory.

After the incident in Temple Dormitory, Charlotte realized that something was seriously wrong and moved out of the dorm and began living in the Palace of Spring.

The sleepwalking continued, and became more frequent.

Later, he was said to have wandered the palace, consumed by his powers, tinged with darkness. Until then, he was fine.

He was unconscious and couldn't remember, but he didn't attack anyone, and he didn't resist when Darius and the handmaids guarding the bedroom door took him back into the bedroom.

At some point, though, I started seeing visits appear and disappear all over the palace, even though they were never open.

Then, one of the maids attacked and killed him.

Charlotte didn't remember anything.

But Charlotte realized it was too late, it was all over.

He told the emperor to just kill him.

The emperor would not allow it.

Instead, I sent Saviolin Tana to the Palace of Spring and reduced the population of all the palaces to a minimum.

Until you find a way to cope.

The imperial family couldn't figure it out.

I don't know for sure, but I have a feeling that if I hadn't been there, Charlotte wouldn't have come back. That day was the last time.

After that day, Saviolin Tana would have been dead, and Charlotte would eventually have had to die on the Emperor's orders.

After all, if it wasn't for me, Charlotte would have died.

"I was afraid to fall asleep."

"...... would have been."

"But if I don't sleep, I'll still be unconscious. I knew sleep wasn't the problem, but....... I was just, like, scared."

Charlotte's hands no longer felt the fear that came with a cold sweat.

Only warm body heat is transmitted.

"Reinhardt."

"I'm listening."

"I think I'm going to get a good night's sleep for the first time in a long time."

Charlotte closed her eyes as she said that.

"Good."

I, for one, could only say.

"Reinhardt."

"Uh."

"Tell me nothing will happen. Tell me."

I stare at Charlotte.

By the power of words.

I, eagerly declare.

"Nothing will happen."

"Yes."

Charlotte nods, eyes still closed.

"I'll believe it."

With a faint smile, Charlotte gradually drifted off to sleep.

I listened as Charlotte's breathing evened out.

I stare at Charlotte's peaceful face as she falls asleep.

And.

[Special Achievement - Turning Point in History].

[A major character (Charlotte de Gradias) who wasn't supposed to be in the original worldline survived].

[The future has changed dramatically].

[Earned 1,000 achievement points].

The exact same message came to mind as in the prologue.

I know it's a bit late, but why am I getting this message now?

Shouldn't this message have come from last night's battle?

I stare at Charlotte's sleeping face. Charlotte's hand is clasped tightly in mine, and her face is peaceful.

Tonight.

I guess it meant something that I stayed until Charlotte was safely asleep.

I don't know what this means, but.

As long as nothing happened, I decided not to wonder what was trying to happen.

Nothing should happen.

You'll be fine.

I'll make it so.

By the power of self-implication.

By the power of words.

I said in my mind. Continue.

I believed it, and I declared it countless times.

Episode 274.

The next day, I returned to the template.

He said he was on a special mission under the direction of Dr. Epinhauser, or something like that.

For some reason, neither Ellen nor Harriet were angry with me.

Technically, this was my most dangerous moment in recent memory. I couldn't tell her, and I ended up looking for danger myself, whether she was worried or not.

Sorry about that.

But it was something I had to do, which made me feel even more guilty.

Because there will be many more.

"What was the special mission?"

Ellen asked, and I clucked my tongue briefly.

"It's not so much a special mission as it is....... some. That's an excuse."

Did you get in an accident again?

Ellen's expression seemed to change, and I shook my head.

"Due to an issue with Tiamata."

"Did you get caught?"

"So to speak......."

This is both true and false.

Charlotte and Saviolin Tana knew I was the owner of Tiamata.

I was lying, after all, and I was terrified that Ellen would see through my lie.

"We agreed to keep it a secret, so there shouldn't be any problems."

"......That's great."

Ellen stares at me.

"Were you worried?"

"Yes."

The way Ellen said it, I felt a pit in my stomach.

"I hope nothing happened."

That's all Ellen had to say.

Nothing happened that night either, so Charlotte said she would spend the weekend in Huangsheng before returning to the temple.

Bertus might find it odd if Charlotte and I returned to the temple together. I don't expect much to happen over the next few days.

Charlotte's survival has been confirmed by the name Inflection Point in History. We don't know how long its shelf life will be, but for now, it's safe.

A new trait. The role of the mood was very important.

It's been a stormy couple of days. Yesterday was Friday, and today is the weekend.

Ellen grabbed my arm.

"You, you have work to do."

"......? What do you want me to do, train?"

"No."

Ellen shook her head.

"Study."

What the hell is this?

"Wait for the kids."

Ellen grabbed my arm and dragged me somewhere.

Ellen took me to the Class A dormitory, the study hall.

There sat Riana, Herriot, and Adelia, huddled together in a circle.

"Ah, there you are, the main character. What's your special mission?"

Riana greeted me with a trembling look. Harriet looked at me, and with a look of determination on her face, she jumped to her feet, and Ellen dragged me over and sat me down.

"Well, what are these....... as soon as I get back."

Herriot set a notebook down in front of me.

"This is a summary of the content and anticipated questions that will be on the final comprehensive exam. Me, Ellen, and Adelia created it."

No.

What?

Herriot's eyes sparkle.

Speaking of which, finals are only a few days away.

"Based on this, you're not going to finish last, you."

No.

Guys.

Why are you trying to impress people with this?

"Don't lose to Ludwig again. Do you understand?"

I don't really need this.

Ellen, Harriet, and Adelia's faces were so serious that I couldn't bring myself to tell them that I didn't care about their test scores.

The competition is Ludwig.

I wonder, how far have we fallen.......

\* \* \*

Sunday.

Winter Palace.

Bertus sat still in his office chair as he received the report. Instead of his usual smirk, he wore a rigid expression.

Bertus read the report without expression.

The idea is simple.

The protection of Charlotte de Gradias and the Palace of Spring by the Emperor's secret order has been lifted.

"......I thought you said you couldn't control that ability?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, it was thought that....... 1I was expecting action to be taken against the Empress soon, but......."

As for Charlotte's abilities, Bertus had just realized something.

Superpower to manipulate shadows.

That's a pretty bizarre set of abilities for someone trapped in a demon castle.

Depending on how you package it, Charlotte's power can be a dark one, and I realized that if you frame it in terms of being cursed by the devil, you can easily overpower it.

But I didn't have to.

There are some things that can't be covered, even if you try.

Protective measures for the Palace of Spring.

News that the staff has been reduced to a minimum and that Saviolin Tana has taken up residence in the Palace of Spring.

A maid was murdered in the night at the Palace of Spring.

After a bit of reasoning, Bertus realized that Charlotte's end was near.

So I left it alone.

But the fact that the protection was lifted and Charlotte is safe means that somehow this case has been resolved.

The competitor you thought was going down will rise again.

'Backed off.

I should have bitten when I saw the opportunity.

If Charlotte's powers were sealed, and she had succeeded in that sort of thing anyway, then the story of the Empress being cursed would not work.

Furthermore, it would dishonor the imperial family. The Emperor's wrath will be directed at you.

It's a structure where there can be no good faith competition, but the Emperor wanted it, and he ordered it.

You have a way to attack, but you don't know if it's valid or not.

It's more likely to be an affront to the emperor.

'What the hell happened.......'

Leaving Charlotte alone was a final act of mercy.

I wasn't too keen on touching the dying empress, and I didn't want to buy a bunch of empty axes.

If the situation is resolved, it's time to start fighting again.

How to unravel the situation.

"What is the boundary of the Palace of Spring?"

"It appears to be strengthening again."

"Hmmm....... It's going to be hard to get information now."

It was clear that the defenses would be raised again, making it even more challenging than before.

"Saviolin Tanara would have seen what happened......."

"I'm not going to open my mouth."

"Yeah, I guess so."

She is the head of the Charnapelle, which only takes orders from the Emperor. Her presence at the Palace of Spring is also highly unusual, as she has been trying to remain perfectly neutral in the matter of the succession.

If Charlotte had recovered, she would have returned to neutral.

"Find out something. Find out what happened. Is the First Empress really better?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

When the servant retreated, Bertus crossed his arms.

The fall of the arch-enemy.

I guess I should feel bad now that it's been reversed.

Bertus found it odd that he didn't feel too bad. Shouldn't he be punching the ground, throwing things and screaming?

But Bertus was smiling.

"Dude, what are you always doing, being an asshole?

"Who cares.

'If you're not ugly enough, you're even uglier. Smile a little. Who slaps you for smiling?'

"How dare anyone slap me?

'You're being weird again. You always seem to be able to twist my words around.

'You always say the wrong thing, always. You're always arguing.'

'You're supposed to smile anyway? I hate it when I don't, but I hate it even more when I see your face.'

'Oh, you're so annoying. Will you go away if I smile?'

'I don't know if it'll turn me off, but maybe it'll make me feel less of an asshole.'

Bertus, who hadn't smiled much since his mother's death, managed a weak smile then.

'Okay, that's better. Still an asshole, though.'

"What do you want me to do?

When I was very young, I had a conversation like that. I don't even remember how old I was.

It was time to stop hating the other brother.

I didn't really know what their relationship was like yet.

However, he's always been a bitch.

Charlotte was that to Bertus, and he was that to her.

The two are incompatible cider.

If one exists, the other must not exist.

You have to fight a battle you thought was over.

That's what makes it fun.

Bertus thought so, smiling quietly in his office.

\* \* \*

Name: Valerie

Age: 17

Current Stats: [Strength 10.2(C)] [Dexterity 9.9(C-)] [Dexterity 11.9(C)] [Horsepower 14.2(B-)] [Constitution 15.2(B-)]

Race: Arcdemon

Talents: Psychic-Self-Suggestion, Psychic-Spiritual, Psychic Sensitivity, Manipulate Magic

Attributes

[Holy Spirit] - Increased resistance to Mental Magic

[Warrior's Bloodline] - Significantly increased growth cap, increased growth rate

[Feeling] - Crisis detection

Capacity

[Demon Domination B] (Archdemon Unique Ability) (Not available in its current state.)

[Self-Implied A]

[Lesson F]

[Enchantment D]

Comprehensive Ability Assessment - Intermediate Demon

Combat Level Assessment - A

It's been a while since I've looked at the status and it's been pretty high.

Under the influence of the Warrior's Bloodline, I noticed that my status gains were much faster.

The combat level is now Rank A.

It seems like just yesterday I was an F, but I've come a long way.

In addition to being able to enhance her magic, she has reached Rank A in Self-Suggestion, and has also awakened the power of the spirits, albeit at the lowest level.

The funny thing is that self-suggestion didn't evolve into psychic, it just became one more superpower.

An A-ranked combat level would mean that I'm now no match for any of the other big guys.

Before I knew it, Demon Domination had gone from rank C to rank B.

F-Rank's Words.

I only reported it to Mr. Effinghauser, and I don't know if he got the full story or not, but I decided to keep it a secret.

A physical scan will reveal your abilities, but Dr. Effinghauser will keep it a secret.

Once again, when I told him that I had awakened a superpower that seemed very powerful, even for a pretend spirit, he just said, "Yeah.

I don't yet know the extent to which this can be used. I haven't had time to experiment with it at my leisure.

I was forced to study for finals because my kids were in the middle of it.

The kids don't know what happened, and I've kept it a secret.

A new power, Necromancy.

And new information on how to use Tiamata.

That it reacts to my anger.

I'm glad I saved Charlotte, but in the end, I needed to do it for myself.

"Reinhardt."

"Oh, Charlotte."

Charlotte returned on Monday morning.

Judging by his expression, he was fine when he was alone.

It was as if a shadow had been lifted from Charlotte's face, as if there had always been a shadow somewhere.

I wondered if I should tell Elise about this, if she might know something, but I decided not to.

If she realizes it's the demon's trail, she might try to do something about it.

If it's Sarkhegar, you'll want to revive it, if it's Eleris, you'll want to kill it.

Of course, there's a chance that she won't be swayed by my persuasion, but there's no way she can do anything that even the imperial wizards couldn't do.

I'm the only one who can control Charlotte's power. The fewer people who know, the better.

And now it's hard to leave the temple.

The pressure from Harriet and Ellen was to stay quiet and study.

I don't think Charlotte's safety is in jeopardy for now, so I'm going to keep an eye on things.

With Charlotte's situation averted, I had to think about the next problem.

Revolutionary Forces.

You have to think about what you're going to do with them.

It is thought that the imperial court was so focused on the question of whether Charlotte would live or die that neither the emperor, nor even his rival Bertus, were able to identify the revolutionary forces.

Failure to act could lead to civil war or civil unrest in the Empire, and a gate breach would be the final nail in the coffin for a faltering empire.

For better or worse, the revolutionaries must be eliminated.

But how the heck do you do this?

Sarkegar, the man in charge of infiltration and intelligence, thinks I'm trying to use them to sow chaos in the Empire and rebuild the Demon Realm.

So you can't tell Sarkegar to kill all of their leaders.

If I give the information to Charlotte or Bertus, I have no way of explaining how I figured it out.

The only way I can think of is to say that I learned about it from the Thieves' Guild.

However, the actual source of the information is not the Thieves' Guild. It's easy enough to see that the source is false by checking the Thieves' Guild.

Charlotte trusts me more than she trusts Bertus, so even if I can't explain it, I'll just tell her it's there.

Time passed, but I wasn't making an easy decision.

I didn't want to affect future succession planning.

Technically, I didn't want to raise Charlotte's hand and make Bertus an enemy, but I also didn't want to raise Bertus' hand and cause Charlotte's downfall.

There was no easy way to determine that.

\* \* \*

Even with so many challenges, my time at the Temple and as a student is flying by.

Finals are just around the corner.

Charlotte's return wasn't the only change on Monday.

Charlotte's abilities are presumed to be beyond crisis at this point.

This is just an "estimate".

So it seems that the imperial family, or more precisely, the emperor, decided to not only reinstate Charlotte to the Temple, but also to put in place safety measures.

On Monday morning, for a brief moment before class, Royal Class assembled only first years in the dorms.

Mr. Effinghauser and Mr. Mustang introduce you to someone.

"This is Sir Saviolin Tana, who, as of today, will be serving as the Royal Class First Year Prefect."

"Good morning. I'm Saviolin Tana, responsible for your daily safety and discipline in the dormitory."

Saviolin Tana was unexpectedly placed in a royal class dormitory.

Episode 275.

Charlotte's abilities are currently safe, but we don't know when they will become dangerous.

Also, Saviolin Tana was not in the best shape, but she struggled to cope.

So, just in case, the imperial family dispatched her to deal with Charlotte's outbursts.

That's probably not the only reason why she's staying in the dorms instead of the Spring Palace, but there's another hidden reason.

That's me.

Charlotte stays in the dorm so that I can be available in case of an emergency, but also so that I'm not exposed.

Of course, being a dormitory warden isn't a bad job, but going from being a First Knight of the Empire to suddenly being a temple warden is a weird thing.

1The Emperor's conclusion for the safety of the Empress and to deal with her outbursts.

The knowing side.

Bertus and Charlotte seemed to know this was coming, and I found myself thinking that this was the right move, if a little out of character.

1As important as the role of Knight Commander is, the safety of the Empress is so important that you'll have to put it aside for a while.

-Director Shanafel on......?

-Why?

Everyone who knew about Saviolin Tana was baffled. No one seemed to understand the situation.

If you didn't know any better, you'd think this was some kind of sick April Fool's joke.

Except for Ellen Artorius, who's over there with a stern, "I should have eaten more breakfast" look on her face.

Standing between Mr. Effinghauser and Mr. Mustang, Xavier Tana had removed his Templar livery and was now wearing a two-piece suit.

"Sir is a good enough title. I can also see to your personal training if necessary."

Their eyes lit up at the prospect of being trained by the world's strongest man.

Ludwig, who looked like he didn't know what else to do but to be excited.

\* \* \*

Originally, there was not a prefect for each grade. There are no grade level wardens, and they are on call and patrol.

But Saviolin Tana has a pretty unique position: she's the headmistress of the first grade.

Her interest is obviously in Class B, where Charlotte is, so she doesn't care about Class A as much.

Aside from the new headmaster.

Finals week has begun.

After Monday's integration exam, there was a lot of chatter during the free time.

"Aren't you looking forward to the festival?"

Of course, a guy like Kono Lint seemed to have nothing but festive intentions.

"I heard it was a festival, but what does it do?"

Erich replied.

"It's a beauty pageant!"

......Yes, that's right.

They think that alone adds a lot of value to the festival.

Their formal names are Miss Temple and Mr. Temple.

And there's a cross-dressing contest.

Normally, the final exam is also the final exam, but I'm supposed to be busy practicing for interscholastic competitions, but with the closure of the Orbis class, that's gone.

I know the student government is scrambling to get something done.

With Royal Class, you don't have to do much to prepare, just enjoy the festivities.

"Reinhardt."

"Uh, why."

Kono Lindt even talked to me about how excited he was.

"Aren't you going to the tournament?"

"Tournament?"

"Uh, but....... Aren't you good enough to get in? They're taking applications today?"

Competitive play is gone, but Temple-wide tournaments will be implemented.

There are grade-level tournaments, and there are unlimited grade-level tournaments.

Originally, I wasn't going to participate because I didn't think I had much of a chance of winning first place.

[Won the (Festival) Unlimited Tournament - 15,000 points].

[Won the (festival) 1st grade tournament - 10,000 points].

But the rewards of the challenge are enormous.

The Orbis class has been decommissioned, so it's highly unlikely that they'll be in the field, and even if they are, I've awakened a spirit to enhance their power.

Enchant Self-Suggestion.

It's safe to say that practically no one can beat me at this point, except maybe Ellen. Of course, we have to assume that enchantments will work in a tournament situation.

If my ability is particularly useful in real life, can I use it in tournaments, which are practice matches, not real life?

In Spring Palace, I tried to do it and it worked.

Ellen said she didn't go last time because she thought she was too sure of winning.

A final exam is still a final exam.

I'd like to see the tournament go out eventually.

Aside from the achievement points, winning a tournament can also earn you a trophy and a cash prize from the Emperor.

"Hmm, let's try that."

The three Ganodab brothers look at me.

They've been looking at me in awe for some time now.

Of course, before we could do that, we had to get some answers.

"Hey, Ma."

"?"

I walked over to Ellen in the front row.

"I'm going to the first grade tournament."

"Yes."

"You're not coming out."

"Yes."

Ellen nods coolly.

Is this enough to win?

The way the three Ganodab brothers looked at me changed.

That asshole. He's cheating.

He was like, "No, but if I die and wake up, I can't win. No, but if Ellen comes on, I can die and wake up and still not win?

I don't need second and third place! I have nothing to gain unless I win! The prizes are worth pennies! This variable has to be stopped somehow!

In a nutshell, it knocked a strong contender out of the running.

This is a bit cheating, but.......

Ellen glares at me, and then says, "I'm going to throw it.

"If you don't win, I'm going to yell at you."

"No! Last time, you told me to only go to the quarterfinals!"

"Things have changed."

Apparently, Ellen's standards for me are much higher than they used to be.

The disenchantment was unnecessarily successful, so I took it.......

My declaration of war.

Our strongest rival, the Orbis class, would have been scattered and reassigned to a generic class.

We don't know if they'll come out or not.

But it doesn't change the fact that I'm a strong favorite to win without Ellen.

Before I knew it, it looked like this.

-By the way, isn't there a Miss Temple outgoing in our class?

Cub.

If you're going to yell, yell a little louder so everyone can hear you.

Herriot and Riana cast their 'disdainful' glances at Kono Lint.

You should realize that you're a flesh-eating bastard in a different sense than I am.

"Oh, no! I, I just thought....... I thought you all deserved to get out......."

I said just don't say it. You?

-Bam!

"Reinhardt!"

And.

Suddenly, the door to the first grade classroom burst open and Olivia Ranze appeared.

No, you should be studying during exams, not here." Olivia scurried over to me, not caring that everyone was stunned by her sudden appearance.

Then, he pretended to hold out a piece of paper. I looked at what was written on it and froze.

[Miss Temple Pageant Application].

Apparently, that's what it said.

"My sister, Miss Temple, is going out!"

"......Well, what is it?"

"Of course you're going to take me, right?"

Miss Temple contestant application.

What the hell, man, are you trying to sell me on this?

"Ah, ah, why does it stick whether I leave or not!"

He even grabbed my face and tried to rub it, and I pulled it away in frustration.

No.

The kids' eyes are getting weird again.

Now I'm going to be a dick in the classroom.

That's what it feels like.

When I force her to pull away, Olivia glances around the cheapened classroom.

"Hmmm. I guess I don't have any competition here."

"......."

"......."

"......."

Liana, Ellen, and Harriet's expressions turned bizarre.

I was like, "Why is that thing suddenly arguing?

No, why did you have to come in here and turn off the aggro? Olivia snorted at her classmates, whose faces were rotting from her out-of-line remarks.

Then, suddenly, he stomped off somewhere.

First position.

I was next to Ellen.

"You, you're not coming out?"

At the sudden provocation, Ellen glared at Olivia.

"Why would I leave something like that?"

At Ellen's words, Olivia covers her mouth and looks down at Ellen.

"You think ...... will work?"

"What?"

"You think I'm going to lose if I don't watch?"

No! Why do you always do that to a kid who's standing still!

Leave me alone!

I wanted to smack Olivia Ranze in the back of the head as she smiled. I was about to go over and say something.

An accident happened.

-Bam!

"Yuck!"

Ellen stood up and grabbed Olivia by the scruff of the neck.

The look of horror on the kids' faces washed over me, and so was mine.

Hey, the lid is open.

Ellen grabs Olivia by the scruff of the neck and glares at her with a stern expression.

"I don't know what the hell you're doing to me in the first place, but get lost, I don't want to deal with you."

"This....... You just beat up....... now you're going to beat up......?"

I was about to step in when I realized that Ellen was in trouble.

An anomaly occurred.

-Koooooow!

"!"

"The world....... is wide....... to keep in mind......?"

Olivia grinned broadly and grabbed Ellen's wrist for her slap.

Like it was no effort at all.

Olivia forced Ellen's hands to part as she molded her blow with her vice.

She's the strongest girl in first grade. She is recognized as a freak of nature among us.

Even the older students watched in horror as Ellen was pushed away. Releasing Ellen's hand, Olivia straightened her clothes and smirked.

-Cock!

Olivia nudged Ellen's bewildered forehead with her index finger.

"I know you're confident, but there's always someone better than you, remember?"

"......."

Ellen stared at Olivia, wide-eyed.

"Why, do you want to fight in a no-holds-barred tournament, because I'm pretty sure I can win both, Miss Temple or the tournament?"

Olivia looked at me, leaving Ellen alone with Earl.

-frown

Olivia winked at me and left the classroom.

Ellen stared blankly at the classroom door where Olivia had left. Everyone was looking back and forth between the frozen Ellen and me.

-There was a time when I envied that bastard.......

-She's never going to get disfellowshipped.......

Erich and Kaier muttered in low voices.

Konorint tapped me on the shoulder.

"There....... Come on."

I never thought I'd see the day in my life when I'd be pitied by this asshole.

No matter how strong I am, I'm still no match for Ellen.

And Olivia Ranze, who may be different than that Ellen, but she's definitely stronger.

Everyone seemed to be imagining that I was going to be popped open like a shrimp amongst a bunch of nasty humans.

Anyway.......

Nuna.

Let's see.

I searched.

\* \* \*

After a while.

"I told you to stop grinding your teeth!"

"Me, I'm sorry! Da, I won't do it again!"

I ended up walking up to the fifth grade classroom, had a temper tantrum, and told Olivia off.

"Are you really going to spill it? Are you going to spill it? Do you want me to see it? Do you want me to see it?"

"Reinhardt! I was so mean! Yes! I apologize! Can I apologize to her?"

"It's apples and oranges, just leave the kid alone, you're not going to pay for the night, huh?"

"Yeah, I'll let it go!"

The situation was the same, just in a different grade.

All of the other fifth graders stared blankly as the sneaky junior grabbed the senior like a mouse.

In the end, I had Olivia sobbing and begging for more.

I didn't expect to actually cry, so I panicked a bit.

Episode 276.

After finishing all of Monday's exams.

Instead of going back to their dorms, the girls in Class A gathered at a cafe near the classroom building.

You'd think they'd go back to their dorms and study, but they're all horned up.

"I think she's a real bitch."

To my surprise, it wasn't anyone else who said it, but Adelia.

Riana and Harriet, as well as Ellen, stared at Adelia with their mouths open in disbelief, because they hadn't expected the always slightly frightened girl to say something like that.

"Ah, him. That....... was harsh......?"

Adelia blushed and scratched her cheeks, wondering if she'd used too strong a word.

Riana sipped her lemonade through a straw and shook her head.

"You're not wrong, you're right, Adelia. No, if you're going for Miss Temple, you're out. Why the fuck would you come to a first-grade classroom and ask me to do something, and what? There's no competition? It's ridiculous, really."

Riana's expression became more strident. Herriot crossed his arms and made a face.

"I really don't like ......."

Herriot grunted, shoveling a mocha sandwich into his mouth.

He's been giving Ellen a hard time lately, and today was no different.

This was a situation where the usually calm Ellen could honestly say she didn't like someone.

The sight of him overpowering Ellen in strength was enough to make everyone panic.

To her classmates, Ellen had suddenly become something of a grade-level phenomenon.

There are only two guys in the first year of Royal Class who get that kind of treatment.

Ellen and Reinhardt.

Ellen is Ellen.

Reinhardt is Reinhardt.

They both have something unique about them, and they're both treated as such implicitly. Of course, Reinhardt never meant it in a good way.

Even if he's a fifth grader. Ellen is Ellen, and that asshole fifth grader has her beat in terms of strength.

We were all shocked by this.

Riana shook her head.

"By the way, is she really into Reinhardt?"

An open question.

The words made Harriet and Ellen glare at Riana.

"You like....... shouldn't it be......? Otherwise, what's the point?"

Adelia somehow managed to catch Harriet's eye and voice her opinion.

"No, at this point, I'm wondering if he's just harassing me for fun. I mean, honestly, what's in it for him?"

Yes, it is.

It can be cute, depending on how you look at it, but today it was more of an argument than anything else.

It won't look good for Reinhardt, and it won't look good for you.

"Harassment?"

It was Ellen who responded.

"I thought she actually liked Reinhardt, but now that I look at it, I can see that she really hates him. If she really likes Reinhardt, shouldn't she have stopped after she said no once or twice?"

If you think about it, yes.

Why does someone you like keep doing things you don't like? It's true that Reinhardt has been telling Olivia Lanchester to stop doing that every time he sees her do it.

Ellen was nervous, too, but after listening to Riana, I think she's right.

Olivia Ranze continues to do what Reinhardt hates.

And Ellen knows things that others don't.

Olivia purified the cursed Tiamata. As such, she is a lifesaver for Reinhardt.

So we know that Reinhardt can't be mean to Olivia any more than that.

He continues to harass Reinhardt about it.

Either you like it or you don't.

It's true that Olivia is bullying Reinhardt.

"......."

No matter how you slice it.

I don't think we should leave Olivia Lance alone.

You've already been pushed once, but you're about to be pushed hard.

Ellen didn't hesitate.

\* \* \*

Ellen didn't head to her fifth grade dorm with such serious thoughts.

What I wanted to say was simple, and it wasn't hard.

I didn't feel like fighting. Not because he was weak, but because he was embarrassed that his actions in the classroom had been reckless, regardless of the consequences.

I'm not looking for a fight.

There's only one thing to say.

Please stop harassing Reinhardt.

I'm stumped, why do you keep doing this?

That's what she was going to say. After returning to her dorm, Ellen headed to the fifth year dormitory alone.

That was fine until he called Olivia Ranze, and the senior came out to see him, smiling a bit sheepishly, as always.

Even when I asked him to tell me something with a look on his face like he was trying to figure out how to do it, the mood wasn't too bad.

Ellen's need was simple.

Don't bother Reinhardt.

It's rude to keep acting like that after I've told you no several times.

Refrain.

Ellen said. Hearing that, Olivia Ranze shook her head.

"Haha....... I heard what you said to Reinhardt......."

Olivia Ranze was smiling broadly.

Reinhardt had already said something, and it sounded like he was leaving the classroom a little early.

"Did Reinhardt ask you to say that?"

"......No."

"Really? Then why are you the one defending Reinhardt's position?"

Olivia's smiling face turned cold.

He looked like he'd just heard the final word in a bad enough situation.

"What are you Reinhardt?"

"Is that ......?"

Olivia rushes over to Ellen.

Ellen doesn't back down, but she stares at Olivia with a determined expression.

"As if you were Reinhardt's. As if Reinhardt belongs to you. I'm asking you to stop harassing my Reinhardt."

"......."

"It's disgusting to hear that from a third party."

Olivia glares at Ellen with a cold stare.

Third parties.

The words struck a nerve with Ellen.

Plus, Olivia said more of that.

"Take care of my Reinhardt!

"You can't be too friendly with Reinhardt, you know why?

"I hear you're a good fighter, but don't bully our Reinhardt too much.

Reinhardt has been talking about it like it's his own. Ellen glared at Olivia, too.

"So did you."

"Yeah, I definitely did."

Olivia smiles.

"I did it because I wanted Reinhardt to be my own. Is that what you want?"

"......."

Ellen was speechless.

Do I want Reinhardt to be my own?

I hadn't given it much thought. If I came to a conclusion I didn't like, it would set off a chain of irreversible events. Olivia still stares coldly at Ellen, who has no answer.

"Why can't you say anything? Why can't you tell me how you feel?"

"......."

"Reinhardt's asking you what?"

"...... is a friend......."

"That's it?"

"......."

Ellen had no answer.

The moment I answered anything. It felt like it was all going to end.

She was terrified that this weird senior in front of her would go off and say weird things and destroy all her relationships.

In the end, Ellen had no answer.

"If we're nothing more than friends, at least you don't have the right to tell me what to do."

"......."

"You're just a friend, you have no intention of being more than friends with Reinhard, and you're telling me to stay away from Reinhard."

Olivia sounded like she was questioning me.

Like you're trying to force open a heart that no one has ever opened, that no one wanted to open.

"That's, like, weird, right?"

It was similar to what Herriot had said to himself one day.

"I don't want to lose anything, but I hate to have it taken away. Do you want to hold on to everything in a clumsy way?"

Olivia laughs, placing a gentle hand on Ellen's shoulder.

It wasn't his usual inoffensive, good-natured laugh, but a clear sarcasm.

"You're so selfish."

Not choosing is also a choice.

Deferring all answers to the future and doing nothing is still a choice, and it will bring about some future.

This will break everything.

Am I selfish.

Ellen felt like a sledgehammer had hit her in the head with Olivia's words.

This guy, why does he hate me so much?

What the hell does he want to do by shaking me.

The so-called Saint of Eredian is just someone Ellen doesn't like.

Why does this person hate me.

I couldn't figure it out until now, but now I do.

You know you're being selfish, you know it's wrong, you know it's wrong, but there's something stronger than that.

I don't want to take anything away from this guy.

It's like grabbing a Reinhardt and never giving it back.

Suddenly, Ellen understood why Olivia didn't like her.

It's the same reason you don't like this person.

Fear of being taken away.

So, no.

Scared to realize her own feelings, Ellen realizes the emotions behind Olivia's cold eyes.

Something in those eyes.......

Fear.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"......what?"

Just as you're afraid that the person in front of you is going to take your Reinhardt, they're afraid of you.

That's why you're poking, prodding, and scratching.

Olivia's expression twisted at Ellen's abruptness.

"Why would I want you?"

The look on his face as he loses his composure at the sudden provocation already speaks volumes.

Ellen realizes she's hit the nail on the head. Now that she realizes that the other person doesn't hate her, she's afraid of her.

Realize you've been overreacting.

"You're graduating next year."

Time is already not on Olivia's side. Olivia pursed her lips in embarrassment at Ellen's words.

"I'm going to ...... for grad school."

"I'll have to get out of the dorm, though."

"......."

You won't have to see that ugly face until next year.

He and Reinhardt, on the other hand, will remain in the dormitory.

They don't like that.

I didn't have to get angry. I didn't have to react seriously to their waving.

Reinhard is bound to stay with me longer, not you.

No need to fight. Why fight when you've already won?

It's the other person who wants to make you ugly, you don't have to go along with it.

They'll hate you, and they'll envy you.

I'm not sure what you're trying to get yourself to admit, but you don't have to.

"Because a year is a long time, right?"

Olivia grits her teeth as if searching for words, and finally speaks in a shaky voice.

"Yes. Do your best."

Ellen looks at Olivia, one corner of her mouth raised.

I feel like I'm doing something very bad.

But it was exhilarating.

It's that feeling you get when you've been getting beaten at every turn, and now you've finally gotten your ass kicked. No, not a punch in the gut, but the realization that you were fighting a grossly unfavorable battle in the first place.

Olivia finally lost her cool and her eyes were reddening.

You bite your lip and glare at yourself.

He seemed frustrated.

You realize that there's a gap that you can't close, no matter how much you scratch at it.

What if Olivia Lanze had been a classmate?

I don't know anything else, but I don't think I've ever looked at Olivia with such a superior sneer before.

Assumptions are meaningless.

In the end, Reinhard is always closer to himself, even when he's spending time with Olivia.

That doesn't change.

"You, you....... You think you're in the same class as Reinhardt?"

"Yes, by the way."

A place you can never get into.

Your most enviable position.

There's no point in being angry with this person if you already have it.

It's just envy, it's just jealousy.

Olivia bit her lip and glared at Ellen at Ellen's brazen admission.

"I wish you'd been born later."

Ellen left the comment with a smirk, then glanced over at Olivia Ranze.

"You, you....... You! You're real! You're real....... Real....... You bad......."

Olivia's mouth dropped open, and she stared at Ellen's receding figure.

When Ellen was gone, Olivia's eyes turned bright red, and she bit her lip and muttered.

"C'mon....... I didn't even find the main hall because I didn't want to touch it......."

Olivia was so frustrated that she ended up in tears.

\* \* \*

She wondered what the point of this was, but she was feeling a kind of exhilaration she'd never felt before in her life. She couldn't have felt this way if she'd punched him in the face.

I wish you'd been born later.

The look on Olivia's face when she heard that was something to behold. Not only did she feel like she'd gotten her comeuppance, but she also felt like it wouldn't matter what he said to her from now on.

Once I realized why I'd been telling myself that for no reason, it didn't matter.

He was so envious of himself that he could never have what he had, and he was so angry and frustrated that he was arguing for nothing.

Back in her dorm, Ellen's steps are lighter and she's walking down the hallway when she bumps into someone.

"Ellen. Anything good?"

"Oh, yeah....... No, just."

Ellen's good mood sank again when she saw Herriot.

Selfish.

Olivia had, apparently, said something like that.

I don't want to let go of Herriot, and I don't want to let go of Reinhardt. So I clumsily try to hold on to both.

So you are selfish.

Olivia Ranze's words come to life.

I wanted to ignore it, but I wasn't stupid enough not to understand what it was saying.

Herriot loves Reinhardt.

I don't want to think about it, but I know it could happen. Reinhard is always thinking about Harriet.

If Reinhardt grows to like Herriot.

What should I do.

I don't want Olivia to be taken away from me.

Similarly.

What Herriot takes away.

I was so scared.

"What's wrong, Ellen?"

Herriot asks gently. You shake your head, as if you're sick.

"......Nothing. Nothing. I'm just tired."

"I'm going to study with Reinhardt, are you going to take a break?"

Apparently, Harriet had a bunch of textbooks in her arms.

I think I'm going to study for a test. Or, more accurately, he's trying to watch Reinhardt.

"What about the others?"

"If you don't come because you're studying your major, it'll probably be just me and Reinhardt."

Then, it's just the two of you.

"I'll be there."

"Yeah, grab your books. Sure."

"Yes."

Herriot walks toward the gun room, and Ellen looks behind him.

He didn't think Olivia's words could affect him.

When I think of Reinhardt alone with his friend, I feel an unpleasant feeling stirring in my chest.

'I am.......'

Ellen bites her lip and watches Harriet walk away.

'What should I do.......'

Already, Ellen found herself preparing to hate her friend.

Ellen's steps were heavy as she walked back to her room to get her textbooks.

Episode 277.

Olivia Ranze was on the dance floor.

"You're not going to learn more about the sword?

'Yes. Father.'

"Why?

"I don't want to learn more skills that could hurt someone, even if I'm not going to use them that way.

'.......'

I knew it was pointless.

I already knew I'd learned enough; I'd been told in third grade that I had nothing left to learn.

Still, Olivia Ranze was afraid to get any more violent. She was afraid that it was getting easier and easier to hurt someone. Olivia stayed away from violence and the possibility of violence.

But now, Olivia held the sword.

Controlling the power flowing through my body, something I hadn't done in a very long time, was too easy.

Olivia is about to enter a tournament.

Unlimited class tournaments.

And Miss Temple.

No Miss Temple, no unlimited tournaments.

Olivia wasn't interested in any of that.

It doesn't matter if that annoying first grader named Ellen shows up or not.

'Ms. Olivia. You don't have to push yourself like this anymore.'

'......No, that's okay. There's still time.'

"I understand the situation, but no matter how tight our facilities budget is, Ms. Olivia is still a student.

I don't know what else.

Money.

I need money.

There are countless war orphans from the Demon War.

Just as a country can't alleviate poverty, an empire can't provide for so many war orphans.

There's a hole in the ground somewhere, scattered with children who don't have enough to wear or eat. Olivia had been sponsoring them since she left her service in the Demon War.

But without her background as the daughter of a crusader knight, Olivia was running out of money to support them.

Olivia can't abandon them. She may have abandoned her faith, but she hasn't abandoned them.

"If Reinhardt knew, he'd say something.

I didn't tell Reinhardt, because I knew I'd be told to stop doing stupid things.

The prize money for the tournament and Miss Temple is huge. The prize money would be enough to keep his organization afloat for a while.

I know that a policy to support war orphans will be announced soon. For a little while, they just need to provide something to eat and wear with their own hands.

That's it.

That's why Olivia Ranze took up the sword.

'For a year or so....... Okay.'

I hung up my sword in third grade.

However, there have been times when I've had to take up the sword for unavoidable reasons.

I went to Darklands to serve, but I couldn't just serve.

There was a time when I was both disillusioned and grateful that I had power.

I've been holding on to it ever since.

I'm confident we'll win, but I don't think it will be easy.

I'm going to have to do some work to regain my senses. Just as I was about to calm my mind and draw on my strength.

"I wish you were born later.

-fast

"Ugh, really!"

-Kang!

Olivia threw her sword away in a sudden burst of heat.

What's the big deal?

Olivia sulked for a while alone in the rehearsal hall, her face bright red.

At that moment, the door to the performance hall opened and someone walked in.

-delay

"Olivia, there you are."

Obviously looking for Olivia, the other person smiled brightly and approached her.

"Oh, yeah. Radia."

Olivia's shenanigans are limited to first grade, but she's still sweet and kind to fifth and sixth graders.

It was not fifth grade, but sixth grade, B-2, Radia Schmidt. She walked up to Olivia with a big smile on her face.

"I haven't seen you with a sword in a long time. Are you going to play in the unlimited tournament again?"

"Ah....... Yeah. I will."

"I see....... Well, that's too bad. I thought I might have a shot at winning this time."

"Is Radia in on this?"

"Oh, I didn't realize, this is your last chance, Windsor's moving out."

"Oh....... I see."

If you're in sixth grade, you've already graduated.

From there, it's understandable to want to compete in an unlimited tournament and see what you've been working on for six years.

Radia Schmidt looks at Olivia with the water lily sword, still glowing.

But Olivia felt her breath catch in her throat, like there was something stuck there.

"But you know what, Olivia?"

"......what?"

"Holy power. Not to be used."

"......Yes, that's right. I know."

It would be absurd for someone who professes to have renounced their faith to use divine powers. Whether it's possible or not.

Unauthorized use of divine power is common.

If all goes well, you will be trained in the temple and become a full priest.

If you refuse, you will be referred to the Inquisition.

So Olivia shouldn't use her powers in public.

You must enter the tournament with your divine power sealed. Radia Schmidt shook her head at the notion that Olivia already knew that.

"You mean you can beat me without using divine power?"

"Oh, no....... I don't mean that......."

Radia Schmidt wasn't being sarcastic, she was genuinely curious, but it was an awkward question for Olivia. At Olivia's confusion, Radia Schmidt shook her head.

"Of course, Olivia, I'm sure you can do that."

It was a cheerful tone without a shred of inferiority complex. But the words that followed were enough to send shivers down Olivia's spine.

"Olivia, don't deny the divine within you."

"......."

"Come back to God. Where you belong."

Olivia couldn't quite meet Radia Schmidt's eyes.

My hands broke out in a cold sweat, and a chill ran down my spine.

This obsession was something Olivia lived with every day.

The members of the Circle of Grace also ask if they should consider restoring their faith, claiming that what happened to them was an aberration on the part of the Crusaders' leader.

Radia Schmidt is not a member of Grace. She is an aspiring paladin who serves the war god Als.

Moshi was a friend who always emphasized that although the gods are different, they should be united in the will of the five great masters.

Olivia was getting tired of this.

"I told you, Radia, I....... I gave up everything......."

"It's okay, Olivia, you may have had a lapse in judgment, a momentary lapse, you may have gotten lost."

Radia Schmidt's abysmal black eyes stare at Olivia.

"So, let me set you on the right path."

"......."

"We're, like, friends."

Olivia's lips quivered as she watched Radia Schmidt smile broadly.

What is the right path to take, and how does it guide you?

Fear.

At some point, Olivia became increasingly afraid of her friends of faith.

So.

I don't know why I keep going back to Reinhardt.

Olivia thought so.

\* \* \*

Monday's exams were over, so I was once again being pestered by Harriet and Ellen to study for them.

Honestly, I should be training for tournaments right now, not studying for exams unless I'm going to get first place.

Anyway, last place wasn't really because I was stupid, it was because I needed the achievement points. I can beat Ludwig without studying!

Even if you only need to solve half of the problem, that's still possible!

"This will come up, memorize it."

"I already memorized it."

"Memorize more, then."

"......Okay."

But they wouldn't know that, so they stuck to me and pointed out the expected test questions.

That feels good.

You know, the kind of....... that makes you feel like you're losing time.

It's a weird situation.

You've already filled out and submitted your application for the Year 1 tournament.

Qualifiers will be held this weekend, and if you make it to the main event, the tournament will begin on the first day of the festival.

I was in the middle of studying when Herriot let out a mewling sound and stretched.

And then he glared at me.

"You, Miss Temple, are you really going to take her?"

"......? All of a sudden?"

Herriot looks at me with a pointed look.

"Why is that?"

"Just say, I'm going to take it or I'm not. Just say it."

"I'm not going to go see it, unless it's filmed."

"Uh....... Oh, yeah?"

Herriot gives me a look of amusement.

In the first place, I'm a throaty man and time is gold.

There's no time for leisurely contemplation of such things, the Black Order could be approaching at any moment, the Vampire Council is going to have to do something soon, and there's Charlotte.

Who has time to play?

Herriot giggles inexplicably, then turns back to his book.

"If I go to see it, you're going to shoot it?"

But Herriot hasn't moved, and now Ellen is asking for it.

At that, Harriet's gaze snapped from her book back to me.

"You're not going?"

"I'll take it when I see it."

"What are you talking about, I'm not going to take it, I'm not going to take it!"

Why is he doing this all of a sudden?

When I told her I wasn't going to go, she said, "Yeah?" and nodded.

It's not like I go to see Miss Temple. Rather, if I'm in desperate need of achievement points and I'm dressed as a woman, I go.

I'm not interested in that!

And since I can't pass myself off as a Temple student, I can't pass myself off as a woman!

[Event Occurred - Miss & Mr. Temple Contest].

[Vote in the Miss & Mr. Temple contest; if everyone you voted for wins, you will be rewarded].

[Reward: One of each of the winner's talents].

...... also sucks.

There's a dirty trickster trying to drag me through hell again, desperate to get me in trouble somehow.

What to do.

Say you're never going.

A powerful event has happened that you can't miss. If you go to the contest without telling me, you can enter at.......

You're not going to like this.

And the most likely to win Miss Temple is Olivia Ranze, so I'll definitely be voting for that, because it's one of her talents, and it's a giveaway.

It's weird not to do this.

Couldn't you have gotten me up earlier? If you hadn't told me you weren't coming!

Uh.

Now that I think about it, that's kind of weird.

If I go to the Mr. Temple contest and I win, what's my reward?

I don't have a president-elect, I already have my talent.

[If she is crowned Miss Temple, she will be given a "talent option"].

A real one.

Mr. Temple's got nothing, even if he does get elected.

Being Miss Temple is a talent option.......

......No. No.

That's just not possible in the first place.

Even then, it's hard to beat the already established Olivia Ranze.

That's no different than the bullshit about 4,000 points for winning a cross-dressing contest.

I can't stomach it, so that's what I have to do to get to Miss Temple.

"Miss Temple is leaving.

"Mr. Temple?

"Miss Temple.

"......You're a guy, right?

"Is there a law that says a man can't go to Miss Temple?

'????'

Why would I do such a crazy thing?

Anyway.

I'm not a contestant, but I should go to the Miss Temple contest.

You can't afford to miss an event like this.

Even if I say I'm not going and sneak over, I'm sure I'll be found out at some point, and what happens then will be entirely at Ellen's mercy.

If I didn't take Olivia, I'd be like, "Why did you go there if you're not going to take him?

"That....... I'll give it a try. I can do it......."

Suddenly, Ellen and Harriet's eyes changed as they watched me flip.

"Oh, no! It's a festival! And it's part of the festival! And, uh, well, you gotta enjoy the festival, uh, uh...... ah, don't you?"

"......."

"......."

Even as I spoke, the atmosphere was so murderous it made my skin tingle.

No, but thanks for this event....... I really appreciate it.......

Why do I feel like shit.......

To lighten the mood, I felt compelled to say something, so I decided to cast my bullshit.

"No! I could be going to see Mr. Temple, not Miss Temple!"

"I bet you're going to see it, you idiot!"

-Pak!

He slapped me on the head for talking nonsense.

"Ooh, why did you hit me!"

No, we're picking Mr. Temple and Miss Temple together in the first place, so we'll get to see both Miss Temple and Mr. Temple!

Even as I endured their cold stares, I was lost in thought.

Miss Temple and Mr. Temple.......

Uh.

Does that give me two free talents?

If I get both Miss Temple and Mr. Temple right, do I have two talents?

Not in the first place.

This.......

I think I have to guess both Miss Temple and Mr. Temple?

On the miss side is Olivia Ranze.

Who is Mr.?

Olivia Ranze isn't in the original because she wouldn't have been in the Temple at the time.

Scarlett, from Class B, was originally crowned Miss Temple. Scarlett, who was scorned for her red eyes and red hair, was crowned Miss Temple. That was a pretty significant episode, as was Ludwig's tournament.

In the original, Mr. Temple for this festival was Bertus.

He's a prince, he's handsome, and now he's going to be Bertus again?

If Bertus runs and is elected, he will receive the Swordsmanship talent, as I already have two of Bertus' talents, Swordsmanship, Enchantment, and Enchantment Manipulation, except for Swordsmanship.

There's no telling what one of Olivia Lanchester's talents will be. It could be divine powers, which wouldn't be a bad thing. He seems to be just as much of a monster as Ellen, so I'm sure he'd give a lot.......

Good.

It's as good as it gets.

Even if you don't, you'll still be better with a sword than you are now, given Bertus's swordplay talent.

"Me, wait."

Ellen and Harriet seemed even more frustrated as I stomped out of the room.

"No, I'm not going anywhere, I'm going to see Bertus!"

"......."

"......."

But the way he looked at me when I told him I wasn't going, and then turned around and said I was, I didn't trust him.

a.

I'm giving the real event a little early.......

No, you gave it to me late on purpose, to give it to me as soon as I said I wasn't coming.

Episode 278.

Bertus was in the dorms, so it wasn't hard to find him.

"......Master Temple?"

"Uh."

"Why is that all of a sudden?"

"No, I just thought you were good enough to get out."

Bertus looked puzzled.

"What, are you trying to tell me not to leave because you're going to leave?"

So that seemed to be the conclusion Bertus came to.

I actually said to Ellen in class today, I'm going to the tournament, so why don't you go?

"Not really, I'm just curious."

Regardless of the likelihood, Mr. Temple doesn't give me anything but Challenge achievement points if I win. It's much more beneficial for me to guess the other candidates.

"I don't know why you want to know that, but I don't think I'm leaving."

Bertus looks at me like I'm crazy for asking this, but he answers anyway.

Why didn't Mr. Temple leave in the original? It's understandable if he's preoccupied with the Charlotte issue. Charlotte's resurrection is probably the biggest headache for Bertus right now.

Bertus doesn't leave.

If so, there's no telling who will be Mr. Temple.

If you get both right, you'll have two talents, and you'll be in trouble.

But we can't leave Bertus behind if we don't want him to leave.

If I go out and become Mr. Temple, I'll only end up with one talent from the Miss Temple side.......

In the first place, I'm not sure I'm good enough to be elected Mr. Temple.

In a way, this event has given me a shitty situation, so I want to make the most of it.

It's a shame you only get one talent when you can get two.......

Bertus' talent, swordsmanship, is one of Olivia's talents.

This is a maximization situation, but Mr. Temple is opaque. Miss Temple is certain, but if you don't hit Mr. Temple, you won't be able to eat him raw.

How to do it.......

I don't want Mr. Temple to be me.

What!

If it doesn't exist, create it!

Make another tough guy besides me Mr. Temple.

You're getting his talent for free. There are so many rare talents here that you can't even buy for achievement points!

You can do this by making Mr. Temple a more overwhelming talent than Bertus' swordsmanship.

Hang.

If I catch anyone, I'll make them Mr. Temple.

If it's ambiguous, write it off!

With a list of candidates running through my head, I headed to the dorm lobby.

Ludwig's health.

That's a talent for fraud. Let's make Ludwig Mr. Temple.

As I walked along, thinking about this and that, I saw the Ganodab trio huddled together in the lobby of the dorm.

Not only the Ganodab trio, but also Heinrich von Schwarz.

He's always been on the outs, and now he's joined the Ganodab trio.

Honestly, that guy doesn't look like Gano.

They were studying, too, huddled together, looking through books.

You.

I walked over to them.

"Uh, uh....... Reinhardt."

I could see the tension in their faces as I suddenly walked up and plopped down in the only available chair around them.

"That....... to go to the bathroom?"

Heinrich had lost his animosity toward me, but he still couldn't help but peck me a little.

"Look at me."

They tense up at the sound of my command.

"Hmmm......."

First, Heinrich von Schwarz.

The ability is Pyrokinesis.

We've already seen that you can have multiple powers, but I don't need Pyrokinesis because of the Flame of Fury.

I wonder if spontaneous combustion will become possible as the level of speech increases, even without the flame of fire.

This is a pass.

Conor Lindt.

Talents are superpowers.

But it's seriously flawed. He makes me feel bad for giving him that ability. When the flaw goes away, it's literally a crazy scam, and it comes too late.

Pass this one too.

Erich de Lapaeri.

Talents are Divine Power, Constitution, and Swordsmanship.

All three are skills I don't have, but I'm not a jack-of-all-trades.

Last.

Kaier Biorden.

Only one talent, giant horsepower.

"......."

This is it.

Kai'er's Giant Horsepower talent literally gives her a huge amount of horsepower.

This Khaier has an enormous amount of mana and the ability to grow mana. He's just not good at manipulating it, so he can't use it until he has to.

The horsepower numbers themselves don't work for either Ellen or this guy. Ellen's current horsepower is rank A+, and this guy's is rank S. He's one step ahead of Ellen.

Horsepower at S rank.

This is why they can be in the royal class even though they have a major flaw: they are useless.

There is no such thing as inadequacy.

So, if you get a talent like Giant Power, you'll be able to use it fully, and you'll get a ton of buffs to your powers.

Furthermore, I understand that once you reach Rank A, Manipulate Magic and Sensitize Magic evolve into a new talent called Dominate Magic.

When you gain Giant Power, you gain the Mastery of Power talent.

This is it.

This guy is perfect.......

"ha......."

"Why, what's wrong......?"

I sighed abruptly, and Kaier was fed up.

When he's Mr. Temple, there's nothing like it.

I patted Kaier on the shoulder as I rose from my seat.

"That's it. It's not your fault."

He's dead and risen, but Mr. Temple is a bad contemplative.

Although not really contemplative.

That.......

If it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

As a retirement....... No is no.

I had no choice but to give up neatly in front of the wall of reality.

If you meant last place, I don't know.

I can't do this for first place.

\* \* \*

The one with the most coveted talent couldn't be made into Mr. Temple because of practical issues.

I have the option to manage it and do something about it.

There.......

There are times when you shouldn't.

Sorry to break it to you, but that's just the way Kaier is.

Who the hell am I going to make Mr. Temple, and should I design a protagonist for once? He's been so unimportant up until now.

When I returned to the study room, Ellen and Harriet were staring at me with fat faces.

"I'm here to see Bertus."

"Who said anything?"

"......."

They both seemed firmly pissed off that I was about to enter a contest.

No, you can't be this mad at me for going to the store.

Of course....... I think a little. She crossed a lot of lines, but.......

Of course, we weren't the only ones in the room.

There's a guy in the corner, quietly studying by himself.

I don't know if he is or not, but the other day he was talking and studying for a while, and when Harriet apologized, he freaked out and said it was okay and not to worry about it and broke out in a cold sweat.

A guy who suffers from extreme human cringe.

My swordplay buddy.

Kliffman.

There is only one talent, 'Combat'.

A fraudulent all-around talent that instinctively finds the best way to win any kind of fight.

Massive hp is the talent I need most right now, but this guy's talent is ridiculous in terms of versatility.

If anything, combat is more likely the talent I'll need later on. I'll get to magic control eventually.

"......."

Only Cliff, who had been studying with his head down, looked in my direction, as if he'd gotten a chill from my gaze.

"Do you have anything to say to......?"

I stalked over to Klippmann and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Cliffman."

"Uh, uh, why?"

"You, Mr. Temple, get out."

Yep, that's a possibility.

This one has potential!

"Uh-huh?"

"????"

"......?"

At my outburst, not only Cliff, but also Harriet and Ellen were suddenly flustered.

"You know, it's about time you got your human lump fixed! Choo, choo, choo. Yes! Shock therapy, Mr. Temple, we're gonna fix it, we're gonna fix it, am I right?"

"Moo, moo, what are you talking about?"

Cliffman had no idea what he was hearing.

"Do it anyway, I'm the one who can do it. What about you?"

"That, that's too sudden, I don't know what you mean......."

"If it's gonna suck, let's suck, right?"

"Why are you suddenly bullying a kid who's just sitting there, you crazy person!"

-Bam!

"Eek!"

In the end, I got slapped in the face by Herriot.

\* \* \*

I can't believe I went from studying to going to Mr. Temple.

I thought it was a little too outlandish. Naturally, Cliff is baffled, and Harriet and Ellen don't understand why I'm suddenly acting up.

No.

If you guys knew what I'm going through right now, you'd be like, "Oh, yeah, I can do that." It's just that it's hard to explain.

Cliffman's Talent Battle is a top-tier Talent, comparable to Ellen's Mastery of Magic and Herriot's Magic. It costs 50,000 Achievement Points to purchase.

The reward for winning a tournament in Year 1 is 10,000 achievement points, which is worth five times as much.

If I can make him Mr. Temple without going to tournaments, I might as well go all in on that.

Herriot shakes his head.

"What is it with you and your sudden desire to get him out of Mr. Temple?"

"Literally, it's going to be a festival. I'm just trying to cure him of his disease, human melancholy."

I say, and this time Ellen shakes her head.

"Does that fix it?"

"You'll gain confidence. No matter what."

"Hmmm......."

Sandwiched between us, Cliffman stiffened and broke out in a cold sweat, as if he were being lynched. Harriet clicked her tongue as she watched him die in real time before our eyes.

"This kid is going to have a heart attack when Mr. Temple leaves if we even look at him. Do you think she can handle that?"

"......."

I don't know about Mr. Temple, but I think you've hit the nail on the head.

There are times when Harriet verbally abuses her kids without realizing it, and this was one of them.

Herriot's personality has changed from the original, but sometimes you have to say something that feels like the original, and this is one of those times.

"Well, yeah....... Someone like me....... How am I supposed to go to Mr. Temple....... There must be a lot of people who are way better than me......."

It was Cliff's best defense.

"No, you're undervaluing yourself too much."

I don't know about Kai, but you have potential, and I'm not saying that for nothing. I know it's an excuse to say that the human doldrums might be cured, but it's not like you can't get frustrated with Cliff when you're the only one watching.

And I can't make things that shouldn't be, but I can make things that are!

Write it off!

It's a mental drain just talking to him, let alone talking to anyone.

In fact, he can't even play most of his skills in practice matches. Of course, that doesn't stop him from beating me overwhelmingly, as he does in practice matches with Ellen.

At first I panicked and didn't do anything, but then I got hit with a punch and was knocked out, and the rest is history.

"I think it's all part of getting better. You tend to be too nervous, and you shouldn't be. I mean, look at me. I'm overconfident about a topic I know nothing about, and I'm ramming it down your throat."

"I love how you put it so bluntly....... Yeah."

"......I don't think it's something to brag about."

Cliff was the only one to hear it, but Harriet and Ellen were furious.

You guys go away! We don't need you! You're making her more nervous than she already is! She's crying and looking like she's gonna throw up!

......But isn't this just bullying?

Shouldn't we stop?

Although.......

It's an opportunity I can't pass up.

I only see a frozen Cliff.

He's the tallest of the first-year students, and technically, he's a handsome guy with a rather cold demeanor. From a distance, he gives off an unapproachable vibe, but when you get right up to him, he's a little nervous.

That's good enough for me, honestly.

"What do you think?"

I looked at Ellen and Harriet and asked if my opinion had limits after all.

The possibility of Cliffman becoming Mr. Temple.

"ugh, ugh......."

As they both stared at Cliff at my words, his expression grew more distressed.

"I don't think ...... is going to be eliminated."

Herriot's honest answer.

"I think so."

Ellen's response.

Klippmann's blush deepened at the unexpected compliment. I stood up and put my hand on his shoulder.

"I see. I'm telling you to do it because it looks like it's going to be me, and I'm telling you this to humiliate you for nothing."

"Well, at least......."

That's not quite right.

We'll be lucky if he doesn't cry if we force him up on stage in this state. If he cries and becomes the butt of everyone's jokes, it will scar his psyche forever and he may drop out of Temple.

You might end up abandoning a child altogether.

It's a shame, but I think it would be better to put a guy like Ludwig up there who would float away if someone pushed him.

"You don't have to do it if you don't want to. Sorry to bother you......."

Eventually, you realize that pushing them further is only going to harass them, so you apologize and try to stop.

"I don't know what's wrong with Reinhardt all of a sudden, but....... Are you sure you're okay with this?"

"......."

Ellen interrupted.

This is not good enough.

I don't think it's just a person-to-person relationship. Cliffman is a guy that I can't play against, and I'm just covering for his overwhelming talent.

He had his own practice matches with Ellen and practiced strengthening his powers, but he was too nervous to practice at all.

Due to a lack of confidence and trepidation, I said things that shouldn't have been done.

"You know what?"

"......Yes."

Cliffman keeps his head down and nods subtly. He knows that fixing that part of him is something he needs to do.

"I don't see why you need to go to Mr. Temple, but if it makes you feel better about yourself, that's not a bad way to go."

"I wonder if it is......."

"Yes."

Ellen stares at Cliff, still emotionless.

and.......

Ellen is better than me.......

"If you don't want to fix it, I don't know, but if you want to fix it, you're going to have to do something."

"......."

I had intended to send Cliffman to Mr. Temple for a completely different reason, but suddenly Ellen was on board.

"......I'll think about it."

And Klippmann seemed desperate to fix that part of himself after all.

-Drat!

With that, Mr. Cliffman rose to his feet. I, Ellen, and Harriet stared up at him, dumbfounded by his sudden rise.

"Where are you going all of a sudden?"

At Herriot's question, Klippmann covered his mouth and began to stumble.

"Well, I'm feeling a little under the weather......."

"Ah."

"......."

This guy.

Is this really good?

I wonder if I'm doing something wrong.

Cliffman staggered out of the room.

Episode 279.

Cliffman didn't return, apparently having used up a day's worth of socializing and mental energy.

No, it's more like I didn't make it back. Harriet was glaring at me.

"What the hell are you up to?"

"Literally."

"Now you're telling me to get in trouble?"

"Mr. Temple, why is it an accident to leave?"

"If you force me to do something I would never do if left alone, that's an accident."

"I did it with purely good intentions."

Actually.

It's never without good intentions.......

If anything, I'm wondering if I should be drying Cliff.

Combat is a great talent to have, but if it goes wrong, you'll lose the talent and Cliff will be forever scarred.

I don't want to abandon him because he's a good kid, even if he's a bit of a wreck.

I don't disagree with Herriot, but isn't telling Klippmann to enter the Mr. Temple contest already an accident?

"She really does do things that are so out of the ordinary that they embarrass her, don't you think, Ellen?"

-nod

As far as I'm concerned, it was pretty out of character for me to make such an offer to Cliff out of the blue. No, it's not something I would normally do either. The problem is the asshole who gives you the asshole event at the wrong time, and you can't do nothing about it.

"...... I think I know why."

Ellen looks at me and blurts it out.

No, how do you know why I did this?

"You said you were going to see a friend, but you're going to see him."

No this.

What a ridiculous misunderstanding!

"Oh, no. What are you talking about?"

"You're going to use that as an excuse to go see Miss Temple, even if it's not her."

"...... and."

Ellen's eyes widened as if she hadn't thought of that.

If there's one person you can tell is an asshole by the look in their eyes, it's Harriet.

No, guys....... Yes, but not as a result.

There's a story....... There is.......

"No shit, not for that reason, but why can't I go to that place, and if I go there, what, am I in trouble?"

"I don't see why not."

"......Yes."

Why do horses look at you like you're going to eat them!

Eventually.

I've become that weirdo who does things that don't even make sense, like going to the Miss Temple contest to support a friend by getting her to go to Mr. Temple.

You're a weirdo for making up a bullshit excuse when you could just go see it with dignity!

Eventually, studying took a backseat.

Herriot looked thoughtful, then looked at me and asked.

"By the way, is she going to the tournament?"

"How do I know that?"

"He'll say anything, including things he shouldn't say to you."

Right, but I don't know if you're going to the tournament?

Now that I think about it, I taunted Ellen and said I could win it all, and then I'd go to the tournament.

"......."

Ellen was silent, but she didn't say much.

"Are you going to leave?"

"Why?"

At my question, Ellen stares at me.

"Do you think I'm going to lose?"

"No, because I didn't say anything."

I just asked you if you were going to leave, and you just gave me that answer.

But that....... From what I saw in the classroom today, from what I heard, and because Olivia is a fifth grader.......

Isn't that a little hard for Ellen right now.......

I'm sure it's just a kid thing, but I'm not very good at managing my facial expressions.

Ellen seemed to read something in my expression.

"Never mind, I don't really care about tournaments anyway."

Ellen said. But she didn't look too happy about it.

"......I'm done for the day."

Apparently offended, Ellen sat for a moment, then left, claiming to be tired. I stared at the study room door, which Ellen had quietly closed behind her.

"She's upset because you said something weird!"

"Why are you doing this to me!"

Suddenly, Herriot brings up the tournament, and things get weird. Not that it was his fault, of course.

"Do you really think....... Ellen is going to lose?"

"I don't know, that's it."

"......I can't quite picture it."

Harriet couldn't seem to imagine Ellen losing.

Anyway, Ellen said she wasn't interested in tournaments, and that seemed to be true.

It was weird.

If I were Ellen, I'd be all over Olivia Ranze in the tournament because of the favoritism.

I didn't think I'd be interested in winning or losing.

By the way.

"You know what?"

"Why."

"What about me?"

Herriot suddenly said something out of the blue.

"What are you talking about?"

"Am I going to lose to her, too?"

The question was completely unexpected, and I was stumped.

"You? What the hell are you talking about?"

"......Why, can't I play in the tournament?"

"Aren't tournaments for melee majors in the first place, and you're a magic major?"

"There's no rule that says you can't leave, I know that."

Yeah, obviously.

The reason why magic majors don't show up to tournaments in the first place is because it's nearly impossible for magic majors to beat melee classes.

How do you deal with a melee major who jumps in front of you while you're casting an offensive spell?

It may be a surprise, but it's face-to-face, confined combat.

I wouldn't even say it's a disadvantage in the first place.

I thought Ellen was going to be the one to go, if anyone was going to go.

"If you don't do it, you don't know it."

I have no idea why Herriot is doing this.

However, something seemed to have changed in Harriet since the incident at Aaron Mede's mansion.

Ellen had also decided that she wanted to play an opponent who was hard to predict.

"......Don't overdo it."

"Yes."

Harriet looked at me and smiled.

"Are you going to support me?"

"......By nature, humans are wired to root for the underdog."

"So what?"

I saw Harriet shake her head and sighed.

"Of course I'm rooting for you."

I'm rooting for him because he's going to lose.

"You suck!"

Herriot huffed in frustration at my words.

Anyway.

Herriot, not Ellen, is a freshman and has decided to compete in an unlimited tournament.

I'm actually rooting for Herriot.

In the first place....... It would be a huge accomplishment just to make it all the way up to meet Olivia Ranze.

\* \* \*

Herriot has gone off somewhere to apply for an unlimited tournament. I don't see how even a genius can go up against a bunch of melee majors, even seniors, in a tournament.

You should have your own ideas.

I wasn't really motivated to study for the test because other kids were.

I left the study hall and swung my sword in the training hall, alone.

Enchantment.

"Hmm......."

It's not quite the same as the real thing, but you get the idea.

The immovable becomes movable, and it awakens a whole new set of sensations.

Combined with the unexpected success of my classes and the self-suggestion of my A-ranking, I've gotten stronger.

You won't be able to win unlimited, but you'll be able to win first grade.

Ellen, the strongest favorite to win, won't be competing.

"Be broken."

Another force, a word.

I mumbled something to the scarecrow, but nothing happened.

"......."

...... receives the column.

Self-implication was mostly mental.

But words must be spoken.

In other words, I have to call out what I want with a grain of salt.

This is me actually yelling at the scarecrow to break, and nothing happens.

It's hundreds of times more embarrassing than self-inflicted.

This is numerical play!

I've become the person with the most powerful superpower in the entire world, so why is my performance proportional to my shame?

You're going to need to yell something in a real-world situation later, and it's going to be incredibly embarrassing if nothing happens!

Why do all my abilities feel like this.......

Furthermore, grade F verbalization seemed to be even more ineffective than grade F self-suggestion.

Eventually.

I guess it hasn't changed the fact that I'm a quintessential comic book hero kind of guy. That....... that only comes out when you mean it....... That.......

Of course, it's even more useless to have a superpower that works well in training but doesn't work in practice.

I know this is much better.

It's hard.......

"He, Boo. Boo....... Do you want to break......?"

Somehow, as I got more and more discouraged, my voice crawled.

But when you're practicing your spells in the rehearsal hall, shouting at the top of your lungs, you're pretty sure you're going to strangle yourself if someone walks in.

Alone for hours, I practiced enchantment, arcana, and self-suggestion and swordplay until the sun went down.

-delay

How long has it been.

"......."

"Uh....... You're here."

Ellen shows up at the rehearsal hall, dressed comfortably. I wondered if she was still upset about my subtle reaction earlier. Ellen pulled her water lance from its sheath and approached me.

"Let's do it."

"Uh, yeah."

As if nothing had happened, Ellen pointed her sword at me.

I didn't say anything, and we didn't fight.

Ellen and I practiced swordsmanship as usual.

-Kang!

-Ka-ching!

-Kagak!

"Ugh!"

"Read some more trajectories."

"I'm doing it......!"

"I can't do that at all."

-Carded!

I improved a lot, but I was still no match for Ellen.

In the end, this was more important to me than anything else.

Kliffman wasn't in the room today, perhaps still mulling it over.

-Pak!

Ellen brought her elbow in the direction of my chin, scaring the sword away.

If I had gotten it right, it would have turned my neck, but I stopped just in time.

As always, it's my loss.

The all-too-familiar defeat.

"......."

"......."

Our eyes met for a moment. Ellen's face was sweaty and her hair was sticking to her face.

I've always lost, and it's been my life.

But when Ellen plays me, she can go for hours without breaking a sweat.

I don't remember when, but at some point, I realized.

I'm a lot stronger than I used to be. I may not be able to tire Ellen out, but I'm no longer the easy target I once was.

Ellen stares at me in that position, unmoving.

Ellen is shorter than me, so naturally she looks up a bit when she sees me.

"Do you think I....... lose?"

Ellen asks that question without a subject.

I wonder if I've been thinking about it all along.

"How do I know that?"

"Lies."

Ellen looks at me.

"You're thinking I'm losing."

"......."

Olivia would be stronger than Ellen, I was secretly thinking.

"I know, I know I lost. It's just, I felt like it. I'm not sorry, I know."

It wasn't like they were really showing each other what they were made of, but Ellen seemed to realize it the moment Olivia Ranze grabbed her wrist.

I feel like I'm no match for this person.

"Uh, I'm sorry."

"......."

Ellen stares at me. Ellen hangs her water lily sword in its rack and pats her hand.

"Don't apologize."

"......."

"I hate that more."

Ellen is perched on the window sill of the rehearsal hall, staring blankly outside.

Now, it's winter.

Ellen took off her casual sweatshirt coat.

Ellen's black short-sleeved shirt is soaked through. Ellen pulls her sweatshirt coat around her neck and looks at me.

"Me, I don't want to fight him and win."

"......Yes."

Ellen is now looking at the Temple, where winter is coming.

Sitting on the window sill, tiptoeing, Ellen sees me.

"I, Miss Temple, am leaving."

"......?"

"I want to beat him there."

Ellen picked a completely different place to fight.

"I don't want to be Miss Temple. I can lose that too. She's famous and....... pretty, so it's okay."

"......."

"I, for one, only need one vote."

Ellen looks at me as she says that.

Only one vote is needed.

Ellen didn't say whose votes she needed.

It was just looking at me.

I couldn't look at Ellen properly.

With that, Ellen climbed down from the window sill and walked over to me.

Ellen gently grasped my fingertips and then gently let go.

Despite her nonchalant expression, I could clearly feel Ellen's hand trembling violently as it lightly touched mine.

He couldn't even look at me properly.

"...... I'm coming."

Herriot competing in an unlimited weight tournament and Ellen going to Miss Temple, both of which were completely unexpected.

Episode 280.

The next day.

"I'm going to try."

Klippmann said, sounding determined.

Of course I did, and then I spent a long time agonizing over the Mr. Temple entry form.

Ellen and Harriet seemed to have already signed up. Both seem to know that the other is going to the tournament and Miss Temple.

"You want me to just close my eyes and write?"

"Well, it was a bit of a pain in the ass to write......."

In the lobby of the dorm, Kliffman had become a wrecking ball over a piece of paper, and I was trying to convince him to just use it when he made up his mind.

After a while, Liana de Granz walked up to us.

"What are you guys doing?"

"Oh, he, he....... that......."

Cliffman stuttered when Riana suddenly spoke to him. He's especially vulnerable to girls who come in with a hook. Ellen does it to him, and Riana does it too, though in a different way.

In fact, Riana has very few boundaries between friend and foe. She'll talk to anyone, and she's not shy about it.

Cliffman stammered, unable to answer at all, so I finally spoke up.

"Mr. Temple is leaving."

"......?"

At that, Riana frowned. She looks like she's heard something wrong.

No, who am I to judge, and it's not me.

"Only Cliff is going out, not me."

"......?"

"......."

Same reaction.

Wow.

You?

This one?

You have a way with words, man.

Cliffman looked like he'd been caught dreaming. Riana sat down across from him and stared at his face.

"Hmmm."

Unspecified traces.

Riana didn't say anything about why you'd leave something like that, or whether you should or shouldn't.

He just stared at me and seemed to be thinking about something.

"That, that....... That....... That's a bit much....... Ah, aha. Ahaha......."

Cliffman scratched his head and reached for the application, thinking that this had to stop.

I guess that doesn't work either.

-Tak!

"Ugh."

But as Kliffman reached for the application, Riana slapped his hand away.

"Give."

"Uh, huh?"

"I've been thinking, "What's the big deal about using this stuff?"

Riana looks like she's having fun.

Come to think of it, he's technically the real A-lister.

She's talented, but she has no interest in studying, and she comes from a wealthy family that spends money like it's nothing. It's exam time and he's pissed off that he's being forced to study by Ellen, Adelia, and Harriet.

He was too excited to miss out on the fun.

Riana started filling out the application, including Klippmann's name and affiliation.

"When's your birthday."

"Uh, well, that's......."

"Quick."

"It's June 18th......."

"Height and weight."

He filled out Kliffman's application for him and handed it to him, leaving only his signature.

"Sign."

"Huh?"

"You want me to sign it? This is your job."

"He, he....... I'm not sure I'm ready for that......."

Riana's brow narrowed.

"Sure. Just do it. Do it. Do you want to get electrocuted or crispy?"

-fazik! fazik!

When Riana's fingertips glowed blue, Klippmann scrawled his signature in disgust.

Riana this asshole.

He knows exactly how to handle Cliffman.

You do realize that indecisive, cranky kids need to be grabbed by the scruff of the neck and dragged away, right?

No, she's just the way she is. Taking the signed application, Riana shakes her head.

"Do I need to submit this?"

"Well, that's....... Well, I don't know about that......."

"I should go."

Riana nodded at my words.

"Why not have someone come with me?"

"Right?"

-Took

Riana jumped to her feet and punched Kliffman in the shoulder.

"Hey, follow me."

"Ugh, huh?"

"I don't understand this. Are you sure you want to be electrocuted?"

"Uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, okay!"

Cliffman bounced to his feet, and Riana led the way, application in hand.

"I can't even do this one thing right, and it's annoying."

Riana led the way, while Kliffman stared at me.

Help!

He had a look on his face that said.

No.......

Me too....... She can't do anything about it.

Cliffman trotted reluctantly behind Riana like a cow being led to the slaughter.

After a while, Riana returned, bringing only Cliff, who looked pleased with himself.

Apparently, they had filled out an application.

"Hmm......."

"That....... Why again......?"

"First of all, you look so nerdy. Your hair, your expression, your posture, your whole demeanor."

The look on Kliffman's face at this poignant point is priceless.

Riana sat Kliffman down and started playing with his hair, trying to put it in an all-back, parting it, and so on.

That's him.......

He liked to dress up and stuff.

It was like they were going to do what they did with Ellen, only this time with Cliff. I don't care if it's a man or a woman, as long as it's a hanger, is that it?

Cliffman, of course, was flinching at Riana's touch, his heart beating faster and faster in real time.

"Hmm....... Something's missing......."

Oh dear, it looks like my mission to create a Mr. Cliffman Temple has slipped through my fingers.

"Anyway, you only trust your sister."

"Huh? Uh, uh....... Yeah....... But why would you want to be my sister......."

"Fuck it. Go throw up somewhere."

"Uh, ah, okay!"

This is what happens. Is that right?

It seems to have passed from the hands of the male Reinhardt to the female Reinhardt.

Before I could convince her otherwise, Riana started poking fun at Kliffman.

When I tried to add something, she was like, "What do you know?" and took control.

Cliffman's resentful stare made me feel a twinge of guilt, but no matter how I think about it, between a villain named Reinhardt and a villain named Liana de Granz, the latter seems more likely to make Cliffman Mr. Temple.

He actually cares a lot about his clothes, and he's probably better at taking care of his appearance than I am.

So in the end, I didn't have a say in the matter, and I figured I could just let someone more capable take over and not bother.

That wasn't the end of it. While Klippmann and Riana were freaking out, Ellen spotted Riana in the distance and approached with guns blazing.

I haven't seen him move that fast in a long time.

"Riana."

"Oh, Ellen. Why?"

"I want to buy a dress. Can you help me pick one out?"

"A dress? Suddenly?"

"Yes."

Ellen nodded.

"Me, Miss Temple, I'm going out."

"......Eh?"

Riana is stunned for a moment.

Why would she do that?

Shocked, questioning.

"Oh. Ohhhh!"

And excitement.

You now have unlimited dressing opportunities on two of your favorite hangers.

"Great! Come to my room, both of you! No, come to my mansion for the weekend, both of you! I'll have the whole zodiac boutique over!"

Cliffman on the left, Ellen on the right.

Liana de Granz is on the verge of happiness.

\* \* \*

Riana didn't ask any questions about Klippmann and Ellen's spur-of-the-moment decision to participate.

He was excited about the idea that good things are good things, and that he was going to try this and that.

I let her do her thing. I don't know much about fashion, and my job is to confirm the winner at the elimination, and if Riana does a good job, she'll get fewer points for the elimination.

We still have a variable named Ellen.

It wouldn't be a bad idea for Ellen to be Miss Temple. Olivia and Ellen are both very talented.

Honestly, I'd be happy with a randomized talent from either of them, and most importantly, Cliff's combat talent.

But what can I say.......

Ellen and Olivia.

If you vote for one of them, the person you vote for should win.

If you vote for Ellen and Olivia wins, you end up getting nothing.

And.......

Honestly, the odds are in Olivia's favor. All considerations aside, name recognition is a different story.

However, Ellen said she only needed one vote.

So Ellen tries to leave, even though she knows she has little chance of becoming Miss Temple.

"......."

Darn.

Headaches are a dime a dozen, and they don't go away, they just get more and more. From big problems to personal relationships.

The problems will only continue to grow.

\* \* \*

It's exam season, but the mood of first-year Royal Class has changed. And it's not just because it's exam time.

It was the new headmaster, Saviolin Tana.

"Reinhardt, Lord Tana has asked me to gather the students who wish to take swordsmanship lessons!"

An excited Ludwig arrived at the A-class dormitory. It was exam time, but he was going to give us a lesson.

"Of course you're going, right?"

"......you're not worried that this is a trial period at all?"

It's not my place to say, but I have other things to worry about and you should be studying, you son of a bitch!

At my words, Ludwig laughed and scratched his head.

"Aww, but what chance do I have of that, I don't know when you're going to quit."

You're right. Ludwig is interested in improving his skills, he has no talent or interest in studying.

"Anyway, pass it on to Class A. They're going to be teaching in the dormitory in Class B!"

Ludwig passed the torch to me and took off like a bird, heading back to his B-class dorm.

......I'm always wondering why he's so weird.

I'd rather die than suffer, after all, I'm my own worst enemy. I sighed and paced the rooms of the A-class dormitory, delivering Savior Tana's message.

I was no different than Ludwig. I'd rather take a swordsmanship lesson from Saviolin Tana than a class.

\* \* \*

A group of people gathered in a B-class dormitory dance hall during an exam period.

In class A, it's just me and Erich.

Erich seems to be working hard these days, but I'm not sure what his accomplishments are.

Cliffman really wanted to come, but he was dragged away by Riana.

Ellen looked like she wanted to go, but she also looked like she wished Miss Temple hadn't come to see if she could talk to Riana.

In Class B, it was Scarlett, Ludwig, and Delfin Izad.

While swordsmanship isn't Delphine's main focus, she's learning, and she's curious to see what the famed Xanapelle master Xaviorin Tana has to teach her.

Saviolin Tana hasn't exactly made herself known to me since she entered the dorm. She's here for Charlotte's protection. I am here to protect Charlotte, and not to reveal myself so that I can take action.

If something happened, she'd look for me, but she didn't even acknowledge me, just nodded at my greeting and walked past.

I know it's to protect me, but it's also subtly creepy.

"Oops, sorry to ignore you.

"What to do.

"But if I pretend to know, I could get in trouble.

'Sorry.......'

Of course, the look on his face said it all.

"They did a great job of coming together in the midst of our busy schedule."

As if that would be the end of her greeting, she pulled a water lily sword from its sheath.

I was a little disappointed that Ellen, the real ace, wasn't there.

I was curious to see what Saviolin Tana would think of Ellen's performance, and it's not like today is the only time we'll get to see her.

Actually, Saviolin Tana seemed a little puzzled that Ellen wasn't here. She just didn't show it.

"I'm not very verbal, and I'm not used to teaching things. So if you want to get something from me, you'll have to learn by doing. Students who realize a lot will learn a lot, and students who don't know what they're doing wrong will learn less."

Saviolin Tana glanced at the five gathered.

"Come forward, one by one, hopefuls."

"Let me try!"

Ludwig jumped to the forefront.

"What's your name?"

"This is Ludwig from B-11!"

Saviolin Tana.

Ludwig.

After the original gate incident, the two became priests.

Saviolin Tana was a harsh and cruel teacher, and Ludwig was forced to get used to her overbearing and harsh teaching methods, even though he felt terrible about them.

She also taught Ellen, but she was more hands-on with Ludwig than with Ellen. Of course, that doesn't mean she didn't teach Ellen anything.

Ludwig and Saviolin Tana.

Although unintentional, my actions succeeded in bringing them together more than a year earlier than their original time zone.

After the Gate, things were out of control, which is why Saviolin Tana treated Ludwig so harshly, but now nothing has happened.

Can they build a softer, more moderate priestly relationship?

"Here we go!"

"You don't have to be loud."

"Yep! Got it!"

"He said I didn't have to yell."

"Yes!"

"You're at ....... Do something."

-Kagagak!

Saviolin Tana deflected Ludwig's full weight with her right hand, and in one swift motion, she brought the tip of her sword to Ludwig's throat.

"Ouch."

"Hmm......."

Saviolin Tana looked at Ludwig and shook her head.

"That sucks."

"Sorry!"

"There's nothing to apologize for. It's just the truth."

"I'll do my best!"

"......."

Saviolin Tana glares at Ludwig, who stares back.

'um.......'

'umm.......'

'Why.......'

"Hey, I don't like this.

As expected, the sound of Tana's heart was read by the viola.

Episode 281.

Ludwig is no slouch either, and he's grown a lot since the first semester, even compared to the original.

Saviolin Tana crossed swords with Ludwig five times in a row. Unsurprisingly, she was subdued in a single blow.

Due to her level, she did not use any magical enhancements and defeated him solely through skill.

Certainly, it wasn't like Ellen.

With the least amount of motion necessary, she brought her sword to her side, not allowing Ludwig an inch of space.

It doesn't even look like he's using much force. He grips his training sword with his right hand and gives it a slight flick, but the sword is pushed back and his trajectory is disrupted.

Right now, Saviolin Tana is unbeatable in the melee division. So she's going to have a tough time with Ellen, and Olivia Ranze is going to have a tough time with her.

You said there's a sky above the sky.

If me and Ludwig were on the ground, Ellen would be in the stratosphere, and Xavier Tana would be on the moon.

Or maybe a different planet altogether, because he can summon an Auror Sword without a sword.

Overwhelming walls.

Ludwig scratched his head, searching for any hint of self-pity or futility at being so futilely defeated.

"You say you practice a lot, but you're falling far short, Lord Tana."

"Call me sir. I'm not here as a knight."

"Yes, sir!"

"......."

Saviolin Tana asked Ludwig to strike a pose with his sword.

"Ludwig, you have a very shallow understanding of the sword. You have learned it mechanically. You know the blade, but you don't know why you need it. You don't understand, so you exert too much force. Swordsmanship, by definition, does not require excessive force. You need a more in-depth understanding of the technique, as all universal swordsmanship theories are based on not using magical enhancements."

"Yes, sir!"

"If you want to know more, come and ask. Over. Next."

The overbearing Ludwig steps aside, and this time it's Delphine.

"Name?"

"This is Delphine Isadra....... Thank you."

Delphine Isadra, who was always on the cheerful side, if not quite as cheerful as Ludwig, was nervous. That's how it's supposed to be in front of a man of his stature.

It's like having Einstein in your science class. They're there to see how you study and give you advice.

It's weird that Ludwig isn't nervous.

Delphine stabbed at Tana with her training blade. Tana did the same this time, thrusting her own sword at an angle to the tip of Delphine's thrusting blade, twisting the blade's hilt.

"Ahem!"

Delphine lost control of the sword and ended up flipping over her wrist.

"Hmm."

Tana blushed and shook her head as she watched Delphine pick up her training sword.

"You're not a swordsman."

"Oh, that....... Yeah."

"Archery?"

"What? Ah....... How......."

"If I had a callus like that between my thumb and index finger, that would be it."

At Tana's words, Delphine froze and stared at her. Tana seemed to see it, the natural calluses she'd developed from handling the bowstring so casually.

"I don't think I have anything to teach you. Next."

Tana turned to Delphine to see if she could offer any advice on archery. Delphine blushed with embarrassment and backed away as if to run away.

No, but you can still say a few words, can't you? You're relentless.

Next up was Scarlet.

Scarlett pursed her lips nervously.

"This is Scarlett....... Thank you."

"Come on."

"Yes."

Scarlett seemed more inclined to play a slow, exploratory game than to point her dueling blades at Tana.

It sees an opening and tries to get in.

Scarlett's skills are the best of any of us here, pure and simple. I'm not so much a swordsman as I am compensated for a number of conditions.

"If you don't come, we'll go this way."

As Tana took a step forward, Scarlet took a step back, her sword pointed forward. As if she would be completely subdued the moment the sword touched.

Tana wasn't in a hurry. For every step she took, Scarlett took a step back.

But you can't stay on the sidelines forever.

Tana's sword was not that fast. In fact, it goes in so slowly that you wonder if it's intentionally slow.

Of course, that's not going to happen in real life.

As if it were a problem.

What would you do if I went into a sword path like this?" With that feeling, he slashed his sword honestly at Scarlett, from top to bottom.

Scarlet has seen that the moment she touches that sword, she is caught in its path and either swept away or bounces off.

Scarlett's choice was evasion.

The moment you try to dodge by stepping slightly to the side of the sword.

"!"

Tana saber-raises and draws her sword toward her body, converting it into a straight stab.

It was close to the same time.

As if it knew in advance that Scarlett was about to make an evasive judgment call, the moment her body moved, it was already transformed into a stab of Savior Tana's sword.

But it's not impossible to deal with.

Scarlet thrusts her training blade toward the path of Saviolin Tana's stab.

The sword is oriented so that the scarlet is further inward.

If we continue to push, Tana's sword will be pushed into an outward trajectory instead of toward Scarlett's body.

This way, Scarlet can stab Tana, but Tana's sword will miss.

But Scarlett's thrusts and pushes are just as scary as Tana's sword.

-Whoosh!

With a flick of her wrist, she flipped the sword backwards.

Quickly claiming the inside, he easily pushed aside Scarlett's dueling blades and aimed the blade at the nape of her neck.

At face value, it's a sum.

As far as the action before that goes, it was just two sums.

"Hmmm. Not bad."

Saviolin Tana nodded, more in recognition of Scarlett's judgment and quickness than the number of times.

"......Thank you."

Scarlett didn't seem to understand why she was being told she was fine when she lost by only two moves.

Since then, Tana has babysat Scarlett four more times.

Of course, it wasn't much different than before.

The only difference is that, like Ludwig, he doesn't rely on brute strength, but on psychological warfare, using his wits to figure out the best way out of a tight situation.

Saviolin Tana seemed to see that in Scarlett.

"You're a good student, keep going."

"Go, thank you......."

"Next."

Saviolin Tana would just say that and move on.

I mean, shouldn't I be teaching her something? Of course, Scarlett is no match for me in terms of pure swordsmanship.

But the look on Scarlett's face suggests that she didn't need the feedback.

His face is wide open, and I can see that he's feeling pretty excited.

I could see Ludwig and Delphine's envy, and Erich could barely look at Scarlett.

The best prosecutor on the continent said it was excellent.

There's nothing more motivating to a sword practitioner than that.

Some people are so strong and powerful that they can change the lives of others with just a few words. Saviolin Tana is one of those people.

Scarlett will use this as motivation to work harder now.

At that point, I don't need to teach you anything in detail, it's just me and Erich de Lapaeri.

Erich hesitated.

"Get out."

"Uh, uh......? Me?"

Scarlett is up next. I'm sure Erich knows that he doesn't compare favorably to Scarlett. So he doesn't want to go out and be compared to her.

Yeah, why are you here?

The name Saviolin Tana is enough to get Erich excited.

Erich looks like he doesn't want to be embarrassed right now.

"Why don't you go to ...... or something?"

"Oh, no!"

-Enough!

If the cub doesn't leave now, it's the last one.

I may not be as good as Scarlett right now, but I'm sure I'll be better overall.

"That would be Erich de Lapaeri, first year Royal Class, A-9."

"Class A?"

"Yes."

"......."

Tana stares at Erhi, the tip of her dueling sword tucked into the floor of the training hall.

'Hmm....... He's cool.'

'You're not even good enough to pretend.......'

"This kid is Royal Class?

"Is this all there is to royal class anymore?

"No, he was fine earlier.

"What is it?

'um.......'

'I don't think I'm going to be able to say anything good about him.......'

A million thoughts rush through Saviolin Tana's expressionless face.

"......You don't need to see it."

"That....... Yes?"

"I don't want to embarrass you. You don't do it."

Saviolin Tana said, as if she knew Erich as soon as she saw him.

There.......

Wouldn't it be more embarrassing to hear that.......

"Next."

Saviolin Tana looks at me this time.

Last turn.

"This is Reinhardt."

"Yeah."

I raised my water sword.

Saviolin Tana and I are officially old friends. We met face-to-face at the Royal Class sponsorship and got sponsored.

But there is no relationship after that. What happened at the Palace of Spring is top secret, so Saviolin Tana is not really an acquaintance of mine, although I am acquainted with her.

So....... This is kind of weird.

"Good, good. You're inferring a sword path from your opponent's shoulders and stride, which is a difficult sensation to develop. But you're not quite there yet. But don't worry. It's just inexperience, and it will come naturally as you continue to train and study."

"Okay, but a little more, like this. A little more strength in your hands, and....... A little more. A little harder. Oh, I'm not that strong yet. Mmm. Okay. Yeah, you can do that. You're still young."

"Great. I can't believe I can do this already, but this would have been better. Look. Like this. Do you know what that feels like?"

"No, no. Not like that. Like this. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's it. You're a fast learner."

"Some more, some more, no, one more time. Mmm. It's getting better. Let's do it one more time."

This person.

He's got me, and he keeps doing this.

No.......

Why are you playing favorites!

I finally understood why Saviolin Tana had offered to teach the children swordplay.

I can see why the other guys said a few words and moved on.

This guy was trying to teach me something.

"Okay, okay, Reinhardt. Excellent."

All the other kids stared at the scene of overwhelming favoritism.

Episode 282.

How many times has the strongest knight on the continent had his life saved by someone else? It's been a long time since it happened, if it ever happened at all, since personal power has reached a certain level.

She may have lived her life on the side of saving rather than being saved by someone.

It was a confluence of events, but in the end, I saved Savior Tana's life.

Had it stirred up some forgotten emotion in her?

She obviously bowed to me and thanked me, but she seemed to think to herself that it wasn't enough.

So, if he wanted to do something for me, he probably thought it would be helpful for him to see to my training while he was still wearing the title of Sergeant Major and staying in the Royal Class dorms.

But it would be weird to teach just me and not the other guys, so I'd bring them in and pretend to teach them, but only teach me.

All good.

Good.

But this.......

I'm just going to be the weirdo again.

"Well, you're going to have to watch the other kids besides me......."

"......a."

Tana, who had been focusing on me, turned her attention back to her students.

"Ah.

"I completely forgot!

Please tell me I'm the only one in the world who can subtly read thoughts in that cold, distant expression.

"Well, okay. I think that's enough for you, so let's watch it again."

At my request, Tana once again watched everyone's swordplay. Of course, she didn't put as much effort into it as she did with me, but in the end, it was more than enough for our level.

Neither Erich nor Delphine took the advice.

Saviolin Tana's teachings to me were definitely helpful, but overly ticklish.

It's embarrassing to be told you're great when you're not even close to Scarlett. This guy clearly doesn't understand that too much praise is feeding.

"Well, I think we're all good to go."

Eventually, after another lap, she grabbed me and taught me a few more things before announcing that the midnight extra class was over.

Everyone was pleased with themselves. They seemed excited to see a legendary creature right in front of them.

Of course, it's not really the stuff of legend.

"I know winter break is just around the corner, but I'll be doing these classes from time to time. I'll let you know when I have an idea, so you can come to the training grounds at the appointed time. That's it."

The class was over, and I went home to rest.

"Reinhardt, that's great, you're the only person I've ever heard Lord Tana praise so loudly!"

Ludwig patted me on the shoulder excitedly, as if he'd been complimented.

Delighting in other people's work as if it were your own.

Every time I realize he's a true human being, I realize how much of a jerk I am.

"Just saying."

"No, Reinhardt. It was great."

Scarlett said, with a rare twinkle in her eye.

I mean, do you say that even though you know objectively that you're better at it?

a.......

Lord Tana must know something I don't, because I feel like this.

Erich's grass was badly dead.

I wasn't scolded or told why I was being so mean.

Saviolin Tana simply said she wouldn't look at you, which was a kindness after all. She didn't want to embarrass you in front of the other students.

I wouldn't be able to say I'm good at something I can't do.

As he stumbles back to his class A dorm because the grass is dead.

Scarlett stared at it.

Scarlett, who had been accused of being a witch, is an excellent student and has never been put to the test.

It will be miserable.

There was nothing amusing about the way Scarlett looked at Erich.

All I felt was a stare. It was neither negative nor positive, just a stare.

The look in Scarlett's eyes convinces me.

That Scarlett is now completely free of the dark feelings that stemmed from Erich and him.

It's better to get out of it than to wallow in it. You could say that Scarlett had undergone a positive transformation.

"When is the next class, I can't wait to take it again."

"......Give me a break, will you?"

At my words, Ludwig scratched his head.

"I don't think I'm cut out for real studying, I'm better off doing this."

You're a madman with nothing but muscles for a brain.

I slowed my pace, afraid that if I stayed with them any longer, I would catch the strange aura. Ludwig, Scarlett, and Delphine headed back to their dormitory and I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"Ah....... Lord Tana."

"Sir."

Saviolin Tana looks at me as if to correct my title, as if I am now her teacher.

He's been very sensitive about the way he's been addressed. First he wants me to call him Lord Tana. Now he wants me to call him Mr. because he's a teacher.

"Yes, sir."

She glances around to make sure no one is watching.

"I have a few more things to say about today's lesson."

I'm pretty sure I have an excuse.

"Let's take a walk."

"Sure."

She led the way, and I followed.

\* \* \*

Saviolin Tana and I walked outside the dormitory.

It was night, and it was getting colder, so the normally deserted neighborhood of the Royal Class dormitory was deserted.

"Royal Class is still a fun place to be."

"......still?"

"Yeah."

She walks with her hands in her coat pockets.

She is a Temple senior at EpinHauser. Naturally, she was also from the Temple Royal class.

"I was no different, a kid who relied on his talent to do nothing. A guy who works hard despite his lack of talent. What's so urgent, a guy who grits his teeth and works hard......."

She exhales a white breath.

"And a natural at everything."

Ellen wasn't here today.

So, when you say I'm a natural at everything, you mean me.

I've gotten to the point where I've been told that.

I'm not the Reinhardt of my incompetence anymore, so when I'm told I'm the guy who has everything, I can't really deny it.

Not the guy who brings everything, but the guy who keeps bringing something.

Although that would be more accurate.

"Which side were you on?"

"...... You know it when you see it, right?"

Saviolin Tana looks at me and smiles.

I haven't set her up, I don't know what her Temple days were like, I have no idea what her past history is.

What was Xavier Tana like in his Temple days, in his Royal Class days?

I can see it without looking. It was like Ellen.

"Ellen Artorius. You didn't show up today."

"Yeah, I've got a few things I need to take care of......."

She probably knows who Ellen is just as well as she knows me. I wonder what she would think if Ellen was competing in Miss Temple instead of training.

Do they think it's pathetic?

She's walking through the dimly lit park in her dorm.

"Actually, I don't remember much about Temple."

"......."

"I've been here for six years, and I've only ever lived in a smokehouse. I've had some friends, but I don't even know what I did with them."

Tana's eyes were blank.

I can't count the hours I've spent here, and I have no memories of any other place.

She must have been a fool who knew nothing but the sword.

The time would have been replaced by skill, but she had no meaningful memory of it.

So what should have been a memorable place didn't seem to be filled with anything.

"After graduation, I joined Shanapelle, and I've had enemies there ever since. Before I knew it, they were calling me the best swordsman on the continent, and then some guy named Ragan Artorius took the title from me, and now it's back."

She walks in a daze.

"You can't just fill your life with titles like that."

She sees me.

"Reinhard, don't live too hard."

"......."

He was born with it all.

No, he lives like he's being chased by something.

She puts her hand on one of the park's trees and strokes down its grain.

"If you live too hard, you'll miss too much."

What was she thinking, I wondered, unable to read the emotion in her expression now.

"What did you miss?"

At my question, she unfolded the hem of her coat and pointed to the sword sheath at her left waist.

Rathalos Tempesta.

No, she's probably referring to the sword itself.

"Everything but this."

He lived for the sword and never had anything but the sword.

A man whose life is all white space except for his sword.

Saviolin Tana was one of those people, and I smirked as I watched her wistful and sad expression.

"Isn't that something I can fill in now?"

"......what?"

"No, no, no, what are you doing, talking like an old lady? By the looks of you, I'm pretty sure you'd be my junior right now."

"......?"

What is he talking about?

She looks at me with the same expression.

"Well, you'll be there when you're stronger here, and then you'll be there when you're stronger there, so it's okay to play a little bit now, right?"

"......?"

"Don't you have a vacation or something?"

"There should be....... not."

Saviolin Tana nods blankly.

"So it's not like I have no time at all. You have a relationship, you go out to eat, you travel. What are you doing with the money you make? Aren't you going to spend it all?"

I can't believe I'm going to give a man who's eaten his fill.

This person is actually much older than my original version.

Whatever.

I'm a guy who's been there, done that.

"Well. You know how to play when you've been played."

"If I....... what the hell am I supposed to answer to you?"

She was baffled, as if she had never heard anything like this from anyone in the world. If you're bored with being the most powerful person in the world, you should get a relationship.

I'm such a weirdo.

It sounds so ridiculous that she doesn't even seem upset.

If it sounds too weird, people will freeze up rather than get upset.

"You told me not to be so hard on myself."

"......."

"Before that, I want you to start living that way."

Not only do superhumans age more slowly, but at a certain level, they don't just stop aging, they age like this.

I don't care what your actual age is, if you wear a Temple uniform, I'm pretty sure you're in the same grade as us.

What are you doing pretending to have a life?

"...... or something."

Saviolin Tana eventually burst out laughing at the absurdity of it all.

"I'm not sure you're the future of the empire after all, Reinhardt."

She patted me on the shoulder.

"But he's definitely the weirdest guy in the empire."

Weirdo.

That was also one of the most common things I heard.

She hadn't called me to talk about nothing in particular.

"Soon, the Emperor will wish to see you."

Emperor.

Does it work.

"It's telling them ahead of time not to be surprised when it happens."

Do I want to thank her for saving Charlotte and reward her, or do I want her to do something for me?

I don't know.

But in the end, it was just one of those things I had to face.

第 283页

Of course, the emperor doesn't accept just anyone. Nor does he meet with just anyone.

You can start by thinking in terms of results.

If you're a nobody, and you don't even have a year in the palace, the least you can do is save the life of a princess.

Although it's technically the second.

That's why meeting the emperor is a lifetime honor in itself.

But somehow.

I'm not the kind of human being who's going to live with that as a lifelong honor.

Just because the emperor asked to see you doesn't mean you're honored, it means you're worried.

The Emperor knows secrets that many people don't, and it's highly likely that Bertus and Charlotte don't either.

You'll be able to discuss the work of the Revolutionaries without taking sides, and you'll be able to ask questions about the work of the Black Order and other magical organizations.

Or maybe you'll get information about a bunch of highly classified magic and alcoholic beverages.

Setting aside the possibility of whether the emperor will trust the information I give him, and whether he will give me what I want, let's just say yes.

What's the point of contact with the emperor?

It could be temporary, or it could be continuous. As long as my abilities help stabilize Charlotte's condition, it will be the latter.

The Emperor will soon seek to see me.

I'm not sure when that will be, but I'm guessing around the winter break after the festival.

\* \* \*

Friday.

The final exam is over.

"Ughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

As expected, everyone was happy to see that the dreaded second semester of Kono Lint was over.

It's even a festival, starting next week, so we'll have a week of festivities before winter break.

I haven't gotten my final grades yet, but I think I'll be in the middle of the pack. Of course, I missed a lot of classes, so I won't be at the top because of that.

I didn't pay much attention to it because I wasn't really interested in it in the first place.

Sure, the test was over, but for some, it was just the beginning.

Me at a first grade tournament.

Ellen competing in the Miss Temple pageant.

Cliff Mann competing in Mr. Temple.

Plus, Herriot in an unlimited tournament.

"Harriet, are you sure you're okay?"

"It's okay, I've got it all figured out."

Ellen's entry into Miss Temple was a surprise, but it was Herriot's entry into the Unlimited tournament that shocked everyone. As if being a magic major wasn't bad enough, she's not even a freshman and she's in the Unlimited division.

The qualifiers even start tomorrow.

Qualifiers will be held on Saturday and Sunday, with the main competition taking place Monday through Wednesday.

And starting Thursday, the unlimited tournament will begin.

The winner of the grade-level tournament will receive a spot in the unlimited tournament, but it's up to the individual to decide whether or not to participate.

I haven't decided whether to leave or not. But I think it wouldn't hurt to try. Even if you're not going to win an unlimited tournament anyway, it can't hurt to try.

It's kind of ridiculous that you think you're already a winner before you've even won.

First grade tournament qualifiers starting Saturday.

And Miss & Mr. Temple.

After that, you'll have a vacation, and you'll have to pick up the pieces from there.

Just as Kono Lindt was excited, so was Riana.

He grabbed Ellen and Cliffman by the hand and began to drag them away.

"Let's go!"

"Yes."

"That....... that must go....... Ah, ah, ah, alright, alright! I'll go! I'll go!"

Cliffman started to say something, but when Riana gave him a killing glare, his face fell and he just nodded.

Riana: His tension is high in a different way than Herriot's, but I can see that he's totally excited right now.

I wonder if there's anything he's working that hard on.

By the way.......

The real Miss Temple.

Who the hell am I supposed to vote for?

It's a trade-off between the benefits and the reality, and it's a tough call to make.

No Clifford, no Ellen, so the rehearsal hall will be deserted tonight. I'm guessing they'll be at the Duke's mansion all weekend, only coming back for the preliminaries, and the dorms have already been cleared.

Herriot went to the Hufflepuff house, and for the first time in a long time, there weren't many people in the dormitory.

Anyway, today marks the end of the second semester of my freshman year. A festival is a festival is a festival.

It's winter and there's no one around the Royal Class dorms, but there's something festive about it. Or maybe it's just me, but even though it was cold, I felt strangely excited.

The Student Government Association said that the original main event, the Royal and Orbis Class Competition, has been eliminated and replaced with numerous performances, recitals, and friendly athletic events.

Temple's clubs and even graduate students cooperated, which is a bummer for those who were hoping for a showdown, but what can you do?

I didn't let my guard down.

There were no people in the rehearsal hall, so I had a special lesson with Tana on the viola. Of course, I wasn't alone, Ludwig and Scarlett were there.

Delphine and Erich did not come. Both for their own reasons.

Erich the asshole, he seems to be trying pretty hard these days though, but it's obvious it's not working out. He's got talent, but he's been playing too much.

At least he's talented with a sword.

I have an aptitude for swordsmanship, but no talent. But I am much better than Erich, who has a talent for swordsmanship.

In the end, I realize how much Ellen's presence has helped me.

I was in a situation where I might as well have been gifted with a sword.

With an overachieving genius teaching me, it was inevitable that my progress would be much faster than a kid with a talent for swordsmanship.

In other words, Ellen is my doping potion.

A year is a long time, but it's too short a time for an unknown to dominate the talent pool.

So naturally, I'm forced to reevaluate what I've been doing.

"Well, that's not how you do it.

The words reminded me of Ellen, who started teaching me swordplay.

My efforts, which started with Adriana, really took off when Ellen got involved.

I wouldn't be able to do anything if I were alone.

Maybe he was still living as a lesser man than someone like Erich.

-Carded!

"Okay, but there's a problem with sophistication at full power."

-Keying!

"Don't get excited, Reinhardt. Your most important....... is that it's a shame."

"It's a shame to call it a flaw, isn't it?

I can see it in your face.......

Stop favoring me.......

"Your enchantment is still very unstable. Of course, the fact that you're able to do it at all is admirable. Don't take that as a reprimand."

Saviolin Tana took care of me, and of course Scarlett and Ludwig.

At first, Saviolin Tana was a bit reluctant about Ludwig's excessive fighting. To be fair, she didn't dislike it, but she seemed to be overwhelmed by it.

I'm playing favorites, and Scarlett seems to have a personal favorite.

But.

-Ka-ching!

"Done, I'll do it again!"

-Billion!

"Are you okay?"

"That's okay, we'll do it again!"

-Bang!

"Now that......."

"No, just one more time!"

I could see the difference in Ludwig's mood as he bounced back from the rough handling.

'What is this? Is he a troll?

'I thought talent was fitness.......'

'That's weird.......'

'I wonder what this is.......'

'I'm scared.......'

Ludwig did not lose his initial momentum and asked Tana to make a move.

Ludwig is an overly honest character.

It's not about the honesty of a person, it's about the honesty of a belief.

I may fall short. But I believe I can be better.

I may be weak. But I believe I can be strong.

I may be shaken. But I will grow more because of it.

It's a character with an old-school boy-cartoon sensibility.

It's a cliché, but it's true.

So, when you meet someone like that in real life, it's kind of intimidating.

Unbreakable human.

A human being who tries again, even after losing dozens of times and falling apart.

"Let's do it again!"

I thought I had gotten horrible.

But instead of gritting his teeth, Ludwig, grateful for the opportunity to fall, twist his wrist, and get beaten up, smiles as he asks Saviolin Tana for a move.

I realized, once and for all, that the real assholes are the ones who do this.

It's been said that the striver never beats the enjoyer.

"Scarlett, while he's doing that, let's do our own thing."

"Ah, yes. Reinhardt."

I was a trying guy.

"Hmph!"

-Ka-ching!

Ludwig was a man who enjoyed himself.

Protagonist.

By the side of a man who saves the world with an unbreakable mind.

-Kagak!

I swung my sword diligently.

\* \* \*

"Reinhardt."

"Uh."

After the special class, Ludwig called me over.

"I thought you were going to the freshman tournament?"

"Right."

"Me and Scarlett are going out, too. You know?"

"Oh, yeah."

This wasn't surprising to me because I thought it was a given. What was surprising was that Scarlett, who would normally have been Miss Temple, was competing in the tournament.

Ludwig said, and pointed toward the smoke screen.

"I'm going to practice some more. I doubt Lord Tana will grant me a favor."

He laughs hysterically.

"If I lose to you so badly, that's rude too, right?"

Ludwig seems to be betting that he can't beat me.

But he'll do his best, because that's what he does.

Make an effort.

Be a good person.

Let's be honest.

It's a weird thing, like a bunch of common phrases that got together and became a person.

"Bye then! Good luck with your qualifying tomorrow, I'll be there!"

"Sure."

Ludwig is much stronger than the original. That's the price you pay for staying out of trouble.

But I have a strange advantage when it comes to being a nuisance.

So I'm definitely stronger than Ludwig now, having been caught up in so many weird things.

However, I wonder if I will be stronger than Ludwig later on.

His unrealistic mind knows no bounds. He must have some sort of warrior bloodline.

Saviolin Tana seems to sense that Ludwig is something of an oddity. Tana seems a bit overwhelmed, but in the end, they have a good synergy.

Having met her in advance, Ludwig will grow stronger than ever before, and at a tremendous rate.

Tana is doing this special lesson to teach me, but it will actually make Ludwig stronger at a tremendous rate.

He'll probably pester Tana for the rest of the vacation. I'm not sure about Tana, but I don't think she's going to shoo Ludwig away when he asks for help.

\* \* \*

"Reinhardt."

"Uh, why."

Scarlett called from the hallway of her Class B dorm.

"Would you like to eat?"

"Meals?"

I hadn't eaten dinner because I was in a special class, but it was still a bit surprising to hear Scarlett say this.

"The Empress asked me to join her for dinner if I had time."

Oh, I see.

For some reason, I felt like I was going to a tournament and not get any extra practice.

Since Charlotte's return to the dorm, they've been cautious of each other, greeting each other when they see each other but not talking.

Episode 284.

Me, Scarlett, and Charlotte went out to the main street.

No news is good news, and this is the perfect time to say it. If Charlotte doesn't find me, she's safe.

So, until now, when we haven't heard from her, Charlotte's face has been all smiles.

Since it was winter, the sun set early and the night was already dark.

But in addition to the bright lights everywhere, the temple was already celebrating, and the main street was already deserted.

"Isn't the festival from Monday?"

Charlotte laughed at my comment.

"Access restrictions are lifted on Monday, but business and traffic restrictions are lifted on Friday. People with temple passes will be able to enjoy the festivities a little earlier."

With that said, the festivities have already begun.

During the festival, the once impregnable temple opens its doors to civilians.

Of course, there are plenty of guards, but for the people of the zodiac, the week of the festival is the only time they get to see what their fantasy temple looks like beyond the massive walls.

But we haven't seen a wave of such civilians yet.

The pre-festivities period.

The streets of Temple were a little more lively than usual, with bright lights, street vendors, and delicious smells everywhere.

There were people buying food on the street, and there were students practicing, playing or singing on the street.

"I'm sure the regular classes have been busy preparing for this and that event, but the Royal Class, who should be the busiest, is taking a break from the festivities?"

Charlotte smirked.

"Then thank me."

"Oh, yeah. I should have seen that coming."

The normal classes are busy with their festivities, and the Royal Class, who should be the busiest, has nothing to do, so they're wandering the streets on the eve of the festival.

"Let's eat that."

As I realized last time, Charlotte is very picky about what she eats. At Charlotte's suggestion, the three of us ate chicken skewers that were being grilled on the street, smelling absolutely delicious.

When he sees something like this, I wonder if he just likes street food, regardless of whether it's covered or not.

"Ouch, hot!"

"Who's eating it, slow down."

"I didn't realize it would be this hot."

Charlotte huffed and puffed at the hot chicken skewers, taking careful, tiny bites.

It was crunching, but it was crunching so hard that it felt like a small mouse was gnawing on it.

What is.

It's ridiculously cute.

Scarlett slowly ate her chicken skewer. I took a bite and just held it.

"......Somehow I'm the hardest eater."

Charlotte looks back and forth between me and Scarlett and says.

I am nominally from a beggar's background.

Scarlett is actually a beggar.

"Too sweet."

"How sweet do you want it?"

Charlotte cocked her head curiously, and when I held it out for her to try, she looked puzzled.

"Uh....... Huh? Why?"

"No, try it."

"Huh? Huh?"

"What's the matter, is it dirty?"

"Oh, no, that's, that's. Not that, but......?"

"If you don't like it, don't do it."

"Oh, no, it's not dirty!"

When I tried to take it back, Charlotte grabbed my arm and yelped and bit the chicken in my hand.

It feels forced.

Scarlett's eyes widened at the sight.

No, really.

What's the big deal about this? Charlotte blushed, and then shook her head.

"It's not even that sweet."

"It's a matter of taste."

"You're so picky in the wrong places, aren't you?"

Charlotte clicked her tongue at me, as if I were some kind of weirdo. Charlotte looked at Scarlett, who, like me, hadn't taken a bite this time.

"Why Scarlett?"

"This is too spicy."

She picked up a random one and realized it was spicy. When Charlotte glared at her again, Scarlett smirked and held out the chicken skewer she was holding.

"De, de....... Would you like to try it?"

Charlotte whined again, this time taking a big bite out of the chicken skewer Scarlett was holding.

"......."

Charlotte's face began to grimace.

Well.

I thought Scarlett's reaction was a bit of a dud, but I guess not.

"......."

"I'll get some water."

"Well, I shouldn't have given you that either......."

Charlotte hadn't chewed properly, and her mouth was slightly open.

What is this.

What did I eat?

It looks like this.

\* \* \*

We sat down at a nearby fountain to rest.

Charlotte, who had been rinsing her mouth for a long time after gulping down the water I'd bought for her, sulked angrily.

"What! Why are you selling that for money! Shouldn't there be a warning! Who eats that stuff!"

Charlotte touched her lips and frowned.

"It's not spicy, it hurts. It hurts. My lips hurt."

"Can't you eat spicy food?"

"Do I really need to eat that?"

"There are people who eat them, and I just bought the best-selling ones."

Charlotte's mouth dropped open at Scarlett's words.

"Why would you do that?"

"I don't know."

The main street sells all sorts of fancy food, but it's not as spicy as the Royal Class dorms or the dinner I had at the Palace of Spring.

It's an unlikely life for a chili pepper.

Scarlett was nibbling on a chicken skewer that she said was too spicy to eat.

I don't know if he's a spicy eater, but he doesn't look like he's enjoying it.

"Didn't you say it was spicy?"

"Yes."

At my question, Scarlett took another bite.

"It's a waste to throw it away."

"......."

"......."

Charlotte's eyes met mine.

That's a bit of a mouthful.

Scarlett and Charlotte devoured their share of chicken skewers.

I ditched it, but there's more to it than that.

"Can't you eat neatly, you're making a mess!"

I handed them both tissues in anticipation of this.

I resisted the urge to wipe it myself.

I hate getting that stuff on my clothes. It's wet and dripping.

"What the hell, when did that happen!"

"Well, yeah......."

Both Charlotte and Scarlett were horrified to see the sauce on their skirts, the corners of their mouths, and even in their hair, and they wiped it off.

Eventually, they both started eating in a bizarre position where they craned their necks forward.

An empress and a beggar eat chicken skewers in the same position. Both are covered in sauce.

That's a precious picture.

"Eh, it tastes good, but it's uncomfortable to eat."

After tossing the remaining skewers in the trash, Charlotte brushed off her sauce-stained clothes. Of course, spinning didn't get them clean.

"But this is all experience, right? Come on, let's get something else!"

Charlotte led the way excitedly. Scarlett smiled at her.

"Lately, I don't know why, but you seem to be in a good mood."

Charlotte and Scarlett are close in B class. Of course, Charlotte probably doesn't tell Scarlett much. So even though they're close, there's still quite a bit of distance between them.

Still, I know Charlotte cares about Scarlett.

"I don't know what happened, but I'm glad it did."

Just as importantly, Scarlett seemed to care about Charlotte.

Charlotte certainly seemed to be in a good mood.

Suddenly, I understood why Charlotte had skipped dinner on Friday and called us.

Because when the real festivities start, there will be so many people that it will be hard to get around.

Tournament qualifiers start tomorrow, right now.

Even if I had a bracelet enchanted with cognitive impairment magic, I'd still be busy with my life and Scarlett would be busy with hers.

"Doesn't that look delicious?"

Charlotte wanted to get a head start on the festivities with us today.

Charlotte's platinum hair glistened in the Temple's winter lights as she flew through the streets.

\* \* \*

We didn't settle on one place to eat, but rather wandered around and ate our favorite street food.

Instead of ordering three, one person ordered one and shared.

It was fried noodles and it was a drink.

"It's nice to be able to try everything."

Charlotte was obviously new to the experience, but she seemed to enjoy it.

Scarlett was the one who was most baffled by the fact that they were drinking from the same straw. She didn't mind, but Charlotte's nonchalance seemed to be the most surprising.

We also came across some pretty cool stuff.

"Chu, a taste of home......."

"...... Not a very good memory."

She sees a straw in a coconut for sale, so she buys one and takes a sip. Scarlett looks at the coconut in disbelief.

"Man, was this bad......."

"So....... No, it's a different variety, it doesn't taste the same as I remember!"

"It's a beautification, that."

"......, right?"

I'm sure it didn't taste like this when I was drinking coconut water on a deserted island in the scorching summer heat. And it's winter.

In a place with so much to drink and eat, coconut is nothing more than a fishy, foul-tasting nectar. Charlotte giggled as she remembered the desert island.

"Haha, I thought I was dirty with all this stuff on my clothes now, but it's nothing compared to then."

There was no such thing as a palace when the prince, the princess, the grand duchess, or whatever, were all twisted together.

I lived through it in Class A, but Charlotte lived through it in Class B, commanding the moment.

"When it was raining so hard, you were like, this is it?"

"I did."

"When Ashur summoned the light with his divine magic, I felt like I was saved."

"Yeah, me too."

They talk about a mission they did in B class.

"What's with Ludwig catching dozens of fish on his first day....... He's amazing, if only he could use his head better."

"But I think he has a lot of good things going for him."

"Oh, I didn't mean to imply that there were a lot of downsides."

"Yes, I know what you mean."

Watching them interact, I got a sense of how they usually interact. It was mostly Charlotte talking and Scarlett making comments or retorts. Scarlett seemed to be a good listener. Charlotte looked at me as if she thought I was being left out.

"You were great back then, Reinhard."

"I didn't do much."

"I heard from Bertus later that if it weren't for you, he'd be out half the first day."

Bertus said something like that.

I can't believe they're even having a conversation in the first place. Granted, they don't ignore each other outright, but they do growl at each other, so I guess it's a conversation.

Honestly, I didn't take the initiative, I just got in front of the kids who were thinking of giving up.

So Bertus, who was a little out of it, took the reins.

To be fair, I didn't do much.

Bertus' command, Herriot and Adelia's magic to set up camp, and Ellen's hunt.

Even in the final orc hunt, Ellen and Harriet are pretty much done.

Of course, I can't deny that getting started is half the battle, and that I ended up breaking it.

Charlotte holds up the coconut, which tastes like something she remembers but is so different from what she remembers that she finds it strange, and brings her mouth to the straw and takes a sip.

"This year, it's been a long one."

Charlotte looks up at the night sky.

There was too much street light to see the stars.

This is a monumental year for humanity, with the end of the Demon War and the destruction of the Demon Realm.

But in other ways, it's been a long year.

To me and to Charlotte.

There was a lot going on.

At the end of Temple's second semester, with the year coming to a close and the festivities just around the corner, I find myself wrapping up the year and preparing for what's to come at the end.

Charlotte clutched the coconut tightly.

It doesn't taste as good as you remembered, but it still tastes like what you remembered after all.

"Let's do better next year, us."

"Yes."

"I hope so."

Hopefully it's good.

Whatever it is.

\* \* \*

I asked Charlotte if she was going to run for Miss Temple, and she said she wasn't thinking about it. She said it would be funny if she won or not.

If she wins, it's because she's a princess, and if she loses, it's because she's a princess.

Of course, I don't think Olivia is the kind of person who would care about that.

Anyway, Charlotte didn't seem to be planning to do anything at the festival.

But if Charlotte is in the tournament, I think it's a given that she's going to win.

I don't know how far Charlotte can go with her powers, but she did push Savior Tana to the brink. I'm not sure if she can only use it under certain conditions, such as darkness.

Of course, it's unlikely that Charlotte, who fears and hates her own abilities, would enter a tournament and wield a shadow.

Friday passes and it's Saturday.

The royal class dormitory was empty.

Ellen, Riana, and Kliffman should be at Duke Granz's mansion. Harriet and Adelia may have spent the night there, too, doing whatever it is they do at the Institute of Magic. Bertus is back at the castle.

So now there are only five of us left in the dormitory: me, Heinrich, and the Ganodab brothers.

Breakfast time.

While I was eating, Heinrich, who was eating nearby, looked at me.

"Qualifying starts today, right?"

"Uh, yeah."

A guy who hasn't been comfortable since the Edina Archipelago incident, but has learned not to argue.

There are no major restrictions in the tournament. There are no psychic bans, so there's no problem with Heinrich or Riana playing.

But Riana seems to have more fun dressing up, and Heinrich didn't show up.

He clucks his tongue and kicks it.

"If it weren't for you, I'd be out."

He was sure he was going to lose to me, so he didn't want to participate. It's kind of cavalier to hear him say that. It's subtly tickling.

Heinrich seems to believe in my victory, and the Ganodab trio listening next to me don't seem to have much of an opinion.

Conor Lindt suddenly looks around.

None of the sorority sisters who used to give me eye rolls whenever I said something stupid are here now.

"Hey, I heard there's such a thing."

Kono Lint glanced around, then spoke up. Kaiir's curiosity was piqued by the words.

"What?"

"Crossdressing."

"......?"

"Crossdressing?"

"Yeah, apparently they do that. It's not on the same scale as Miss Temple or Mr. Temple, but there's a competition where men dress up as women and women dress up as men."

Erich frowned at that.

"Aren't you crazy, why would you open that?"

"But they do it every year, so it must be well received."

Pageantry.

It makes me dizzy just thinking about it.

I glared at Conor Lint.

"Shut up, any asshole who watches that shit is a pervert."

Answer.

I tell you, I once dressed up as a woman and confessed to Kono Lint.......

Dizzy.

I feel like throwing up.

Shot.

And anxious.

I think something's going to happen.

I'm nervous about the event popping up!

[Event Occurrence - Pageant].

[Purpose: Win a cross-dressing contest].

[Reward: +5 Magic, increased Anti-Magic].

a.......

I'm so dizzy.......

Fucking asshole.

I don't know what the fuck you're doing, but I don't know what the fuck you're doing to me.

"Are you Mr. Reinhardt, A-11, first year Royal Class?"

"It's ......."

"Your entry for the cross-dressing contest has been accepted."

It's you, I'm killing you.

Episode 285.

Receptionist for the Women's Convention at Temple General Headquarters.

I pressed it deep into my hood so no one would recognize me.

"You know, sir."

"I'm not a teacher, but do you have anything else to add, Mr. Reinhardt?"

Please don't say my name!

I'm secretly famous, someone might recognize my name!

There's a bunch of students around me signing up for all sorts of competitions, and I'm the only one in a completely empty pageant registration room!

Kids look at me like that!

Oh, my God, that....... I think he's leaving.

Oops.

The big one.

I think he's embarrassed and wears a hood.

No, but you're going to show your face at the competition anyway.

You're looking at me like this!

"You know, that cross-dressing thing....... Can you keep my identity a secret......."

"Oh, you mean you want me to compete in a cross-dressing contest but keep my identity a secret?"

Don't speak too loudly!

But the receptionist smiled coyly, as if she understood what I meant.

"For detailed competition instructions, please refer to the pamphlet here. Line....... Ah. Hmm. Great."

Nuna.

Don't look at me like that.

I wonder if there are a lot of guys like me.......

No, but I have my reasons.

When the achievement points didn't work, the bastard finally offered to increase my hp. How could I not eat that?

I finished my reception and hurried out of Temple General Headquarters, wondering if anyone would see me.

"Xfoot......."

I muttered to myself and hurried to see if anyone would see me.

Something like a dog.

Dog, dog, dog.

Dog!

Luckily, I didn't run into any familiar faces.

\* \* \*

If it gets out that you're in a cross-dressing contest, you're done.

Why did you leave that?

There's no excuse to talk about it!

If I get caught posting this on a topic where everyone who watches it is a pervert.

It's just a suicide angle.

You....... You actually liked that, didn't you?

No Ellen, no Harriet, no Olivia, no Bertus, no Charlotte.

Everyone who knows me will be appalled.

But I won't be found out. I've asked that my identity be kept secret, and I'll introduce myself as a cross-dresser.

That's what it says in the pamphlet for participants.

[If a participant requests identity protection, the organizers "must" guarantee confidentiality].

It's a contest that's definitely prepared for a guy with a shady hobby.

I'm going to change my face with a ring....... When I get caught, I'll blame it on my makeup....... I shouldn't have gotten caught in the first place.

No one is going to recognize John Doe as Reinhardt because he's going to be wearing a different face. In fact, there's no reason for royalty to go to a cross-dressing contest.

The moderator suddenly says, "Mr. Reinhardt, first year Royal Class!

If you don't do this bullshit, you'll never get caught.

You just have to watch out for assholes like Kono Lint.

Should I threaten to kill her if she goes to the pageant? No, I'm afraid that would make them wonder if I'm in it.

5 hp for an increase in anti-hp.

It's a huge step towards horsepower dominance, and I can see why the anti-horsepower increase would make sense.

That's a good thing, because I have a very good chance of winning.

Why can't I love it?

Why do you always have to make me go through all this crap to give it to you? Just give it to me for free! Why is there a greater reward in enduring shame than fighting for your life?

"Next. The preliminary match between Mr. Reinhardt, Royal Class First Year A-11, and Mr. Olanken von Istua, Dardia Class First Year C-32, will now begin. Please take your places."

I'm so distraught that I can't even see what's going on right now.

First-year tournament qualifiers to determine the main draw.

It wasn't the only qualifying event going on in the huge qualifying arena.

You can't see what they're armed with or what their face looks like.

Now I'm freaking out.

I feel like I'm going to die of frustration.

"......."

It's just that your opponent is very focused on being royalty.

"Start."

On the referee's signal, I lunged at him. I threw down my training sword.

I feel like I'm crossing the line if I pick up a water sword at this point.

Go for the fist.

I just heard it, and I forgot the other person's name.

I'm sorry. An unnamed friend.

-Bam!

"Kick!"

"Reinhardt wins!"

Anyone who meets me today, consider yourself lucky!

You are very sensitive today!

\* \* \*

-Puck!

-Bam!

-Bam!

-Thump!

There was a monster on the loose at the Group C qualifier.

"What's that....... What's that......?"

"Royal Class......."

Unarmed. Whether they're using a sword, club, or spear, they'll charge at you at a speed that's too fast for your eyes to follow and finish you off in one fell swoop.

Armament basically means distance. If you have the advantage in distance, you have first strike.

This is why a sword has an advantage over a bare hand in an armored fight, not to mention a spear has an advantage over a sword.

However, with the overwhelming penalty of bare-handedness on his shoulders, he's faced with the prospect of losing the fight if he allows a single hit, and he rushes in to take down his opponent before he has a chance to attack.

"No, not even royal class. He's probably a first year like us......."

"It's famous in the royal class."

If you're like most students, you aspire to Royal Class and the now-defunct Orbis Class.

The Orbis class is not the object of much jealousy; they've earned it through hard work.

But the perception of royalty is a little different.

Talent.

Guys who get in based on that alone.

As such, they are often the target of jealousy and envy. It's not as bad as the envy of Orbis' classmates, but it's still there.

But when they saw a monster that could end any fight in five seconds while faking a servant's face for something very offensive, they had to change their minds.

Overwhelming physical prowess that makes all the non-skills every student has ever learned irrelevant.

That's royal class.

What have we learned so far, and what have I been training myself to do?

The existence of a royal class makes you feel unfair, but seeing how good they are makes you feel self-deprecating.

What's a knight and what's a melee specialist, there's no way I'm going to be in the same line as that monster.

And, as much as I hate it, I can't help but agree.

If you're that good, you deserve to be treated that way.

A place that breeds monsters like that, a place that makes you feel like you don't even have a chance against them.

Obviously, they deserve special treatment in the Empire.

"...... Me, I'm abstaining. How do you beat a guy like that?"

If you're not in your bracket and you're in Group C, you're going to end up fighting that monster.

Many students walked out without a fight.

\* \* \*

Preliminary Round Group C.

This is the group I'm in.

Each group competes in a tournament-style qualifier, with the group winner advancing to the main event.

There were thirty-two finalists.

There will be thirty-two group stage matches over the weekend.

I qualified by sticking where I was told to stick, going where I was told to go, and sticking again.

Suddenly.

"......The winner of Group C is Reinhardt, Royal Class A-11, as the last competitor has withdrawn."

I stared at the back of his head as he walked down the aisle, not even thinking about fighting across from him.

I immediately looked around.

All the students who were eliminated from the preliminaries were looking at me like I was some kind of monster.

I check myself, not a drop of sweat, not a scratch.

In the exam room, I check my distance from the students who look at me in awe.

Is this the distance.

I said that the royal class is scattered with bastards who are no different than the regular class.

After all, that's where the talent and skills are that the regular class can't match.

Even the self-loathing Erhi de Lapaeri, who I dismiss as a gadfly, would be able to qualify here and easily knock those guys out.

I see the distance in their eyes.

I'm very, very far from these guys.

It's gone.

I know that stare.

I know what that stare means.

That gaze, that's the way I sometimes look at Ellen.

Suddenly, I wasn't looking at someone with that gaze, I was being looked at by someone else.

The way they looked at me was too far away.

It's the kind of gaze that sees a different kind of being, one that you can't even recognize as the same human being.

I can't be like them anymore. And never will be.

\* \* \*

Won Group C. Breezed through to the main draw.

The main draw is divided into four groups of eight players each, labeled A, B, C, and D.

The group winner fights the other group winner to determine the winner, and the last man standing fights for the championship trophy.

I didn't meet Orvis or Ludwig in qualifying.

The organizers are thinking, too, so they've balanced the groups. They're not going to do something stupid like put the favorites in the same group.

It's a tournament, after all, and it's a festival.

The favorites won't be placed in the same group in the main draw.

So, even in the main event, I won't be meeting Ludwig or any other potential Orbis class participants in the early rounds.

If you're from the Orbis class, you're most likely going to see freshman A-1 Gladen Amorel.

I don't know why he would enter when he was supposed to be in the runner-up position, beating Ludwig and losing to Ellen in the final.

If I were to compete, could I win?

I think I'll be able to beat him if the enchantment moves properly.

In Ludwig's case, I'll win, and in Gladen Amorell's case, he'll have to get serious.

Grade-level tournaments will be held on a Monday and Tuesday schedule. On Monday, we'll have the main bracket, and on Tuesday, we'll have the semifinals, finals, and placings for the group winners.

On Wednesday, there's....... Well, there's a cross-dressing contest.

Friday will be the finale of the festival, with the Mr. and Miss Temple contest and the finals of the unlimited weight tournament.

The Unlimited tournament will also have qualifiers today and tomorrow.

The unlimited tournaments are actually the biggest draw.

After Tuesday, when the grade-level tournament winners are crowned, the main event of the unlimited tournament will begin on Thursday.

I'm going to give it a shot.

By the way, how's Herriot doing.......

He thought today was a qualifier.

I won easily because I was playing against freshmen, and I wouldn't be surprised to see him get knocked out of an unlimited tournament, which is usually played by upperclassmen.

I think he's really hurting if he doesn't make it to the finals.......

That's not what I expected.

"You won?"

Herriot shrugged nonchalantly.

"......How?"

"It doesn't matter how, it's a win-win."

What the heck did they do?

Herriot knocked out the upperclassmen in a near-melee?

Harriet stuck her tongue out at me, saying she wouldn't tell me, and then stormed out of the dormitory. She's going to the Hufflepuff manor.

It's going to be like that in a couple days?

No.

No.

"I'm going to try harder, more.

Herriot had been trying to be strong since long before those words, when he'd lamented not being able to go to the Darklands with us.

Herriot continued to work on becoming a mage in his own right, or more accurately, getting used to fighting.

This would be the payoff.

That, by the way.

Did he stop by my dorm to tell me he won his group?

Why is he so cute?

\* \* \*

Sunday.

"......Sir, I think I may have misheard you."

"You heard right......."

"......."

I've said a lot of mean things to Elise.

But this time, it just didn't seem to make sense to her. I get it. Surely, surely, I get it.

"You need a dress......?"

"I said......."

If this makes sense, it gets weirder.

Pageantry.

You'll need clothes. You'll also need a wig, although you can make your hair longer with Sarkegar's Ring.

Riana might be appalled that I would do such a bizarre thing, but I think she'd end up giggling and torturing me with it.

Of course I wouldn't be able to choose that option!

Beyond a lifetime of teasing, I want to strangle myself when I think about how Ellen and Cliff will see me.

But I'm not supposed to be discerning.

So, I'm whining because she's the only person I've ever confided in.

I want you to pick out a dress.

"It's a cross-dressing contest................"

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

"What the hell....... that......?"

Eleris's lips were quivering.

My kid....... It was already weird, but it got weirder.......

Gaze.

"Well, it's very important and necessary for me, but I can't go into details."

"......You mean something to do with the future?"

"Well, so to speak......."

My growth, to be exact. Eleris was still confused.

"I mean, there's no way in hell that....... What your cross-dressing has to do with preparing for the future....... I don't know, but......."

Even Eleris's eyes were shaking violently. Eleris....... I'm about ten million times more upset than you are.......

"But I'm sure you have a plan."

I have a plan.......

Some asshole wants to give me a stat boost if I win a crossdressing contest....... Such a shitty plan.......

"I....... Come on, degradation."

Eleris watched my expression die and seemed to know that I didn't want to do this either.

Elise pats me on the shoulder, dying of misery.

After all, she's the only one who knows how I feel.

Episode 286.

Even the crazy, rootless event called a cross-dressing competition is called a competition after all. It is a legitimate event, promoted by the Student Government Association and approved by Temple.

Not only is there a prize for the winner, but it's a well-structured competition.

The good news is that there are so few participants that there are no qualifiers.

We don't need cross-dressing dudes doing charm offensive bullshit to get to the finalists.

Straight to the finals. They come out by number, make their pitch, go around the room, and then we vote for a winner.

You can't become a completely different person, but you can put on a different outfit and change your vibe a little bit, and if someone who knows you sees you, they won't be able to tell.

I have a cheat key for this situation, the Ring of Sarkhegar.......

I feel like such a dog for saying this, but.......

There's no way there's anyone prettier than me there.......

So first, we need a dress to wear to the competition.

And you have to decide what kind of bullshit you're going to do to sell yourself....... what kind of bullshit to do when appealing.......

Should we dance or sing?

I really, really want to cry. I can't tell you how many times I've been frustrated and sad about my life here, but I've never been so frustrated that I feel like I'm going to cry.

To me....... What are you really doing to me.......

You must never be seen as Reinhardt, lest anyone guess it's you. You'll also need to tuck in your usual shitty temper.

If you suddenly turn around and do a hard turn, somebody might say, "That's Reinhardt, isn't it?

Most of the people who come to the tournament don't know me, but there are some who have heard of my notoriety, and I think there's a very high probability that Kono Lint will come.

It didn't take long for Eleris to return.

Empty-handed.

"Hmmm....... Well, first of all. that....... I went to the boutique and saw....... Most of the dresses are custom made, so....... They say they have to take your measurements and make them....... Of course, there are some made-to-order ones, but....... It's not quite right for you to wear......."

"......."

My height is about 181.

You can turn into the Ring of Sarkegar, but it's an adventure to adjust your height just in case.

Why did you leave the pageant?

No, but he was short back then.

What did you do?

You might say, "Well, I'd rather be short than tall.

"Let's get her a dress with a long skirt. You'll be able to say you were bending your legs, and you'll be a little shorter."

"Oh, you mean hoop skirts."

I don't know what that means, but I think it's called a hoop skirt.

Shorten your height with Sarkozy's ring. If you cover your legs with a bulky hoop skirt dress, you'll have the excuse that you were bending your knees if you get caught.

Now that I'm shorter, they're less likely to recognize me.

As long as the organizers are good at keeping it secret.

I feel like I'm losing, but I can't help it, because I'm already preparing myself for discovery. Body shape is something that I can control to a certain extent, so I can make my body fit the clothes instead of the clothes fitting my body.

Eleris said she'd better get back to work then, and turned to leave.

"Well, that....... I think the sleeves should be, uh, long."

If you could see my biceps, that would be a little weird, too! Hearing my words, Elise's lips trembled again and she nodded.

"Oh, that....... Yeah....... degradation."

Sickness.

Fucking real.

I seriously hate myself for thinking about how to be a proper crossdresser!

Still....... I have to win.......

You can't help it if you want to win....... I'd really want to kill myself if I came in second.......

As I waited for Elise, who had gone out to buy a dress, I stared blankly at the ceiling, my mouth open.

The appeal is....... What the hell am I supposed to do.......

Someone, please, kill me.

\* \* \*

In the end, all I did on Sunday was prepare for a cross-dressing contest.

Right now I have to focus on the main event of the tournament, which starts tomorrow.......

Why do I feel like I'm treating the pageant more importantly?

As for the dress, Elise had brought a booklet of designs from the boutique and flipped through them. The design was one thing, but it was the sleeves and skirt that mattered. She picked a dress in the style of that wedding dress, called a hoop skirt.

And bringing the dress you bought in a trunk.

I've been beating myself up, but in the end, I can't let it go to waste.

As I said.

There's no point in rushing to the top if you're not prepared.

If we don't win first place, this whole thing is bullshit.

"......."

"......."

I was now, finally, trying on the dress Elise had bought. That was on my list of priorities.

Something you can wear by yourself.

So, I was now wearing the dress that Elise had bought.

I didn't change her face shape, but I did adjust her height to match her hair and dress length.

To make sure that no one would recognize me, I changed my hair color to silver instead of my usual blonde. I don't want my hair color to be so different that it makes me look different.

Elise looked at me with a lukewarm expression.

"......Say something."

If it's a dog, at least say it's a dog!

"Why in the world would you do this......."

Eleris pursed her lips in embarrassment.

There is no Demon Realm, but a Demon Realm lord is currently having his cross-dressing examined by an underling, and if he doesn't get a psychotic break, that's weird.

"That, but....... This, strangely....... you look good."

Damn!

Don't pat yourself on the back!

"That's the important thing, do you recognize me?"

"What? It's just a change in hair color....... I don't think it's made much of a difference......."

It makes sense. After all, it's the original version and I'm not wearing any makeup, so it's unmistakably me.

"Mirror....... Do you want to see it?"

"......."

Unsightly.

I don't want to look dirty.

"Show me......."

Still, you have to see it.

Eleris summoned a reflective barrier from thin air. I saw myself in the mirror formed by the magic.

Reinhard (silver hair, dress), who seemed to carry all the cares and worries of the world, stared at me.

Rumbles.

Dizzy.

I....... Why would I?

Is this my karma after all?

I think it all started when I played the trick of turning into Sarkegar's ring and being confessed by Kono Lint? Didn't I show him that possibility when he didn't even know it was possible in the first place? Now that I think about it, it's all my fault for turning around and looking at my karma?

It's very sad, but it's not that weird, it's just that Reinhardt makes himself look good when setting up his appearance.

But problem.

I can't help but recognize that it's me from a distance, but up close, I'm the one who knows.

You need to do the following

"That....... will still be....... if I start it?"

Elise carefully laid out the makeup she'd bought in front of me.

Elise said she didn't know how to apply makeup. It was a skill she had no reason to know.

So, she said, she learned how to do makeup with properties while walking around looking at dresses in boutiques.

I don't know how much she learned about makeup in that short time, but I wouldn't worry about it. Elyse is Elyse, so I figured she'd be good at it.

The problem is, it's not her face, it's my face.

I shed the uncomfortable dress once and for all, and sank into a chair.

You've tried on the dress, you don't need to wear it anymore.

The only time I've worn it since then has been to a women's pageant.

"Whoa....... Okay, let's do this."

"For example, ......."

I felt like I was on a death row.

\* \* \*

I'd rather be in a situation where I'm going to Miss Temple. I'd just be a different person altogether, and I think I'd be more comfortable with that.

But this is a cross-dressing contest, and Reinhardt signed up for it in the first place.

I have to accomplish the bizarre goal of looking like a completely different person, while maintaining Reinhardt's appearance as much as possible. In reality, the organizers will keep my identity a secret, but they know it, and they'll think it's weird if someone else shows up.

So I changed the color and length of my hair and called it a wig.

And makeup. Thicker makeup could make you look like a completely different person. The funny thing was, Eleris seemed to be very good at it, considering how quickly she'd learned. Her dexterity wasn't mediocre, but she'd seen it all before.

I could only look at Elise with a dying look on my face.

Importantly, Eleris can't enter the temple.

There are two ways to do this

You can learn how to apply makeup from Eleris, or you can visit her on the day of the competition to get your makeup done and return to the Temple.

They're both like dogs.

"......."

Both Elise and I had the same dying look on our faces.

Elise's eyes are wide as if she has no idea what she's doing, but she's applying makeup to me, and I'm not talking to her.

But as she applied more and more makeup, Elise's expression became more and more grotesque.

What's....... with a look on his face like he wants to know.

"......What's wrong with you?"

"That....... That....... what......."

Eleris's lips quiver.

"You look so good in this......."

"......mirror."

I could see the face with the makeup almost done.

"......damn."

I see.

Too much makeup.

There's a little too much makeup on Elise, but basically the original is fine, so I feel like I can do whatever I want with it.

Then Reinhardt's face isn't even my face in the first place, it's technically just a character customization.

That you can change at will.

I can't even remember what the original version of Valerie looks like now. I mean, technically, it's fine.

I've been on Reinhardt's face longer, so this side feels more like my face.

Anyway.

It's weirdly okay, which makes it even more annoying.

Here's the thing.

"......looks like Reinhardt to me."

"Well, yes....... ."

Reinhardt's face is not intentionally made that way, but I have a strong impression that it is because of his life.

So it's like a real-life version of "What if Reinhardt had been born a girl?".

Even if you don't immediately recognize me, I'm sure anyone who knows me will inevitably say something like, "Isn't that Reinhardt's sister?" or "Does Reinhardt have a sister?".

I imagined Kono Lint asking me to introduce him to my sister.

This is the worst.......

Makeup can only take you so far. You've succeeded in making yourself look good, but you can't hide it.

Now we come to our final task.

"I need to do something about these dirty eyes first."

Ever so subtly, we get into detailed molding. The Ring of Sarkhegar, using its power.

Soften the angry eyes a bit, and make the jawline a bit thinner, not overly noticeable, but just a tiny bit.

Let's put the self-pity aside for now.

I win.

Do whatever it takes to win!

It took me three months of fine-tuning in the mirror.

It feels like you're saving a preset, and you're memorizing this look just like you memorized Reinhardt's look.

By the time I was done, I thought my eyeballs were going to fall out.

"......下载."

"......why."

"Now it's him, unless it's a girl....... I have a strange feeling....... I think I'm at that level....... That, I'll stop."

Just when I thought I was dying of praise, Elise spoke up.

Right.

If a girl doesn't have a face like this....... That's even weirder.......

"But....... The more I look at this, the more I think it's Reinhardt's sister or Reinhardt's brother......."

"For example, ......."

Since you can't touch the big picture, whether you're changing the color of your hair or fine-tuning your face, you're bound to end up being a derivative of Reinhardt.

That doesn't mean you can't reverse them all.

It's like hell. Eleris hesitantly opened her mouth, struggling to speak.

"Degraded....... I think I know what the problem is......."

"What is it?"

"Facial expressions."

Elise pointed to my face in the mirror.

"Facial expressions are the problem."

My expression in the mirror.

I can see the look of death on their faces, and I know they're stressed as hell. You feel like your nerves are on the verge of exploding.

Yes.

This is the facial expression default for the Reinhardt mk.I.

My usual dirty look. I don't have dirty eyes in the first place, I just have a look that makes my eyes look dirty.

But I'm even more stressed about this preparation, so my face is ten times dirtier than usual.

So, right now, I'm about ten times more Reinhardtian than usual.

"Look....... You should try smiling......."

"I'm not in the mood to laugh at ......."

What's not to laugh at in the mirror after this shit?

but that didn't work out.

The corners of my mouth quirked upward.

Forcing a smile was harder than I thought it would be.

Oh, shit, practice smiling in the mirror. What kind of announcer are you?

"Joe, a little more crispness......."

"Working on it......."

You need to put a smile on your face when you're feeling like crap.

It was to die for.

Eleris is right that facial expressions are a problem.

"Apparently....... seems to be working."

All I had to do was change my facial expression, and I looked like a completely different person.

I don't even recognize it.

It's just that I've changed my usual frown to a smiley face.

Eventually, another hour passed, and another, and another, until it was the middle of the night and I was practicing smiling in Eleris' semi-subterranean room.

Finally.

"This is....... It's perfect, it's like a different person altogether."

"Yeah......?"

In the mirror, I saw myself smiling disgustingly, even though my mind had been pulverized into dust and shattered.

I see.

It never looked like Reinhardt.

That's it, you're all set for the pageant.

This is what it's like to have sour water coming out of your stomach. No, it's bitter water coming out of your stomach.

That night, I almost cried in my sleep.

No.......

It was really, kinda, kinda neat.

Episode 287.

The outskirts of Saint-Thion, a provincial city in the Duchy of Saint-Thuan.

Adriana was settling back into monastic life. Calm, serene, and uneventful. Adriana's daily routine was tranquil, a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of the temple.

"Sister, the Mother Superior is calling for you."

"Oh, yeah. I see."

Adriana left the prayer room at the call of another nun and walked slowly down the deserted hallway.

Where there's no reason to rush.

Where everything is quiet and secluded.

It's not a pleasant place to be, but Adriana has re-acclimatized to the landscape and is content.

There were faces that came to mind from time to time, but he pushed them out of his mind.

So, you should probably forget about it.

-Smart

"This is Adriana. You said you wanted to talk to me, so here's......."

-Come in.

The abbess, Melia, has been caring for her since she was very young and is practically her biological mother.

Of course, when Adriana was very young, someone else was the abbess, but when the previous abbess passed away, Melia took over.

She was mourning Adriana's return from the Temple; she had sent her there in hopes that she could use her talents to help more people.

But in the end, Adriana chose to return, and while the abbot was saddened by this, he did not reprimand her.

Abbess Melia of Artouan sat in her unadorned, book-filled study, looking at herself with a gentle smile.

"Have a seat."

"Yes."

Adriana sat down in a wooden chair, and she sat across from me.

There was nothing fancy about the place, just austerity.

The only thing of value here is a book. The Artouan Monastery is difficult for thieves to get into, but if they do, they'd rather leave their belongings behind.

The owner of a frugal house of such believers.

Abbess Melia looks at Adriana with a gentle smile.

"What is monastic life like, Adriana?"

"Very well, sir."

"Is it hard to get used to?"

"Yes, everyone has been as nice as ever......."

Adriana's socialization was not a problem, as everyone had taken great care of her since her return from the temple. As is the case now, the abbess would call Adriana in periodically to talk to her to make sure she was adjusting well.

"Do you regret leaving Temple? If you've changed your mind now, I can talk to you about it."

"No problem, sir."

Though not coercive, Melia would occasionally ask if she wanted to return to the Temple. Adriana's answer, of course, was predetermined.

She didn't want any more chaos. It was the best thing for her to spend the rest of her life in this calm, peaceful place, Adriana thought.

"Is that right....... You're still firm on this one."

"Yes."

Adriana had no desire to return to the Temple.

She'd be lying if she said she hadn't, but for now, she was content. Melia pushed herself up from the table.

"Why don't we go for a long walk?"

"Yes, sir."

It was a good thing for Adriana to talk to the chief, so she didn't hesitate to follow.

Melia went outside the monastery, not inside.

Outside the provincial capital city of the Duchy of Saint-Théon.

With the exception of the Artouan Monastery, the area around the monastery was deserted.

It was winter, and the dry grass was blowing in the wind.

"It's windy."

"Oh, thank you. Mr. Director."

Melia placed her hand on Adriana's shoulder, and a faint white glow enveloped her body, sending warmth through her.

Together they walked through the frosty winters, not in cloaks but in the warmth of divine power.

"Adriana."

"Yes, sir."

"It's been a year since the devil fell."

"......, that's right."

It's a story after the end of some grand narrative, after something humanity hadn't asked for had been accomplished.

The Demon Realm, which had terrorized humanity for so long, was destroyed, and the Demon King was defeated by a warrior.

Humanity has achieved the victory it has long sought. Adriana wasn't sure why the abbess was suddenly talking about such things. But Melia had always told her stories that helped her, starting with this one, so Adriana walked alongside her in silence.

"The devil has fallen, and all the demons who serve him are gone, so the wishes of mankind have been fulfilled, and the wishes of our faithful have been fulfilled, right?"

"Yes."

Demons in the service of demigods.

If the enemy of mankind was demons, then the enemy of the believers in the Five Great Gods was the forces of demonism.

Now that the demons have fallen, so will the followers of demons among men. Adriana had no objection to the idea that this was also a victory for the Great Lord.

"But I think it's both a victory and a crisis."

"What's a crisis......?"

Adriana shook her head.

Melia stares at the winter landscape with deep eyes.

"The empire is beginning to fear the power of the Lord's Church."

"ah......."

"In the Jinni Crusaders, gathered for sacred duty, to fulfill the will of their masters, they see the beginnings of a rebellion. What an act of unfaithfulness."

Adriana had never heard Melia talk like this before.

"The Empire needed the power of the Five Lords to win the Demon War, and now that the hunt is over, they want to persecute us like boiled hounds."

"Persecution......?"

"Yes. The Empire is increasingly trying to step into untouchable territory. They've already been in."

Melia turned her head to look at Adriana. Those eyes were not the eyes of her mother, the always gentle and kind Melia that Adriana remembered.

The anger and hatred seemed to breathe in it.

"You've already shown your imperial ambitions by replacing the Crusader Knights with your own, Adriana."

"......!"

Adriana's breath caught in her throat. Adriana's lip trembles, and she speaks cautiously.

"That, that's....... The former leader of the Crusader Knights of....... for what he did to......."

"Adriana, that would be imperial propaganda."

Rumors are fed, and the truth is distorted.

"The last Grand Master of the Crusade was a man who accomplished the feat of demonic subjugation. The Empire, fearing that the Crusaders might rise up, was a force to be reckoned with."

Adriana's eyes widened when she heard that.

The leader of the Crusader Knights was caught trying to torture his foster daughter, and was dismissed for his crimes.

In an effort to keep the current Crusaders and their leader in check, the Empire has replaced them with rumors and fabricated evidence.

The latter was a lie, but the Empire actually had such intentions.

People eat rumors that are good to eat, not rumors that are reliable.

The latter was a delicious rumor for the faithful, that the imperial persecution of the Five Great Houses had begun.

But Adriana knows the truth.

He and Reinhardt discovered the truth. It was another first-year classmate who actually found out, but he was very close to the truth.

The abbot doesn't realize it's something he's directly involved in, so he believes the replacement of the Crusader Knights is an Imperial conspiracy.

"If nothing else, the next Crusader Commander is pro-Empire, so that shouldn't be a problem."

It's too far from the ecliptic.

The removal and replacement of the Crusader Chief was perceived by many as religious persecution.

Leviathan Lance is a hero of the War on Demons. His actions, while inevitably leading to his removal from the position of Crusader Knight Commander, were ultimately unpopular with the majority of the religious population.

In reality, firing a Crusader Knight is not something the Empire decides to do, nor is it something it can do.

The decisions of the five papal conclaves are believed by religious to be imperial pressure.

"Adriana, it is a religious virtue to stay out of the affairs of politics, but when politics begins to persecute religion, it is a matter of concern."

That's why Melia, the Artouan abbess, hasn't spoken about politics in her life, but now she does because she believes the Empire is cracking down on religion.

Melia stares at Adriana with deep eyes.

"The Templars are a unifying organization that exists for the fellowship of the saints of the Five Great Houses now that the Demon Realms are gone. The unfaithful will misunderstand it, misrepresent its intentions, decide it is a threat to the Empire, and seek to dismantle it."

The Crusader Knights unite the power of the Five Great Houses.

This was an unprecedented organization.

While the Crusader Knights were created to subdue the Demon Realm, they were not an organization that could be disbanded just because the Demon Realm was gone.

The Knights of the Temple also served to bring together and communicate with members of each of the five major orders.

If the Empire tries to dismantle the Crusaders, there will be consequences.

But even though the Empire hasn't said anything, religious people like Melia believe the crackdown has already begun.

This is how the battle between demons and humans began.

They have no intention of attacking each other, but they imagine that they will, and they have prepared a formidable army.

That's why wars are wars.

What people do when they start to believe in violence that doesn't exist.

"We can't stand still, Adriana."

"Whoa, Director......."

"We must unite the power of the Five Great Houses, and stand against the Empire."

Naturally, we prepare for violence.

But Adriana was both horrified and intrigued by Melia's words.

The Artouan Monastery is not an armed group. Adriana doesn't know how they're supposed to work together, what the hell is going on, or why they're telling her this story.

"Adriana, the Order with No Name needs you."

The Order of the Nameless.

Adriana was a new name to me.

Melia stays still and grabs Adriana's hand, leading her somewhere.

"Adriana, I'm afraid to send you off on your own, but the person you're going to see has promised to protect you as much as she can, and she says you won't be in any danger."

"Nu, who....... Who are you meeting......?"

In the winter wind.

As Adriana crossed the hill, she could see a wagon parked on the side of the road and several people standing beside it.

They were all strangers, but Adriana recognized one face.

That's it.

Adriana thought she understood why the abbess of St. Thion, outside the ecliptic, had said this to her. Melia held Adriana's hand gently.

"You've been swept up in the empire's machinations, you've been wronged, and now it's up to you to restore your honor."

Adriana could see why Melia was relieved to send her to someone.

If you don't know the details, there's no reason to be afraid to entrust yourself to this person.

"Are you Adriana?"

"......."

Adriana couldn't help but go white at the sight of the cold, middle-aged man.

Leader of the Crusader Legion, Reverie Ranze.

He stared at Adriana.

I could tell by the look in his eyes.

Leverier Lance clearly knew that Adriana was involved in his wave.

You know and find.

But Abbess Melia didn't know that.

"He's a good boy, but he's got a hard heart. You're in good hands, sir. Please take care of Adriana."

"Don't worry. I know it's a great wood."

That's why she hands Adriana over to Leviathan so easily. She gives Adriana to Leviathan because she believes him to be innocent.

Melia, who had trusted and followed her like a mother, was now a member of a mysterious secret society. Reverie Ranze placed a hand on Adriana's frozen shoulder.

"Don't be so shaky. Adriana."

Adriana shudders, barely able to open her mouth. Leviathan's cold gaze bore into Adriana's.

"You'd think I'd done something terribly wrong."

Why the hell are you taking yourself there.

What's up with Leviathan?

Adriana couldn't tell anything.

Episode 288.

Monday.

It's the start of the long-awaited Temple Festival, and I have a week of work ahead of me.

For one week starting today, the Temple will be open to all civilians.

Of course, it's mostly parents who come to the temple to see their children. With students coming from all over the continent, some parents come to visit their children for the festival, while others are just zodiac people who come to enjoy the temple festivities.

Of course, in this case, the safety of Temple students is our top priority, so restricted areas are in place, and security is much higher than usual.

But even if you're well-protected, you're still going to get a lot of people.

The opening of the temple to civilians means that it is during these festivals that the temple is most vulnerable.

While this year is uneventful, next year's holiday festivities, just before the gates open, will capitalize on the vulnerable moment and cause a ruckus.

But I'm not even sure if that's going to happen.

If history is any indication, the accident could happen this year.

If the Black Order were to come to the Temple, this would be the easiest time to do it. They haven't said whether they're coordinating internally or not.

If they come, I'll have to deal with them, and I'm pretty sure they won't try to kill me, at least.

Anyway, Monday.

It's a festive time of year, but we're not on vacation yet.

Clifford, Ellen, and Riana all returned to their dorms.

All the students of Royal Class were now assembled in the main hall under the direction of the Student Council.

In front of the entire Royal Class gathered on the first floor, Student Council President Ceres van Owen stood at the top of the stairs.

"Starting today, the Gradias Temple festival will run for a week."

She used honorifics because she was in front of the whole school.

"Normally, the Orbis Class and the Royal Class would participate in the opening ceremony at the Great Stadium, but as you know, this year all of the official events and schedules that are supposed to take place during the festivities have been canceled, including the opening ceremony."

"So, very unusually, the Royal Class has been granted unlimited free time during the festival. Students who wish to participate in tournaments or festivals on a personal basis are free to do so."

"This year, you just have to enjoy the festivities. If you want to do something, do it, if you want to play, play. You've worked hard all year, and you can participate in activities to recognize your accomplishments, or you can just kick back and relax."

"We don't have any official event precautions, but we'll spread general precautions."

"We have a significant number of civilians in the temple right now. They come from all walks of life and all walks of status. We ask you not to get into unnecessary confrontations with civilians, and we ask you not to get into confrontations with them."

"There are always a number of frictions between students and civilians at Temple festivals, some of which are the students' mistakes, some of which are the civilians' mistakes. If an unidentified civilian puts undue pressure on you, you can ask a nearby guard for help and it will be dealt with immediately. There is a lot of security at the moment, so you'll see Temple guards everywhere. Of course, if you put pressure or show of force, it will be dealt with as well."

In short, don't get in trouble and don't get hurt. Ceres van Owen looked down at her students after she finished.

"As President of the Royal Class, I would like to wish you a successful year with these festivities."

It's a celebration of all the hard work that every Temple student has put in during the year. So play, have fun, and then relax as you head into winter break.

Of course.

For me, it felt less like a break after a hard run and more like a final gateway to get through the year.

Tournaments validate how much I've improved from not being able to do anything at the beginning of the semester.

If I win the Grade 1 tournament, I'll see how far I can go in the main event of the Unlimited tournament.

Miss and Mr. Temple.

And a freaking cross-dressing contest.

Let's get over this hump and take a breather.

"Have a great festival. Over."

With that, the festivities began, with some students rushing out of the dormitory as if they had been waiting for this moment, and others returning to their dormitories with sullen expressions on their faces, as if they didn't care about the festivities.

Herriot was moving with a group of people.

They were members of the Society for the Study of Magic.

-You guys play, I'm fine.

-No, it's okay, let's go.

-This is really good.......

-I've still got a lot of work to do, and the main event is just around the corner.

The members of the first-year Magical Research Society gathered around, led by Herriot.

-Junior, are you practicing today or not?

And then there's Redina.

-Ah, yeah....... I was thinking about it, but you can go to the festival.......

-No, this is more fun!

-Well, that's.......

Apparently, the Magical Research Society is backing Herriot in the Unlimited tournament.

He never told me how he did it, but he won his group in an unlimited tournament and advanced to the main event.

I wouldn't have done it myself, but he did.

Herriot's level of skill in combat means that it's very likely that his combat skills are on par with mine, and possibly better, even with very few hits.

I've been hit, bruised, rolled over, and groped.

Herriot felt the desire to be a good fighter, and he was succeeding.

So rather than enjoying the festivities, Heriot seems to be focusing on preparing for an unlimited tournament. Apparently, the members of the Magical Research Society are helping out.

The same majors are coming together to create synergies that are separate from the work I've already ordered.

This is a good thing.

Herriot made eye contact with me before heading toward the Ministry of Magic.

I'm sure he'll come over to watch, but he'll be busy doing his own thing.

After a brief, apologetic glance, Harriet left the dorm.

I mean, it's not like it's a big deal, so why feel bad about it?

Herriot left the dorm.

I was at the back of the line for the Class A dorm, and at the front was Ellen.

You've spent the weekend trying things on and trying to figure out what to do at Miss Temple.

He turns his head and looks at me.

I left Temple on Friday and returned late last night, so it's been a few days since we've seen each other.

Makeup is something I'd have done in The Duchess of Granz, but of course, Ellen is bare-chested now and her outfit is just a school uniform.

"?"

Ellen shakes her head as I glare at her.

By the way.

What should I say?

I don't think it's much different from the usual, but I don't know if it looks any prettier.

-Ellen! Come to my room. My new makeup order just came in this morning.

-Ah, yeah.

Ellen stared at me, then was grabbed by Riana's arm and dragged away.

-Do I have to call you?

-Ah. Uh, yeah.......

-Isn't it time for you to take charge? What's wrong with the kid?

-Me, sorry.......

Ellen on the right, Cliffman on the left.

Riana dragged herself away.

Ellen was glaring at me as she was being dragged away.

Are you debating whether or not to come to the tournament today?

What to say.

Rather than enjoying it, everyone seems busier than usual.......

It's a festival, and I want it to be festive.

It felt like that.

"Reinhardt!"

-Wrong!

"What the hell!"

Suddenly, Olivia wrapped her arms around my back and I jumped in surprise.

"Let's go play with my sister, there's so much we want to eat and do!"

Olivia looks at me with a twinkle in her eye.

"I'm busy with the first grade tournament finals today."

"Oh, right, so can I show you around today?"

"If it comes, it comes, and if it doesn't, it doesn't."

As Olivia was talking, her eyes met Ellen's as she was being pulled away by Riana in the distance.

"Hey, you said Miss Temple was coming out."

"Yes....... That's right."

Olivia unwinds her arms from around me and looks back and forth between me and Ellen.

"Are you going to take a picture of me?"

I had no answer, and Olivia pinched my cheek.

"An empty-headed idiot."

Olivia smirked, then went off somewhere.

\* \* \*

Monday.

There are tons of events, performances, and activities going on throughout the temple, but I was far from the hustle and bustle of the festivities.

Today is the day of the first grade tournament finals. The tournament finals for each grade level will continue in the same stadium, and the seats will be filled with spectators.

I'm in Group A. It's my first match.

There are a total of 32 first-year finalists.

Round of 32, Round of 16, and Round of 8.

There are three matches left to play, with the semifinals and final tomorrow.

To prepare for the first grade tournament, I teamed up with Ludwig and Scarlett.

Needless to say, Scarlett and Ludwig also qualified.

Ludwig looked at the bracket and smiled pleasantly.

"I just happened to be in the wrong group, thank goodness."

I was in Group A, Scarlett was in Group B, and Ludwig was in Group C. We won't see each other until the winner of our group is crowned.

If we're playing each other in a tournament, it's at least a semifinal.

"Is that a coincidence?"

"Did you do this on purpose, then?"

Ludwig.......

My sins are great for making you this way.

"Sure, why not, if you put the favorites in a group, there's nothing to see later."

"Oh, I see......."

There are four main brackets.

Groups A, B, and C have people from the royal class.

And there are some familiar names in the Group D bracket.

Gladen Amorell.

The Orbis class is gone, but it's joined by a guy who moved to the regular class.

There may have been other girls from the Orbis class, but I didn't recognize their names. Nilsonia or Rilka Aaron or Ender Wilton or something.

There may have been some unknowns in the mix, but we've got Gladen Amorelle in Group D for now.

If we win our group, who will we play against Gladen Amorelle?

We don't know yet.

We were on our way to the stadium where the main event of the tournament was being held. There, we'll play three matches today, followed by the semifinals and finals tomorrow.

Ludwig was laughing heartily.

"The kids are coming over later, what if I get nervous?"

There are only two finalists in the B class. So they're coming to watch the tournament as a group, except for a few... to watch Ludwig and Scarlett compete, to be exact.

Apparently, they're all coming except for the Magic Society.

How about mine.

Ellen and Harriet probably won't be able to make it.......

Olivia's the only one who's coming, but she seemed a little upset earlier, and I don't think she's coming.

What about Charlotte? There's a bunch of B kids, so maybe they're not coming to see me.

No, I'm just going to do my job, whether you come or not.

Why am I feeling a little nervous?

Why do I feel like I'm the only one whose parents aren't coming to the sporting event where everyone else's parents are?

I've been a kid for so long that I really don't think I'm any different than a kid, but now?

"Reinhard! Let's go!"

"Uh."

An unnecessarily stiff answer came out.

第 289页

The temple was overflowing to the point where people were getting run over. There were more students than usual, and the crowds were huge.

It was refreshing to see the temple bustling with people, even if it was crowded.

There were a lot of people there, so there was a certain amount of commotion among the chattering voices.

I'm a student who gets into a fight with a passerby, or an outsider who gets grabbed by security and yells at me as I'm being dragged away.

It was as chaotic as it was exciting.

Scarlett, Ludwig, and I pushed through the crowds to reach our destination.

The main stadium of the temple.

An amphitheater used for important games or events.

It's very large, with over 30,000 seats.

It is used whenever there are important athletic events inside the temple, as well as tournaments like this one.

Today is the main round of the grade level tournament here.

Not surprisingly, there was even a replay screen for spectators.

Tomorrow, the semifinals and finals will be held here, as well as the main event of the Unlimited tournament.

This is the kind of place you'd expect to see a bunch of guys in athletic clubs, but of course I hadn't connected with them until now.

The royal class guys who were coming to watch the tournament would come later, but since we were participants, we arrived early.

"People....... There are a lot of them."

The crowd that had gathered at the entrance to the stadium to watch the tournament, Ludwig froze and muttered to himself as he watched them.

"The tournament is one of the main events of the festival."

"Wait, Scarlett, doesn't that mean the kids who come to see us won't have a seat?"

"It's okay, Ludwig. The royal class gets in over capacity for all events."

Scarlett had done her homework, and she knew the details. The details of Royal Class privileges at the Temple are endless.

"Oh, I see, but what's this overcapacity thing? How can people get in if we're at capacity?"

"......Well, you can think of it as a special seat, a seat that doesn't count towards the capacity in the first place, if that makes sense, and that's what Royal Class is granted."

"Oh, yeah?"

I could see a flicker of 'pathetic' in Scarlett's expression.

I know it's a human thing, but.......

What the hell happened to the relationship between the main heroine and the hero.......

Scarlett doesn't dislike Ludwig, but she often finds herself thinking of him in a "not good enough" kind of way.

I guess that's my karma.

Gradias Temple Grade Level Tournament Finals.

We headed for the stakeholder entrance, not the visitor entrance.

\* \* \*

Since the identities of the finalists are all shared, we were able to get straight to the athlete's waiting area inside the stadium by simply submitting our IDs.

The stadium is huge, so the players' dressing room, which is strictly off-limits to spectators, is also huge.

It was fully equipped with amenities inside, including exercise equipment, priests in case of injury, and guards for safety.

There are 36 finalists in each grade. All the grades were there, so the total number was over two hundred. There were even private rooms to accommodate them all.

We were ushered into a waiting room for first-year students.

"When all of the finalists arrive, we'll give you a heads-up and instructions, but until then, please make yourself comfortable in your respective waiting rooms or halls."

The three of us took a seat in the hall, told to let the desk know if we needed anything.

Ludwig seemed to marvel at the bustling athlete's waiting room, which rivaled any royal class dormitory, and that was true of Scarlett as well.

We checked to see if anyone had arrived before us, and everyone was either resting or getting ready in their own way.

However, I was mostly alone.

They're picked and chosen from the many classes in the Temple. It's not every day that three people from one class, like the Royal Class, all make it to the finals.

So everyone felt like they were dealing with each other and were on high alert, regardless of the comfort of the venue itself.

Most likely, you're thinking to yourself, warming up, or doing your own imagery training.

It's like a freshman in high school, but it's like a national team tryout.

The strongest seventeen-year-old in the Temple. Or, to be more hyperbolic, the best of their class within the continent.

It's hard not to be nervous.

"Reinhard, do you want some bread?"

Ludwig, of course, didn't know any better and asked me where I had gotten the bread.

Scarlett's eyes naturally met mine.

"......."

"......."

You and I are kind of on the same page.

But you.......

Originally, it was just her and him.......

No. Done.

"Uh, give me one."

"This is delicious."

"Well, me too."

Scarlett eventually ate it.

-.......

The wary gazes of our neighbors are directed at us.

In a room full of people, most of them alone, all of whom seem to be enemies, three people who seem to know each other well are huddled together, breaking bread.

Three finalists who appear to be from the same place.

If that's the case, there's only one possibility they can think of.

You can't help but notice that we're from the royal class.

Wariness, hostility, and fear.

All those eyes are on us.

"Uh, um......."

Ludwig glanced around to see if anyone had noticed, and Scarlett was still munching on her bread.

"What the fuck, assholes. You never seen me eat bread before? You can eat it too. What do you want?"

Eventually, I got annoyed with the stare and snapped a few words at him.

But this is where the guys who say they're going to sleep on their own floors end up.

It's a place full of people who take pride in their skills, unlike the other clumsy bastards.

"What did you say?"

With my nerves stretched taut, there were enough of them to go around, glaring at the first one who did. I crossed my arms on the couch and laughed as he came toward me.

By the way, is that a high school student?

I think it's going to be two meters tall.

Of course, that didn't stop me.

I don't know about the others, but this one in particular kept giving us a particularly nasty look.

"I've never seen you eat bread before. Who are you to judge?"

"This asshole can't see that you're from Royal Class, and he thinks that because you don't have Orbis Class, you're going to win."

The mood suddenly turned sour, and Ludwig stepped in.

"Ah, ahaha. La, Reinhardt. What's wrong with you all of a sudden. Calm down. That one over there. I'm sorry. My friend is a little sensitive."

"......."

"......."

He looked back and forth between Ludwig and me, and I glared at him.

"Who are you, in the main bracket?"

"Group A Reinhardt."

"That's great. I'm in Group A."

He looked at me, snapped his fingers, and untied it, as if he was going to do it for me.

"What's going well?"

I smirked at the sight of it.

"Too bad for you."

I'm going to get blown to smithereens, so what's the point?

Don't get it?

After a nerve-wracking battle, the nameless man retreated, and I heard a voice behind me.

"......You're still driving a train wreck."

"......, you."

"We've never spoken, but I'm guessing you remember my face?"

Of course it is.

Scarlett and Ludwig tilted their heads in confusion, for this must be the first time they'd seen him, though they hadn't spoken.

"But you don't know my name, Gladen Amorel."

He reached out his hand to me. There was no animosity toward me in his outstretched hand.

"Uh....... It's been a while."

I felt a little bad for him, because he'd lost the privilege of being a special class after all the trouble I'd caused.

\* \* \*

Gladen Amorelle sat across from me on the couch we were sitting on.

"It's gone now, but it was my first year in Orbis."

Scarlett and Ludwig had an ah-ha look on their faces as they realized why we were spherical.

Gladen Amorel didn't seem to have any other feelings for me. After all, blowing the whistle on Rilka Aaron wasn't something he did alone, it was something the entire first year Orbis class agreed to.

I know him to be a very cold person, but the fact that he spoke to me first and shook my hand suggested that something had changed.

I don't know what that changes specifically.

"I thought you'd be in the tournament."

"...... is it?"

"I'm not sure why, but it just felt right."

The gnarly Ludwig woofed his authorization bread.

"So first grade is....... all scattered?"

"Yes, but he's in the temple anyway, so if you try to meet him, you won't be able to."

The first-year Orbis students scattered to their respective regular classes.

However, Gladen Amorel seems to have taken the initiative to create a club through the Student Government Association, creating a group of first-year Orbis students. A club is a classless organization.

After all you've been through together, you don't want to cut ties so easily.

He told me, without me asking, that Rilka Aaron is doing well. She said she's a bit of a late bloomer, and made a sly joke about how she thinks she's a little taller these days, but she's not really tall at all.

"I'm kind of glad it happened. Because honestly, it was hell."

The Orbis class is gone, but the guys seem to be getting along just fine.

That seemed strangely comforting to me.

For all the problems I've caused, and all the changes and incidents I've caused, I feel like there has to be a positive change somewhere.

Gladen Amorel is the winner of Group D.

The four seated here are the strongest contenders.

I'm no stranger to Gladen Amorell, but this was my first time talking to him.

But it was clear that this guy owed me a favor.

"Of course, I don't intend to lose. Reinhardt."

That's it, a competition is a competition.

He knew all about it, and so did we.

\* \* \*

"The Temple's main stadium has powerful protection and binding magic built into it, so there are some special things that can only happen here."

"All of you who participate in the main round of the tournament will have a powerful protective spell applied to you."

"What you are about to do will not be in the form of a practice duel. If you are in danger of being mortally wounded, powerful protective and summoning spells will be triggered, and you will be transported to a place of safety. Of course, you will be dealt a defeat."

"In other words, you can't seriously injure or kill your opponent if you're at full strength, so the Gradias Temple tournament will be a 'very realistic' situation that will bring out the best in participants."

"That's a long way of saying it, but at the end of the day, what I'm saying is simple."

"Think of it as a real battle, and do whatever it takes to win. There's no such thing as foul play."

"Sure, things can happen, like getting gouged or having a limb broken. However, all injuries that can be followed up on will not result in a defeat - remember, a punch in the face does not result in a defeat."

The 36 first-year finalists stood still as they listened to the explanation.

It's a far cry from the countless practice matches I've had with Ellen.

Even if you really want to kill your opponent, the protective enchantments and bindings that hang over the stadium, as well as the numerous safeguards placed on the participants, ensure maximum safety.

This allows them to fight to the best of their ability. It serves as a spectacle and pushes the participants' combat skills to the limit.

It's a fight, after all.

It's to show the fight to its extreme, and to show what monsters the Empire breeds.

Tension was evident on everyone's faces, even the usually laid-back Ludwig, who seemed to realize that the tournament was right around the corner.

"When the call comes, you'll be ready for it."

Tournament Round of 36.

Today, we need to determine the winner of the main bracket.

"Group A, first match. Reinhardt, Royal Class, Grade 1, A-11. Lagares, first year Dalon class, C-2. Be ready."

I was competing in a grade-level tournament, the first of many festive tournaments to come.

\* \* \*

He said that of all the shows, the fireworks and fighting shows were the best.

Temple Main Stadium.

Seating for only 30,000.

I didn't think I'd be so nervous seeing it filled up, but I was.

I mean, even if we had a full house and a tournament going on tonight for grades 1-6, what's the point of having this many people here? There's going to be people standing around, not even in the seats.

Is this fun?

a.

I realized that no matter how advanced this worldview is, it's a place where mass media outlets like TV, smartphones, and the internet don't exist.

In a world where stimulating entertainment is so rare, swordplay by empire-bred talent, even if they're just kids, is a pretty big deal by our standards.

The big screens scattered throughout Temple's main stadium alternated between my face and the face of my opponent.

-oooooo

......The odd exclamation from the audience when my face comes up.

This.

It feels weird.

I tried to see if I recognized any faces in the crowd, but there were too many to make out.

Everyone is looking at me.

I felt weird looking around to see if anyone had come to see me.

No.

Everyone's busy.

But strangely.

In tens of thousands of people, I shouldn't be able to find it.

Oddly enough.......

In the distance, I saw a dark-haired girl with a calm expression.

It was Ellen.

Ellen is looking at me.

Next to him, Riana, and Clifford.

And Herriot.

As if that wasn't bad enough, there was Olivia Ranze.

-Our Reinhardt is the bestYaahhhhhhh! HandsomeYaahhhhhhhh!

And then there were the other guys, the Class B guys.

Charlotte looked at me and smiled. She didn't say anything, but I could tell she was rooting for me.

And, of course, there was Saviolin Tana sitting next to him, for protection, of course, but she was looking at me with her arms crossed.

I couldn't help but smile at the sight.

-Cheer up.

I could also see the shape of Ellen's mouth.

-Woo, woo....... Woo! You win!

Herriot stumbled, but he made hand signals and shouted.

Not only Herriot, but all the members of the Magical Research Society had come to Redina.

-Junior! Cheer up!

I thought everyone was too busy doing their own thing to come.

They're all here.

Ellen and Olivia, who don't get along very well, are sitting next to each other, and because they're right next to each other, they're trying to sit at least a few feet away from each other.

They're all here.

"Whoa......."

The sword in your hand is not a training sword, but a true sword.

I was told to pick a weapon that fit my hand, so I chose a longsword with the same weight distribution as the one I used in Darklands.

My opponent's weapon, like mine, is a longsword.

-And now, the much-anticipated Gradias Temple Festival. Grade Level Tournament First Grade Group A! Game 1! Let's start now!

-Waaaaaah!

With a shout from the moderator. In a thunderous roar.

Yes.

It's the first game, so let's do something fun.

Sorry, buddy.

Shouldn't I show my friends who've traveled all this way from their own lives to see what I've been working on for the past year?

Believe.

I, enchant.

-Kurung!

Blue flames leap from my body in an explosion of power. I hear the roar grow louder and louder, and I watch the man in front of me grow weary.

Swift(迅速), Strike(逸格), Harden(硬化).

Self-Suggestion, Enchantment.

Add it all up.

"I, win."

Plus, the power of words.

I, take a step forward.

You've only taken one step.

-Woof!

"!!!"

The next thing I know, I'm in my opponent's face.

Winning.

I don't want anything else.

\* \* \*

-Waaaaaah!

"I guess I should have come to ......."

Amidst the cheers, Herriot muttered something about being unhappy.

The third match of the freshman year in Group D had just ended. Reinhardt's match was over in less than five seconds.

There was still plenty of time before Reinhardt's next match.

After the first year group stage ends, the second year group stage will begin.

So you don't have to watch the round of 36 matches in every grade, but the way Reinhardt was playing, it looked like it was all going to be over in a flash.

So when Reinhardt played, the crowd was not overwhelmed, but more bewildered.

I was like, "No, what is this guy? It was overwhelming, but a little bit refreshing.

Just for fun, it was more fun to watch him fall and roll and fight desperately.

So they came to see Reinhardt play, but they don't really want to see Reinhardt play.

Ellen and Harriet were busy. But in the end, after debating whether or not to come, they did.

Olivia, who met them halfway, was forced to sit next to them, despite her protests.

The reason was simple.

"If we stay together, Reinhardt will find us right away.

Reinhardt might not find you if you're sitting in the audience by yourself.

But sitting with his friends would make it easier for Reinhardt to find them. In fact, he did find them.

When Reinhardt won the first game by an overwhelming margin. Olivia even had the nerve to scream at the top of her lungs, "Take me, take me, take me, take me, take me!" to the hilarious delight of everyone around her.

Reinhardt's next match will begin when all 36 Group D matches have concluded.

Herriot stares at Ellen.

I thought Ellen might be in the unlimited tournament, but she's in Miss Temple, which is kind of weird.

"Oh....... It's Reinhardt's turn sometime. I didn't come here to see that....... Hey, when's Reinhardt's turn? Look at the bracket."

"You should see for yourself."

"If you tell me to do it, I'll do it!"

"...... Reinhardt hates people who say that. Oh, you don't know that."

"Hey, hey....... Whoa, that's it, let's not talk."

Angelic only in Reinhard's presence. Someone who acts as if she could give Reinhardt everything she has, while being harsh to everyone else who is close to Reinhardt.

An Eredian saint who seems to be becoming increasingly unhinged and perverse.

Olivia Ranze.

Neither Ellen nor Harriet. They're in different competitions, but he's the one you want to win.

Can I win.

Instead, Olivia Ranze acted like she didn't give a shit. No, she deliberately ignored them and pissed them off.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"Shut up."

As Olivia began to tell the truth, Ellen frowned and glared at Olivia.

"What? Why don't you and your sister go out there right now and play an event match? People would love that."

"Let's do it here and now, not over there."

"Really?! Show me, huh?"

"Don't copy Reinhardt because it's offensive."

Plus, Ellen was getting weird whenever she saw him.

Ellen, Olivia Ranze.

If those two burst into the arena, everything that happens after that will be completely uninteresting to people.

"Both of you, please stop......."

Herriot felt dizzy just looking at them.

Episode 290.

As the clock ticked down to the end of the Round of 32 matches in Year 1, it was time for the winners' second round, the Round of 16. There were eight matches to be played in total.

Unsurprisingly, the first match of the round of 16 was Reinhardt's turn.

"Reinhardt, come on!"

Olivia squeaked.

-From now on, the round of 16 will be a best-of-three series.

The moderator further explained that the quarterfinals, the final group match of the day, would be a best-of-five, best-of-three format.

Reinhardt made eye contact with his supporters in the round of 32, but this time he wasn't looking at them.

You'd think they'd give it a chance.

Herriot thinks so.

"......Wait."

Olivia's giggling face hardened.

"That's kind of weird."

Ellen noticed something, too. Both Ellen and Olivia seemed to sense something that the rest of the audience did not.

"Why? What's going on?"

Olivia mumbled, her expression turning serious.

"Reinhardt's condition is....... looks a little unwell."

"I think there's a problem."

Neither Ellen nor Olivia had any intuition that something was wrong with Reinhardt's condition.

Meanwhile, off to the right of their seats, in a cluster of Class B students, Saviolin Tana watched Reinhardt with her arms crossed.

Like Olivia and Ellen, Saviolin Tana knew something was wrong with Reinhardt.

More accurately than the other two, of course.

"Reinhard is not used to enchantments."

"...... Probably, right?"

Charlotte knew that on some level.

"When you're pulling on a force you're not used to, you're going to get stuck."

"Limits?"

Reinhardt has always been successful at harnessing new power in times of crisis. But this time it's a little different.

This is a tournament, not a real game, and you need to keep fighting back-to-back.

Unfamiliar enchantments will cause you to become unwell the more you use them.

"Reinhardt would be vulnerable to a back-to-back."

The problem with using enchantments was that they would become increasingly unhealthy as the number of fights increased.

Not all of the Royal Class students in attendance were there to cheer Reinhardt on.

However, on some level, I was already convinced that Reinhardt would win.

Ludwig and Scarlett are great, but Reinhardt can do magic, too.

But now he realized that the enchantment would inevitably lead to Reinhardt's downfall.

Charlotte looks at Reinhardt, who has a worried, stern look on his face.

"If I don't use a magical enhancement and....... without using magic enhancements?"

"That would be the best way to go, but....... It might work for today, but what about tomorrow......."

Clumsy strength comes at a cost.

-Let's get started on the first match of the Temple Tournament Round of 16!

With the call of the moderator, the first match of the Round of 16 began.

\* \* \*

The round of 16 ended 2-0 in my favor.

There were no dangerous moments.

However, there were a couple of dangerous moments in the first set when I tried to avoid using Enchantment.

While my opponent was a common class, he wasn't someone I could ignore in the end, and I was forced to pull out my Enchantment again in the second set.

It's entirely possible that a student in the regular class could train for a year without being accepted into the Orbis class and outperform the Orbis class.

I tried to solve it with self-implication, but it didn't work out as well as I thought it would.

Of course, I did manage to pull off two wins without using any enchantments.

When I returned to the waiting room, I was greeted by Ludwig and Scarlett.

The waiting room also had its own inside bleachers so I could watch the game. I think Ludwig and Scarlett watched me play from there.

"That was great, Reinhardt."

"Good job."

"......."

Enchantment.

I was realizing that it was a double-edged sword.

No wonder.

It's a power you've only used twice before today. You succeed on your third try, but you pay the price for using a power you're not yet familiar with.

I didn't pass out, but my entire body felt as heavy as a soaked cotton ball.

He had to face the next game without enough time to recover.

This is not a common injury and is not a condition that can be healed by an on-call priest.

This was fine until the round of 16.

However, the upcoming quarterfinals of the Group A main draw will be best-of-five, and tomorrow's semifinals will be best-of-three.

I don't know about you, but I don't feel confident in beating Gladen Amorelle, Ludwig, or Scarlett without an enchantment.

If you have a bad day today and don't get back on track tomorrow, or if you pull out too much in the semifinals tomorrow.

I may not win.

I was under the illusion that the enchantment was all mine.

I was sitting still in the player's waiting area, watching the next match in the round of 16.

-Ka-ching!

A bear, or perhaps a human chariot, was roughing up his opponent.

Enchantments are powers that increase your physical abilities by leaps and bounds.

-Thump!

The -1 set was won by Mr. Richard Howleman of the Irajon class!

The one who stomps on the off-balance opponent wins the first set.

I don't know about you, but I'm sure you'll overwhelm me in strength.

That's my last opponent for the day. He's a bit of a bad match for me right now.

I wonder if I can beat that guy without using enchantments.

My fingers were shaking uncontrollably.

\* \* \*

The rule of thumb is that losers leave the queue, so the queue, which was quite large a while ago, has thinned out.

Year 1 of the Irajon class.

Richard Howleman.

It was clear that I would be facing the same human tank that I'd been dueling against in the quarterfinals of the Group A main event.

"Rilka is in that class."

"Oh....... Really?"

Gladen Amorell explained it to me as if he knew. I can't believe Rilka Aaron is in the same class as that asshole.

I'm not close to him, but I'm subtly worried.

"I hear he's got a reputation for being a brutal bastard, and he says he got weeded out in the personality screening for the Orbis class, though I'm not sure how that really is."

There's a chance that the talk of the Orbis class is just hype, but they actually made it to the main tournament, so we know they're not blowing smoke.

He's as much a character as he is a skill.

"He's just like me."

"Haha....... That's how it works."

Gladen Amorell smirked. This guy has somehow gone from being a douchebag to just plain nice.

Of course, in a matchup between Gladen Amorel and Richard Howleman, the result would be a clear-cut win for Gladen Amorel.

I've seen Ludwig, Scarlett, and this guy play.

This guy is definitely the best of the bunch here, aside from all the others.

Assuming I don't use Enchantment, I'm not going to beat this guy. I've heard that Self-Suggestion has reached Rank A, but I'm not sure if that's enough to give me a clear advantage.

I don't know about using the power of words, but I haven't figured out how to make that work yet.

-click!

The winner, Richard Howleman, bursts through the doors of the bleachers and stares at me.

"Are you ready, royal class dregs?"

"......."

The victory is now in doubt.

Because I knew the enchantment wasn't really my power.

He looked at me with an unmistakable sneer.

"Why aren't you talking, are you getting a little scared?"

I looked up at him, crossed my arms, and smirked.

"I heard you failed the Orbis class character test."

"Yeah. It didn't go in, not that it didn't go in."

"What's toughness, I don't think it's toughness, I think it's the fact that you look like a beggar and you've been eating shit, don't you?"

His face contorted, and I chuckled.

This.

It's better to swear at a problem that can't be solved than it is to swear at a problem that can't be solved.

"That's so fucking ugly. That's what you call a face. You look like you're rotting your eyes out. Get out of here and wash up some of that gravy. You smell like a pig."

I mean, there's nothing like a personal attack.

"You son of a bitch......!"

"Hit it. If you want to get disqualified."

I got right in his face. I chuckled as I watched his eyes roll back in his head. He raised his fist, but couldn't reach it.

If you stretch, you're disqualified.

I laughed at Richard Howleman, whose fist was crying.

"I thought you had a bad temper. I'm guessing you don't have a problem with character, but it's really your face that got you rejected?"

"This dog......."

"La, Reinhard....... Stop it......."

Eventually, Ludwig and Scarlett tore me apart. Gladen Amorell thought this was going to get him in trouble, so he left the bleachers with a very angry Richard Howleman.

We weren't the only ones in the bleachers.

All the other guys were looking at me like I was a mad dog.

Where's that asshole from regular class?

I also have a royal personality.

"......Reinhardt, I really don't understand what you're doing."

Eventually, Ludwig, a man of true character, was told.

"I'm so glad we're in the same class as Reinhardt......."

Scarlett sighed heavily.

\* \* \*

Everything worked as expected.

Scarlett, Ludwig, and Glayden Amorel advanced to the finals of their respective brackets with no upsets. The first-year tournament was down to the final match of the day for each.

The variable is that my enchantments are eating away at my conditioning.

If I win two games in a five-game, three-way group final, but then collapse in a heap of blood in the last three games due to illness, it's still my loss.

-Waaaahhhhh!

The crowd went wild as it was now just a game for the big boys.

Of course, I still don't see what the fun is in this.

As someone who grew up watching warlords in full body armor fly around and shoot laser beams out of their hands, it's just not a fun thing to do.

This world is a cultural barrenness.

To be spectacular, you'd have to have a superhuman vs. superhuman matchup, but that's not what a first grade tournament is about.

An unlimited tournament would be a spectacle in that regard.

Finally, the final duel of the day.

I watch Richard Howleman stand across from me. He stares at me with eyes that seem to consume me.

Why did I keep putting in the ipsilon, even though it was a bit much?

Honestly, I do it just for the hell of it, but I do it for the look on his face.

If your opponent is the kind of person who loses their cool and gets excited easily, there's no reason why you shouldn't make them do the same.

It's best to win without using any enchantments.

If you can make an overwhelming weight difference with enchantments, you won't have to worry about this, but for now, I'm not going to use enchantments.

If so, you should go into battle with a clear understanding of the differences between you and your opponent.

My weapon of choice is the Longsword.

The Longsword is an ambidextrous sword, but not so much so that it can't be wielded with one hand, so you can switch between one-handed and two-handed use.

The saber is approximately one meter long.

However, Richard Howleman's weapon of choice, a two-handed sword commonly referred to as a zweihander, is the emitter.

The sword is about 1.8 meters long, which is about my height.

A weapon that outreaches my weapon in reach and outweighs it.

His sword is too long to balance his weight when thrusting, so his weapon has a ricasso that allows him to hold it above his guard and swing it.

It has an extension handle, so to speak, and Parrying Hooks, a second guard designed to defend against ricochets.

A sword that looks like a regular sword with an extra handle and guard.

Judging by his physique, he should be able to handle that greatsword with one hand to some extent.

He's got the range, he's got the height.

Like in his duel with Rilka Aaron, where he was eventually forced to stick to kicking because of his small stature. Being in the same weight class as Lich is already a deal breaker in itself.

You have to admit it and go with it.

The opponent has the advantage under the minimum conditions.

But when have I ever fought a losing battle.

A monstrous man with a monstrous sword will eventually be weaker than any opponent I've ever faced.

It's only the quarterfinals.

I've gotten stronger, but in the end, I've just recognized that I'm not perfect, and I can't be perfect.

It's just that the penalty is that I have to fight to keep one of my most important powers sealed away.

In the semifinals or finals if you're using a disenchantment.

Now is not the time.

-The quarterfinals of the Gradias Temple Tournament begin now, with Reinhardt of the Royal class facing off against Richard Howleman of the Irazon class!

-Waaaaaah!

-Reinhardt! Come on!

Olivia's cries sounded piteous.

There.

-Reinhardt!

I even added a voice I didn't think I'd ever hear.

Even as the showdown began, I couldn't help but turn my head in surprise.

Ellen made a hand trumpet and shouted.

-Win!

I hadn't expected Ellen to do that, so I was surprised, as well as Harriet and Riana, who were sitting next to her.

It's just a shout out.

But everyone who knows Ellen knows that it's very rare to see her like that, and that's why they're so surprised. Olivia watched in amazement from the sidelines as Ellen screamed at the top of her lungs.

Ellen does something she doesn't do, something you wouldn't expect her to do.

Ellen looks at me and exclaims.

-If you don't win, I'll kick your ass!

Most of all, I was surprised.

It's not self-explanatory.

It's not as if I've gotten better.

By the way.

Oddly enough.......

My hands stopped shaking.

So far, I've been relying on self-implication for everything.

When I believe in myself, I change, and it has shaped me so far. All the power I didn't have came from it.

But for once, it doesn't come from there.

For once, there are no superpowers, no exorcisms, no manifestations, and no enchantments.

Win.

Ellen's cry stopped all trembling.

It shouldn't make anything better, because a word of encouragement shouldn't be able to restore the broken balance of the body caused by the instability of the magic circuitry.

Why.

Why am I feeling like everything is okay?

"Huhhhhhh!"

Why.

A human tank is hurtling toward me.

"......."

I wonder if it's because I don't feel like I'm going to lose at all.

Episode 291.

A greatsword, a zweihander, is brought down upon me.

-Kagak!

I parried his blade with my sword, twisting it out of the way, then switched to a half-sword stance and slashed at his throat.

If you're a sloppy bastard, you've already allowed the nape of the neck here and that's it.

But he's a dick, and he's a dick, and he's a dick, and he's a dick, and he's a dick, and he's a dick, and he's a dick, and he's a dick.

I thrust the spilling sword back up at an angle, catching my blade in Zweihander's parry hook and pushing him away.

From the weight of the weapon itself, it's a fool's errand to push the sword further if you're being outmatched in a power struggle.

-Ka-ching!

I pull my sword out at an angle, closing the distance. Howlman quickly switches positions.

-Ka-ang! Kagak! Kaduk!

A few more rounds of back-and-forth ensued.

He keeps his distance and utilizes a long reach to keep you at bay. If it works, great, if it doesn't, no harm done.

There's no reason why he shouldn't take advantage of his overwhelming advantage. So he's just doing what he does best.

The longer reach always has first dibs, and the shorter reach is at a disadvantage having to dig in.

That's why it's so annoying to play against spear wielders when you're using a sword. I can't say I've ever physically beaten a spear wielder in a qualifier.

In this case, the opponent was not armed with a spear, but in the end the reach difference was significant.

And another one.

-Ka-ching!

Even the weight of his sword is vastly different from mine.

So the weight on the tip of the sword was going to be different.

It's an unwieldy weapon, but in the right hands, it's a blunt instrument. And this guy had the physicality to handle a zweihander.

"Why, you act like you're going to chew them up on paper, but when it comes to dealing with them, it doesn't work out?"

Richard Howleman sneers at me with a wicked grin.

To others, I had to look like I was being pushed, and I was.

"Don't you dare get all gravy-headed over a holy duel. Wipe your sweat off, asshole."

"......hhh."

Even though he was smiling, I could feel his nervousness.

No matter how physical you are, that's a lot of armor.

I'm sure he's been training a lot, but at the end of the day, close combat takes a lot of heart and energy.

This isn't just a workout.

As long as there is a prerequisite of fighting, there will be combat fatigue.

When I say he has the initiative, I mean he's going to keep using that initiative and keep taking the offensive stance.

I ended up just calmly walking away, accepting the no preemption situation due to the reach difference.

Be exhausted.

Show me a crack and I'll bite.

Because we're not all Ludwig, our stamina is not infinite.

He's nervous, I see an opening.

If you're at a disadvantage due to a disparity in armor, you have to take advantage of his penalties.

-Kang! Kaang! kang!

I calmly back away, occasionally circling to the side to deflect his attacks.

Be urgent.

More.

Be a little more impatient.

I step back as if to entice him to attack.

He holds his sword in a long stance, his right hand on the handle and his left gripping the ricasso, and stabs backwards.

It's a two-handed sword with a short grip, but a monstrous length to begin with. Even held like that, it has a much longer reach than my weapon.

Basically, a reverse thrust is a top-to-bottom slash rather than a forward thrust.

The wider the gap between the hands holding the sword, the easier it is to balance the weight and the stronger the blow.

If I'm going to parry that sword, it's going to have to be an upward thrust, and he's actually applying force in a half-sword fashion, and I'm going to have to parry that downward thrust in a half-sword fashion in the same way.

But his sword has a parry hook and mine does not.

Then, even if I win the power struggle, the parry hook on his sword will block my sword, but if I'm pushed, my sword will slip and my hand holding the parry hook will be sliced by his sword.

Differences in armament.

It makes some choices impossible and others possible.

A low, backward thrust with a long grip on the sword is difficult to push off or parry due to the balance of forces. If I clumsily clash with my sword, I will be pushed back.

His reverse stab.

That one, and the others, happen almost simultaneously.

From one to ten.

I learned some things in class, but it was Ellen who really opened my eyes.

Using a variety of weapons, Ellen taught us how to attack and defend with a number of different weapons.

In this situation, taking a stab that's more like a slash, and half-sworded to an opponent with that armor, is suicide.

It's a split second, and judgment comes from the body, not the head.

Embodied memory.

A spinal cord reflex, if you will.

After so much practice and training, I don't draw conclusions from thoughts. I've been hit so many times that I've gotten to the point where my body is pulling memories out of my brain.

Of all my things, this one is a labor of love.

It's safe to say that the memory of this body, which has been broken, rolled, beaten, knocked down, and beaten into submission, is the only thing I've gained from my sweat.

This is not a cheat.

The general knowledge gained from Ellen is that in a situation where there is such an armed disparity, such a forceful slap should be avoided, not pushed away.

Neither he nor I have spent time in the Huturu Temple, so there's no reason to dismiss the other before we've had a chance to get to know each other.

He doesn't think it's going to work either.

He clearly has his own calculations in his head. At the end of the day, it's a battle of numbers as much as it is a battle of bodies.

It will assume that I'm going to dodge the stab, make me dodge it, and then design another derivative attack from that situation.

If I dodged to the side, or if I dodged to the back, I would be designing a derivative attack, such as a stab or a slash with a split-second change of grip.

The moment that sword is drawn, he designs it, and I design it to cut through it.

The bottom line.

Under normal circumstances, the general rule of thumb is to avoid this situation.

But.

I make judgments I shouldn't.

The judgment that he thought I couldn't get out.

With that, scatter all of his designs.

I, raise my sword to strike.

In a situation where I have a weight, reach, and physicality advantage over my opponent, I make the worst possible move.

Under normal circumstances, this would be the worst case scenario.

I'm not typical.

I put all my power into a single blow.

A blow (一擊).

-Bam!

"!"

I am a superhero.

It's definitely in my power to do more than just generalize.

With a sudden burst of power, I knock his sword away from him, and then I plunge my half-sword into his open chest wound at the nape of his neck.

-Flash!

A bleary-eyed Richard Howleman was recalled by a recall artifact.

Critical Hit Success.

Set -1! Mr. Reinhardt takes it!

My victory.

\* \* \*

Best of 5.

3 wins and 0 losses overall.

-Royal Class Reinhardt finishes Group A of the First Grade Tournament undefeated!

-Waaaaaah!

I was staring at Richard Howleman, who had been recalled to the tournament field after a reverse recall.

He doesn't know I'm a psychic.

And since this isn't a boy's cartoon, I didn't bother to explain to him that I'm actually a superhero and that I have all these powers.

So he must have thought I was up to some kind of trick.

Of course, he's been using all of his powers in previous duels. It's just that I hadn't utilized the self-suggestive, single-point focus, skill I had named.

After all, in a fight, a single gap is the difference between defeat and defeat, so I took his attacks as normal, only to burst into a burst of power.

All you have to do is poke around a bit and get in.

He doesn't even realize what he's done. He must have felt possessed. He must have gotten a clear sense of his opponent's capabilities, because he suddenly seemed to have a momentary burst of unusually strong power.

"You....... You're up to something....... It's clearly foul play......."

Richard Howleman muttered through clenched teeth.

I didn't bother to explain it to him.

"Your lack of information about your opponent is also your mistake."

There's no such thing as a superpowered ban anyway, so it's pointless to try it.

You've already won.

So I have no intention of upping the ante, no intention of provocation.

All that was left for me to do was win Group A.

Undefeated.

Minimize the use of disenchantment and succeed in achieving that.

My duel was fresh, but I was undefeated in sets and unbeaten. The crowd cheered loudly.

I was a little nervous at first, but after going through it a few times, I've gotten to the point where I'm not terrified of all the eyes on me, even if I don't enjoy it.

There were tons of people in the audience watching me.

I was there, watching people who would have hoped for my victory.

Semifinals, and if you win there, the finals.

Now, we're down to two.

\* \* \*

I watched all the remaining matches.

Gladen Amorell, like me, went 3-0 with no sets lost.

Ludwig finished with a close 3-2 win.

The Scarlets took two games first, then dropped a set and finished with a 3-1 win.

In the end, everyone made it to the final as expected, albeit with different set scores.

The Royal Class, the Orbis Class, and the Special Class have all gone up.

After the first round of competition, there would be a short break and the crowd would either take a break or stay put.

The quarterfinals brackets were also immediately set.

I locked eyes with Scarlett.

"Ah....... Reinhardt."

"......Well, here we go."

Scarlett and I.

"I said Ludwig, take care of him."

"Me too!"

Gladen Amorell and Ludwig.

The semifinal matchups were determined as follows

They're all pretty tough opponents, so I figured it would be the same no matter who got caught. Enchantment is the key to this matchup.

The timing of your use of that power, which can only be used so many times, and your ability to withstand the aftermath will determine whether or not you win.

I was a little nervous about the fact that tomorrow was the final.

I thought the week-long festival was long, but after all, there are tons of events, and anyone who participates in anything has to be on a tight schedule.

It doesn't end when the finals are over.

Winning or not, I have a cross-dressing contest on Wednesday.

"......."

"Reinhard, what's wrong?"

"No, just."

Ludwig and Scarlett examined my complexion as my expression suddenly turned sour.

"Great job, everyone!"

When we left the stadium to head back to the dorms, Charlotte was there to greet us.

Class B power, including Charlotte.

And most in A class. Ellen and Harriet didn't say much, but I could see the emotion in their faces.

"Maybe I should have just left. I could have laid them all out with a phage."

Riana was scratching at her earlobe, making a mocking noise.

Apparently, everyone except Bertus.

The Ganodab trio plus Heinrich and Klippmann.

No, but I only saw Cliff, were they there? Where were they?

......I think he was sitting on the other side, but I couldn't find him.

There was Olivia Lancerredina, there was Saviolin Tana.

"Hey, junior, you're starting to get the hang of fighting, aren't you?"

"You can say good job, but do you have to say it?"

"Yeah, well, if you can't do that, it's weird!"

Redina giggled and grabbed my arm.

"We're all going to go get something nice to eat, let's go!"

In both Class A and Class B, it seemed like everyone was there to celebrate their success in reaching the finals.

In the original, Class A and Class B were rivals, fighting, biting, and getting along terribly. Class A was the one to bully Class B, but Class B didn't like Class A either.

But now the two classes were getting together, talking to each other, and talking about going out somewhere on this beautiful day.

-Hey, I thought you were going to an unlimited tournament?

-Ah, yeah.

-Well done, but that's weird, because I heard it's been a while since we've had a magic major compete.

-...... should be good.

-Yes, I hear you're pretty awesome.

-Heh, so far?!

Herriot doesn't seem to have much of a relationship with Charlotte, who she probably doesn't even know, but she's leading the way.

"Let's go, Reinhardt."

Ludwig laughed and tugged on my arm.

Everyone was leading the way.

I sense myself becoming part of this landscape.

I see people and their relationships that have been changed by me.

This situation was not intentional, but the result was perfect.

Everything is perfect.

Too much.

Episode 292.

There are twenty-two first years in the Royal Class.

Twenty-one people, all but Bertus.

Add to that Olivia Ranze, Redina, and Saviolin Tana, and you have twenty-three.

Of course, Olivia thought it was a bit of a cop-out to be in the middle of this, so she patted me on the shoulder for a job well done and walked away.

I didn't forget to thank Olivia for coming on the way out.

Despite the fact that I had a terrible relationship with Ellen, she stood by me and cheered me on. The same could not be said for Ellen.

Aside from feeling like my head was going to explode, I was grateful to Olivia.

'Take care of yourself, win, but don't get hurt. That's all you need.'

"Yes.

After Olivia returned, Charlotte and I wandered the streets with a large group of twenty-two people.

There were musicians playing in the streets, people performing, and the streets were alive with activity.

B-10, the musically talented Ranion Sesor borrowed instruments from street musicians and played them so perfectly that passersby stopped and applauded.

When was the last time you were running around doing this and that.

I couldn't even remember.

Of course, there was no time to hang out late into the night. After we gathered, ate, and hung out for a bit, the group split into two groups: those who went back to their dorms for work and those who stayed on the streets.

Charlotte wanted to play some more with some of the kids in Class B and Tana, the viola.

Back home, it's me, Ludwig, Scarlett, who has a final tomorrow. And the musically talented Lanyon Sessor.

And then there were the members of the Magical Research Society and Harriet.

Before I knew it, Ellen was walking beside me.

When he suddenly shouted earlier, I thought my heart was going to fall out of my chest, but now he's back to his old self.

"Body, are you okay?"

"Do I answer honestly, or do I lie and tell them not to worry?"

Ellen glares at me at my bullshit.

It's weird to see Ellen's lips popping out after all these years.

"Honestly, no problem."

In the end, it's not so much a serious injury as it is a nervousness that can make a difference at a crucial moment.

It's a big deal, just like Richard Howleman never beat me because he kept pushing that pawn.

"Don't hurt yourself. Don't overdo it."

"I hope so."

Ellen and Olivia end up saying the same thing.

Herriot was walking some distance away, chatting with members of the Magical Research Society.

The Magic Society seemed to have gotten their act together to support Herriot's unlimited tournament run.

I can see Louis Ankton in particular thinking hard.

What did it accomplish, which was most likely something I didn't know.

Can Herriot win.

I think that's probably going to be difficult.

However, just making it to the main draw of an unlimited tournament is already a huge accomplishment. It's possible that you got lucky with your bracket, but luck is a combination of skill and luck.

As if sensing my gaze, Harriet, who had been talking intently as we walked, glanced at me and shook her head.

"......Why?"

"......No, good luck."

"......Isn't that what you need to hear right now?"

I do.

There's still some time left in the Unlimited tournament, and the immediate finals are tomorrow. Herriot takes a moment to laugh at the absurdity of my comment.

"I'll be good."

Herriot gave me a warm smile.

I've never seen him smile like that before.

"So, you're good."

Not everyone is rooting for me, not everyone wants me to win.

But there are those who want me to win.

I started doing it for the achievement points, but for some reason it's gotten away from me.

I now wanted to win, even if there was no reward.

\* \* \*

As soon as we got back to the dorm, Ellen, Riana, and Kliffman scurried off to get ready for Miss and Mr. Temple.

But Olivia didn't look that busy, so what were they doing that kept them so busy?

Herriot, who would obviously be busier, went not to the dormitories but to the manor house of the Magical Research Society.

The Ganodab trio and Heinrich seem to have stayed behind to enjoy the festivities, and Class B was pretty much empty except for the quarterfinalists.

It's a festival, and I'm pretty sure I've had my fill, but there's still plenty of daylight left.

"That's subtle."

I had just gone into my room and changed into my sweatpants when Ludwig, who was sitting in the lobby of my dorm, spoke to me.

"......You don't think I'm in the wrong class B dorm, do you? You don't think I can tell right from left yet?"

What are you doing here?

Of course, I guess it doesn't matter now that we don't have A and B classes anymore." Ludwig stood up.

"I'm a little anxious."

"Anxiety?"

"Because honestly, no matter how much I think about it, I think Gladen is stronger than me."

Ludwig doesn't look frightened. But there was anxiety lurking in his expression.

"So, do you think you could practice with me? Scarlett said she's taking the day off."

"Hmmm......."

Ludwig is an uncontrollable bastard, but I haven't gotten much more involved with him than that. I didn't want him to affect the main character in a way that other characters might.

But you can't avoid it forever.

"Yeah. I didn't do much either."

All injuries can be healed by the on-call priest, so there was no reason to say no if you weren't using enchantments.

\* \* \*

-Kang! Kaang! ka-gak!

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

"Huh."

Ludwig took a short, deep breath and scratched his head.

"I can't do this."

I didn't use any enchantments, just self-suggestion.

We played about ten times, and I won.

The rank of Self-Suggestion is A. A clearly advanced psychic power.

There are obvious limits to self-suggestion, given the derivation of the higher-level power, Necromancy. But psychic powers are psychic powers, after all, and my significantly enhanced abilities were more than enough to take on Ludwig.

The conclusion was clear.

If Ludwig comes to the final, I'll win. I don't even need to enchant him.

"Fucking....... I'm tired of....... it's my side......."

But I was the one who won, and I was the one who was exhausted.

This guy, whose health was above S rank, kept losing the duel itself, but my health was running out.

Oh, the feeling of winning and losing.

"Let's take a break."

"Whoa....... Yeah."

I'm not weak, but Ludwig's stamina was a monster, so we had to play it safe and practice matches.

The dorms were empty because it was a festival, and the only people who showed up in the first place were Cliff and Ellen.

We had a lot of time, so after hours of crossing swords, I was exhausted and Ludwig was sweating profusely.

I was at the end of my rope and I was at my wits end.

"I'll lose, won't I?"

Ludwig muttered as he hung his dueling sword in its sheath.

It's not about being weak.

I just know in my gut that I don't have a chance against Gladen Amorelle.

He knows he's going to lose, but he's not going to give up. That's the kind of guy Ludwig is.

I look at Ludwig, wiping the sweat from my face with a towel hanging from the chair.

"I suppose."

I'm not going to deny it.

Gladen Amorelle's skills are beyond Ludwig's, and beyond Scarlett's and mine. I can only match him in terms of superpowers and magical enhancements.

But first, they'll have to get through their quarterfinal matchup against Scarlet without a hitch.

Ludwig opened a window in the smokehouse.

A cold winter wind blew in, but it didn't feel so bad because I was covered in sweat.

"Reinhard, I have a question for you."

Ludwig, who is looking out the window, says with his back to me.

It was the first serious look I'd seen from the always cheerful and jovial guy.

"What is it."

"You've been fighting even though you know you're going to lose, haven't you?"

"...... did."

"But, you won them all."

Ludwig gazes into the darkness of the temple during the festivities of winter.

I've been a part of some very strange things. I've fought battles I knew I couldn't win, but I've won them all.

In just one short year, everyone has come to accept that the combat-ready F-class Eevee is the strongest contender for the Year 1 tournament.

An egg that hits a rock with an egg and always breaks the rock.

That was me.

"How do you think that could have happened?"

Ludwig seemed curious about the secret.

I'm not asking for superpowers, enchantments, or tons of coincidences. Nor am I questioning your cheats.

"Trust me."

"You believe?"

"Yeah."

At a loss for words, I end up telling him about my superpower, which Ludwig of course knows.

Self-implied.

"You're going to lose, you're going to lose, but you have to believe."

"You can win?"

"Yeah."

I put my water sword in its cradle, leaned back against it, and crossed my arms.

"I'd rather believe that I'm going to win, and I'm going to win, no matter what, than that I'm going to lose, but I'm going to work hard."

"And if you still lose?"

"What does it matter?"

The result doesn't matter.

"I'm going to lose, but I'm going to do my best" is like a ready-made excuse for defeat: "But I tried, so I'll do better next time." Isn't that just setting up an escape hatch for your defeated self?"

I've been living in that mindset for a while now, since returning from Darkland.

I can't say I don't still feel that way. But I do know what's best.

You have to believe in possibility, even when it doesn't seem possible. Only then, when you see a glimmer of possibility, can you grab it.

I'm going to lose, but I'm going to do my best, which is not self-deprecating, it's just comforting.

I'm not that good, I'm self-aware.

It shouldn't be in the past tense of I worked hard, but in the future tense of I will win.

Not by judging the past, but by shaping the future.

It has shaped who I am today.

"Rather than prepare that excuse, I figured I'd better believe I was going to win anyway, because, well, what else is there?"

Of course, Ludwig is not a psychic. Accepting what I say won't change anything.

"I run away....... Yeah, that's it. I was....... You did. Saying you tried hard wasn't enough....... Yeah."

Ludwig closed the window and turned away.

You'll lose.

You can't win against Gladen Amorelle.

"See you in the finals. Reinhardt."

Ludwig certainly said so.

Episode 293.

"Reinhardt? I hear he's a psychic."

"That's not fair!"

"Did you just yell at me?"

"Oh, no. That. That's....... Sorry."

Richard Howleman shouted, then hung his head.

After not winning a single set in the quarterfinals, Richard was furious. He had already realized he was going to lose when his opponent enchanted him.

But they didn't use it.

Some strange force kept pushing me into unintended gaps, and I lost.

Lack of information about your opponent is also a mistake.

So I looked it up, and it turns out Reinhardt was a psychic in the first place.

That's not fair.

Why did I have to lose to such an absurdity, such a nonsense, that I had trained with honest sweat.

Richard Howleman's eyes widened and he gritted his teeth.

If I didn't have superpowers, I would have won. I could have trampled him. But that excuse didn't work.

Richard Howleman was now in the dormitory of one of the regular classes, the Irajon class.

There were classmates and seniors gathered.

Even a temple is a temple, and this was a festive time, so they were sitting around in their dormitories, drinking.

It's not quite up to par with Royal Class in many ways, but it's a temple after all, so it's not overly cramped.

They were the kind of students who, by all appearances, were not the most sincere practitioners of temple life.

The seeming organizer of the gathering poured a full glass of alcohol into the glass of Richard Howleman, who would have been the winner of the night if he had played his cards right, but who ended up being the loser of the night because of the Reinhardt factor.

-zorrrr

"Anyway, you have to keep your word, right?"

"Oh, that....... Hey, promise?"

"I thought you said you'd leave the pageant if you didn't make it to the quarterfinals?"

Why cross-dressing contests are always strangely successful.

This is because it's used as a punishment game between people who know each other. It's like a guillotine match between people who know each other, and there's always enough participants to make fun of the loser.

Those who are laughed at, those who seek to be laughed at.

That's why participants in cross-dressing competitions usually leave feeling like this.

Apparently, not too long ago, Richard Howleman accepted a bet. He was so confident.

Of course, I didn't realize at the time that things would turn out this way.

Overconfidence is a recipe for anger.

Richard Howleman's complexion became contemplative.

"Oh, no, that's not why I did it!"

"I said if you made it to the quarterfinals, I'd leave the pageant, and you did the opposite? Hey, did anyone here not hear that? Raise your hand if you did."

The extreme laughter suppression began.

Even if Richard Howleman's character is a dick, he doesn't have the balls to mess with you, but he's a dick enough to punch you in the face for smiling at him.

"Oh, I'll do whatever you ask me to do, but please don't do that......."

"Leave the pageant, that's all I want from you, asshole."

The senior gulped down his drink and exhaled. As Richard stood there at a loss for words, one of the first years muttered softly.

"Uh, by the way, aren't we done signing up for that?"

"!"

Richard's complexion improves for a moment.

"Don't you think I know that? Hey, you can apply for that an hour before the competition."

As if there was no way out, he giggled and the other seniors seemed amused.

"You would have been in trouble if you won! I was really trying to get out, you know?"

In the first place.

The seniors already knew that there was no way the regular class would be able to make it to the quarterfinals in a tournament where the specialty classes would be playing.

"Reinhardt, you cheating bastard!

Richard Howleman's hatred for Reinhardt was burning, but little did he know that they would meet again.

\* \* \*

The day after the festival started.

Tuesday.

It was the day of the grade level tournament finals, and naturally, the first grade games were scheduled to start first.

Yesterday was the main event, but today is the real deal. As such, the audience was much larger today than yesterday, and the theater was literally packed.

In an effort to keep me sane, the kids left me alone today. But they'll all be sitting somewhere in the audience. Not only me, but Scarlett and Ludwig had advanced, so the entire first-year royal class would be sitting in the audience, just like yesterday.

It's all about elitism, whether it's Royal or Orbis. The fact that there isn't a single person from a common class in the final four means that elitism is right after all.

I'm not sure about that.

He will most likely meet Gladen Amorel in the final. Ludwig seemed to have made up his mind about something, but it's only in special cases like mine that determination becomes strength.

If you use enchantment against Scarlett, you're going to have to use enchantment against Gladen Amorelle in the upcoming finals.

For someone like me, who is vulnerable to back-to-back battles, that's the worst. If I pass out, I will be disqualified.

You can't overdo it either. Tournaments are all about earning achievement points, which in turn is about getting stronger.

There's nothing more ridiculous than trying to earn achievement points only to suffer irreparable internal injuries.

I'm not at an advantage by any means. I hold a powerful weapon, a double-edged sword, but if I use it wrong, I'll win more than I lose.

First-year tournament semifinals, first game in that situation.

-Royal Class first-year Reinhardt and Royal Class first-year Scarlett in their semifinal match. It's on now!

-Waaaaaah!

With a shout, I found myself standing across from a girl with fiery red hair and red eyes.

He is armed with a longsword in the same style as me. However, his sword is slightly shorter and lighter than mine. However, the difference in reach is not significant.

I haven't practiced with Scarlett that often, but we've had a few practice matches this semester while taking swordsmanship classes together.

Scarlet is fast and agile, and her swordsmanship is based on excellent reflexes. She tends not to engage in forceful fights, instead using her skill to deflect her opponent's sword or to change the path of her blade with a flick of her wrist to exploit her opponent's weaknesses.

With solid fundamentals, he anticipates his opponent's sword path and attacks with a counter.

Basics.

That is absolutely not good enough for me.

I don't think my skills are bad, but I didn't start from the bottom and build up slowly, because Ellen, who can do everything from the basics to the applications, gave me a good overview.

In a way, I'm a student of how to solve problems; I've been taught conclusions rather than theory, that this is the answer in this situation.

Scarlett, on the other hand, understands the theory perfectly and can understand all the problems that are built on it.

It's a matter of absolute time invested in swordsmanship, which is why I shouldn't be standing here in the first place.

I wouldn't be here if it weren't for Ellen, if it weren't for my superpowers, if it weren't for my enchantments.

But in the end, I'm here, and that means I have to deal with Scarlett, who has an overwhelming advantage in actual skill over me.

Scarlett, one of the two main heroines in the original, had been bullied for being ominous, and much of her confidence was now gone.

In the original story, Ludwig.

For now, Charlotte has taken Scarlett under her wing.

Then, a red-haired girl looks at me.

"Reinhardt."

"......?"

Scarlett opened her mouth before attacking.

The audience can't hear our conversation.

"You're my idol."

"......what?"

I couldn't help but be taken aback by this.

But it didn't make sense to me.

Scarlett and I both came from the same street, after all.

"I was afraid of being kicked out of the temple, and you were always so confident, like it didn't matter."

Scarlett was there for my duel with third-year Mayaton.

I had no contact or relationship with Scarlett.

And it was a duel in an A-class dorm. Scarlett, who was being bullied at the time, watched my duel until the very end, even though Erich had noticed.

After that, I continued to have little contact with Scarlett, but I knew he had something of a favor for me.

Even when I was injured, he would visit me and talk to me briefly about this and that.

It was a different feeling than liking me. We'd pass each other in various places, talking about nothing in particular.

I knew in my gut that Scarlett meant something to me in some way.

I mean, it was called Idol.

"I was looking at you and thinking."

"If I'm weak, it's not because of where I come from, it's just because I'm weak."

"I can do that, I can do that, I can do that and not get kicked out, no, not even kicked out. It doesn't matter if I do."

"Not everyone is going to like you, but not everyone is going to hate you either."

"I realized that if you live a life where you're just standing up for yourself, you can get something out of it, and it's okay to be hated by a lot of people, and it's okay to do things that make you hate everybody, because not everybody hates you, and somebody likes you."

"Just as it's impossible to make everyone like me, it's impossible to make everyone hate me. Looking at you, I realized that."

"I've been trying to change since I saw you, and I can't change completely, but I'm trying to change a little bit, because you can do it, and I thought I could do it, and I should be able to do it."

I thought it was Charlotte who changed Scarlett.

But, no.

Scarlett and I had no contact, but I realized that it was okay to be me.

So things were changing. Scarlett, who was Miss Temple, was now competing in the freshman tournament.

At the end of the day, they're both trying to prove themselves in some way.

Scarlett is trying to prove something.

"I'm sorry, this isn't the place for a conversation, but I had to say it."

I realized that the only reason Scarlett was in the tournament was to be my opponent.

"I consider it an honor to be your opponent here."

I had unwittingly become Scarlett's idol.

Scarlett points her sword at me.

Scarlett's eyes narrowed and her expression hardened, a far cry from her friendly demeanor.

"I'm going to do my best."

After a long, inaudible introduction, the roaring crowd fell silent again as Scarlett took a step forward.

Scarlett's drive to do her best was different. It wasn't the same as what she was used to facing in practice.

This is the main stadium.

Where you can attack with the intent to kill your opponent.

In other words, it's a place where you can just throw everything you've got at your opponent.

"Well, it would be polite to you."

Scarlet.

A crimson-haired girl lunges at me.

As it lunged at me, I could feel its red eyes tracing a trajectory through the air.

-Ka-ching!

"Boom!"

Along with the enormous weight in my grip, I felt an extreme sense of alienation.

Self-implication.

Does not trigger.

"Superpowers don't work for me."

Scarlett is not a superhero.

However, it's also not a superpower.

Because this guy's talents are clearly linked to his superpowers.

Scarlet, the crimson sword.

Talents are immune.

The original name is Spellbreaker.

Magic and superpowers don't work on him.

\* \* \*

Scarlett's nickname, Witch, doesn't make sense in the first place.

Scarlet can basically take all kinds of mental and offensive magic with her bare hands.

This also negates any superpowers.

Scarlett's nickname is Witch because of her extreme resistance to magic.

Of course, he's not completely magic-free, as that would neutralize this stadium's crystalline magic. Adjustable anti-magic. Taking it to the extreme would only make him immune.

Antihorsepower definitely exists and can be trained.

However, there are only two people in this world who are resistant to superpowers.

One is Ellen Artorius, who has a two-way resistance, and the other is Scarlett. And in terms of resistances themselves, Scarlett is overpowered.

Therefore, Scarlett's talents do not grow. Where is the room for growth in her immunity levels and ability resistance?

I did that.

However, it has definitely grown.

I distance myself from Scarlett with a stern look.

Self-implication is the ability to influence yourself, not others.

However, the fact that Self-Implication, a power that strengthens myself rather than attacking Scarlett, doesn't trigger means that Scarlett's ability resistance is affecting her surroundings.

No matter how high your armor is, the only thing you can resist is the magic used on you.

You can't stop a mage from casting a spell on bare ground.

Scarlett can influence the psychic powers going on around her. I don't know if it extends to magic, but I can certainly block my own self-suggestion triggers.

Scarlett's talents are more advanced than the original.

The reason is probably I.

We don't know how, but Scarlet has definitely changed.

He wasn't playing me like a normal practice match, he was using his talent to beat me.

When I said I would do my best, I meant this.

If you haven't used this ability in your practice duels with me so far, was it out of sheer respect for me?

-Kaang! kang! ka-gak!

Your powers have been sealed.

"You can't use it without a magical enhancement, or without the aid of a superpower."

-Kang!

"Ahem!"

Soon, the enchantments that could only be used with the aid of self-suggestion were also blocked.

It's not Gladen Amorelle, it's not Ludwig.

Scarlett was my nemesis.

Scarlett's talents are of no use to anyone in this position.

Scarlett's talent only works for me.

Scarlett might lose to Gladen Amorell, and I might beat Gladen Amorell.

Scarlet can be overwhelmingly dominant for me.

-Kang! kang! kagak!

Ducking back and barely managing to deflect Scarlett's barrage of swords is only possible because her body remembers things that should be called wrong answer notes, if not the basics she's been working on.

She must beat Scarlett through sheer skill.

But is that even possible?

My opponent's time and mine are qualitatively different, but quantitatively, Scarlett wins.

Self-suggestion had become a part of me. Now that it was gone in a combat situation, I felt like I was missing an arm and a leg.

I didn't realize it when I was using it like my own body, but now that it was cut off, I was feeling extremely helpless and empty.

Self-implication was the bulk of my power.

Without superpowers, I've never been so bad.

-Ka-ching!

Scarlet thrust my sword upward, twisting the hilt and slashing at my throat with it.

"Aha!"

-pot!

Reverse recall.

-Royal class Scarlett takes 1 set!

I, lost the first set.

Episode 294.

-Waaaaaah!

Some people in the audience were cheering, but others who had been following the tournament since yesterday were confused.

"What the hell, why did Reinhardt lose!"

Olivia Ranze blurted out, not understanding.

This was mostly the case in Royal Class. Even the B class was like that.

The undefeated Reinhardt repeatedly backed away from Scarlett, only to be pushed back and drop the first set.

Without any magical enhancements, she was simply being pushed back. Sure, Scarlett's swordplay was flashy and quick, and she found the right gaps.

Reinhardt was strangely helpless.

Everyone in the room realizes that things are a little weird, but they don't know what exactly is weird.

"I'm not using my superpowers."

Except for Ellen.

"......what?"

"I'm not using my superpowers."

No one else does, but Ellen does.

Having shared a sword with Reinhardt more times than she can count, Ellen knows everything about his sword. When he uses it, when he doesn't, and when he uses it and uses the power of temporary enhancement. Ellen knew every detail of it.

So now Ellen could see that Reinhardt was somehow not using the power of self-suggestion at all.

"Why can't I use it?"

"I don't know."

It was Harriet who spoke up at Ellen's words.

"That....... I thought her powers were immune. Maybe that has something to do with it?"

Ellen doesn't know much about Class B's work, but Harriet does, thanks to the Magical Research Society. Immunity, a very unique but very powerful talent, depending on the circumstances.

At the suggestion that it might be working, Ellen nodded.

"So, you're saying Reinhardt can't use his superpowers......."

"What the hell, Reinhardt has a superpower of organs and it's not fair to let him use them, ahhh!"

Olivia sulked, and we all agreed that superpowers were already cheating enough.

The guy who's ridiculously pro-Reinhardt now knows that Reinhardt is a great man who would defend him no matter what he did, no matter what the reason.

He's too tired to talk about, so it's best to let him rampage on his own.

Bottom line.

An odd talent called immunity.

That's what makes Reinhardt so influential.

Hearing that, Saviolin Tana looked at Reinhardt, who had been recalled to the match for the second set.

Charlotte watched Scarlett and Reinhardt.

Scarlett, Reinhardt.

They both mean different things to you, but they are important to you.

They are the ones who feel sorry for the other when their heart leans one way or the other.

But this time, we're up against a bad opponent.

"What will happen?"

At Charlotte's question, Saviolin Tana shook her head.

"Reinhardt must be hard."

Saviolin Tana doesn't know much about Reinhardt's psychic powers, but if he can't even use his magical enhancements as a result, it's a no-win situation.

"Unless you summon Tiamata.

But that's not something you can easily show.

Saviolin Tana predicted Reinhardt's defeat.

If she had met Scarlett in the final, she could have been runner-up, or if she had fallen in the other group in the quarterfinals, she could have won.

As a result.

Reinhardt had very bad luck.

\* \* \*

I ended up handing over the next set similarly to the first.

-Current set score 2:0! If Scarlett can take one more set, she's guaranteed a spot in the finals!

The moderator's voice rang in my ears like a madman.

The screen alternated between a calm Scarlett and a tense me. She said she would do her best, and she was.

I also did my best in practice matches, maximizing my strength.

Scarlett has been dealing with me without using her powers so far.

Scarlett does her best to honor me, or at least pay homage to me.

The words "cut her some slack" rose to the top of my throat, but they wouldn't leave my mouth. I have my powers, and Scarlett has hers.

They just take advantage of each other.

Scarlett doesn't laugh at me when I'm losing badly, and she doesn't worry about me.

I'm your idol?

Why am I your idol when I am so weak in your presence?

I know I'm not talking about the skill part, of course, but in front of Scarlett's expressionless face, I couldn't find a way to get through to him.

I was using a superpower to leapfrog an opponent who had a significant skill gap in the first place.

With those tools unavailable, there was no way I could overpower Scarlett.

I hadn't expected to be stopped by Scarlett.

I hadn't considered the possibility that Scarlett's talents might block my superpowers, and since that wasn't possible in the original, I figured it couldn't be possible here.

Using Riana as an example, in the original game, if Riana's Charge hits Scarlett, it does no damage to Scarlett.

Right now, Riana won't even be able to trigger a charge in front of Scarlett.

I had to admit it.

I was arrogant.

I wasn't thinking about Scarlett, I was thinking about the final after Scarlett.

But the reality is that I struggled here, dropped two sets, and now have to accept defeat.

There's no way to beat it.

After all, superpowers were most of me. In Scarlett's case, it was a bad match.

Rest assured, Scarlett is the only one in the world with that level of immunity.

When you wonder if the price of arrogance is defeat.

"Did you give up?"

The start of set 3 has already been announced, and Scarlett asks without approaching.

"......."

"Is it because I'm a superhuman who just happened to have superpowers, and without them, I'm an incompetent, shitty person who can't do magic or anything else?"

Scarlett says, "That's not true. Is that a criticism of me?

Are you laughing at me, calling me pathetic, a dog running away with its tail between its legs because there's nothing left to believe in?

It didn't sound like it.

"It's not."

Scarlett says, pointing her sword at me.

"When you're fighting with a third grader, and you know no one's going to help you, and you know you're only going to get worse if you get up, but you keep....... You kept getting up."

Scarlett takes a step toward me.

"I remember the look in your eyes."

What I was thinking then.

It was a long time ago, so I don't remember much about it. But sometimes, what you go through, someone else remembers better.

Scarlett seemed to think so.

It was a powerful memory for me, but it seemed to be even more powerful for Scarlett.

With nothing to play for and everyone wanting me to lose, I got up and kept getting up even as I was getting beaten, blown up, and knocked down.

My side was nowhere to be found.

Still, I managed to get up and give Mayarton a run for his money, eventually awakening his superpowers.

The look in his eyes, of course, is my look, so I don't know.

But Scarlett remembered.

"Show me that look again."

Scarlett slowly walks toward me.

They don't come to hold my hand, they come to point a sword at me.

Emotions are inherently unbalanced.

Scarlett was not important to me, but I was important to her. I hadn't done anything for her, but she had taken something from me, and through her efforts to make sense of it and to change, she had become a different person, with different abilities.

That's why Scarlett says I'm her idol.

Scarlett doesn't want me to give up here.

They don't want to see their idol run off with his tail between his legs because his powers are finally sealed.

Just like then.

You want to see them grit their teeth and get up and do something.

Scarlett doesn't know me. She only idolizes me. In her idolization, Scarlet has a version of me that she wants me to be, and it's not the real me.

A magnified, self-defined, and in a sense deified part of myself.

Scarlett wants something from me.

There's no reason for me to fulfill that wish.

This is coercion.

You can do it.

So show me.

Show me that I'm no match for you.

In Scarlett's calm, serene eyes, I see a certain intensity that he wishes for me.

Someone who I hope will forever remain my hero, someone who I hope will continue to be in front of me by becoming an even greater person.......

Obsession.

Painful childhood experiences twist people. Scarlett is no exception.

The memories of the streets and the bullying at the Temple, where Scarlett had been twisted. She may have gotten out of the quagmire, but she could not help but give herself over to a new twist.

Scarlett found her salvation in me, not in Charlotte.

Therefore, the nation that has found salvation wants me to stick to my way of life.

Like you've always done, even when you know you shouldn't.

This time, you're going to be your own trial, and you're going to hopefully overcome it.

Now that my superpowers have been neutralized, I'm not much different than I was at Mayaton in my first semester.

Scarlett turned me into a first-semester nerd.

As in, get over it.

What if I lose, what if I don't find the answer.

Will Scarlett be disappointed in me?

If you're disappointed, what's next.

Does he despair when he realizes I can no longer be his idol?

There's no reason I should be responsible for all those feelings. Scarlett only idolizes me and tests me.

However, I learned the real reason Scarlett entered the tournament.

I wasn't trying to prove anything.

It was for a completely different reason than the original.

Scarlett entered the tournament to make me prove something, not herself.

He knew he was his own worst enemy, and he wanted to see me surpass myself.

It can't fulfill every wish, and there's no reason it should.

I never said I wanted to be your idol, and there's no reason I should be.

Scarlet is no better.

He's not better, he's different.

He had a life that was bound to be twisted, he just met me and got twisted in a different way.

Scarlett.

I didn't always feel comfortable around him.

I'm a victim of what I think is a weird setup: being bullied for having red hair and red eyes.

It felt uncomfortable and weird, like my mistakes were walking around in real life every time I saw them. So when Charlotte protected Scarlett, I felt a little less guilty.

Somehow that worked out.

I felt a strange sense of guilt and relief that someone else had solved my problem.

Maybe I was hoping someone would fix it for me because I didn't want to ruin the original storyline, and I knew it was a cop-out, but I let it happen anyway.

But the answer was actually on my end, not Charlotte's.

I don't know what happens when Scarlett can no longer idolize me. But the Scarlett who idolizes me gets along with everyone and tries to stand up for herself.

Any problems that arise from idolizing me will only happen to me.

He might force me to do something, he might have unreasonable expectations of me, and he might be unreasonably disappointed.

If yes.

It's a fitting price to pay for my part in creating your misery.

"Yes, Scarlett."

If anything, it cleared my head.

I grip my sword and point it at Scarlett, who takes a step closer.

Self-implication is unresponsive.

"I don't know what you want from me."

But that doesn't mean the experience is gone.

The answer is only there.

"I'll show you more than that."

Enchantment.

Without even the aid of self-implication, it has to be done.

You might get hurt, you might get injured.

If you get knocked out, you don't win.

But, hey, it's okay. My classmate, the one who says I'm his idol, the one who wants to live with what's broken and too late to fix, says something to me.

He lived the misery I described.

You can't fix it, but you can live with it.

It can do that much.

I don't feel it, but I've felt it.

It doesn't seem possible, but I've done it.

Like going from a tetrapod to a unicycle.

It's a short ride.

Believing you can get a little further.

It doesn't generate as much power as faith, but that's what faith is in the first place.

It's rather odd that the power has been generated as you believe.

In the first place, faith is an unanswered echo.

Therefore, I believe, as all humans do, having regressed to a primal state of faith.

I, can.

You've harnessed the power that runs through your body before, so there's no reason why you can't do it again.

I nudge the things that feel right.

Scarlett watches me.

-Woof

The feeling of exhilaration in my body was like nothing I'd ever felt before.

Without the aid of self-suggestion, I am only now truly on the path to superhumanity.

"...... You did it."

"Yeah."

Scarlett was more pleased than I was that I had gotten stronger.

You're broken.

Just like the rest of the world.

Like I'm responsible for every bad thing that happened to you.

If you've overcome all your problems by idolizing me, if you're the way you are because I'm always in front of you.

"Here we go."

Forever, I will remain your idol.

Episode 295.

The moment I used the enchantment, the outcome was decided before the swords ever crossed.

Before Reinhardt's body was engulfed in blue magic flames, Scarlett had already lost her sword the next moment.

-Ka-ching!

Reinhardt's sword bounced off Scarlett's sword as he lunged forward.

Most martial arts techniques are designed to be used against opponents of the same class. Therefore, a fight between a superhuman and a non-superhuman is not a fight because of skill, but because of the weight class itself.

Weapon loss.

In other words, unable to fight.

-The third set is won by Mr. Reinhardt!

Set 3 ended with a shout out from the moderator.

"What the hell is going on here?"

Olivia didn't seem to understand. She didn't realize that Reinhardt could only use his Enchantment with the aid of Self-Suggestion, so it would seem that he had been deliberately avoiding using it until now.

Ellen and Scarlett are the only ones who know about it.

Ellen was the only one in the room who could see exactly how Reinhardt had grown in that brief moment.

Ellen clenched her fists involuntarily.

'Reinhard.......'

Reinhardt took the next step. No one else could know, but Ellen knew only too well how big a step that was.

I'm so glad it did.

Ellen had to fight back the urge to get up and run to Reinhard.

Ellen's excitement and the audience's bewilderment aside, the game goes on anyway.

Wins and losses are 2:1.

Even if Reinhardt succeeds in enhancing his magic without the aid of psychic powers, it's a double-edged sword.

For the next two sets, you'll have to rely on your magic to beat Scarlett, as you won't be able to use your psychic powers.

But if they do, will they be able to compete in the remaining finals?

We survived the crisis, but it was clear that the win was in doubt.

-Okay, let's go ahead and start set 4.......

However, Scarlett and Reinhardt are facing each other. Suddenly, Scarlett raises her hand.

-Yes, what happened to....... ah.

The emcee's panicked voice echoed through the stadium.

-Scarlett, a first-year rookie in the royal class, declared an abstention.

Abstain.

This out-of-the-blue declaration stunned the audience, as well as his opponent Reinhardt.

\* \* \*

Waiting room.

"Reinhardt needs to win, we can't afford to lose any more steam here.

Scarlett abstained with those words.

It seemed to be satisfied already.

Scarlett wanted to see me not give up. My reaction when my most powerful force and tool, my superpowers, were neutralized.

Scarlett wanted me to get through it somehow, because she always showed me something, and she never gave up, so hopefully this time she would too.

I, somehow, reciprocated that unforced compulsion.

That was the purpose of Scarlet in the first place.

The moment I succeeded in enhancing my powers without the aid of psychic powers, and mastered myself, Scarlett stopped testing me.

If the set had continued, the outcome would have been unclear.

A split second.

It was a short-lived magical enhancement, but it was used without the aid of psychic powers.

My fingertips were tingling and a bizarre pain was coursing through my body, as if every muscle in my body had been torn.

Even with the help of self-suggestion, I couldn't use the power for a long time, and I couldn't help but overload my body even more.

Scarlett could have beaten me. But in the end, when she saw what she wanted, she gave up.

Blah, blah, blah.

I didn't want to, but in the end, Scarlett was playing in the tournament to push me to the next level.

I'm going full throttle. You can do things in this stadium that you can't do in practice.

The crowd went wild, but I went back to the waiting room, and Scarlett went back to tell me to win.

It was an uncomfortable, yet somehow responsible, stare, as if expectations were being imposed. If I had been a normal person, if I had been Reinhardt, I would have told him to cut the crap.

But Scarlett felt indebted to him in more ways than one, so she didn't say anything.

Ludwig and Gladen Amorelle left to prepare for their next match.

So, I was the only one in the waiting room with the first graders, and I was the only one in the stands.

No matter who comes up, I can use self-suggestion this time. Scarlett, my most unexpected adversary, dropped out when I showed him what he was expecting.

Ellen was probably the only one in the audience who noticed my change.

It's been three months since I've been nagged so hard by someone to enchant, and it's been three months since I've had to say no.

This time, however, he succeeded in enhancing his power without the aid of psychic powers.

......Can I have your compliments?

What is it?

I sound like a kid who wants a pat on the back for doing something good.

No, actually, Ellen is also my teacher, so it's not that different, is it?

Anyway, a lonely waiting room.

I sat down to watch the semifinals, which would determine my final opponent, while continuing to self-suggest to get back on track.

How long has it been.

-All right, the second game of the first grade tournament quarterfinals is about to begin!

Ludwig and Gladen Amorell were stepping onto the field.

In the original, Ludwig doesn't get a single set from Gladen Amorelle.

Ellen doesn't give up a single set to such a Gladen Amorelle.

But Ludwig is even stronger than he was in the original.

Still, he's not going to win. He's technically next to Ellen and me at this point. If he ever awakens to the power of magic, he'll be above me in a heartbeat. Except for Scarlet, who is a bit of a special case.

Willpower doesn't always equal power.

I, too, felt uncomfortable in the moment of self-suggestion, knowing that the power I wanted was not in my body.

I had gotten used to my superpowers.

It reminded me of how ridiculous it is to derive power from beliefs that don't have an inherent answer.

But Ludwig decided to stop talking about losing.

The screen illuminates Ludwig's face.

Ludwig, always with a slight smile on his face and a nice, personable expression.

His face was set, cold and hard.

I had never seen that look before.

\* \* \*

Gladen Amorell.

He was an A-1 in Grade 1 of the Orbis Class, and his skills were not at all comparable to the Royal Class, making him a strong prospect for the next generation of the Orbis Class.

You can do it.

You can take down the royalty. Just keep doing what you're doing. No, you can do more, harder.

I've heard that phrase so many times that it's stuck in my head.

He does what he's supposed to do, when he's supposed to do it, better than anyone else.

Gladen Amorell.

Those who, in a sense of forced improvement, thought it was something they had to endure, but found it to be hell and fled from it.

Gladden Amorelle has found a way to laugh and relax.

Now that he's realized that there's no reason he should have to live a forced life, Gladen Amorel is more likely to be nice and kind to others than he used to be.

I don't have to live with the feeling of someone following me around.

But that doesn't mean I'm lazy. In fact, I feel like I've gotten better because I've somehow found the time to focus on the things I want to practice.

The satisfaction of voluntary training.

So while Gladen Amorelle's personality has changed, his skills haven't regressed. In fact, it's safe to say he's evolved.

The man who hadn't laughed in a while smiled again.

However, the relative.

Royal Class B-11 Ludwig.

Ludwig's good-natured, easy-going, friendly face was not smiling now. As if he was determined to do something.

It's as if there's a wall behind you, and once you reach it, it's all over.

A smiling Ludwig pointed his sword at Gladen Amorel.

Reversed, they are pointing their swords at each other.

Gladen Amorell says to Ludwig.

"Sounds like you have your heart in the right place."

"......."

After a moment of silence, Ludwig turns to Gladen Amorelle, his face still stony.

"I'm the last horse in the royal class, which means my talent is good enough to get me into the royal class, but I'm the least talented in the room."

"......, what's your talent?"

"Stamina."

Normally, Ludwig would be grinning like an idiot and scratching his head, but now he was stoic, speaking with a straight face.

"But I had a friend in Class A who was infinite, who didn't have a single talent. Even in Class B, he was talking a lot, saying that Class 11 should be his. Of course, I didn't think so."

"But the point is, he really, really had nothing, not even the slightest advantage of physical strength like I had."

"But he might be weak, but he wasn't weak, and that's not a good thing, but he didn't let all the bad things that happened to him get him down. No matter how many times he got knocked down, no matter how many times he got knocked down, he always got back up, even in those moments when it would have been easy to give up, when it would have been right to give up."

Gladen Amorel seemed to know who Ludwig was talking about.

"I'm the opposite."

"Let's work hard. Whatever it takes, and if I work hard enough, I'll be able to keep up with my incredibly talented classmates, even if I'm losing right now. That's what I believed."

"I was living in the mindset of a loser."

Always wait for later.

I've been too objective about who I am. I'm not good enough for him yet. I'm not good enough for him, so let's work hard. I'm still losing, but one day I'll be able to stand side by side.

I can't help it for now.

"But he knew he shouldn't, but he kept going. Bumping and falling and getting hurt, believing he could win even though he couldn't. I've spent this year trying to do things that are impossible and reckless."

"Right now, I'm much weaker than him."

"Obviously, I was originally stronger than him, but while I was rationalizing a lot of other things based on the idea that I was working harder, he was outrunning me and going the distance."

"While I was hiding behind excuses for myself, telling myself that I'm just working hard enough, he was tackling the impossible. Something that shouldn't be possible, but he believed it could be."

"Yeah. I admire Reinhardt."

"To catch up to this distance that has already been caught up."

"I think that's what I need to do from now on."

"I can't, but I believe I should, and I'm going to do it, because Reinhardt said I should believe it."

"I'm not going to hide behind the excuse that I'm working harder now, because that's just going to keep me stuck."

Ludwig grips his sword and looks at Gladen Amorel.

Gone is Ludwig, the bottom of the class B who accepted reality and resigned himself to it in the name of hard work and grit.

Changes.

Now, I don't console myself by saying I'll do my best.

To do well, not hard.

Not to do your best, but to win.

"So."

You find yourself scratching your head at all the things that didn't work out, saying that it will work out better later.

Now discard it.

Willpower is not power.

However, there is only one person in the world who knows the truth about this world.

Will is not power, but Ludwig is the hero of this world.

Causal nuclei.

By their very nature, protagonists can turn their will into power.

Such a protagonist.

Ludwig declares.

"I."

"Null."

"Win."

The world is, and always will be, on his side.

\* \* \*

What the fuck is that?

I couldn't help but roll my eyes at the quarterfinal results.

The score was 3:0 in favor of Ludwig.

We seemed to be having a conversation, but when the duel started, things didn't go the way I thought they would.

Ludwig's sword struck Gladen Amorel with overwhelming force.

It's not even a disenchantment.

It's not like you have superpowers.

Ludwig used his physical strength alone to counteract every sword Gladen Amorell threw at him and stabbed back.

Overwhelming weight class difference.

Something that could only be done with a magical enhancement, Ludwig had done with his bare hands.

People in the audience stared at Ludwig, who had just defeated Gladen Amorell with monstrous strength.

-Waaaaaah!

While those who don't know the situation are thrilled by the overwhelming and enormous fight itself, I'm left speechless.

That's not the kind of speed and reaction you can get without a disenchantment.

We don't know what we did, but Ludwig is different.

This is bad enough without enchantments, but with enchantments, you're going to be even crazier.

I could tell that my words from yesterday had somehow resonated with Ludwig.

Will cannot be power. Except for me, who has the power of self-suggestion and word.

I watched as a stern-faced Ludwig stood tall amidst the cheers of the crowd.

I realized what I was overlooking.

Saviolin Tana, the current reigning world champion.

Ellen, the next worldbuilder.

Olivia Ranze, another World's Strongest candidate who survived when she should have died.

One of the most talented people in the history of magic, Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

And I, who had the gift of infinity and grew tremendously in a year.

What the hell.

-Waaaaaah!

In the end, the main character is Ludwig.

The protagonist can turn will into power. Anger, sorrow, vengeance, and desire can be transformed into strength, giving them unbelievable power. The world bends to Ludwig's wishes, even if there is no reason for it.

When you need strength, use strength.

In situations where deferral is required, use deferred.

The power I have.

Self-implication is, after all, a degradation of Ludwig's power.

The power to turn will into power was originally Ludwig's.

The world is built for the protagonist, and Ludwig will have everything he needs.

Ludwig looks somewhere.

To be precise, look at the inner bleachers.

I look through the window at Ludwig.

Ludwig looks up at me.

The guy who said he'd meet me in the finals, did meet me in the finals.

\* \* \*

Nothing worked out the way I thought it would.

Nothing is easy, just as it was foolish to believe that a 10,000 achievement point challenge would be easy in the first place.

I struggled against Scarlett, who I hadn't really considered, and it looked like I was going to lose, but his withdrawal put me in the final.

Gladen Amorelle was eliminated by Ludwig by an overwhelming margin.

If I work hard enough, I'll get to you guys someday.

Ludwig, who believed so, abandoned his weakness.

A situation that is so different from the original plot that it is now impossible to predict and has become meaningless.

You're not awakening an enchantment, and you're not using superpowers.

It's just a protagonist.

That one advantage made Ludwig stronger.

After a short break, it's time for the finals.

You're not feeling your best. But that doesn't mean you're in bad shape.

If you use Self-Suggestion, you'll be able to match Ludwig, and if you use Enchantment, you'll be able to overwhelm him.

But you don't know if it's going to make it to 3 sets or not.

If I don't get it right, I'll be in the pathetic position of not losing to Ludwig, but losing to a failure to condition.

-The long-awaited final stage is about to begin: the battle between Royal Class A and Class B!

I see you're avoiding the whole "battle of the bottom" thing.

Ludwig and I were facing each other as the moderator spoke. Our faces, which had been smiling, had hardened.

Now there's a look I like.

Ludwig, who had been lacking in seriousness, became serious.

"I guess that worked, huh?"

"...... I think it was."

Ludwig seemed to have a hard time believing what had happened to him. Ludwig stares at me.

"I wonder if I can follow you."

"You haven't learned yet. Asshole."

Holding the sword, I smile at Ludwig.

"Don't think you can keep up. No, think you can trample over things like you and stand on top of them."

"Haha....... Yeah. That's right. Something like that."

Ludwig looks at me with a smile. But it's not the coy smile he's been showing me.

"Well, that's odd, Reinhardt, you're certainly strong, but there are plenty of people stronger than you......."

Ludwig grips his sword and sighs.

"At some point, ....... doesn't work."

"What?"

"That I beat you."

The smile fades from Ludwig's face once more.

"Well, I can't quite picture it."

That look on Ludwig's face, those words, I knew.

Because there is only one being who thinks so.

The one who will be looking at me from the audience.

There are many who are stronger than him, and many who are better than him.

But. I can't picture myself defeating Ellen Artorius. She'll always be the same, looking down on me from a vantage point far above me, and teaching me swordsmanship.

In the original, Ellen was that to Ludwig.

A wall you can't follow, no matter how hard you try. Something you always have to look up at.

Now, it's my job to look at Ellen.

"You're getting stronger so fast that no matter how hard I try to keep up, you're going to be way ahead of me."

No wonder.

Ellen came in already strong, but I started from a worse position than Ludwig and faded away.

That's why Ludwig's eyes are on me, not Ellen.

I can't help but think, why can't I be like Reinhardt?

Ludwig was feeling barriers to me, not Ellen, and he was forced to make me his object.

Ellen may be stronger than me, but Ludwig's goal is to overtake me.

An insurmountable wall.

For Ludwig, the wall had become me, not Ellen.

Ellen's place in the original is now mine.

The long-awaited finals of the 1st grade tournament are here!

The protagonist's eternal rival and object of admiration.

That's my role in this world.

"I don't think so, but I'll give you the benefit of the doubt."

Ludwig takes a deep breath.

"I can beat you."

I sheathe my sword. I turn to face Ludwig.

I only taught Ludwig one thing.

Make resolutions for victory, not excuses for defeat.

It's not much, but it's what I taught them after all.

"No."

And, it's my specialty.

"You, you can't beat me."

Ludwig looks at me and says

"I."

I look at Ludwig and say.

"I."

And we look at each other and say at the same time

"You. I win."

-Kurung!

Blue magic enveloped my body, and Ludwig leapt at me, stomping his feet.

-Quack!

The moment their swords clashed, they shattered as if they had made a promise.

Episode 296.

The sword is broken.

But neither I nor Ludwig was fazed. As if he knew it, Ludwig tried to strike me in the head with the pommel of his broken sword.

"Suck!"

Enchantment.

Answer.

I let go of his head and drove my fist into Ludwig's abdomen.

-Bam!

-Puck!

"Poof!"

"Suck!"

Ludwig rolled several times across the floor before getting to his feet, the blow to the stomach terrifying. Their arms were broken. No time to reload.

I threw the broken sword away, and so did Ludwig.

Ludwig pounces, and the longer I hold on to the enchantment, the harder the next set becomes, so I have to finish quickly.

Ludwig, who has fallen, is scrambling to his feet, looking for a ground-and-pound.

Pounding after a tackle.

That's what we're aiming for for now.

-Thump!

Ludwig fell on top of me, crashing to the ground.

At this point, it's already over.

A moment of reflection.

The moment he fell, he grabbed me around the waist and flipped me over.

Enchantments provide protection, but do not add weight per se.

-Thump!

In an instant, I lost my balance and flew backwards.

Crazy.

The subject hasn't even been disenchanted, and his power is already out of the realm of normal.

That's a monster bigger than me.

Me, the unsteady hand.

Ludwig may lack physicality, but he makes up for it in staying power.

I don't know what the hell happened to his body, but I can't fight him without magnetic suggestion and magical enhancements.

I win.

I never thought I'd be in a position to rival it, but it shouldn't be any easier than it already is.

Just as in the original, Ellen's mere existence spurred Ludwig's growth.

I am also a growth engine that makes Ludwig stronger just by existing.

I even stir up Ludwig's tenuous sense of jealousy and inferiority because I started at the bottom.

The stronger I get, the faster Ludwig gets stronger.

I, for one, will not lose to you.

You will only be stronger if I am always a wall above you.

The protagonist must be strong.

One day you will be stronger than me, but for now I must be stronger than you.

That's what a rival is.

So, you can't lose.

I'm finally getting serious with the guy I created but always avoided because he was a subtle asshole.

He sees me as a serious rival, and I can't help but agree.

The last one standing is the winner.

You, for now, must lose to me.

I will concede the final victory, and you must continue to lose to me.

To do this, I don't think I can lose, but at the same time, I believe I can't lose.

"You, you can't beat me."

Declare that you will never lose.

"Suck!"

I lunge at Ludwig and throw a punch, but he dodges my outstretched arm with a shake of his head and grabs me by the arm to take me to the ground.

However, as I ran into the force of his pull, I brought my knee up to meet Ludwig's chin.

-Bam!

"Boom!"

Ludwig takes a solid knee to the jaw and stumbles backwards.

Ludwig rolled around a few times before waking up.

I looked at Ludwig's gums to see if he was okay, and saw a trickle of blood.

He doesn't even look sick. You have to give him credit for grit. Of course, it's only in situations like this that pain is felt less.

You can't lose.

The unexpected variables of this tournament, which I entered for achievement points, changed my purpose.

Scarlett and Ludwig, who were merely competitors, meant me in different ways.

I didn't think I had much of a connection, but as a result of my actions up to this point, these guys were seeing me in different ways, but ultimately similarly.

Scarlett was idolizing me.

Ludwig wanted to catch up with me, but he felt like I was a wall he could never reach.

So, I'll give you a landslide victory.

For the sake of the growth of this weirdo who wants to climb every wall he can't climb, I have to.

So, let me show you.

Ludwig rushes toward me, his lips bitten off and bloodied.

You've shaped this world so that it's on your side, but I have more.

Self-implied.

Words.

Enchantment.

And the feeling.

And a training partner named Ellen.

Under all conditions, Ludwig can't keep up with me.

So, trample it.

In this moment, your greatest weapon is not an enchantment, nor is it a superpower, it's your instincts.

Read it out loud.

To lunge is to take an action that causes your center of gravity to shift forward.

Timing is everything.

If you can read what step they're going to attack and how they're going to come in, you can put a counter in.

While it's important to know which foot you're powering through, it's even more important to look at your shoulders. You can predict the movement of the arm by looking at the shoulder. Someone skilled in martial arts might be able to throw a punch without moving their shoulders, but neither Ludwig nor I are at that level.

If the waist is moving instead of the arms, we can assume that the attacker is going to use their feet.

Moving with a sword is no different in the end. Every action has a starting point, and it must come from the body.

Ludwig's right shoulder falls back as he runs.

The right shoulder pulls back slightly, which means the right arm is about to reach out to me.

If so, you're trying to use your left foot as an axis and your right fist in my face.

It seemed too accurate.

There are many ways to do this.

Ludwig can either slip his right fist out and use his left fist to punch deep into his face, or he can use the thrust of his incoming right arm as a weapon.

The moment you read what's coming, the game is already won or lost.

I neither deflected nor returned the attack.

Before Ludwig can even get into an attacking stance with his left foot.

I take a step, or rather a poke, forward.

We know that as soon as Ludwig's left foot hits the ground, he will move his right shoulder on the axis of his left foot.

I poked the point one timing ahead.

The moment just before the attack begins.

-Bam!

I kicked the crap out of him just before his left foot touched the floor.

"Boom!"

As a result, it looked like he was lunging to kick me.

It's even more damaging because it happened when you weren't prepared for it.

Ludwig didn't get up this time as he sprawled across the floor. It was a perfect counter, with the power of magic and self-reinforcement.

It's weird to wake up.

-First set! Mr. Ludwig has been declared incapacitated, so Mr. Reinhardt takes the match!

Ludwig didn't even wake up.

"ugh......."

As the priests rushed to his aid, Ludwig collapsed and looked up at me.

It was like looking at an inscrutable being.

In fact, I only had to see Ludwig lunge to take him down with a single, precise blow.

It reads perfectly. No matter what I do in the future, it will eventually read.

How the hell am I supposed to beat an opponent like that?

He had a pensive look on his face.

My trait of clairvoyance was giving me too much efficiency. Partly, I suppose, because it's the power I've been given in exchange for the most dangerous thing I've ever done.

I was smiling.

"I told you you couldn't win."

"......."

Not yet.

I swallowed that afterthought.

I felt like a villain.

No, he's actually the villain. Because I'm the Devil, and Ludwig is the second hero of humanity after Lagan Artorius.

A warrior who is always defeated by demons.

But maybe one day we'll catch up with the devil and do justice.

The overly perfect picture seemed to foreshadow my eventual downfall.

After being healed by the priests, Ludwig stands up.

"Let's try again. Reinhardt."

Ludwig wonders if it's a good idea to have such an inscrutable opponent as a rival, but he doesn't give up.

"It won't be much different."

"Still, you never know until you try."

He'll fall again and again, but he'll get back up.

You're not going to give up, you're going to keep bumping up against it.

I've always been the egg that breaks the rock, but this guy is the one that throws the egg until the rock breaks.

I don't consider myself superior to Ludwig.

Someone who has never been broken, someone who has been broken hundreds or thousands of times and still gets back up.

Ludwig will be greater than the likes of me.

However, greatness doesn't buy you victories.

Right now, I'm stronger, and Ludwig can't cross the gap.

-Set score is 1:0! Reinhardt has taken the first set! Okay, second set of the first grade tournament final, starting now!

-Waaaaaah!

Amidst a roar that I had become accustomed to after only two days, Ludwig and I were issued replenished armor.

This time, a sword.

What's the difference between a fist and a sword?

In this first-year tournament, which was already full of upsets, there were no more.

I took a commanding victory in two straight sets.

And so, I won.

\* \* \*

I'm technically outclassed by most close combat majors, but I'm outclassed by Ludwig.

So no matter how much his physicals rise, I'm still ahead of him with the enchantment, and his moves are too easy to read.

This is a fight where it didn't make sense for me to lose even one set. Ludwig's only chance of victory was if I overdid the enchantments and burned out, and that didn't happen.

My victory in the final clinched first and second place, followed by a third and fourth place match between Scarlett and Glayden Amorel.

The result was a victory for Gladen Amorelle.

And just like that, the first-year tournament is over.

I never thought I'd get to hold a trophy in my hands like this.

[Achievement - Win the First Grade Tournament].

[Earned 10,000 achievement points].

I've never scored so much in one go.

People have been cheering me on.

"Do you think I can keep up with you?"

There was no despair in Ludwig's defeated expression, but he seemed to sense the doubt.

"You know what I'm going to say, right?"

"......Yes."

Ludwig smiles at me.

"I'm supposed to believe I can catch up, right?"

"No."

I crossed my arms, holding my trophy.

"It's not a matter of believing, it's a matter of thinking."

"Oh, right. You did, didn't you?"

Uh oh.

Looks like the main character has been inducted into my school of self-suggestion, says Ludwig, winner of the 2nd place trophy.

"I can keep up with you, Reinhardt."

"What do you mean no way?"

It's a strange religion, where you want me to believe that your version of the future is true, but I don't agree with it.

Believe in your own future.

In the end, I and Ludwig had similar powers, albeit different ones.

I did run into some weird stuff while trying to earn achievement points, but my plan didn't deviate too much.

I won.

That day, Ellen was watching from afar.

He said he'd punish me if I didn't win.

Because you won.

Do you want a pat on the back?

Episode 297.

"Compliments."

"Well."

"Compliments."

"Well."

The same question was asked twice, and Ellen and I glared at each other fatally.

"You said you'd scold me if I didn't win, so I should praise you because I did!"

"I didn't say anything about compliments."

"Reinhardt's the best, you knew he was going to win!"

"...... is so full of platitudes that it doesn't even inspire me."

"Seo Woon Hae Ee Ee Ee!"

Ellen said she hadn't agreed to praise me, so she upped the ante. Eventually, the tournament was over, and I won, even though everyone saw it coming.

They won and lost fights, but they didn't have a grudge against each other. Ludwig was Ludwig, Scarlett was Scarlett, and they were unique.

Just like yesterday, all the members of Class A and B celebrated their victory together.

It is a festival, after all.

Both Harriet and Charlotte congratulated me on my win.

Ellen also stopped me on the way back to the dorm. We waited for everyone to go home, and then it was just the two of us.

"......."

Ellen was stumped.

I could give you some compliments, but do you think you can't handle me saying that?

He was a little red in the face.

"I....... Saying things like this. A little. It's weird....... I know."

"......what."

"I was proud of ......."

I felt like my head was going white from the sound of it.

"You, I was proud of you."

That's a little more than pleasing.

I was stumped.

No, not awesome, cool, or proud, which is a weird word!

"Are you my mom?"

At my words, Ellen's face turned fat again. You act like you've been raising me like a baby.

You know I fed you more than enough to eat.

"I taught you."

This kid, who was hopeless, ended up winning a tournament after I taught him for a year! He felt the same way!

"So you're the good guy after all?"

"Yes."

Ellen nodded and smiled.

"You've been good to me."

With that smile and those words, I didn't know what else to say.

It was mostly Ellen who made me who I am today. Ellen looks at me and smiles dazzlingly.

"You've done a great job, Reinhard. Congratulations."

"......."

In the end, even if it was all thanks to Ellen, I was the one who persisted in trying to learn swordsmanship by bullying her to the point of exhaustion.

There were a lot of coincidences and cheats, but I was the one who was willing to learn the hard way, swinging my sword, bumping and falling.

Not all of my power has come from hard work, but I can't say it hasn't been there.

That's why Ellen is telling me about all the hard work.

"What....... Thanks."

You whine for praise, but when you get it, you don't deserve it.......

Right.

Uh.

I even got a compliment from Ellen.

I don't think anyone disliked my win, and Ludwig and Scarlett seem to like me more, so it's a good result.

By the way.

My shoulders are getting heavier and heavier, and my stomach is rumbling like it's on fire.

This is due to the side effects of enchantments. In fact, I had to use enchantments for the entire third set to overwhelm Ludwig, and it was physically exhausting.

You're right, it's unreasonable.

I was dizzy, but not to the point of passing out or coughing up blood.

However, I don't think it's just about disenchantment again.

I'd like to get drunk on the joy of winning and forget about it for a while, but I can't forget until I try.

Today is Tuesday.

Tomorrow is Wednesday.

"ah......."

Pageantry.

It was coming up tomorrow.

Is this what it's like to cry and eat mustard.

My moodiness seemed to get worse, not better.

In the end, I gave up on qualifying for the Unlimited tournament because it was clear I wouldn't be in shape to do anything after the Women's event.

\* \* \*

Tuesday night.

Hogwarts House.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen was experimenting in a safe room in the basement of his mansion. It's a very large laboratory, with enough crystallization, protection, and soundproofing magic to allow him to experiment with higher level destructive magic.

Outdoor labs are not out of the question, but since destructive magic is often accompanied by binge drinking, it's best to do it in a controlled environment.

It's a festival, and you can't do this experiment outside.

Inside the safe room, Herriot was experimenting with something, and outside, beyond the security window, the entire Magical Research Society was watching.

-Woof

A stream of flame shot from Herriot's fingertips and landed in a pile on the opposite wall.

-Bang!

Another explosion followed, this time a streak of flame that enveloped Herriot from the top of his head to his shoulders.

Lesser destructive magic called Firebolt.

In an instant, five fireballs form and hit all of them.

-Quack, quack, quack!

It was very fast, with almost no casting.

Herriot's wrists and forearms were streaked with blue energy lines.

"Success!"

"That's it......!"

"Wow, I can't believe this is actually happening......."

Herriot went on to demonstrate a number of sub-destructive spells, including Lightning Bolt, and even casting fireballs.

These are all spells that Herriot has mastered. And even if you don't specialize in destructive magic, you can still do this.

Except different.

You're casting unusually fast, and even multicasting.

When Herriot emerged from the safe room, all the members of the Magical Research Society's eyes lit up when they saw her.

"That's it! Are we done?"

At Christina's words, Harriet smiled wearily.

"Somewhat, but I think it needs some work."

"Junior, you're a genius!"

Redina jumped for joy like it was her job.

"There's no way this is going to be......."

Louis Ancton mumbled something incoherent. Harriet laughed at the dumbfounded Louis Ankton.

"What if it's something you made and you panic?"

"No....... It's just words, and I don't think it's exactly connected to the theory......."

Louis Ankton was even more stunned to see the spectacle he had envisioned come to life.

"This, I think, is a magic system that no one but you can use, like this....... There's no way other wizards can do it. I mean, I know it makes sense, but I never thought it was possible."

In other words, Herriot was using the tools that Louis had created too perfectly. The implication is that Louis Anckton was a genius for creating something like this in such a short time, but only Herriot was a better genius for using it.

"Really? Then I'm good."

On Herriot's right arm, beneath the cuff, blue, pictorial things hummed and glowed, then faded.

"Ugh, Reinhardt won too."

Herriot sighed heavily, stretching to see if he was tired.

"I should do something."

Unlimited tournaments are at a different level than Grade 1 tournaments.

Even though he didn't know who would win, he didn't think he was going to do badly.

The members of the Magical Research Society knew what Herriot could do, so they didn't think it was arrogant confidence.

An annoying human being who keeps interrupting and picking up bullshit.

Olivia Ranze.

She braced herself, determined to break his arrogant snout.

He's so focused on Ellen that he has no idea he's going to get hit in the wrong place.

\* \* \*

Wednesday.

Herriot wasn't in the dorm because he was busy, and the girls competing in the Miss & Mr. Temple pageant weren't there because they wanted to start preparing properly.

In other words, everyone I know is busy with their own shit.

And.

I'm not idle either.

"Reinhard, we're going to watch the parade, do you want to come?"

For some reason, I've gotten to know them better since the tournament, the Ganodab brothers and Heinrich.

Kono Lindt looked at me and waved.

"No, I'm taking a break."

"Oh....... Did you push yourself a little too hard yesterday?"

"......."

It's true that it's overwhelming, and it's true that my body needs a break, but I can't take a break today.

Crossdressing contest....... I gotta go.......

With a 5 hp boost, this might just be the most important event of the festival.......

Right now my horsepower is 14.2, but if I go up 5, it will be 19.2.

Just 0.8 more points here and the Magic Dominance talent will bloom.

So I can't bring myself to give up.

In the end, it was a good situation for me to be in, where my best friends weren't asking me to go somewhere today.

No matter what I do, no one is going to care where everyone else is, so I can go to a cross-dressing convention and come back and no one is going to ask me where I've been.

You sneak out of your dorm to go to a cross-dressing convention and come back.

I'm such an asshole!

Yeah....... You're right, I am a madman who has sold his soul and dignity for events and challenges, but I crossed a river of no return when I turned into a woman and confessed to Kono Lint.

It's my karma.

If I stayed still, I'd get halfway there, but the asshole got wind of the weirdness and has been giving me this shit ever since.

If you hadn't done that, I might have given you a different festive event.

It's my fault, it's my fault, it's my big fault.

\* \* \*

The pageant is held at night.

Of course, it's not going to be in a huge space like a main stadium, but in some kind of indoor auditorium in a regular classroom, but we already know the location.

It's lunchtime.

The competition starts at 6pm.

But I had to start preparing now: I had a dress that I could put on and take off by myself, but I couldn't do my own makeup.

I'm going to head out of the temple, get my makeup done by Elise, and return with my clothes.

And of course, I'm going out and back with a hood on.

Luckily, it's a festive time of year, so crowd control, including ID checks, is lax at the Temple Gate.

Once you're all set up outside the temple, you can kill some time in a secluded spot and then sneak in when it's time for the contest to start.

There's no point in wandering around in the temple.

I don't know why anyone would want to consider the number of cases of something like this in a covert operation.

In practice.

Oh my god, this makes me a million times more nervous than the tournament!

What if they recognize me? What if someone sees me? What if the moderator suddenly says, "Reinhardt!"?

Shouldn't we just go out? It's magic anyway, and if we keep doing it, we'll climb. Isn't it too much of a gamble? Do we really need to control magic? There are spirits?

Okay, no need to get greedy here, right?

Despite the mess in my head, I was now walking out of the dorm with a half-souled look on my face.

The streets were crowded with people during the festival. But wherever they were going, I couldn't be bothered.

I felt like my brain was going to split in two as I was simultaneously thinking about giving up on the pageant and trying to figure out what facial expression would make me look less like Reinhardt.

No, the brain is supposed to be left-brained and right-brained.

My mind was grinding away in real time, forgetting the obvious.

I don't know what the hell I'm doing, and it's broad daylight.

Elise was still running the store. Though it still didn't seem to be working.

But today, they closed the store and told me to wait at home.

A residential neighborhood near the Aligarh shopping district.

I knocked on the subterranean door and Elise answered it.

"Welcome, degradation."

"Uh."

She'd already gotten ready, and her room was clean and lined with makeup.

Eleris studied my complexion and shook her head.

"The tournament is at....... Didn't work out?"

"No, I won."

"But why does your face look like....... Ah."

Eleris nodded, the corners of her mouth twitching slightly, as if she'd forgotten why I couldn't help but look grim at the news of our victory.

"......But good job, Jae. That's some impressive growth."

"Thanks......."

After saying something I don't know if it was a compliment or a consolation, Elise sat me down in a chair.

"That....... Do you want to get started right away?"

"......I'm going to do it anyway, what's the point in dragging my feet?"

They both looked devastated.

I started by washing my face and using Sarkhegar's Ring to change my face into the shape I had previously molded.

It's a subtle difference, but add some makeup to it, change your expression, and you look like a completely different person.

The reflective shield she summoned reflected a face that had been slightly reshaped, but was still pale and silver-haired.

"......Why? Oh, no. No. Don't say anything."

It's weird to think about, I just changed a little bit, no makeup, and this is it!

It's like drawing a girl and calling her a boy!

"......Let's get started."

"......."

This is the beginning of a hellish time.

It's a day anyway.

In a day or so, you won't have to do this horrible thing anymore.

No matter how hellish things get in the world, you'll always remember it as the way it was. You can twist a chicken's head off, but the dawn will still come. Time marches on, the world turns upside down, and the pageant ends today!

No matter how slowly time passes, tomorrow will come, and when it does, I'll be able to say goodbye to this filthy mess, and all I'll have left is a bunch of fake hp and achievement points!

When you're done, you'll think, "Oh, I'm so glad I did that," and you'll swallow your shame and be proud of yourself for doing it!

I make excuses for myself to self-justify.

a.......

I think I'm going to level up my self-suggestion.

Episode 298.

I was ready to go. I got out with plenty of time to spare.

I've already changed my hair to the silver locks from last time. The expression is important, but I think the change in hair color also played a role.

The original impressions were much faded by Elise's and my exhausting efforts.

"Oh, well. Uh-huh."

And, most importantly.

Voice.

I changed my voice to an ambiguous one, not too feminine, not too masculine. With my original voice, there might be someone who would recognize me based on my voice alone.

In the end, it's sad to realize that making Reinhardt look so unrecognizable, and changing his voice so ambiguously, are all details for when he's found out.

If it were someone else, they could just be 180 degrees different.

I'd Rather....... Miss Temple was better.......

With the last insurance policy in place, there was no hesitation.

All that's left is to get back to the temple in time for the start of the pageant.

But if you're too timely, you never know what might happen. You'll have to get your team together before the start time to get ready in the first place.

So, I'm hanging out in Eleris' subterranean chambers, and I've just come out to the Aligarh shopping district.

Dress is casual.

It's not a temple uniform, obviously, and it's not women's clothing. It's just makeup and a different face shape and body type.

No...... Then you've changed everything, haven't you?

I was carrying my trunk, hood tucked into my robe, just in case anyone saw me.

I feel like I'm going on a secret mission.

Is status really that important.......

Did it really have to come to this.......

In a fit of self-doubt and self-rationalization, I slowly made my way toward Aligarh Station.

Inside the history, I checked every time I came back, but the store was installed properly. Of course, it was getting bigger than it was at first.

When I first proposed the business, I thought it would be a nice idea, but once I started it, I realized that it was a very good idea, and the Merchant Guild was investing more and more. It seemed like the number of shops was growing from just snack shops to more and more shops.

There will come a point where the Rotary Club will not be able to support the size of the business on its own, and you will need to reach out beyond the club.

At some point, we may see something like an underground mall in a large terminal. I don't know when that will be.

Regardless, the amount of money the club is making is growing exponentially.

If other organizations or other merchants come in, it won't be bad in the end. Since we have the rights to the business, there are a lot of ways to make money, whether it's by charging for the rights or just paying people to work like sharecroppers.

If you don't like a business, you can use your power to kick them out. That's what power is for.

I can't believe I've gone through life without thinking about this, and now I can't believe I've allowed myself to have such vicious thoughts.

Such.

Shops in front of Aligarh station.

The Aligarh district is the Seoul equivalent of Yongsan-gu. It has a very high foot traffic and is known for its shops. Although its merchants are more famous for being vicious.

I saw some kids skulking around the store.

-How much is this?

-Oh, that's ten fairy tales.

-That one, that one?

One was asking for prices in front of the club member in charge of the store, while the other was sneaking around in the club member's blind spot.

These assholes.

What is it?

One of them was catching the wind, and the other was sneaking snacks into their arms. I don't know if the people on their way to work didn't see it or didn't care.

Ha.

It's a cute thing to do when you're a subway vendor.

But.

Still, a rice bowl is a rice bowl.

Where are you, you little yellow bloodsuckers.

Just as I was about to approach a bunch of wannabe organized crime figures.

-Pak!

"Yuck!"

"Gotcha, assholes."

A man from out of nowhere grabbed the two kids by the back of the head.

"!"

When he realized the situation was out of hand, he tried to get away from the counter.

"Get him!"

At the command of the first two kids, someone else who was waiting jumped out and snagged the one that was trying to get away.

Suddenly, the three children were arrested for shoplifting, and passersby began to stare in amazement.

No, and what are these assholes?

My outfit doesn't look like a guard.

I'm not even a member of the club, and the store representative who is was just as confused as I was.

"Good catch, you little fuckers. You don't know how close we were, do you?"

-Bang!

"Yuck!"

I could only watch in disbelief as the bully who had snatched them up slapped the little girl across the cheek.

"With you!"

"Yuck!"

-Bam!

"You low-life bastards who do this!"

-Bang!

"Yuck! Hmph, hmph!"

"Lock him in a dungeon and never let him see the light of day......."

-Pak!

"......?"

My body went out of control. I found myself holding the hand of the guard who had slapped the child's cheek.

"......what?"

"Oh, no....... The kid....... What you did was wrong....... What did you have to....... do?"

No, but you still beat him like this?

"I don't know who these three are, but they've been to every station in the city, and they've stolen more than twenty times, so they're felons, if you want to call them that. They're social evils, and they don't deserve the attention of a young lady like you."

Oh, Miss?

I feel like I'm bleaching my hair with that statement.......

No, it's not bleached because I have silver hair.

And these three guys were professional thieves?

Twenty times?

You've touched my rice bowl twenty times now?

You deserved a good beating, didn't you? No, I'd like to beat you up, but not that badly.

People were looking on in confusion at the bullies who were suddenly beating her up, and at me, who suddenly jumped in to stop her, and at the kids who started crying when they were hit.

They were even more terrified when I appeared as if I was going to save them and then suddenly changed the way I looked at them.

"Well, still. I mean, it was wrong, yeah. But I still don't think that....... This is kind of. 거. It's gross, right?"

The expression dick.......

I didn't back down, but added my two cents, and the apparent leader of the gang narrowed his eyes.

"It's none of your business, lady, go on your way."

It was a threat.

By all accounts, these guys were not guards.

He was dressed in the same color as a passerby.

However, I do have to admit that I'm a bit of a snowflake now.

My wrists, thick neck, trapezius muscles, and forearms holding the kids. And the calluses on my palms.

That should give you a pretty good idea.

It's not a bully.

They're trained people, a lot of them.

If I went any further, the commotion would grow. The kids are looking at me like they're begging me to save them.

No, I was trying to beat you guys up for him, so it doesn't matter if you see me.

I don't want to cause any more trouble than this. I don't know who these people are, but if they're here, they're likely to get themselves into trouble.

I don't want to look like I'm a Reinhardt of the Temple Royal class!

When I glared and looked like I was about to back away, he smirked.

"You're a young lady who hasn't had to deal with a lot of shit because of your pretty face. Be careful in the future. The world ain't so easy."

a.

The feeling of a screw falling out.

It's been a while.

"This asshole is real."

"......what?"

"What kind of uneducated asshole beats up a kid on the street and then gets all smug about it?"

His expression changed drastically at my unnecessary insult.

With the screw broken, I could no longer hear the brakes.

"Who the hell are you guys? You're not even in the Guard. This is the Guard's job, not the job of assholes like you who don't have a clue."

"I told you to be careful."

"Be careful, you bastard......."

-Pak!

"!"

"Huh, so you're a hand-wringing asshole?"

I snatched back the hand he reached out to slap me on the cheek; he was stunned that his arm had been grabbed at all.

Yeah, he's a little smaller, but he's just as powerful. Same self-suggestion. I glare at him.

"Are you sure?"

It's not the Reinhardt of old.

Nothing, of course.......

It's a little different today in a different sense.......

"Ha....... Doing a shitty job got me a shitty bitch......."

His eyes changed, and there was a strange gleam in them.

Feeling detects.

Live.

From now on, if he's going to use his hands, I'm going to have to be serious. The man in front of me and my nerves are on edge, and a hand-to-hand fight is about to begin.

"Enough."

A voice cut through the silence.

"What's going on?"

I cut through the murmuring crowd and someone appeared.

"Do, dear......."

"I thought I told you not to make ...... too loud."

A calm-faced Bertus was walking toward them.

No.

Why is she here?

\* \* \*

George.

I don't know what's going on, but I think it's early.

"I'm sorry."

"......No, I'm not, I'm not, I'm rude......."

I stood stiffly watching Bertus apologize as he served the tea.

Bertus didn't recognize me at all.

I never thought I'd have to go to this place to have my makeup validated. I'm wearing a lot of makeup, and I've changed a lot of things, so it's no wonder I don't recognize myself.

I was relieved that I didn't recognize him, but I also felt a cold sweat running down my spine because I didn't know when I would be caught.

"We've been experiencing a lot of inconveniences lately because of the temple festival, so we've had a lot of extra guards, and some of them aren't in full guard uniform, and they're not trained to do this professionally, so sometimes they overreact, so we understand that you might feel uncomfortable with that."

"Oh, no....... I didn't even know that......."

"However, their behavior was clearly wrong and they will be disciplined according to our internal procedures. I know it won't be enough, but I hope you'll forgive me this much......."

"Well, yes, yes, yes!"

When I asked what Bertus was doing away from the Temple dorms, here it was.

Bertus did not reveal that he was a prince.

I introduced myself as the person in charge of operational reliability and security for the horsepower train during the festival.

Temple festivals draw people from all continents to the Yellow Road. There's a huge influx of people, which means a huge influx of horsepower train riders. It's not just the temple that's crowded, it's the entire zodiac.

Bertus seemed to be more interested in getting back to work and racking up one more accomplishment than enjoying the festivities.

In the original, when Charlotte didn't have a competitor, she went to Mr. Temple, but now that she does, she feels like she needs to do something to earn it.

He's a workaholic, too.

Charlotte is playing.......

Still, I'm sure Charlotte would rather be enjoying the festivities than working this time of year.

It turns out that Bertus' constant absence was due to his duties as head of the magic train operation at the festival.

I'm here to take care of some stuff at Aligarh Station, and I think they've got a bunch of thieving kids who've committed more than two dozen thefts, and they've put them undercover in anticipation of them popping up around this time.

So I told them to go get them, and I saw them chasing after them, and I saw the guys who had gotten high, and I saw their hands on them.

This.

It's a terrible coincidence.

A coincidence too good to be true.

It's around this time that I meet Bertus.

You're such a dog! You're doing this on purpose, aren't you? You're doing this to me!

Bertus was apologizing to me. Without revealing his identity as a prince.

Bertus, this one is just plain badass.

I can't deny it now.

I feel like an emperor.......

"I didn't know the details of the situation....... I'm sorry too."

When I realized that the guy who was beating the kids up was actually a plainclothes cop or something, I didn't have anything to say. The kids will get what's coming to them, and the dude will get what's coming to him for trying to punch a stern man in the face.

There's no reason to stay here.

What's more, I don't want to stay in Bertus' line of sight any longer!

"Well, I'll leave you to it......."

"But she has silver hair."

Bertus's voice caught me trying to get up.

"You have a rare hair color."

"Hello, dyeing....... ."

"Oh, is that so?"

Bertus looks at me with a narrowed brow.

"By the way, are you a Temple student?"

"That's ....... Why, that's..."

"No. Look at ....... It looks familiar."

Shot.

Fuck! We have to run!

But Bertus blinked, as if he'd been surprised by his own spit.

"Oh! Not at all that. I have no other intention, really. that....... Looks familiar....... Hmm. No, that's just going to sound weird."

Perhaps thinking that his words might come across as condescending, Bertus fell silent.

Awkward silence.

I need to run, but when do I choose the right time to run? Bertus can't find the words to tell me if he thinks I've said something weird, and I'm watching for the right time to run.

"......Where are you going, traveling or something?"

Bertus asked, looking at the trunk.

Just saying. Should I say traveling?

"Well, just....... Yes."

With a cursory glance, I grabbed the teacup. It was black tea, poured by Bertus.

Teacups.

"A man who doesn't know how to hold a teacup can't be a nobleman.

A memory from long ago flashed through my mind.

How do you hold a teacup? I mean, you know, I've seen him do it, and I've seen him do it, and I've seen Reinhardt do it, and I've seen him do it, and I've seen him do it, and I've seen him do it, and I've seen him do it.

No, Bertus wouldn't remember that!

But what if I remember?

I was so anxious, I thought I was going to lose my mind.

C'mon, asshole, just suck it up! Why are you making things worse?

Even if the situation is malicious, after all, I started the car!

Struggling with the urge to crush my own skull, I gripped the teacup with both hands.

-MoonMoonMoon

Of course.

My hands shook as if I were suffering from catalepsy. Bertus stared at me in disbelief.

"Well, I'm a little bit....... that. have."

"Oh, is that so?"

I ended up holding the teacup with both hands and barely managed a sip.

What I was doing to act nonchalant was even weirder.

"I'm surprised you have hydrocephalus, considering how young you are."

Bertus raised his teacup.

Yeah. Hydrocephalus at this age? That's weird!

Why not?

Hydrocephalus at a young age?

"I'm an alcoholic."

"Poof!"

Bertus spat out the black tea he'd been drinking, embarrassed by the reason he'd thought of.

On my face.

"......."

"That, that, sin, I'm sorry!"

Bertus was genuinely flustered, pulling out a handkerchief and holding it to my face, then hesitating.

"...... is fine."

I wiped my face with the handkerchief Bertus handed me.

Hydrocephalus at a young age. The reason is alcoholism.

I'd say your answer is even more ridiculous.

Bertus was visibly flustered, as if he never thought he'd see such disrespect in his life.

I wiped my face with a handkerchief, as carefully as I could.

Fuck.

What if this takes off my makeup?

I'm already pissed off that I have to worry about this shit.

"Well, I'll leave you to....... to go."

"Well, I'm really sorry......."

Bertus lowered his head in pity. Better this way than that.

It's clear that he thinks I'm leaving early because of the rudeness he committed.

Luckily, I also knew my cover was good enough to fool even the snowy-eyed Bertus.

"Hey, I was wondering. If I asked your name, would it be....... ?"

Bertus asked as I turned to leave the stationmaster's office.

I didn't think of crossdressing pseudonyms!

I'm already "real" enough.

I don't want to be more real here!

"......It wouldn't hurt for you to know."

"......a."

Leaving Bertus's subtle reaction behind, I stormed out of there.

Episode 299.

After the mysterious ghostly woman leaves.

Bertus wiped the cold sweat from his forehead.

"What a mistake I made.

A cold sweat ran down Bertus's spine at the unimaginable rudeness that had crossed the line of decency.

Bertus had never seen or heard of the act of spitting tea into someone's face, nor had he ever imagined it.

The behavior was rude, crossing the line.

The other person seemed puzzled, but not angry.

It was a ridiculous answer.

His hands were shaking excessively, and I wondered why someone who didn't know who he was would be so nervous.

Alcoholism out of nowhere.

The answer was not at all in keeping with his seemingly noble demeanor.

The outfit was plain and not very upscale. I couldn't tell what was in the large trunk, but it didn't look like a luxury item.

Technically, she'd be a well-bred peasant girl.

Her features include shiny silver hair and delicate, almost painterly features. She wears heavy makeup, but it doesn't feel out of place.

He was a strange man in many ways.

From a distance, I could hear the commotion, and even as I walked, I could hear the angry voice.

-Huh, so you're a hand-wringing asshole?

-Are you there?

That doesn't sound like the kind of thing you'd expect a well-bred young lady to say.

-delay

"I, Your Majesty......."

"Uh, sit down."

Bertus froze, looking at the man before him and the two other men he'd brought with him.

They knelt before Bertus, not in chairs, but in front of him, even though he hadn't said anything. Bertus looked at the three kneeling before him, legs crossed and arms folded.

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Sin, I'm sorry!"

"Am I not understanding you correctly when you say that your goal is to ensure the safe operation of the horsepower trains and their respective stations, and yet you want to create a sense of urgency among the citizens?"

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty!"

The man who was about to swing his hand in frustration at a ghostly lady.

These three are not just troops, but vassals of Bertus.

In other words, the knights of the Duke of Salerian.

Bertus smirked.

"How much did you get?"

"Yes?"

"You're lucky it didn't happen. If you'd actually laid a hand on her, I'd be rolling around on the floor for a week, being told by the head of security that I'd been beating up citizens, and my half-brother would be doing nothing but watching me self-destruct. Too bad. It's a good thing she was bad enough to block your slap with one hand, huh? It's a good thing she didn't make my week of hard work go to waste, huh?"

"Sin, I'm sorry. God had a short fuse."

"Oh, how much did you get paid, I don't get it, why are you doing this crazy shit unless you got paid by Charlotte. Tell me, how much did you get paid by my half-brother?"

The three knights of the Duchy of Salerian grimaced at Bertus's evil stone joke.

Bertus' demeanor now was subtly reminiscent of Reinhardt's.

"Kill me, Your Majesty!"

Bertus had no intention of killing the three, though his judgment was warped.

Knights are somewhat above the law the moment they become privileged, especially those from families close to power.

So some people think that their privilege comes from them. So they can be overly ignorant and arrogant.

The knights of the Duke of Salerian are not the only ones.

The guards are just a few words away, and they're not held accountable for killing people, so they think it's okay to kill a few citizens.

It was a bit, well, seriously stupid to try to handcuff a citizen in public.

"If you try to ruin my week like this again, it's going to be fun."

Bertus said with a murderous look on his face, and then bit them.

There's no point in being competent if you're too short with your thoughts.

If they like stabbing, send them to a place where they can stab a lot.

Bertus has already decided which change to send the three of them to.

It's one thing to punch a shoplifter, but it's quite another to punch a citizen who tries to stop the situation.

Bertus didn't see it, but he heard the silver-haired lady grab the knight's wrist.

He didn't look like he had any power.

Bertus knew of a few out-of-standard cases, of course, where size and physical strength were not necessarily proportional.

What's he doing.

For the first time in his life, Bertus was very curious about the identity of the person who had spit tea in his face.

'I'm sure I've seen this before.......'

And somehow it felt familiar.

It's not a face, or an expression, or anything like that.

-Huh, so you're a hand-wringing asshole?

-Are you there?

Somehow.

That sounds familiar.

But the impression of the silver-haired woman was so strong that Bertus couldn't think of anyone else.

I think it was kind of cute how he was so flustered and fidgety at the sight of himself.

'......It wouldn't hurt for you to know.'

Also, he seemed to know who I was even though I hadn't told him. Of course, it's not like I didn't recognize the face, so it wasn't particularly strange.

Who.

What's he doing.

Bertus is disturbed by this sudden turn of events.

\* \* \*

It was bad enough that I'd run into Bertus by some stupid coincidence. But it was even worse when I realized that if I'd just let the kids get beat up, nothing would have happened.

This.

It was a concept, but now that I'm living it, I feel like I've become this person.

No, but it's not like we're beating kids like dogs, is it?

...... may be true, but it's a bit glossed over by the time I say it.

Never mind.

There's no way Bertus would come to a cross-dressing contest. I thought he was supposed to be working on something important, not the Temple Festival, so he wouldn't be able to step foot in the Temple.

My steps were getting heavier and heavier as I got closer to the temple.

Real.......

I really don't want to go.......

Still, you have to go.

This is all for my own good.

No choice but to go.......

The trunk was heavy, too, as if it were dragging a load of iron.

One thing I did decide to do.

If you go off on a tangent like that, you might get into trouble.

First of all, whatever happens, just suck it up. If you don't, it could be worse.

\* \* \*

"Why would I......."

Kono Lint stared blankly into space with unfocused eyes. She was now wearing the women's dress the organizers had provided.

Konorint wanted to cut out his own tongue for talking nonsense.

"The pageant, I hear it's today?

"Well.

Heinrich von Schwarz, Kaier Bioden, Erich de Lapaeri, and Kono Lindt.

The four of them walked around together throughout the festival, enjoying themselves.

"They're taking applications for that until this evening.

I only brought it up because I had the nefarious idea that it wouldn't be me.

'The guy who lost at rock-paper-scissors is out. How about that.'

Boys will sometimes bet their lives on strange bets.

To be more precise, we go on futile adventures to see the ugliness of others.

"......What? Why would you leave something like that? Are you crazy?

"Why, it's fun, right?

How embarrassing it will be.

Watching each other do things you'd never want to do in front of a bunch of people. Seeing the shame on their faces.

A lifetime of teasing.

There's no reason not to. Unsurprisingly, it was met with mixed reviews.

Until Kono Lint said this, it certainly was.

"It's not just me, right?

There are four candidates. So the probability is one in four.

It's a gamble you can't afford not to take.

Before rationality prevailed, Conor Lindt preached.

"If you don't pay, you're out!

The result is.

"......."

It's all explained by the fact that Kono Lint is now in the waiting room at the back of the great hall where the pageant is being held.

To be me is to be someone, and that was Conor Lindt.

It's equal odds, but strangely enough, it often takes one to go first, and Kono Lint was that one.

"Asshole, will you shut up?"

"Oh, okay......."

"Look at your face. What's wrong with your skin? You don't even wear makeup. Bam."

Liana de Granz was painting Kono Lint's face.

Riana, who usually treats herself like a cow, has the honor of having Duchess Young-ae do her makeup with her own hands.

Normally I'd be thrilled and my heart would be racing, but Kono Lint was just dying in real time.

"What, a cross-dressing contest?

"Do you guys have a hobby like that?

"Penalty?

"Oh, him?

'Hmph. Ugh. Oh, yeah. That's funny! Ah, ah, ah, ah! Makeover? Yeah. I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it! Where are you? Is it today?

I have no intention of putting on makeup, but friends, after all, are very supportive of those who are caught in the middle of a bad situation.

They go to her because they know she's the only one supporting Ellen and Cliff on the Mr. and Mrs. Temple issue.

As if on cue, when Kono Lint decided to participate in the cross-dressing contest, he managed to get Riana, who was usually a hard-to-reach person, to talk to him.

As if that weren't enough fun, Riana personally applied Kono Lint's makeup and picked out her outfit in the back waiting room where the pageant was taking place.

Of course, Riana didn't lend her clothes.

Dressed in one of the many women's outfits provided by the organizers, Riana fumbled around, trying on makeup and even a wig.

After a long pause, Riana clicked her tongue.

"What?"

"What."

"No matter what I do, it's just funny."

"......."

Riana giggled at the sight of Lint's face, as if it was too ridiculous to be true no matter how hard she tried.

A similar scene was unfolding around me. The convention isn't that big, so the waiting room is just a giant hall at the back of a huge auditorium. Some people sighed heavily, while others, like myself, had their makeup applied.

Usually, it's a bad look.

Some were fiddling with themselves in the mirror, and others were harder to see.

And there was this giant, giant humanoid chariot standing there, wearing the largest dress possible, but it looked like a short skirt.

It was even worse to watch him be ashamed of himself.

This is hell.

Kono Lint wondered who was worse, the demons of hell or the spectators who came to laugh at them.

Since the number of non-participants was limited to one person to help with makeup and outfits like Riana's, it was a good thing that she was the only one who could laugh at this.

His mouth is the problem.

There's no point in wallowing in self-pity.

Entry number 1.

Kono Lint wore a sign with his number on his chest.

It's even number one.

You said the entry numbers are randomized, not in order of application.

The last person to sign up must bat first.

It made me want to die even more.

"Why weren't you born prettier?"

"Why is that my fault....... Why should I be born pretty....... I'm a man......."

"Yeah? But he wasn't exactly handsome."

"Help me......."

Riana was applying her makeup and giggling about what was so funny.

Who's to blame?

You can only blame yourself for creating this hell.

In the midst of all that hell of looking at each other and holding back laughter, in the slightly rowdy waiting room while preparing for the competition.

Kono Lint saw someone sitting somewhere in a corner, among a group of people who looked like him.

It was a man in a robe.

Apparently, it was a participant.

I couldn't get a good look at her because she had her hood pulled down, but I could see that she had silver hair, a fine jawline, and shiny pink lips.

Even when I pretend, it's not the same.

Someone approached the person in the corner, not talking to anyone, just sitting there.

It was someone who appeared to be an organizer.

I couldn't hear the conversation because it was so far away, but he seemed to be saying something, and then he nodded in understanding and took off his hood.

For a moment, Conor Lindt was speechless.

It was the same for the other participants who happened to be in his line of sight.

We seemed to be having a conversation in that state, and the organizer nodded in understanding.

"Where do you see that?"

Riana turned her gaze toward Kono Lint as well, and dropped the cosmetics she was holding when she realized he was looking away.

"......What, are women allowed to participate? No, that can't be right, can it?"

Riana mumbled something to herself.

Even though I knew it wasn't true, I couldn't help but say it.

Girl.

No, not a girl, but a girl nonetheless.

When the girl was done talking to the organizers, she put her hood back on.

"That's a man?"

Riana asked, looking back at Kono Lint with a puzzled expression. Though her face was no longer visible,

"Well, even if you ask me about it......."

The two of them, and anyone else who saw the silver-haired contestant, were stumped.

Kono Lint even thought that the girl(?) seemed to make eye contact with him before she put on her hood.

I'm pretty sure I saw the hooded girl's face turn bright red.

'No way.......'

Konorint felt something in that face, in that demeanor, in that glimpse of the girl, however fleeting.

"You're not in love with me, are you?

Kono Lint was on a strange tangent.

Entry number 40.

If nothing else, Lint could see the number on the girl's chest.

Konorint could see that the girl kept mumbling something under her hood, using only the shape of her mouth.

-Why the fuck are they here....... Why the hell.......

Of course, I didn't realize that it was mostly gibberish.

Episode 300.

As the start time approached, everyone but the contestants and organizers had to leave the waiting room.

"It's the best I can do."

Leaving behind Conor Lint, who looked ridiculous in his wig and full makeup, Riana giggled and left the waiting room.

All that's left are about forty cross-dressing contestants.

Most of them looked like they were guilty of something. Of course, there were a few who were more than capable of cross-dressing.

Those who presumably have such a hobby.

With over 100,000 students at Temple, there's bound to be someone out there with a taste for it.

And someone who seems very dangerous and extraordinary.

Hooded entry number 40.

I was biting my nails at how anxious and nervous I was.

Kono Lint also realized that the situation sucked, but he wondered what was so disturbing about it.

If that's the case, what's the point of coming out?

Are you in the same situation as me?

"Okay, the competition is about to begin. Contestant number 40, please remove your hood."

"......."

The moderator came out and started to set up, but I didn't hear him, so I didn't know what to do.

"Take it off."

"......."

Eventually, Chae Geun was forced to take off his hood, and the other participants were speechless at the sight of him.

"......."

No.

That's a man?

They all had that look on their faces.

Entry #40 is completely unable to smile, but somehow manages a subtle forced smile with extreme effort.

"Are you sure you didn't go to ...... thinking it was Miss Temple?"

"Maybe......."

The participants seemed to know each other from the sidelines, and I almost wondered if Kono Lint wasn't real - in fact, it was more believable.

Yes, that's the only case.

It can't be a man with that face.

That's how I started to understand it.

Everyone was convinced that the pretty girl had sent her Miss Temple application to the wrong pageant, so when she got there, everyone assumed that she was in the middle of a bunch of weirdos and didn't know what to do.

I'm applying for the Miss Temple pageant, and the sight of cross-dressing men, and even Gurhan in a dress, is bound to cause panic!

I want to go out, but I'm too shy and embarrassed to do it!

Even though the organizers didn't say anything, everyone started to feel sympathy for the pretty girl who was blushing and stomping her feet (even though she wasn't).

Eventually, someone has to step up.

You don't belong here, and you need an escort to get you out of here.

The chivalry that was beginning to sprout in everyone's hearts was triggered first.

"Well, um. Big."

It was a human chariot in a dress.

"......?"

Entry number 24, a tall, sturdy human chariot. In a place where cross-dressers are mostly misfits, an overwhelmingly misfit has begun to approach a beautiful girl.

Conor Lindt was stunned.

"No! No one else knows, but you shouldn't!

That behemoth is too much of an eyesore to approach that frail, slender-looking girl.

A towering, all-muscled beast in a one-piece suit, made even more hideous by a blonde, long-haired wig, approaches the beautiful girl.

The girl stared blankly up at the hulking figure approaching her.

He doesn't say anything, but he's smiling sheepishly, the corners of his mouth twitching.

It's clear he's scared.

Konorint, even he was confident that he would froth and fall if a monster like that approached him in that manner.

But of course, the human tank, Richard Howleman, who thought he was being chivalrous and acting like a gentleman, was completely unconcerned with his appearance and smiled gently.

"Apparently, you picked the wrong contest to enter......."

"......?"

"This is, like, a cross-dressing contest. It's not a Miss Temple pageant."

I said it because I thought it would be cool, but it wasn't cool at all because of the situation, the outfit, and the fact that I was in a cross-dressing contest.

Naturally, all eyes are on her. The silver-haired girl's eyes rolled back in her head.

He wanted to say something, but didn't want to say anything, and his lips were moving nervously.

"Don't be intimidated. It's a simple event, so if you leave after giving a good explanation to the organizers, you can contact us at......."

The same thought is on everyone's mind.

That asshole. It's clear he thinks he's so cool.

Are you going to use your current gentleness and consideration as a weapon to find out what class the girl you're about to leave is from, and maybe even get her to promise to eat with you later?

The girl finally decided that silence was not enough to defeat the magical coven in front of her, and she spoke cautiously, her lips quivering.

"...... is a man......."

From the girl's mouth came an ambiguous aesthetic that made it hard to tell if she was male or female.

"Yes?"

Richard Howleman asked, puzzled, as if he must have misheard something.

Girl, no. Number 40, who identified herself as not a girl, bit her lip.

Of course, the girl is just angry at the abomination in front of her for not being able to recognize her words the first time.

Fuck off, asshole.

His actions were motivated by this, but in the eyes of others, they were merely an expression of vindictiveness toward those who were causing him trouble.

Pissed off and impatient.

Similar, but subtly different.

Everyone is just giving the poor creature the benefit of the doubt.

When that didn't work, entry #40 said tersely.

"That....... came to the right....... right."

"!"

Richard Howleman's face hardened, as did the faces of the others.

Sometimes it's hard to believe what you see.

I didn't believe it when I saw it, but now I've got confirmation.

That creature is.

It is claiming to be an entity that is biologically in the same category as them.

"No, no, no......."

Richard Howleman looked like he had just lost the love of his life right in front of him.

Looking as if his soul had been sucked out of him, the humanoid staggered back to his seat. But others, too, could not help but glance at entry number 40, whose face was flushed red and head bowed.

Forty times she bit her lip and said nothing, her face soaked with shame and embarrassment that red water dripped from her face.

\* \* \*

-shoot

Shot.

I washed my hands in the restroom near the waiting area, with water running in the sink.

You can't wash your face, and you don't want to go potty.

I couldn't stay there because I felt like I was going to rip someone's head off.

Sickness.

I figured Kono Lint might be in the audience, but why the hell is he a participant, even looking like that?

My heart nearly dropped when I thought Riana, who was applying my makeup, would recognize me.

The first time I came, the organizers kept asking me if I was the person I signed up to be, or if I was someone else, and I had a hard time explaining it.

The good news is that my makeup and camouflage were perfect, so no one recognized me, and I was even told I was someone else.

That's why Kono Lint didn't recognize me, and even that human tank guy I played against in the tournament didn't recognize me. He even looked like he was trying to be nice to me.

No, not even close.

You mean to tell me that I look like an idiot for submitting my Miss Temple application to a cross-dressing contest?

-shoot

"Whoa......."

Real.

I'm going to lose my mind.

Be nervous.

If I relax and let my temper get the better of me, Kono Lint might recognize me.

That's a look only Reinhardt could make.

Oh, come to think of it?

It could be a crazy development.

Laugh.

I need to manage my facial expressions so that no one recognizes me by the time I'm done.

"Ew, ew, sin, sorry......!"

"......?"

"Huh? Here's a man's makeup....... Ah."

Even the tournament officials got confused and fell asleep when they saw me.

Fuck.

When something is too good to be true, it is.

You say you're overpaid.

I must have gone too far with this one.

And my entry number 40.

This is random.

There are only 40 participants.

Clearly, they chose me as number 40 on purpose. It's obvious.

\* \* \*

A cross-dressing competition that's in a league of its own, if not the most anticipated.

-And without further ado, let's kick off the 8th annual Temple Sorority Pageant, hosted by the Temple Student Government Association!

It's been an annual cross-dressing competition for eight years.

While there wasn't the same overwhelming cheer as at the tournament, the room was packed in a rented auditorium for a regular class.

Some people were intrigued by the idea of such a weird competition, while others were there to see their friends' black marks on their lives as punishment.

There were no thunderous cheers, but there were plenty of people in the audience ready to laugh or watching with interest.

And there was a bunch of people from an Iranian class who had come to see Richard Howleman's black history.

And Liana de Granz, Heinrich von Schwarz, Erich de Lapaeri, and Kaier Bioden from the Royal Class, who came to watch the pageantry.

Four Royal Class students were there to observe the black history of Kono Lindt.

Heinrich asked, looking at Riana sitting next to him.

"Did it go well?"

"Well, in what sense?"

When the guy who said I was falling into my trap, that I was the only one, got caught, everyone cheered. Everyone was looking forward to seeing what kind of weirdness Kono Lint would come up with.

Erich asked, looking at Liana.

"But how many times is he?"

Riana giggled at the question and looked at Erich.

"One."

"Eek."

"Quack."

They couldn't believe their ears when they heard that they were the first to bat in this hellish competition. They can only imagine the look on Kono Lindt's face right now.

-Come on, we've got a lot of great contestants this time, and we're going to introduce you to the first contestant in the highly anticipated cross-dressing competition!

The moderator had a lot of tension in this bizarre competition.

-Royal Class First Year! I'd like to introduce Konorint-kun! Please welcome him with thunderous applause!

It wasn't thunderous, but the word "royal class" brought a round of applause.

"Ooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Liana de Granz squealed and clapped, somehow more excited than when she was watching the tournament.

You'd think this would be the kind of thing a duchess would be honored for, but even the kids who didn't know her well knew that Liana de Granz was a great person who had nothing to do with that.

The Ganodab trio, now joined by one more, but they were fed up with Riana.

I can't believe they get so worked up over other people's misfortunes, even though they are the same way themselves.

'devilish.......'

Everyone, with that thought running through your head.

The first batter with a sour face. Kono Lindt was walking up to the stage.

Riana's makeup was perfect.

The outfit choice was perfect.

The wig selection wasn't bad, either.

"Poof!"

"Kitchen!"

"What the hell!"

However, there were a few flaws in the hangers.

Between the four of us, I can see why the cross-dressing contest has been going on for eight years now, despite its odd title.

I don't know what else, but it was funny.

-Mr. Lint, you're a Royal Class student, right?

-Yes.

-It's really cute, and it's okay to be confident.

-.......

The moderator glared at Kono Lint as if to say, "Don't give a fuck.

-Oops, my bad, I meant the clothes are cute, not Mr. Lint.

-Ah.

Lint's face fell at the emcee's words, and the audience erupted in laughter. This is what a cross-dressing contest is supposed to be about: a contestant who's in it for the wrong reasons, and a moderator who's gently scratching him.

-Did you do your own makeup?

-......No. If your friend is.......

-A friend? Someone who's watching right now, obviously? You're really good at this. Who is it? Can you raise your hand?

At that, Riana, who was watching from the audience, raised her hand. She didn't seem embarrassed by the attention.

Upon seeing Riana, the moderator looked back and forth between Konorint and Riana.

-Oh, you're a woman, is that your girlfriend?

"Aaaahhhhhhh, no way!"

A look of extreme dislike flashed across Riana's face, and once again the audience erupted in laughter.

The Ganodab brothers stared at her like she was some kind of monster.

I've gotten to the point where I can't stand George, the man.

-You deny it vehemently. Mr. Lint, are you hurt?

-Ah, no, no! Why would I be hurt!

Conor Lint, who admitted he was hurt by the vehement denials, was dying by the minute.

-Why did the Royal Class have a cross-dressing contest?

-Isn't it like the other kids, like a penalty or something?

-They play the same way we do? I don't think so.......

While his demonic classmates in Royal Class were busy scoffing, the audience's reaction was a little different.

For starters, Kono Lint comes with a royalty premium.

Even in a temple with nearly 100,000 students, there are only about a hundred people in the royal class. So when you hear the word "royal class," there's something you have to eat to get in.

The perception of the Royal Class is firmly ingrained in the minds of most regular class students that they are an untouchable elite and arrogant bunch.

So, the guy in front of me in the ridiculous cross-dressing who's trying to figure out what to do is Royal Class?

Somehow, the royal class student, whom you usually think of as a sky-high figure, becomes approachable.

With that royal class premium attached.

-Hey, isn't she cute?

-Response.

The reaction of female students was a little different.

Kono Lint doesn't fall into the handsome category by any stretch of the imagination, but he does deserve to be called cute.

Add to that Riana de Granz's makeup, and you've got yourself a pretty girl, if not a cute one. Of course, the boys would disagree, but there were plenty of girls who found Kono Lint's shyness a bit cute.

-Cute!

-You're cute!

The secondary school girls were throwing their hands up in the air and giggling, and Kono Lint's eyes were glazed over because he didn't know what he was getting himself into.

After a few more questions, the moderator moved on to the big question.

-Konorint-kun is supposed to be a psychic, by the way.

-Ohh.......

Superpowers.

People know they exist, but very few people have seen them. Even in the temple, there are royal class students and psychics.

No matter how much we know about psychic powers, they're still a foreign concept to most people. So it's no wonder that the idea of a royal class student dressed in a funny costume is so exciting.

I didn't just lie and say it was random and then put Kono Lint at 1 and Reinhardt at 40.

At the mention of superpowers, Kono Rint and the other Royal Class boys stiffened.

-I don't think you've decided what you're going to do during your appeal anyway, so why not show us what your superpower is? Teleportation, that's cool!

-!

-Ohhhhh!

Those in the know know.

Conor Lindt's superpower is not something that can be shown to the public.

Of course, the penalty is now somewhat offset by.......

Still, you can only go as far as your underwear.

-Ah, no, no, no, no!

Conor Lindt's desperate cries could be heard.

The boys stood gaping at the prospect of nearly squaring the black history of Kono Lindt.

Riana's mouth hung open in disbelief. If she'd been a little more mesmerized, she might have said, "Show me, show me, show me," but she was still keeping her wits about her.

But.

Some people don't know the full story here.

-show me!

Starting with someone shouting.

-Show me! Show me!

We were all eager to see the psychic demonstrate his powers.

"This, this....... What?"

Riana looked at Heinrich and mumbled something incoherent.

"Well, yeah......."

Even though it's a cono lint that fell into the trap I sold.

For once, it was a close call.

第 301页

Cannot be shown.

-Show me! Show me!

Kono Rint wanted to bite his tongue and die as he listened to the cries of the people in front of him.

"Do something stupid!

The moderator had no idea what to make of the superpower, but assumed it must be something special, and the audience was on the edge of their seats, eager to see what Royal Class had in store for them: teleportation.

If I suddenly teleported out of this spot in my underwear, this pageant venue would be a mess at worst and a laughingstock at best.

Your abilities are deeply flawed. So you can't show it.

I have to say that. I'm already embarrassed to be in public like this, and I don't want to do anything more embarrassing.

Because while people might want to see a skillful teleportation show, what they're really going to see is a very dangerous picture of a pervert in nothing but panties teleporting from bronze to bronze!

Just like that.

I have to say.

-Show me! Show me!

Conor Lint hears a cry directed at him, sees a gaze directed at him.

Even though you're standing here looking like this, you see their eyes on you.

It's an envious gaze.

It's a stare that Kono Lint has never received before.

The subtle jealousy, envy, and envy of those who are seen as royalty.

The boy has never been through it.

It's long since been stigmatized within the royal class as the same ability.

-Dude, that's awesome!

-Soon we'll be able to move the top with it, right?

-He, Chu, congratulations Lint.......

When I was able to move my underwear with me, my fellow psychic colleagues rejoiced.

It's the kind of pathetic ability that gets cheered and praised just for being less pathetic.

I don't think I'd ever be able to do what Reinhardt did, which is to travel around and do all these crazy things.

Or awakening superpowers while fighting a senior.

You're back from doing something crazy in Darkland.

Or awakening a magical enhancement at the end of a fight.

You win the first grade tournament with aplomb.

That kind of thing.

It's not your job to do things that make people's jaws drop.

But now, they're looking at themselves.

Just because they're royalty, just because they're superpowered.

Some people even said it was cute.

The first attention I've ever gotten in my life. What if I told them that they couldn't use their powers because they would strip them naked.

There's a useless guy like that in the Royal Class.

I wonder if that's going to change.

It was painful to imagine their excited stares turning to cold ones.

Useless abilities.

No, it's an awesome ability, but one that has too many critical flaws to be practical.

How long does it have to be like this?

Waiting to see what we can move with underwear next, and being happy with the small progress we've made.

I wonder, when am I ever going to be useful?

Kono Lint felt the cries of the people were distant. The moderator's chaegun also sounded like a distant echo.

With so many people in the spotlight, Kono Lint feels rather alone.

I don't want to be like Reinhardt.

He chooses to do things that are as dangerous as they are accomplished.

I don't want to live like that. I don't think I could.

However, I don't want to have to hunt and peck for risks like that dude with the stupidly handsome twin plates.

A little bit, though.

Like the world is being strangely generous to him.

Maybe I'm being a little generous.

How long do I have to go through life with these same powers, introducing myself as a psychic, but never being able to show it to anyone.

If Reinhardt taught me anything, it's this.

Recklessness sometimes has consequences.

Recklessness doesn't necessarily lead to failure.

Me too.

The world has something for you, too.

And I know that it's not going to be in my hands unless I try.

If a tree has fruit on it, and I don't take the risk of climbing the tree, the fruit will never be mine.

-show me!

Kono Lint brings us back to reality after a short but long hiatus.

The boy decided to do something.

His royal classmates, who had been sneering at him, were turning white. They had read something in the boy's determined expression.

-No! No!

Especially Riana de Granz, who was having the most fun so far, shaking her head in disbelief. While a moderate amount of embarrassment passes for humor, Riana is still not a naturally evil person.

The child is about to cross a river of no return, and you desperately try to stop him.

"No.

But Lint is no longer listening to anyone else.

I decided to do it.

Sometimes you have to move forward, even if it means failing.

-show me your brother!

It's not because of the squeaky-clean middle school girl in the front seat.

"Mr. Lindt, if you find the demonstration difficult, you can show me something else......."

And it's not because of the moderator who sits on the sidelines.

-show me!

And it's not because of the shouts of envy in the eyes of so many.

-Don't do it!

It's not for anyone.

Self.

You're tired of the stagnation and you're sick of yourself.

So, even though you can't live like Reinhardt, you decide to emulate the way he's done things in the past.

There is a point of no return, and that point is now.

Push yourself to the edge, and take the next step.

If it fails, it sucks.

If you succeed, you won't have to live on pennies anymore.

There is no more extreme situation than this.

Because I have to, I will.

"Something, let me show you."

-Waaaaaah!

Kono Lint, in her dress, strained her eyeballs.

I will complete my teleportation by moving my clothes along with me, and now I am truly on my way to becoming a psychic.

The coordinates to move are to the right of the stage.

The ability itself is easy to use.

I just can't figure out how to overcome the penalty.

I still don't know, but I'm determined to realize the extremes of teleportation in extreme situations.

"Suck!"

Kono Lindt clasped his hands together.

-pot!

-Oh!

In a flash.

A hush fell over the auditorium.

Kono Lint has successfully teleported.

-Urr......?

The audience was stunned.

"To......?"

The moderator was stunned.

-u......?

-What, what......?

And the royal classmates watching the scene were equally stunned-not by the predictable side effects, but by the sheer shock of seeing something so unexpected.

"......?"

And Kono Lint, who was present, was equally dumbfounded.

Clearly, Conor Lindt has succeeded in teleporting.

But his body was still there, right where he was.

It's the clothes that have been moved.

Kono Lint had all of his clothes, except his underwear, moved to the right side of the stage.

Conor Lindt was stunned.

So did my classmates.

ConoLint's capabilities have evolved.

What's happening now is ridiculous. That's why those in the know know that Kono Lint's capabilities have gone beyond quantum leaps and bounds to create something close to a miracle.

"Sue, did you know that teleportation is....... like this?"

"Uh, that, that....... Uh, no."

However, people, including the moderators, can't help but think that this is what Kono Lint's teleportation ability is supposed to do.

You didn't move yourself, you moved the clothes you were wearing.

Kono Lint has achieved miraculous ability growth.

-꺄아아아악!

But.

The end result was the same as if I were suddenly naked except for my panties.

\* \* \*

-Well, that was entry number one, Konorint-kun!

Kono Lint fled to the back of the stage, and it took a while for the confusion of the students and audience, who were caught off guard by the suddenness of the situation, to settle down.

"What did I....... What did I just see......?"

Liana de Granz muttered, frozen in place.

This was partly due to Kono Lint's sudden underwear breeze, but also, of course, to the fact that he was using an ability unlike any other.

Heinrich, Caierdo, and Erich were equally baffled.

People don't know Lint, so it's inevitable that they're going to be stunned and dumbfounded. Because teleportation doesn't necessarily mean you're moving.

To those in the know, however, Kono Lint's success in sending objects, when all he had ever done was move his own body, was astonishing.

While the result is a ridiculous shifting of clothes, it's safe to say that the ability itself has evolved by leaps and bounds.

Some of the people who didn't know the truth looked like they had thrown up their hands in disbelief, while others thought it was cute to see Kono Lint running away in panic.

But the four who knew the truth were speechless for a while, their mouths hanging open.

\* \* \*

-And that brings us to our next two contestants!

The moderator began to move the contest forward to clear up the confusion.

The four of them were there to see the ridiculousness of Cono Lint in the first place, so there was no point in sticking around now that it was over.

Of course, after all the contestants have introduced themselves, there's still the voting process to determine the winner. But that's enough for now.

Despite the shocking results, the important work is done and there's no reason to stay.

But the Royal Class Four, as well as others, didn't get a seat easily.

-What have you prepared for your appeal time?

-Let me show you the dance.

The contestants' antics were hilarious and kept me watching. Some of them were punished and some of them were voluntary, but they were all pretty funny in their own way.

"Hey, what is that? What is that?"

"Ack! Ack! If it's funny, it's funny, don't hit me!"

After the shock of Kono Lindt's revelation, Riana laughed, patting Erich de Lapaeri, who sat next to her.

"No, you're going to have to shave some leg hair, ahhh!"

Riana laughs as she slaps the person next to her.

"This is crazy....... Oh, my stomach hurts."

I've seen dancing, singing, and out-of-the-blue defeats for appeals.

When a cross-dressing music major nailed a soaring baritone solo, everyone clapped along.

After a few minutes of this cross-dressing contest, Riana clapped her hands as if she'd remembered something.

"Right!"

"Well, what's the point of....... You gonna hit me again?"

Erich flinched as Riana's eyes lit up as if she'd just remembered something.

"That's right! That's right! You know what!"

-pakpakpak!

Sure enough, he did it again.

"Oh, why does it keep hitting me......."

Liana pats Erich on the shoulder a few times, then looks at the Ganodab triplets and says, "You're right.

"There was a weird kid in the waiting room earlier."

"Weird kid?"

Erich asked, and Kai'er's expression turned strange.

"If any of the kids there don't look weird, that would be even weirder......?"

That's true, too.

In a waiting room full of cross-dressers, it's even weirder when you're the only one who isn't weird, because where there are weirdos, you're weird.

"No, there was a pretty girl in the back?"

Riana hesitated, then settled on a harsh phrase.

"......?"

"......?"

"......?"

I'd even go so far as to say that Riana is a stunningly pretty girl.

Of course, being the place that it is, it must be a man. Riana shook her head, remembering the weird kid she'd forgotten about in her shock earlier.

"I think it was 40 or something."

Riana was going to stay until then, if only out of curiosity, and the rest of her classmates were curious, too.

To what extent?

I'm just curious.

If a man cross-dresses and looks that good, what are you going to do?

None of the three understood why they were sitting there, but they didn't leave.

-All right, I give you entry number 24, Mr. Richard Howleman!

"......."

"......."

"......."

The appearance of the two-meter-plus dress made everyone want to cover their own eyes, and the moderator was freaking out.

"......I want to get out."

The corner of Riana's mouth twitched slightly, as if she'd seen him earlier but hadn't noticed.

-Uh hmm, big. Um....... ugh. Mmm. Uh, yeah. Ah.

It would be even worse if the muscular hunk was blushing and crossing her legs while tugging at the hem of her dress.

After a hilarious exchange between a broken moderator and an embarrassed cross-dresser, the moderator decided it was time to move on and went straight to the appeal.

-What have you prepared for your appeal?

-squat, let me show you.

Everyone watched in bewilderment as the humanoid suddenly demonstrated a high-weight squat in a one-piece.

It was ugly in a lot of ways, so there were a lot of escapees from that part.

Amidst the cheers and laughter, the cross-dressing contest was coming to a close.

-And now, the eighth edition of the highly anticipated crossdressing competition is down to its final contestant. A final contestant who is sure to surprise you in more ways than one. We can't reveal her real name because she's requested identity protection, but entry number 40, please come forward!

The 40 John Doe entries weren't the only ones, as there were quite a few who kept their class and name a secret.

Riana had already seen it once, and the other three onlookers were curious to see what it was like, given what she had said.

The last such participant.

John Doe #40 slowly walked onto the stage.

-with.......

The audience's reaction to contestant #40 walking out under the spotlight was a stunned gasp.

"What, what is......?"

"No......."

"What......?"

The reactions of the Royal Class students weren't much different. Even Riana, who had already seen it once, was frozen in place, staring blankly at number 40.

Silver hair that glistened in the light. It's a wig, of course, but the hair is so vibrant for a wig that it almost looks like her own hair.

Golden eyes, seductive full pink lips, a fine jawline and forehead, and a clean, slender white neckline.

She had slender shoulders and a perfect waist, although it was hidden by the hem of the dress.

There he was, smiling a gentle, kindly smile.

So the same question is bound to be on everyone's mind.

That's a man?

That's a lie.

-He, he....... I hate to break it to you, but....... Are you a cross-dressing contestant?

-Yes.

There, a neutral, subtle minor.

Rather than cheering or exclaiming, everyone was frozen in place. One of those "does this make sense?" moments.

-You asked to keep your identity secret, is there a reason?

For a moment, his face cracked as if a needle could fit through it. Number 40 quickly regained his expression.

-......Well, everyone has secrets.

-I see....... Do you usually dress like this?

-.......

At the moderator's provocative words, Number 40 stared at the moderator for a moment.

Everyone has just sensed a fleeting glimpse of No. 40's true expression, but no one has seen it clearly. Quickly recovering his smile, Number 40 smirks and says, "I'm sorry.

-No, not at all.

-You mean this is your first time?

-Yes.

It looks fine, but people are watching.

Her expression was as nonchalant as a steel wall, but Number 40 was now clutching the hem of her dress.

It was clear that he was very nervous. His face was getting redder and redder, and it was clear that he was very embarrassed about the situation.

Episode 302.

-Why did you enter the cross-dressing contest in the first place?

-money.

-Ah, the prize. Yeah, you can do that.

The moderator kept asking me awkward questions, which I answered like I was fine with for the 40th time, but the longer he kept asking, the tighter his grip on my dress became.

After 40 times of embarrassment and shame, people's faces get weirder and weirder.

In fact, that's not much different from the behavior of the previous 24 humanoids. No, it's exactly the same.

But people who are nauseated by the same behavior 24 times are mesmerized by the same behavior 40 times.

It's cute, so maybe it works anyway?

Same.

Dangerous ideas are getting into people's heads.

-So, what are you going to do with your winnings this time? Buy another dress or......?

-.......

Of course, the moderator didn't stop being a jerk. The 40 awkward smiles of embarrassment were enough to make people sympathetic.

-Stop harassing me!

-Yes! Stop it!

-Ask me a normal question!

Eventually, people started to criticize the moderator for embarrassing 40. People had gotten to the point where they were emotionally invested in 40.

-Oops, that was a bit harsh, I apologize.

-No, thank you.

The moderator asked her about her daily life and hobbies, and once the nasty questions were out of the way, the silver-haired participant answered with a nonchalant expression.

It was the usual question-and-answer period, but people were starting to find themselves wishing this last segment wouldn't end so soon.

"......, I don't think I should look any further."

Erich muttered to himself.

You start to realize that you're about to take a dangerous step.

"......Yes."

"......."

The other two boys weren't much different.

Normally, Riana would have given her a disdainful glance, but this time she couldn't resist.

"Why do I get jealous when I see a man?"

Riana mumbled something along those lines.

-Okay, so now we're going to slip in an appeal to.......

-Later!

-You're doing it too fast!

People even tried to stop the moderator from proceeding.

Number 40 just laughed and said "ahhhhh" as if he was embarrassed by the audience's behavior, but it was adding fuel to the fire that shouldn't have been added.

-Well, it looks like you, #40, have come to exert an enormous influence on the tastes of a lot of people.

-He....... Sorry.......

-No, you don't need to apologize, but we can't drag this out forever, we have votes and the contest needs to wrap up soon. So, what do you have for your appeal?

In the end, the moderator didn't give #40 any more time.

-I will sing.

There was nothing new about it because everyone else was doing it. Of course, we didn't have any accompaniment, so everybody just did it unaccompanied or brought their instruments.

Singing is a common talent show, but everyone's eyes lit up when they heard that contestant #40, who seemed to have a lot of secrets, was going to sing.

-What song is this?

-It's my own composition.

-Oh, it's self-written, are you a music major?

As if trying to pry, No. 40 gave me a subtle smile.

-What?

Blah, blah, blah.

Number 40 sang during the appeal.

And everyone was stunned by the beautifully sung song.

It was the lyrics and melody of a song about a beanstalk hawk that I had never heard before.

Introducing myself, the song is called Chilgapsan.

It was bizarre and weird, but in many ways it was shocking because the style was completely unheard of in the zodiacal culture.

\* \* \*

After all the participants introduced themselves, it was time to vote.

Forty contestants took the stage once again.

Everyone from No. 1 Kono Lint, who put on a silly underwear show but had a shocking evolution of abilities underneath, to No. 40, a mysterious contestant who looked like she could go straight to Miss Temple.

The results were obvious without looking.

Everyone just stares blankly for 40 seconds.

The more I look, the redder my face gets, and the more I realize that pathetic participant #40 is twitching the corners of his mouth trying to keep a smile on his face.

The sight of a man on the verge of insanity, unable to bear his own shame, is bound to set people's hearts on fire.

Sure, the song was a little out of place in the ecliptic, but isn't there a magic formula for this kind of situation?

Four dimensions.

So even if you do something weird 40 times, it's understood that it has its own charm.

"Really....... I guess he didn't want to come out."

Whether you think it looks good or not, you can't help but agree that contestant #40 is really, really struggling to get through this.

Why you're here when you don't want to be.

"But....... I wondered how much money I'd need, so I went to......."

Money.

People can only assume that contestant #40 really needs the prize money. People start gossiping and speculating amongst themselves.

"I don't know who he is, but he must be very handsome to begin with, so shouldn't he be on Mr. Temple?"

"Just in case, Mr. Temple is out too."

"Oh, right."

If you win the cross-dressing contest and also win Mr. Temple, you get double the prize money.

It unites all the spectators who have come to watch the competition.

Men wonder what the hell he looks like in the first place.

Women, on the other hand, wonder how handsome he really is.

If you're in a pageant because you're broke, you're going to be in Mr. Temple.

If you go to the Mr. Temple contest, you're bound to come away with the conclusion that you might know who this guy is.

In the midst of all the chatter, the Royal Class students were alternately staring at Kono Lint and number 40.

While the embarrassing underwear show from episode one seems to have been forgotten, Kono Lint was both embarrassed and appalled.

Kono Lint is both embarrassed and elated by this situation. I give my friends the "hey guys, I did it" look, but they just stare back 40 times.

"Hey, by the way."

"What."

Erich de Lapaeri thuds his shin into the meat of Kaier's side.

"Hey, don't you think he keeps looking at me?"

Erich is referring to participant #40, of course.

"......? I thought you were looking at me?"

"Wasn't it me?"

Riana frowned at Heinrich and Kaier's words.

"What are you talking about, you idiots? He's a man, if he's looking at me, he's looking at me, why is he looking at you?"

All four people in the room were thinking about how 40 kept looking at them.

"Me?"

"Because I am?"

"I think it's me."

"No, of course not me. What are you talking about?"

All four begin to sweat the small stuff.

They were actually right.

Number 40 kept rolling his eyes and made occasional eye contact with four people.

They look away as soon as they see it, but they're definitely doing it. So it's inevitable that thoughts like that will be running through boys' heads.

At least he's a guy.......

No, but still.......

No, absolutely not.

Maybe?

Maybe it's actually a woman?

I was drowning in a sea of confusing thoughts.

Of course, it's not like that 40 times, it's really just an eye roll.

"Hmmm......."

Riana was looking elsewhere this time, not at number 40.

"Why?"

"No, that guy over there."

Riana whispered to Erhi, pointing somewhere.

"Kinda, kinda spooky, don't you think?"

There was a man in a black robe standing at the very back of the auditorium, staring at number 40. Of course, there were quite a few people in the audience with their hoods pulled down to hide the fact that they had come to see this competition, just as there were people like Number 40 who came to this competition to hide their identity.

However, the overly drab black robes were off-putting to look at.

"......Yes."

Erich shivered slightly, feeling unnecessarily chilled.

With that out of the way, let the voting begin.

Contestant #40, who reluctantly cross-dressed because she was broke.

She would have gotten a lot of votes, but when she says she only entered the contest because she needed money, she starts to get sympathy votes.

It was obvious that I was going to win 40 times, and I did.

It was a near unanimous win, with no one disputing it.

\* \* \*

It's a hell of a time.

"How does it feel to win?"

"Oh that....... Thank you so much. Yeah."

Still, it's a hell of a finale.

As I clutched the winner's crown and trophy, I tried to force a smile, but I also wanted this hellish time to end.

[Event Complete - Crossdressing Competition].

[Earned 4,000 achievement points].

[Horsepower status increased by 5].

[Antihorsepower is increased].

In the end, after a hell of a time, I got the reward I wanted.

And the prize, twenty gold coins.

20 million won.

That's actually quite a bit of money.

But I wondered if it was a price worth paying for my dignity, which had been lost and might be lost even more in the future.

My horsepower status was originally 14.2.

Now, my horsepower is 19.2.

Just 0.8 more and you get the talent Magic Dominance.

Yes.

Soon enough.

I did this shit for this.

Wreaths and trophies for the winners, and applause and cheers from the audience.

-Oh! Take me!

-She's prettier than me, so just do it!

The glow of middle school girls.

-You! Have me!

-siblings.......

The luminescence of middle school boys.

-Our secret friend Hajaaaaaah!

High school students were no different.

Dizzy.

I feel like throwing up.

Still, I tried to keep a straight face. Just as Bertus didn't seem to notice, the others didn't seem to notice me.

And the moderator who had been harassing me with stupid questions looks at me with a big smile on his face.

"Now, the song you just sang to celebrate your win, can you do an encore?"

"......."

They asked me to sing one more song to celebrate the win, so I ended up singing Chilgapsan one more time.

I don't know about you, but it was pretty funny to see everyone's bewildered faces as if they didn't know what to make of this.

Do you know the sorrow of the Seven Armored Mountains?

Anyway, the cross-dressing contest is over.

Now all you have to do is properly dispose of the trophy and return to Reinhardt safely.

-Ahhhhhhhh! Me....... That's weird......!

a.

Should I just kill you all and go to hell?

Episode 303.

You've won.

I accomplished what I wanted and everything worked as expected, but I felt like my soul had been stolen.

And I should have realized that I was only thinking about the pageant itself.

Anyway, I need to get out of the convention center, and there's no way I'm going to have an army guarding me. I should have thought that there might be some crazies around who would definitely try to catch me on the way back.

But I was only thinking about winning, not planning a safe route home.

Many of the exiting audience members were waiting to catch up with me on the way back.

I couldn't help but notice the crowd outside the auditorium.

"......."

I feel like a celebrity.

But the difference between me and a celebrity is that I'm a cross-dresser. I'm surrounded by a bunch of guys, both male and female, who all want to know who I am.

If you tell me it's Reinhardt, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know, I don't want to know!

If you leave, you'll get caught.

If they get within striking distance, I'm not sure I can keep my fist out.

The other contestants in the pageant saw me at the exit and smiled sheepishly.

Obviously, there was no way they were going to get screwed.

What to do?

Apparently, this is the only way out.

Should I go out the window?

"That....... If you're not going to leave......."

"?"

As I stood in the doorway, unable to get past, someone spoke to me. I turned around and there was Kono Lint. He'd changed his clothes so he wasn't wearing a dress, but his makeup made him look ridiculous.

Of course, I'm here with clothes on, so I don't have anything to change into.

I could have just walked away.

"Oh, I'm sorry."

When I moved out of the way of the door, he sulked and tried to get past.

He's a dick to me in a different sense than he was to Reinhardt.

Konorint, I didn't get a good look at what that guy was doing, but I know what happened.

You teleported something other than yourself.

In the original, the most advanced form of Kono Lint's ability was to move everything with him, including his clothes. I don't know what happened, but this guy can now move other things.

I don't know if it's an enhancement or what, but I do know that Kono Lint has come a long way from the original.

Conor Lint's ability boost is more massive than my 5 hp increase today.

Kono Lint continues to stare at me, and I'm about to make my way to the exit.

Ability boosts.

Spatially move something other than yourself.

"Okay, wait, wait, wait."

I grabbed Konorint's arm without realizing it.

"Eh, yeah?"

Conor Lint blushed as I caught him, his lips quivering sweetly.

A look of not knowing whether to like this or not.

It's not like that, asshole!

There are people outside.

"Uh, can you move me outside, please?"

The only thing that can save me now is Kono Lint.

\* \* \*

Naturally, he freaked out.

Kono Lint went on to explain that his powers weren't meant to be, that there might be side effects, and that he might end up naked. Of course, that could happen.

That can happen.

No! It's okay!

I'm fired!

I've earned 14,000 achievement points for the tournament and the women's competition. Combined with your existing achievement points, that's 18,000.

You can write as much as you want!

"I'll live with the side effects, so please do it."

"Well, at least....... Well, you might get a nasty surprise......."

Even when I blindly asked him to just do it, Kono Lint had a hard time doing it.

"It's okay, I don't blame you, I'll take it."

He looks at me as if to say that he thinks it's better to be thrown naked into the distance than to be caught by the people outside.

No!

You made it!

You don't believe me, I don't believe you, but you're a god.

After a moment's hesitation, Kono Lindt nodded with a puzzled expression.

"That, that....... I'll try it then."

Today marks the first time Kono Lint has successfully spatialized an object. Now we need to succeed in spatializing people.

Of course, it's entirely possible to end up moving only your clothes.

So, use retire.

Kono Lint succeeds in spatially transporting me to an off-the-beaten-path area outside the great hall, clothes and all.

[It takes 100 achievement points to cause that event].

100 points.

To my surprise, it was very affordable. I was expecting something like 500 points. Is this guy's ability already so advanced?

[Use 100 achievement points].

"That, hand......."

"Oh, yeah."

Konorint took the hand she held out tremblingly.

Come on, asshole.

Don't be shy, I said, and I glared at Conor Lint as he concentrated.

"Well, even if it doesn't work out....... too....... resentful."

"It's going to be fine."

"......."

He breaks his concentration and looks at me.

"...... Do you trust me?"

No.

What was I supposed to do?

Just let me go already!

"Sure."

I couldn't help but smile and say so.

-pot!

Then, in a blink of an eye, the scene before me changed.

"Futile."

I had never seen this kind of spatial movement before, so I couldn't help but gasp in surprise.

In one fell swoop, we were on the outskirts of the auditorium, away from the crowds.

I was the only one who didn't move with ConoLint.

The effect of the resignation was clear.

Luckily, I was still wearing my clothes. Now that I'm safely out of sight, all I need to do is change and get back on track.......

While I was thinking about that.

-pull

"......."

I could see something falling out of thin air.

What is it?

I picked it up out of thin air as it fell to the floor. I held it up to the dim light around me.

"......."

The moment I saw it, I realized I had written the wrong exit.

The clothes Conor Lint was wearing just a moment ago have fallen off.

Kono Lint manages to move me to the outside of the great hall, away from the crowds. Along with his clothes.

That bastard.

He sent not only my clothes, but also his own.

Somehow, it was dirt cheap.

Oh no, there's a new penalty for Conor Lint: having to send his clothes with him?

Still a dime a dozen or you?

Do I need to return this?

No, why don't you just come over here too?

Now that things have gotten to this point, you're going to have to come get your clothes.

But this is the boulevard.

Showing up here in your underwear would be too much for Kono Lint to handle.

They think I'm just a girl in a dress.

Should I give this back?

"......."

What's the point of getting out of this?

I'm tempted to just take it out.

I can't do better than that.

"Fuck......."

Eventually, I was forced to stagger back toward the auditorium where the pageant was taking place, still in my dress.

\* \* \*

Luckily, I didn't have to face the crowds in the auditorium.

There were familiar faces on the benches slightly further away.

Heinrich, Erich, Kaier, and Liana de Granz were nearby, waiting for the upcoming Kono Lindt.

It's also dangerous to go to them.

But I hated being caught by the "I'll give you my brother" crowd more than I hated dying.

-Why doesn't she look like this?

-Do you want to change?

They were grumbling that the cono lint wasn't coming out fast enough, so I approached them, fortunately in a position where the light wasn't too bright and they couldn't easily see me.

"Well, over there......."

"......?"

I could feel everyone's surprise when the winner of the pageant suddenly showed up with the clothes.

"He's prettier than me. Why? Do you have to pee?"

Riana smiled at me and asked.

You are such a bitch!

All the other men were frozen, so Riana was the only one who could talk.

"Royal Class....... You're students, right?"

"Yes, but?"

It didn't matter if I noticed because I was wearing a royal class uniform.

"These are Mr. Lint's clothes......."

"......?"

At that point, everyone's faces went blank.

"He asked me to spacewalk outside....... I asked for a favor, but I also asked for your clothes....... and send them to....... It's going to be difficult....... But I'm not sure I can go back......."

"Ah. I see."

Riana held up a hand to silence me, as if I didn't need to say more, and then snatched up Kono Lint's clothes.

You're so good at recognizing these things.

My assessment of the subject I'd just thought of as a bitch had changed like the flip of a palm. Riana giggled and looked me up and down.

"If you're into that sort of thing, you should come over to the Duke of Granz."

"Is that ......?"

"If you say your name is Liana de Granz, they'll open the door for you, and you can try on all the men's and women's clothes you want."

He laughed, and it was clear he was trying to put me down.

You.

You're a real bitch.......

Anyway.

After returning Kono Lint's clothes to their side, I left the place like a fugitive.

I've seen enough dirty looks.

Now, please, let's get back on track.

\* \* \*

There's no end to the dirty looks.

Yeah, there's no way you're going to let me off scot-free in this situation where your goal is to humiliate me.

I try to get away, but I end up being chased by someone who recognizes me.

"Hmm, that. Not a weirdo."

"......."

"I'm just wondering, if she's so broke, why she's going to a competition like that if she's struggling so badly. Hmm."

A middle-aged man with a bald head grabbed me and started rambling on. I think he was in the audience, but he was talking about how he was not a weirdo, he had a successful business, and his children were about to enter the Temple.

"I mean, if things are tough, I can personally sponsor you."

What is this.

I don't know why it's gotten to this point.

It could be that this person is actually a do-gooder who's trying to help you out of a pinch.

But you have a weird look in your eye.

You know what's really weird about the way you're looking at me right now?

I felt goosebumps all over my body.

"Of course, I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but I'm not looking for anything. It's just, if you have any difficulties with Temple life, you can talk about it. Uhm. Let's do that."

Yeah, I can say that, but you've got a weird look in your eye.

I'm pretty sure he's neither a Temple student nor a faculty member, so should I just slap him and tell him to stop talking shit?

Unfortunately, it's a festival and there are people everywhere in the temple. Naturally, there are guards on duty.

It would be even more embarrassing if I got caught punching someone in the face in public and had to be questioned by the guards. And of course they'd find out I was Reinhardt.

This is the final test.

If you don't hold your tongue here, the whole neighborhood will know that Royal Class Reinhardt won a cross-dressing contest and was dragged off to the Guard by a creepy middle-aged man.

Then it's a suicide angle, really.

Be patient.

One time I couldn't resist and ran into Bertus.

If I can't hold it together this time, it's really over.

"Oh, I see what you're saying, but that's okay."

"Uh-huh, I'll take the favors that adults give me, but let's go somewhere quiet and talk about it."

"It's okay, there's plenty of money in it, it's not that big of a deal."

"Don't think it's too weird, I'm just doing it because it seems like a good idea. Do I look that weird to you?"

"Not because I think you're weird, but because you're really good."

"Well, let's at least talk about it."

Oh, get away from me, you real asshole.

I'm pissed. If you can't understand me when I'm trying to make myself understood, I'm going to have to yell at you.

It's like it's never going to let me go.

"You're making me look so weird. Let's go somewhere quiet and have a cup of tea or something......."

That moment when you realize you can't use your fists, but you need to say something harsh.

"What are you?"

"!"

Someone approached, a man whose voice alone had a meaty resonance.

I turned around and there it was, a human tank.

She's changed into her own clothes, so she's not wearing a dress anymore.

Human Chariots, Richard Howleman.

I was not alone, but with a group of people. There were quite a few people, probably from the same class.

The middle-aged man froze at the appearance of a bully worse than a bully.

"What is it?"

"Oh, no. I don't want to talk to that....... I need to talk to this student about something......."

"This student doesn't seem to have anything to talk about with you."

Richard Howleman then looked in my direction.

Shot.

It's weird, but I'm glad you showed up.

Kick him out!

As if my pleading eyes hadn't already done the trick, the two-meter-plus thug twists his head and looks down at the middle-aged man.

"I don't think you have anything to say, huh?"

"Well, I'm not a weirdo!"

"A slender cow on a lustful night....... No, if you grab a student and don't let him get away with it, that's what makes you a weirdo, not anything else, eh, and won't you get the hell out of my way before I turn you over to the Temple Guard?"

A slender student.

You got your ass handed to you in a tournament by that skinny kid, asshole.

And I definitely meant to say girl.......

"That, that...... seems to have been a misunderstanding. Hmm. Uh, excuse me."

In the end, the middle-aged man ran away with his tail between his legs at the sight of the giant.

-Oh, that's great, Richard.

-Each, but this.

"Oh, it's loud!"

There were some assholes whistling in the back that looked like they were going to be bad.

Thanks for kicking them out, but I think there are worse assholes out there.

"Well, hmm. Big. Gee, are you okay?"

Richard looked down at me and coughed.

I'm kind of giving up now.

This is crazy.......

No, it's already gone.

"Ah....... Thank you."

My blood pressure is rising at the sight of a group of people who appear to be Richard's classmates or seniors whistling. They're probably here to see Richard in this state.

I have no idea why this guy is in a cross-dressing contest, but whatever.

Richard says, red-faced and unable to look at me properly.

"You might want to go back to that....... You'd better get back there quickly."

"Well, you should......."

-Dude, just send it?

-Let's eat!

"Oh come on!"

Richard shouted behind him.

Hey, at least you're being a gentleman. I thought you were a big ol' scumbag.

Now that I think about it, I was the one who started the fight in the tournament, not him.

Overwhelming garbage, I know. Richard looks at me with a troubled expression.

"Hey, you need to get back to work. Before you get in more trouble......."

"Ah....... Yes. Thank you."

Eventually, with the help of an unlikely source, Richard Howleman, I was able to peel back the layers of middle age.

Episode 304.

"No, your superpowers are stronger and now you have to move your clothes with you? Seriously, why does life have to be so twisted all the time?"

"......I don't know. How do I know that?"

The more Riana held his stomach and laughed, the more his face rotted. Luckily, Contestant 40 was able to return the clothes to the Royal Class students, and Kono Lint was able to get dressed and out on the streets again.

He didn't want to win, he just wanted the time to pass quickly, so he could go back to his dorm and get some rest with a fresh mind.

It was a horrible experience, but it's over.

Or was it just bad memories?

Someone who doesn't even believe in themselves, but then beams as they tell you they do.

That trust, even with the eventual penalty, is what made the new ability work once and for all.

Who's where.

I don't really want to do anything, but it would be nice to know that much at least.

At the very least, we can be friends.

The girl's-no, the boy's-hand, briefly grasped to move him, was strangely soft.

In the waiting room, I got nervous and bit my nails, which turned out to be unsightly, but they were as soft as the hand I was holding.

Kono Lint shook his head vigorously as the strange thoughts continued to overwhelm him, as if trying to get rid of them that way.

"...... What's wrong with him?"

Riana even took a few steps back, as if the cono lint had gone a bit too far.

"Uh, isn't that him?"

Kaier pointed as if he had spotted something, and there was what appeared to be a girl, though not a silver-haired girl in a hoop dress.

I could only see the back of his head, but surely the only other person dressed like that today was Contestant 40. Erich looked at him and nodded.

"Right."

"......What do you think is going on?"

Heinrich shook his head at the sight.

Standing in front of the two-meter behemoth was Participant 40, who was much shorter than him, while a group of giggling, pretentious-looking people surrounded him.

-.......

-.......

It's not close enough to hear what you're talking about.

However, no matter how you look at it, all you can see is a picture of him and a group of people harassing and threatening participant #40.

Everyone realizes that this is a guy who used to compete in cross-dressing competitions. The sight of a man of his size in a dress was quite shocking and memorable.

Riana smiles, the corners of her mouth turning up at an angle.

"Huh, are the boys bullying the poor little girl?"

It was a weird thing to say, and we all looked at each other in disbelief, but from a distance, it was true.

You don't know what's going on, but you're in trouble.

"This sister needs to be saved."

When Riana is about to go to the rescue of a poor little boy who is obviously in trouble.

"......I'm just going to?"

"......?"

One side of the encircling group opened up, and the silver-haired boy jerked his head at Geohan, then abruptly went on his way.

I don't know what's going on, but they just seem to let me go. They even say hello, so it's like they're grateful for something, right?

"What the hell."

"You're lucky if nothing happens......."

Riana bit her lip, glad that nothing had happened. Riana watched as the big boy stared at Number 40 as he stalked away.

"Anyway, sinful man, that."

Riana giggled at the sight, as if it were too funny.

"By the way, I was wondering what she's majoring in after all, and where her classes are......."

Riana said, and then fell silent.

The group that seemed to be harassing me 40 times let me go as if they weren't. It must have been a misunderstanding. But Riana gestured toward 40, who was getting further and further away.

A little further back than that, to be exact.

"Hey, that."

"That?"

"Hey, isn't that the guy who was at the convention earlier?"

Where Riana pointed, someone in a black robe was walking still behind Number 40.

"Something like....... looks like."

Erhi had seen those creepy black robes before, and he knew what Riana was talking about.

Someone in a black robe, who looked suspicious enough, was indeed following 40. Everyone's expression turned serious at Riana's words.

"I don't know what it is, but isn't he a little dangerous?"

A mysterious assailant is chasing Number 40. Riana and the other Royal Class students think something is going to happen to him.

"Let's follow along."

"Wee, isn't that dangerous......?"

Kaeir said, a little peeved. I wonder if I'm getting myself into trouble.

"Is this the time for that?"

Surprisingly, it wasn't Riana who said it, but Kono Lint.

\* \* \*

Tailed.

And this time, I was sure it wouldn't be a simple pervert like the middle-aged dude from earlier.

At the convention, everyone was looking at me, but I clearly saw the guy in the black robe at the very back of the room, staring at me.

It was a little off-putting, but there are a lot of guys like that, so I let it go, and now he's following me.

What are you trying to do to me?

I have to take off my dress and remove my makeup, and a strange man is chasing me.

It's not following me fast, but it's definitely closing the distance. He can't do me any harm on the sidewalk, but I want to get back to the road!

I even went out onto the main street and blended into the crowd in an attempt to get away, but my black-robed pursuer was still following me within a certain distance.

I could have told the guards that I was being followed by a weirdo, but I didn't want to get in trouble.

I turned into the alleyway, wondering why I was going through this.

Follow him out of the temple. He returns to the dormitory as Reinhardt.

Just as I was thinking that, I turned the next corner in the alley.

"!"

"......."

Behind me, the black-robed thug appeared before my eyes.

This guy is dangerous.

Scarily, I already had my fist outstretched.

-Whoosh!

But my fist slammed into thin air, and the robed thug shrugged off my straight with a nod of his head.

Its movements are out of the ordinary. My sudden attack didn't deter the creature from attacking me.

"......I'm just reaching out to you because I think you're done with your work, Reinhard, and I have no intention of attacking you."

"!"

The words seemed to freeze my brain.

Know me.

No one noticed me.

"You, who are you?"

Despite my adversary's slurred voice, he remained calm.

"You should have known that Order would be contacting me soon."

Black order.

They said they'd be in touch soon.

If.

That happened to be today.

It wasn't just freezing, it was like being hit with a sledgehammer.

No, no.......

Why.

Why today?

Not to Ellen, not to Bertus, not to Harriet. Not to any of his dorm mates.

But in a weird way.

My cross-dressing has been discovered by a magical associate who is neither an enemy nor an ally, with whom I will be discussing big things in the future.

"Uh, since when have I seen....... since when? Oh, no, how did I get to....... in the first place?"

"I looked at the participant list. Entry number 40, Reinhardt."

Damn, you saw that. How did you know I was going to a cross-dressing contest?

I mean, it's a black order, it's not exactly classified, but they can just go through the list and find it, and it's okay?

The Black Order member stared at me through his black robes.

"You know, like....... This, this. I have my own reasons......."

This one has a story!

I can't really say, but it's a story!

"I have no interest in your personal preferences."

However, rather than respecting my taste, the salesperson dismissed me as if he didn't care.

The man I assumed was going to do something nasty to me actually didn't care what I looked like.

I'm trying to make excuses for this, but I don't give a shit about it.

Me, not so much. As far as they're concerned, I'm a pretty big deal with a road vampire as my henchman, and I thought it was a little unreliable for a guy like that to be traveling around like this.

"We don't care about how well you dress, we care about how much valuable information you have for us."

This attitude that it doesn't matter.......

This.

That's weirdly hurtful.......

Ellen's no slouch either.

Is the Black Order a group of extreme douchebags, or is it just this guy.......

I wasn't sure if it was because it was a festival, or if it was actually no big deal to infiltrate the temple.

Whether or not I was teetering on the edge of embarrassment and crisis, the Black Order member had his say.

"You said you needed knowledge of the Order, and you said you could give us information on the Cantus Magna. Is that correct?"

"...... did."

It's so embarrassing to talk like this, and I feel like I'm the weirdo because the other person doesn't care.

"What knowledge do I need?"

Dealing with the Black Order.

That's where this bizarre timing comes in.

Are they really unrelated to the gate situation? I don't know. But we have to find out somehow.

No time for pranks, and no time for embarrassment.

"How to Open a Portal to the Otherworld."

"......."

He didn't answer my question, didn't ask why I wanted to know, just watched me in silence.

"Do you know?"

"You asked what knowledge we need, not that we would provide it. If you have something of value to offer, we will share knowledge in return."

"So, are you admitting that you have some knowledge worth sharing?"

You don't need to know how to do it specifically.

The fact that the Black Order can tell me how to do that is proof enough for me. Give me the information about Cantus Magna, and I'll tell you how to open the portal to the other world. The moment they say that, the Black Order becomes an organization capable of causing the Gate.

I don't want to know how.

Whether you guys know it or not, that's all I need to know.

"I can't answer that."

However, the Black Order was not without its challenges.

"Then the deal is so unfair. If I give you information about Cantus Magna, you might not be able to give me what I want. Why should I make such a deal?"

There is no reason to make a trade where one party loses. Just making sure that we both have a hand is my goal.

"Do you have any reliable information about Cantus Magna?"

"Well?"

"Does this mean the information is not ready?"

The settlement agent's mood changed; he looked a little angry.

"It's like you can't tell me yet whether your knowledge is ready or not."

"......."

Neither he nor I were displaying any animosity or aggression toward each other.

"We'll discuss this and get back to you."

After all, it's not something you can decide from the line in front of you.

"......."

"Until then, we hope to have information on Cantus Magna ready for you."

"What if I'm not ready?"

"I don't think you're the kind of guy who would play games with us."

At the end of the day, we both knew what we wanted, but nothing was really exchanged.

However, the Black Order didn't say they didn't know.

It seemed like there was a glimmer of hope for resolving the gate situation.

My heart was beating like crazy.

This won't solve all your problems, but it's another one.

You're over one of the biggest hurdles.

The Black Order didn't seem to wonder about my intentions at all, just that a deal is a deal when the parties are ready for each other.

"At the appropriate time, we'll come back to you......."

-Bang!

"......."

Just as the conversation was coming to a close, a lightning bolt suddenly flashed out of thin air and landed on the underside of his right cheek.

But the light was interrupted by a flash of protective magic.

Suddenly, what?

"Pretty girl, come here!"

I turned around and there they were, the Royal Class guys from the cross-dressing contest with Liana de Granz and Kono Lint, watching me.

Why did they come all the way out here? But by the looks on their faces, I knew what they were thinking.

What's wrong with you, pretty boy? What's wrong with you?

Riana exclaims, her face turning white.

"Quick!"

Riana called out to me urgently, and the settler looked at me and nodded subtly, as if he knew what was going on.

Is it a signal to go.

You're a dumbass, but you seem to have a point.

"Yes, yes!"

I scrambled to Riana's side, and she squeezed my hand, her eyes lighting up at the sight of the black-robed member of the Order.

"What are you, a wizard?"

"......."

"I don't know what you're up to, but what the hell are you doing in the temple, get out of here!"

-Pajik!

A light flashed near Riana's hair. As if to say, if you try anything foolish, I'll blow you away.

Oh, no.......

I don't care who you are, you shouldn't be arguing with a Black Order member.

Lucky for me.

"Hmm, that's too bad."

The Black Order member suddenly started playing kidnapper and backed away.

"I'll see you next time, pretty boy."

"......."

That.

Was that a tease?

I don't know if he was acting or teasing me, but he slowly backed away, turned, and disappeared.

Riana looked at me as the black robes disappeared and asked with concern.

"Are you okay? Did something happen to you?"

"Oh, that....... Yeah, yeah, yeah....... Nothing happened......."

No.......

You didn't have to come.......

"Uh-oh, so you're not going back fast enough, what were you doing? I mean, I tried to get away from you, but you can't just walk into an alley like this, you idiot. Where do you live? I'll take you home."

"Oh....... No, that. That's a nice......."

The long, dirty day ended with Riana's fumble.

Episode 305.

It took another three months of stubbornly insisting that Riana take me, and then another three months of trying to get her to let me go. Luckily, after a while of convincing her that the other girls seemed to be okay with her and that she should just go, she finally let me go with a sour look on her face.

There was some discussion about whether or not we should call security, but we tried to convince them that we weren't in trouble.

After removing all my makeup and changing my clothes outside the temple, I returned to my dorm.

The dress is in Eleris's basement.

It was an expensive piece of clothing, so I thought it would be better to return it rather than throw it away.

Naturally, I threw away the trophy.

There's an expression in martial arts.

Oscillator.

It's kind of like the fundamental bioenergetic energy of a human being, and it's kind of like a last-ditch emergency battery that if you run out, you die.

My whole body was drained of energy, to the point where I felt like I had written something like that.

I've been out and about all day, so you probably haven't seen me in the dorms. Of course, I wasn't the only one running around.

Naturally, I didn't get back until quite late, so when I got back to my dorm, I saw the same guys I'd encountered today in a completely different light.

"Hey, what have you been doing all day?"

Case in point, Liana de Granz, who cheerfully told me her sister would take her home.

"It's a festival, so I'm running around."

"Alone?"

"Sometimes you just want to be alone."

My shoulders tensed unnecessarily.

I might make a connection between what I just saw and what I look like now. Honestly, I don't think I'd recognize myself in the mirror.

I actually didn't recognize all of them.

But seeing him as Reinhardt made me feel uneasy and my heart was beating like crazy.

Oh, you?

Ya.

a.......

Oh, was it you or not?

I pretend to be okay with saying this, but it sends a chill down my spine.

Riana giggled and threw her arm around my shoulders.

"Didn't you watch the pageant?"

"......Why would I go there?"

Actually.......

Gone.......

He was a contestant, not a liver, and even a winner.......

It's even weirder that I don't recognize it at all.......

"Oh, you didn't get to see that. Phew, you should have seen him."

Riana giggled and went into her room.

The Three Stooges, nay, the Death Penalty, have since bumped into me, but they haven't reacted.

However.

"......?"

"......why."

"Huh? Oh, no."

Only Kono Lint had a bit of a weird reaction.

But in the end, he didn't seem to notice.

Of course not.

I'm back to my Reinhardt self, not just the makeup, but my body type, height, and face shape.

It's kind of weird when you realize it!

Something like......?

\* \* \*

Outlying regions south of the ecliptic.

A group of people had gathered on the grounds of an abandoned monastery that occupied a fairly large plot of land. It's impossible to tell who the group is by their clothing, but in the center of the bonfire, someone is sitting on an old wooden chair.

A man in a chair.

Leviathan Lanze, the leader of the previous Crusader Legion, stared at the girl in the Temple uniform standing across from him.

Her name is Radia Schmidt.

He was a quarterfinalist in the Unlimited tournament and a sixth-grade student in Temple Royal's class.

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"I think it's worth a try ...... and Lord Boulton has said he'll do what's necessary if things go that way."

"Elion Bolton?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm sure he'd be happy to welcome Olivia back."

Radia Schmidt looks determined, like she's got her mind set on something.

"But if things don't go as you expect, things will go as planned. Radia."

"Yes, sir."

Apparently, even though the current Crusader Knight Commander was Elayon Bolton, the girl was calling him Levi Lance.

Everyone here had no hesitation in referring to the former master, Leverier Ranze, as master. When she was done, Radia Schmidt turned to leave.

"Sir."

"...... have anything else to say?"

Radia looked off into the distance of the monastery and couldn't help but feel sad.

"Does it have to be....... Does it have to be that child? That child will eventually become....... faithful....... in the arms of God."

"Enough."

Leviathan cut him off mid-sentence, as if he didn't want to hear more.

"It's not that I don't realize that Reinhardt is better suited for this role, as you say."

At the mention of Reinhardt's name, a strange emotion flashed in the girl's eyes. A twisted hatred and anger flickered in her eyes.

"But Reinhardt is a student in the same Temple Royal class as you, and even a classmate of the Prince and Princess. You realize this is not a situation to mess with."

"......."

"Of course, if the situation warrants, we may have to reach out to them, but keep in mind that this is for the best at this time. Also, we're not necessarily sacrificing the child. Under the circumstances, no one will get hurt."

"......Yes, sir."

When Radia Schmidt had finished speaking, she left the monastery.

The man at Leverier Lance's side says cautiously.

"Do you think it's going to work out the way he thinks?"

"Not at all."

Levereer Ranze shook his head in disbelief.

"The idea is bold, but....... It's not going to work out the way he thinks."

"......Yes."

"I'm nervous, I know you're good at what you do, but......."

Leviathan clicked his tongue as he looked in the direction the girl had disappeared.

"Let's hope I don't do anything stupid."

"Sorry about that. We thought it would be helpful for you to see......."

The man who had brought Radia Schmidt to the nameless monastery bowed to Reverie Lance.

But what happened was what happened.

Radia Schmidt's usefulness isn't limited to this one time. She's about to graduate from Temple, but she's also set to join the Knights Templar.

"In the future, block people."

"Yes, sir."

Like it or not, Radia Schmidt was going to be a useful member of this group for a while.

"What about Adriana?"

"......Please wait."

"Yeah."

Levereer Ranze nods and instructs the man beside him.

"I think we should wait and see. See how Radia Schmidt's plan works out, and if it doesn't, write to Olivia. Tell her you have Adriana with you, and she'll understand."

As long as you have Adriana with you, it's too easy to call Olivia out of the Temple.

It's only what comes after that matters.

Leviathan Lance stared at the blazing flames.

Only Olivia Ranze can restore the honor of a fallen Squadron Crusader leader.

Take it slow from there.

Leverier Lanche intended to write a history of the sacred land that would last a thousand years.

\* \* \*

Sitting on her hard wooden bed, Adriana watched the pale moonlight stream in through the tiny opening.

A room with a single hard wooden bed and two paladins standing guard.

"......."

Adriana buried her face between her knees.

The Order of the Nameless.

Brought here by Revere Lance, Adriana is under the watchful eye of the paladins of the Order.

He thought that Leviathan was trying to retaliate against him.

But that's not where his value came from.

"In a few days, Olivia will be here.

"All you have to do is explain the situation to Olivia and convince her to change her mind.

That was all Leverier Lancet said.

If it's a situation, what's the situation, and if it's a persuasion, what's the persuasion?

It's about convincing Olivia, who has abandoned her faith, to return to it, and Adriana doesn't see why she should.

We just know.

That he was bait to bring Olivia out.

Levereer Lance attempts to change Olivia's mind. Even if he fails, he hopes to restore his authority and honor by reversing the words of his foster daughter, Olivia, who has brought him down.

You are just bait for it.

Adriana rejected it.

Olivia made her own choices, and she sees no reason or need to force herself to reverse them.

After that.

Adriana was stuck like this, forever.

The Order of the Nameless.

Adriana knew they were trying to create a new divide in the human race after the Demon War.

I was disappointed in people of faith. I thought it was the fault of the believers, not God.

But.

If God's followers are getting it so wrong, shouldn't God be warning his followers?

Olivia will be here soon. If she knew she was being held hostage, she would have no choice but to come.

Because she is that kind of person.

Despairing at her hostage situation, Adriana couldn't do anything about it.

There was a festival going on in the temple to the north.

In a ruin to the south, Adriana crouched, silently cursing the gods.

\* \* \*

Thursday, breakfast time.

Kono Lint was eating breakfast. The word was out in Class A that Kono Lint was going to a cross-dressing contest.

But Cliff was the only one who freaked out when he heard it.

-Will you be okay today, Harriet? How are you feeling?

-You're good, you're good.

Ellen was uninterested, and Adelia and Harriet were busy talking about something of their own.

I thought Reinhardt was going to say something when I told him I was out there, but he was like, "Uh....... Why would you go out there?" and that was it.

I was surprised.

I thought you'd be freaking out, or sulking, or lashing out, or something.

So Kono Lint was unnecessarily watching Reinhardt. He might not be the first one to touch him, but he'd be the last one to be grumpy.

Kono Lint had a strange feeling when he saw Reinhardt last night.

It's hard to put into words, but something.

A strange feeling. You can't quite put your finger on it, but you feel like you know something, but you can't quite put your finger on what it is.

Such a subtle feeling.

Despite the festivities, the morning scene doesn't look much different.

Everyone is at their desks except for Bertus, who seems to be busy with his own business.

Such a normal breakfast time.

Kono Lint unnecessarily looks at Reinhardt. To look is to stare.

To look up means to watch Reinhardt.

Then, not far away, Kono Lindt sees Reinhardt's hand on Ellen's, eating next to her.

That hand.

Nails.

Its shape.

It was jagged, as if it had been bitten off.

"......!"

When Konorint saw those nails, he had a hunch, almost a revelation, like electricity running through his body.

Anxious number 40.

The 40 times I've bitten my nails.

The 40 times he asked if he could be moved.

The 40 times you meekly reached out when asked for a hand.

of the nail.

The.

A nail that has been bitten off and ruined.

"Aye."

"?"

"?"

Kono Lint mumbled something under his breath and met Erich and Kaier's suddenly confused stares.

Absolutely not.

Yesterday's him, the silver-haired, angelic one.

It's hard to put into words, but that.

With that someone.

Reinhardt didn't just bite his nails because they looked alike.

Number 40 was silver-haired and gold-eyed.

Reinhardt's eyes are blue.

But that's what lenses are for.

"Aye."

"......What is it?"

"What's wrong with you?"

Kono Lint knows his idea is not even worth considering.

-You're playing in an unlimited tournament today, aren't you?

-Yes.

-......Will it work?

-Well, whatever. But aren't you going, too? You won the first grade tournament.

-No, I'm not going out, which is a good thing for you, because I'm going out.

-What?! You think I'm going to lose to you?

-Huh, where do you get the idea that you're going to win?

-Yes, look!

The voices are also too different.

Compared to the laid-back, warm aesthetic of yesterday, today's Reinhardt sounds a bit cloying, doesn't it?

There are qualitative differences in people.

There is as much difference between 40 and Reinhardt as there is between an angel and a devil.

Kono Lint tried to force down the unpleasant images that were swirling around in his head.

By the way.

If I had a silver-haired wig on my face, golden eyes, a shorter stature, and a slimmer build, I'd look like him.

Right.

"Aye."

"What's wrong with you?"

"What hurts?"

Eventually, Kono Lint struck out on his own and bought some beanchuk from his friends, who were eating quietly around him.

Episode 306.

As of Wednesday, my own participation in the festival was over.

As long as Riana is helping Kliffman and Ellen prepare for the contest, there's nothing I can do about it.

Today, Thursday, is the main round of the Unlimited Tournament. And tomorrow, Friday, we have the Miss & Mr. Temple contest and the finals of the Unlimited Tournament.

I had qualified for the unlimited tournament by winning the first-year tournament, but chose not to play.

I suppose it wouldn't be a bad idea to get some experience, but I'm not sure I'd want to risk injury, and I'm not sure I'd want to risk my health when I'm using a power boost.

My lighthearted first-year tournament turned into an unexpected struggle, and now with the Black Order and the Vampire Council, I don't know when I'll have to play for real. I couldn't push myself any harder in the tournament.

So there's not really a schedule to participate in.

The damned cross-dressing contest was canceled, and of course the Black Order thought I was a bastard with bad taste.

Herriot was in Group C of the main bracket of the Unlimited tournament.

Participants had to get to the stadium early to set up, so Herriot had to leave early.

Before we left, I had a chance to chat with Herriot for a bit.

"I don't know what to say, but....... Would that work?"

I feel bad saying this, but I don't even know how the hell Herriot made it through the qualifiers.

"I'll figure it out."

Herriot chirped, annoyed by my concern.

I've been nervous since the morning, so I've been asking her questions, and she doesn't seem overly confident, but she doesn't seem overly nervous either.

"Earrings?"

She wasn't even wearing her serenity enchanted earrings.

At my words, Harriet sighed.

"Artifacts are off limits, right?"

Was it?

Come to think of it, yes.

Granted, I'm a full-time artifact user at the point of Sarkhegar's Ring, but I didn't really check to see if I'd gotten the artifact.

That said, you'll have to fight with Herriot's easily-excited temper without anything to back it up.

"Anyway, don't force it. If you feel like you can't, just hit him. You won't get hurt, but you might, so be careful. Almost all of the finalists will be able to enchant, so think about that......."

"Hey, even my mom doesn't nag me this much!"

Eventually, Harriet squealed, and then looked at me with a sad smile.

"Are you that insecure about me?"

Was it supposed to look that way?

"Oh....... No. Not that......."

"No, I know, it's just the way it is. And the truth is, I'm not that offended that you're doing this."

Herriot sighs.

"I know you're just worried about me, thank you."

While it could have been hurtful to take the nagging as a sign that she didn't believe in herself, she chose to look at it positively.

"Still, I'm trying to be different."

I want to be strong.

It's a physical strength thing, but I was thinking before that it's a mindset thing.

Ellen was thinking that her mind was ready, but her body wasn't.

Herriot didn't think either was ready.

In the end, after many days and events, both Ellen and Harriet had changed. There was no single event that caused this, but rather a series of events that overlapped and accumulated to instill a desire to be strong.

To both Ellen and Harriet.

"That, I'll show you this time."

Herriot said it proudly. It was the first time I'd seen him smile in a long time, and he'd always seemed so serious and serious lately because of everything that's been going on.

"Is that something to look forward to?"

"No matter what you expect......."

Herriot chuckles.

"More than that?"

With those words, Herriot left.

It's hard to believe, but when Herriot said that no matter what you expect, you'll get more than you bargained for, I knew he wasn't lying.

\* \* \*

I know of only two people who make it to an unlimited tournament.

One is Herriot de Saint-Ouen, who has just taken off for the stadium.

The other is, of course, Olivia Ranze.

When I said to Ellen that she was Miss Temple or that she could beat me in a no-limit tournament, it wasn't a taunt, it was because I actually played in both.

After Harriet left, I found myself at the front door of the dorm.

"Hmph, were you waiting for your sister?"

"Well. Right."

"I didn't think so. I'm surprised."

Olivia spotted me on her way out of the dorm, squinted, and smiled.

"By the way, senior, can't you use divine power?"

We know that Olivia is confident in her abilities. Although we don't know how much.

Still, Olivia's greatest asset is her divine power.

But of course, since she had renounced her faith, Olivia shouldn't be able to use divine power, regardless of whether or not she could. At my words, Olivia smiled.

"Right, because we can't fall prey to the Inquisition."

"Is ...... really that bad?"

"Unauthorized use of divine power is, of course, forbidden."

You're confident of winning the tournament without even using your long-term divine power? Of course, you've already proven yourself by making it to the main draw.

At my question, Olivia tilted her head and gave me a coy smile.

"Huh? Do you care?"

"......Well, you'll figure it out."

"Chet."

Olivia stuck her tongue out at me for almost feeling too good.

So confident, even when she can't use her most important ability. I wonder how good Olivia really is.

And I had one more question.

"I have a question."

"What is it?"

"Hey, I thought you didn't go to Miss Temple last year. And the tournament."

"You didn't have time last year because you were out serving, did you?"

"You said it was like that before, you weren't really interested."

"Oh, yeah. I did."

Olivia is not a person who likes to show off. Before this, she's always been humble, caring, and even took a year's leave of absence to do rear-guard duty in the Demon War.

Anyway, Olivia Ranze is not the kind of person who likes to show off, even though she has changed. She's never been to Miss Temple, she's never been to a tournament or anything like that.

"You want to know why I'm leaving all of a sudden?"

"Yes, it is."

You're constantly being urged to compete in Miss Temple or tournaments, so why are you suddenly competing in all of them?

"That....... It's not really that great......."

At my question, Olivia blushed and scratched her cheek with her finger.

How Olivia Lanchester, who was never interested in flaunting beauty or power, suddenly became interested in both.

Shyly, Olivia opens her mouth to speak.

"That....... money....... because......."

"Money?"

"Uh....... Yeah."

Money?

Someone who seems to be more indifferent to money than showmanship is competing for it? Olivia ahhhhs and laughs coolly.

What to say.

He looked a little silly and innocent.

It was the first time I'd seen a genuine expression on Olivia Ranze's face in a long time.

The first time we met, I felt like I was seeing the Olivia Ranze of old, when she complied with a rude first-year's unexpected request to meet face-to-face and talked to me in earnest.

"Well, I'm the one who got kicked out, not technically."

"......Ah. Yes."

"So....... I don't have any money, so now......."

a.

Was it?

As the daughter of a crusader knight commander, she may not have known anything else but that money was scarce.

But now that Revere Lance has been dismissed from the Crusader Order and his relationship with Olivia Lance has broken down, Olivia's been able to pull some strings to stay out of trouble, but now she's in trouble she can't tell anyone about.

He has no place to get his pocket money.

I needed money, so I started competing in tournaments with huge prize money and Miss Temple.

It was all about the money.

Olivia blushed, embarrassed to say the words.

Still, it's kind of cool.

"......Doesn't the dignity fee come from the template?"

Royal class students receive a monthly pocket money in the name of maintaining their dignity.

Four gold coins per month.

Four million dollars may seem like a small amount to some, but it's a lot of money.

On top of that, Olivia is someone who doesn't seem to have any interest in luxury. She doesn't wear any jewelry or accessories, and she doesn't have any expensive hobbies.

Isn't the dignity fee from the temple enough then?

"That....... Yeah, but......."

Olivia bit her lip slightly.

"This is really stupid and kind of. I thought you might be embarrassed, so I wasn't going to say it, but......."

Olivia eventually sighs heavily and looks at me in frustration.

"I have a nursery school that I've personally sponsored for a long time, but I gave up my faith, not the kids. I used to have a lot of pocket money from my ex-father-in-law, so it wasn't a problem, but even after this, I've had to cut back on my sponsorship. There are some places that don't have enough money......."

"......."

"So I'm running out of money, and I'm kind of stretched thin, so I'm going to......."

I could see why Olivia was reluctant to tell me.

She knows she's going to be told she's stupid.

It wasn't a place she could support with her own hard-earned money.

But even now, when money is tight, I can't cut back on my donations or quit, so I need the money for tournaments and Miss Temple that I wouldn't have otherwise been interested in.

In the end, it was all about the money, not about getting in Ellen's face for nothing.

Olivia's lips twitched, as if she were making an excuse.

"Well, at least I....... that bad?"

"What's that?"

"The money I get paid to play for places like Chanapelle is not the kind of money I would use to....... for a sponsorship, it's not like that."

I once asked Olivia why she couldn't live for herself.

I wonder if he thought I'd be upset if he told me the real reason he needed the money.

"Actually, I've been thinking about it, but I talked to you the other day and I think it's not the best idea....... I'm thinking about it, but it's okay."

No matter how you use the prize, it's yours to keep.

I'm guessing that the organizations she's supporting are not financially comfortable. We don't know how much Olivia's donations are, but if they're reduced, they're going to be affected.

When I said nothing. Olivia smiled weakly.

"After all, I'm an idiot......."

Olivia mumbles to herself in disbelief.

"I do think it's stupid."

"......."

Is it stupid to try to help others when you can't even help yourself?

I used to think so. I still do, to some extent.

"Still, can that be a bad thing?"

However, those who don't live that way have no reason to look down on those who do.

Be yourself.

There are just some people who live like Olivia.

I don't know and can't judge its rightness or wrongness.

At my words, Olivia looks at me with wide eyes, slightly surprised.

That's not a bad thing.

By no means did I say it was a good thing to do.

"Thanks, Reinhard."

But Olivia smiled as if she was being cheered on. I felt my breath catch in my throat whenever I saw Olivia's expression, not her usual fake one, but her genuine one.

"You are my strength. So much."

Olivia smiled sheepishly, stroked my hair, and winked at me.

"Sis, I'm going to win."

"I didn't mean to say ...... to win."

"......Don't beat around the bush if that's how you got it!"

Olivia scrambled and ran out of the dorm.

......That was a pretty big deal.

By the way, Olivia did not compete in the grade level tournament.

If the prize was money, I could have gone to a grade level tournament.

He thought it wasn't fair because his opponent would be a fifth grader, when in fact he was in school for one more year, and he wouldn't be able to play in the sixth grade tournament.

I think that's why I only played in unlimited tournaments.

As I watched Olivia walk away, I became a little more agitated.

Miss Temple, and unlimited tournaments.

Olivia said after both of their dominant wins.

And I'm pretty sure Herriot and Ellen would be at a disadvantage there.

So, aside from my personal feelings, I was psychologically rooting for Ellen and Harriet. They were fighting a losing battle.

But Olivia was entering both competitions not just for fun, but for something very serious to her.

Now it's hard to know who to root for.

But the nursery's funding is a problem.

This was a bit of a mystery to me.

That can't be right.......

"Oh, there."

After Olivia left, I was walking back to my dorm when someone called out to me.

I was a student, and as the lowest ranking member of the Royal Class, I couldn't possibly have a junior, so it had to be a senior.

"What?"

"You're Reinhardt, right?"

"Yes, by the way."

It was a senior woman with a good-looking face, who called me over, but she was looking off into the distance, not at me.

He was staring in the direction of Olivia's disappearance, to be precise.

"What did you and Olivia talk about?"

"......Well, it was just a small thing."

But who is this guy?

"...... is it?"

The senior in front of me started to glare at me.

I didn't see anything hostile in that gaze.

What to say.

I'm overcome by a strange feeling that sends chills down my spine. He's smiling at me, and I don't know what to say.

It's a weird feeling, like smiling isn't really smiling.

"So, who are you?"

"Oh, you didn't introduce yourself."

He held out his hand to me.

"It's Schmidt. Radia Schmidt. Sixth grade."

"......Ah, yeah."

I clasped her outstretched hand.

Despite its good looks, I felt it in my hands.

Not a normal person.

For some reason, I feel uncomfortable, so I stare at him.

"What can I do for you?"

"Oh, no, Reinhardt. Nothing to do."

He looked at me and gave me a coy smile.

"Not yet."

What is it?

Leaving me with a strangely creepy comment, the unnamed senior slowly walked away from me.

Episode 307.

I met a senior who gave me a strange feeling, but in the end, I didn't learn anything about him other than his name.

Radia Schmidt.

She was a cheap person. She was definitely different from Bertus and Charlotte, but I couldn't put my finger on what made her different.

Herriot is in Group C of the main draw.

Olivia was also in Group C of the main draw.

With a full round of 32, I figured I'd have to get there early to see Herriot play.

Herriot was the only first-year Royal Class competitor, so you'd think there would be a few people in Class B who wouldn't come to watch, but strangely enough, everyone was in the stadium.

Even if he wasn't close to Heriot, he seemed to be curious about the fact that a first-year student, a magic major, was competing in an unlimited tournament, and he wanted to support her because she was his classmate.

It was interesting that there was a sense of motivation as classmates, if not chemistry, since there was no knowledge between A and B classes.

The entire first year class was on their way to the stadium, except for Ellen and Cliff, who would be at the contest tomorrow, and Bertus, who wasn't even in the dorms.

"Whoa......."

"......."

"Hah......."

"......."

"ah......."

-Physics!

"Hey, why do you keep sighing like an asshole?"

As I walked away, sighing heavily, a feverish Riana flashed a light bulb and screamed. The whole class turned to look at her, but I didn't give a damn.

"Aren't you worried about him, he's about to go fight amongst the big boys?"

My kid walked into a tiger's den, man!

It's not like they're freshmen in the waiting room, and the mom is like, "Hey, cute junior, what are you doing here, this isn't the place to show off your skills," and she's like, "I don't think Harriet can handle that!

What if there's a guy in there like me, arguing with me!

"Is Harriet a child?"

"So it's not a child?"

"......."

"......."

a.

They were classmates, not us.

Still.

We're @Mr\_Parker.......

I can't help but worry. No matter how much I say I'll take care of myself.......

"Hah......."

I sighed again. Riana frowned at me as I sighed, wishing the earth away for nothing.

"Be very sacrificial to the negativity, eh?"

"......Jesse?"

At Jessa's words, the Dettomorian, who had been following along, stared at her.

"It's not a ritual, but it's a quick spell to bring good luck......."

"Detto. If that works....... Isn't that like cheating......?"

"Is that......."

"Yeah, let's not do that."

"Yes......."

Charlotte realized that the Dettomorian was trying to do something.

From the look on Charlotte's face, it was clear that cheating wasn't the issue, but rather that she thought there might be side effects to what the Detomorian was doing.

"Don't worry. Reinhardt."

As I continued to fidget, Ellen spoke up next to me.

"She'll be fine."

"Based on what?"

"Just."

Ellen wasn't smiling, nor was she making a face.

It was just the usual blind, fat look.

"I'm sure you'll do great."

Believe.

The phrase was eerily familiar.

I told the Grand Duke of St. Thuan that your daughter was the most magically gifted person in the history of mankind, and that there was no limit to what she could do to astonish the world. I said so.

On that note, I can't believe I'm sighing amongst my seniors about playing in a tournament.

As if it weren't enough to believe that you're going to do something, that you're going to show us something great.

This must have been how Archduke Saint-Thuan felt when he heard about the Magical Research Society's research project.

The feeling that when someone is important, everything they do is ugly.

It's like you're so worried that you don't think he can do something that he's perfectly capable of doing.

Herriot is ugly.

But that's only because I value him so much.

I don't want you to get hurt.

I'm not his parent.

Still, it would be disrespectful to him to think of him in that way.

Still....... Our paktong.

If you get beaten like three times in the first game.......

What to do.......

I try to change my mind, but it's not easy.

That's a bottle.

"It's okay, Reinhardt. You'll do fine."

This time, it wasn't Ellen who said it, it was Louis Ankton.

Naturally, the Hufflepuffs were there to watch Herriot play, as was senior Redina.

There was a strange lack of concern on their faces.

"Hey, Reinhardt, stop worrying so much and get ready to be surprised!"

Redina giggled, covering her mouth.

Is there some kind of secret weapon?

It seemed like the Magic Society guys put their heads together for this Heriot's tournament and came up with something.

\* \* \*

The least fun of the grade-level tournaments is obviously the first grade tournament, because it's the lowest level.

It's no surprise, then, that the most fun you can have in a grade-level tournament is a 6th grade tournament. But as you move up the grades, it's not uncommon for juniors to be stronger than seniors.

That's why there are unlimited tournaments.

Ever since we went from matching grade-level tournament winners against each other to having an all-ages unlimited tournament, this was the big match of the festival.

For generations, when the winner of a 6th grade tournament advances to the main event of an unlimited tournament, that person often wins, but there are quite a few times when they don't.

As such, this is arguably the biggest event of the festival.

Soon.

This is the crowning of the strongest in the temple.

Of course, there's a catch: it's only for contestants.

-Wow!

Therefore, the excitement and buzz was not comparable to the first-year tournament.

The crowd was huge, standing room only.

"Ugh, that's too loud."

Riana's voice came from behind me.

Royal class seats were also quite full.

Olivia Ranze, Harriet, and the rest of the royal class would be there. There would be so much shouting that others wouldn't be able to distinguish the sounds, but with my enhanced hearing and focus, I would be able to make out the din of the crowd.

-Who's going to win?

-Wouldn't Radia do it?

-No, Olivia, you're in the race, too.

-Ah....... Yeah? I've never seen him fight before. Isn't he a divine power major?

-That was my major, but....... I hear you're really good in melee.

-Yes? Who?

-Huh? I heard that somewhere too....... Who said that?

Stories swirled around her about other people who had come to watch, but in the end, it was all about Olivia. Some fifth graders came to watch her play, including student council president Ceres van Owen and members of the religious club Grace. It was crowded, so I only made eye contact with them.

"......."

Even Saviolin Tana has admitted that Olivia is the next big thing, so you don't have to look far to see what she's capable of.

Sitting next to me on the right is Charlotte.

To his right sits Savior Tana, the governess and Charlotte's bodyguard.

Olivia kept telling me she was a good fighter.

He also said he hates violence.

We know both to be true. That's why the Royal Class audience was mostly talking about Olivia's performance.

But an important fact.

It's clear that very few people have seen Olivia in action.

Rumors abound, but no one seems to have seen her in action because she's not one to show off her power.

There's a lot of talk about how great it is, how amazing it is, but when I saw it, I was like, "What? I didn't see anybody doing it.

"Is someone named Olivia that great, Lord Tana?"

Charlotte, sitting next to me, whispers to Savior Tana.

Charlotte was eventually bothered by the sounds she heard around her.

"For now, you must address me as Sir, Your Majesty."

Seriously, this guy is weirdly sensitive about how he's called?

"...... If you're going to do that, you're going to have to pay me as a Temple student in the first place, right?"

"......That's not allowed. How could I commit such blasphemy."

"Oh, so you're just calling me Charlotte and treating all my classmates as if they're blasphemers?"

"That's not true, the temple has its own rules, so follow them......."

"No, I'm the headmistress, and the rules require me to call you Charlotte.

"Isn't it self-adhesive?

"I made a mistake.

"What do I do?

Is it an illusion that I feel like I can read your thoughts even when I'm not looking at your face?

'Let's just....... Let's talk about it.'

"Well. Olivia Ranze is an excellent student. Especially among the talent of Temple Royal's class, with a promising future."

"Oh. How much?"

"Hmmm."

Saviolin Tana crosses her arms and watches the competition, which has yet to begin.

"I'd be very surprised if there's a student who's at the same level as Olivia, if not slightly below her."

"Hmmm, Lord Tana....... No, I mean, how do you know about Olivia Lanchester?"

"Most of that is from junior Eppinhauser, but from what I understand, Olivia Ranze hasn't taken any close combat classes since her junior year."

I realized that most of the students were talking about how great Olivia was, but I had never seen her in action. There was no reason to show it in class.

"Why?"

"He said he didn't want to learn more skills to hurt someone."

"......That's a funny thing to say."

"Effinghauser said Olivia was already at a point where she didn't need to learn more."

"......a."

Charlotte looked incredulous.

"The moment you said you didn't want to learn more, you had already learned so much that there was nothing left to learn, right?"

"......, so to speak."

I don't want to learn any more skills to hurt someone! (There's nothing more to learn)

What a funny guy.

Anyway, since then, Olivia hasn't taken any hands-on classes or competed in any competitions.

"Of course, I've never been good at it either."

Even Saviolin Tana only heard about it from Effinghauser.

"So it's all just a bunch of rumors then?"

At that, Saviolin Tana shook her head.

"Hmm, at least it can't be a rumor."

"Why?"

"Yes. You do realize that Olivia Lance went to the front lines during the Demon War, don't you?"

"I heard you're going into wounded warrior or medical......."

"Your Highness."

Saviolin Tana looks at Charlotte.

She did not participate in the Great Demon War. Not that she didn't participate, but she couldn't.

But she could not help but know the details of the circumstances of the Demon War itself.

"At a time when a human hand was a precious commodity, a powerhouse of divine power like Olivia Ranze could only do that?"

"......Did they put you in the field?"

"Of course, they say they didn't send him into battle against his will, but anything can happen behind the lines. A raid by the Demon Army, for example."

I do, and so does everyone else in the temple.

I was thinking too naively.

It was a war, and when I told people that Olivia's job was simply to heal people and take care of the wounded, they were like, "Oh, yeah, that's what you do when you go to the front lines.

Saint of Eredian, as she was nicknamed.

When she told me that she had come back from doing something noble, like a white-robed angel, I just assumed that was it.

"I'm not going to tell you the details because it's not a good thing for you to hear."

Saviolin Tana looks out onto the field where the first match is about to begin.

"Olivia Ranze has been in unsafe places, faced unsafe things, and come out alive."

"......."

Olivia is not a greenhouse plant.

She lived through a real war and came out of it alive.

I wonder if that made me hate violence even more.

For Olivia, it would never be a good memory. That's why she would tell everyone that she was just doing her service.

"Olivia Ranze was called a reaper in your part of the world, not a saint."

Olivia killed countless demonic forces on the battlefield where she went to save people.

Thus, even her allies feared her and called her the Grim Reaper.

I didn't think Olivia would like being called Saint Eredian.

In fact, she had a nickname she was sure to hate even more.

Episode 308.

Unlimited tournaments are a far cry from the first-year tournaments I experienced.

Many of the participants were seniors from the Royal Class or former Orbis Classes, and none of them were so good that they could be ignored even if they were from the regular class.

First, of the finalists, the Melee class had awakened to the power enchantment.

It's true that many people don't become enlightened until they graduate from Enchantment, but that means there are those who do.

This is the place to see who is the strongest in the Temple. As such, enchantments should be built into the foundation.

Some brackets are designed so that people who are close to winning in the first place don't meet in the preliminaries and get knocked out.

As I watched the Group A match, I caught a glimpse of the strange female senior who had spoken to me earlier in front of the dorm.

-Ladia Schmidt, 6th grade, Royal Class!

She was also a tournament competitor.

It seemed like she was the favorite to win before Olivia's name came up.

Was it competitor conscious, like if Olivia didn't compete, you were almost certain to win, and then all of a sudden Olivia competed and you felt like it would make it harder for you to win?

Olivia is a year behind, so she should be in 6th grade.

This means that Olivia and Radia Schmidt would have been in the Temple for a long time.

But Olivia's been doing some crazy things lately. I can't imagine Olivia being in bad blood with anyone.

Radia Schmidt, 6th grade, Royal Class, B-2.

Whatever he was thinking, the important thing was that he was very good.

I could feel it in my hands, but seeing it in my eyes was something else.

"......that's a lot."

"Sure."

After watching Radia Schmidt's main event, Ellen and I couldn't help but agree.

Paladin family. A monster that uses both divine and magical enhancements.

She walked away with a clean win, and the people in the next match, winners and losers alike, were incredibly talented.

Even if I had won first grade, I wouldn't be able to show my business card. I wasn't particularly proud of myself for winning first grade, but I couldn't help but think that I still had a long way to go when I saw how good the seniors were.

I don't know about Ellen, but I'm not there yet.

The crowd was also on the edge of their seats as they watched the students battle it out with their enchantments.

Charlotte didn't seem to care about any of this, but she was paying attention as she listened to Saviolin Tana's commentary from the sidelines.

It was quite helpful to listen across it.

Who's going to win this time, who's going to act this way in this situation, the outcome is already decided, etc. Saviolin Tana was pretty much right.

Of course, there were those who weren't interested at all.

"Adelia, wake Harriet when she comes out."

"Huh? Ah....... Yeah."

Riana slashed at the thigh of Adelia, who was sitting next to her.

Me-Ellen-Liana-Adelia

Since they were sitting in this order, he lay with his head on Adelia's side and his legs across Ellen's thighs.

Ellen stood still as if she didn't care, but I didn't.

"Do you want to fuck in a skirt?"

"I don't care if you're wearing shorts."

Riana lay back as if it didn't matter and tried to run her hand under her skirt.

Well, what the heck!

-Bang!

"Yuck!"

"......."

And just as she was about to do so, Ellen, who hadn't moved, slapped Riana's thigh with a loud crack.

"Stay still."

"Uh, yeah......."

Ellen stared at Riana, and Riana nodded as she lay there with a dazed look on her face.

Ellen clutched at the hem of Riana's skirt as if she were afraid Riana was going to make a fool of herself.

-Bang! Quack!

In the meantime, two of the enchanted students were getting into a rough fight.

It's not hard to follow visually, but it's a battle of monsters that I'm not sure I'd win if I stood in front of it.

Now, it's time for Herriot to take on those guys.

How the hell are you supposed to deal with kids who aren't confident in themselves?

We're @Mr\_Parker.......

You're good at this, right?

I'm so anxious I'm going to lose my mind!

It's not like you're mentally going through a hard time because you lost, right?

-MoonMoonMoon

"Stop dropping your legs."

Ellen finally said something to me.

No, but I'm not sure what to do with my anxiety.

-Haah.......

From somewhere, I heard the earth sigh, a sound very similar to my own.

It wasn't the sound of a sigh that made me suddenly focus on something else.

I'm not sure what to say right now, but it felt very similar to me.

It was familiar.

-Honey, stop it.

-You're not even anxious?

-My kid will figure it out eventually.

The Grand Duke and Duchess of Saint-Thuan sat side by side.

When you think about it, it's festive season, so it's not that unusual for the Grand Duke and Duchess of Saint-Thuan to be at the Temple. Herriot was even competing in an unlimited tournament, so it was only natural that they would come to watch.

The seats weren't very close together, so I don't think the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan recognized me.

But it was clear that both me and the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan were thinking the same thing.

I was doing it, so I was definitely the crazy one around here.

This....... But.......

Should I go say hi......?

I think we've cleared up that misunderstanding.

It's not like your friend's parents came all the way here and you didn't see them, and it's not like you didn't see them and say hello.

But I'm not sure I'm supposed to say hello.

What to do?

Once that's done, let's think about it.

Anyway, it's nice to have someone who shares the same anxiety.

\* \* \*

Third match of Group C of the Grand Finals of the Unlimited Tournament.

That was Herriot's first bracket.

The only first year, and also the only Magic major in this tournament, is Royal Class First Year A-4, Herriot de Saint-Ouen!

Herriot stood still, dressed in a long-sleeved outfit that looked comfortable for the activity, not a school uniform.

A first year, and a magic major at that.

Even the most casual observer already knows that Herriot is at a disadvantage.

Naturally, the Royal Class first years were there, as well as Riana, who had been lying down and was now sitting up properly, looking out over the pitch.

Her opponent is Isa Shelkin, a senior in Eleanor's class.

Whoever it is, they'll have access to disenchantments, as will all of the main eventers in the Unlimited tournament.

He's listed as being from the regular class, but it's entirely possible that he was a transfer from the Orbis class.

Armed with a sword.

Herriot was unarmed because he was a magic major.

The Unlimited tournament is a best-of-five, best-of-three format starting with the round of 36.

Herriot's expression was tense. This would be her first time fighting someone in front of this many people.

I hope it doesn't fail to cast.

After a brief introduction from the moderator, the first set began.

I enhanced both my eyesight and hearing to get a better picture of the situation.

Isa Shelkin stares at Herriot.

-Magic major, though I don't know how a first year made it to the finals.......

The fourth grader points his sword at Harriet and says, "Hold still.

-If you were lucky, that's over, junior.

Herriot didn't say anything.

When it comes to defeating magic majors, it's all about speed.

Don't give them a chance to attack. Aisa Shelkin's body glowed a pale blue.

Enchantment.

-Thump!

And with that, a rush. Isa Shelkin's new model comes at Harriet like the wind.

Herriot stretched his hands out in front of him as he watched the rush.

-Quack!

Isa Shelkin's lunging thrust was blocked by a blue veil centered on Herriot's hand.

It is presumed to be a protection class magic. So far, so good. It's been pre-cast.

But the protective magic can't last indefinitely.

As if she knew that, Isa Shelkin pounded away at Herriot's protective spells.

-Bang! Quack! bang!

A blunt blow with the power of an enchantment. It's not enough to play defense.

The blue glow was fading, as if the protection had already reached its limits.

We all watched in silence. Even Saviolin Tana was watching, not wanting to jump to conclusions.

-Quack!

Isa Shelkin's blow leaves you unprotected, and she stabs again, taking advantage of the gap.

The next protection is not yet ready.

For a moment, I thought I was allowing an attack.

-shhh!

The new Herriot is gone.

"!"

Having lost her target in an instant, Aisa Shelkin threw her sword into the air.

She couldn't see it, but everyone in the audience could.

On the other side of the stadium, there was Herriot.

Blink, a short-range spatial travel spell.

"It's the first magic a Battlemage must master."

Saviolin Tana's comment was short and scary, and Aisa Shelkin turned her attention to Herriot, who had closed the distance in an instant.

But.

-Flash!

The blue light from Herriot's right hand connects with Aisa Shelkin's body.

-Crack!

Whether it was the protective force of the magical enhancement or her training in anti-magic, Aisa Shelkin flinched, but she didn't collapse.

But there's no easy way to recover from a lightning strike.

That brief moment.

-Currrrr!

A searing ball of flame hovered above Herriot's right shoulder. The fireball shot toward Isa Shelkin before it could be cast.

-Quack!

Before the explosions of fireballs had died down, I was looking at an unbelievable sight.

The fireball was scary to hit, and another fireball was already spawning and shooting to Herriot's left.

-Quack!

Another fireball was shot at Isa Shelkin, who was once again caught in the crossfire and explosion.

That's weird.

Saviolin Tana narrowed her eyes at the sight.

"The casting speed is....... very fast."

People were realizing that Heriot's spellcasting speed was very fast.

Not to be outdone, Herriot fired a total of three consecutive fireballs to Isa Shelkin.

It was already limited enough.

The third fireball struck, and with the glow of the recall artifact, Isa Shelkin was summoned back.

-First set, and it's a win for freshman Herriot de Saint-Ouen!

What the heck happened.

He's like, what the hell did you do?

Herriot pinpoints me from the crowd and looks at me.

As if he thinks it's a given that I'll listen to him. He says.

-When?

I don't know what the hell he's been doing all these years.

All I knew was that an unusually talented kid was starting to do unusually things.

-Waaaaaah!

And the crowd roared with delight at the destructive power and splendor of the magic itself.

I don't know what she did, but I'm pretty sure I'd be no match for her now.

I grinned at Harriet.

The mouse was worried about the cat.

But hey, it wasn't a bad feeling.

-What did I tell you? Didn't I tell you it would be fine?

-Yes, I knew this was coming.

-.......

The Grand Duke of St. Thuan had changed his tune.

Episode 309.

The result was 3-0 in favor of Herriot.

Her opponent, Isa Shelkin, was dumbfounded.

You've been defeated by a magic major.

It was inevitable.

The downside to magic is casting. But in the face of Herriot's unusually fast casting speed, Aisa Shelkin was always going to be a beat slower.

While Heriot obviously doesn't have the ability to no-cast, he literally tossed a melee major under the bus in a situation where his casting speed was apparently very high.

Redina's talent for no-casting is what makes it so ridiculous.

A guy like Heriot with enough hp can overwhelm a combat major with his casting speed alone, and if he didn't cast at all, he'd beat them to a pulp before they even had a chance to breathe.

The audience is just cheering, but we can't help but be baffled.

It's kind of weird for Heriot to be that way, because it's already weird.

That goes for Saviolin Tana, who has been watching all the fights and commenting on them.

"Magic requires casting."

"Yes, because it's common sense."

At Charlotte's answer, Saviolin Tana tilted her head; she, too, seemed to find the situation a bit bizarre.

"But at higher levels, Battlemages use magic almost instantaneously, without the computation of casting."

"Yeah, that's probably true too."

"Herriot de Saint-Ouen seems to have the casting speed of a skilled Battlemage."

The look on Saviolin Tana's face was one of conviction: "There's no way that's possible.

For Saviolin Tana, an experienced Battlemage was not a lightweight, but a battle-worn, battle-scarred Battlemage.

Casting speed of a Battlemage with at least 10 years of experience.

Is it really possible.

"Of all the mages, Battlemages are the only ones who care about multicasting or chain casting. The rest of the classes don't need to cast as fast, and finesse is the way to go, not speed....... Why else would you spend time on that skill......."

Fast casting speed is great, but it's only for Battle Mages. Battle mages are looked down upon by wizards, as I once heard a kid say.

Fast casting is, after all, a skill reserved for knife-eating mages.

It seemed incomprehensible to Saviolin Tana that a young lady of the Grand Duchess of St. Thuan should be skilled in a skill that only a Battlemage could master.

Herriot wanted to have real power. That's why he devotes his time to skills that don't necessarily have much to do with his noble birth.

Of course, the fact that I was able to do that just because I took the time to do it didn't make sense to me or to Savior Tana.

What the hell was going on at the Magic Institute?

Adelia met my gaze and smiled in embarrassment.

It's a secret.

"I think Herriot de Saint-Ouen is going to do pretty well."

In the end, it was clear to me that Herriot had gained a significant amount of combat power that I hadn't anticipated.

Ellen said that Harriet would do well.

I don't know if she knew this was coming, but Ellen didn't seem too surprised.

\* \* \*

As the round of 32 matches unfolded, I realized that, contrary to my fears, Heriot had the right stuff. Heriot was clearly good enough to win the Unlimited tournament qualifier and earn a spot in the main event.

With the round of 32 matches in Group C underway, the moment everyone in the know has been waiting for has arrived.

Olivia Ranze, Royal Class 5th grader.

Because of her celebrity status, some people recognized Olivia and cheered, and the royal class reacted with enthusiasm.

The emcee rambled on about Olivia. There was a lot of unfamiliarity, but Olivia just stood there with a thin smile on her face.

But if it's a problem.

She gave up her faith.

But she can still use holy power. And at a very powerful level.

However, it would be problematic if she were to use her divine powers, having renounced her faith at this point.

She must fight without divine powers if she does not wish to be heard.

The opponent is a fifth-grade boy.

She's introduced as being from the General Class, but apparently she's from the Orbis Class. The Royal and Orbis classes have had quite a bit of interaction, so it's not too strange that Olivia would know each other.

Olivia didn't look in my direction.

Everyone is curious to see what Olivia can do, and it's the first time Saviolin Tana has seen her in action.

-And with that, let's start the last match of Group C!

With a startup declaration.

I was curious to see what Olivia Ranze would look like in a fight without using her divine powers.

The opponent is armed with a spear.

Olivia was unarmed.

The spear-wielding opponent's body is engulfed in blue mana.

Olivia looks at her opponent with a smile.

-Sorry about the audience.

Olivia's words rang in my ears.

-Because my game is kinda, kinda boring.

-Woof

Olivia's body was enveloped in blue, fiery mana.

I had assumed that Olivia would be able to enhance her magic. Without using any of her divine power, the naked Olivia moves.

No, I could tell she was moving, but I couldn't even follow her movements with my eyes.

-Bam!

-cur...... billion!

The next moment, Olivia was already ramming her fist into her opponent's abdomen.

The force of the blow sent his opponent flying, and he landed a good distance off the field.

Even with my enchantments, I couldn't believe the destructive power of my bare fists.

-Oh, was that too much?

Set 1 was over in a flash.

Strong contender.

No, I think I'm the only one who can win.

Me and Ellen were staring blankly at Olivia, who had just blown away an opponent who was just as enchanted as she was.

You must fight without divine power.

Well, I wonder if it was a penalty in the first place.

Olivia seemed unstoppable in her condition.

I can't believe the nickname for her is Saint Eredian.

Shouldn't he have been labeled the strongest in the temple?

\* \* \*

After all the round of 32 matches have been completed.

After a short break, it was time for the round of 16 matches to begin.

Just like in the first grade tournament, the winners of each group will face off in the semifinals and finals tomorrow.

So Herriot will need to win this round of 16 and the next quarterfinal to have a shot at the final.

But finals aren't what Herriot is about.

Player Waiting Room.

Harriet sat still on the couch. She wanted to go into her room and collect her thoughts, but she thought it would be good to get a feel for the people she might have to deal with.

"You said Herriot, you're amazing. I'll see you at the next game, take care."

"Oh....... Yeah."

Some people were nervous, but the next match was with a cheerful-looking female senior. From the Royal Class, I knew she was a psychic, not a melee player.

The ability is Wind.

He easily defeated his opponent by blowing him away with wind pressure and knocking him out of the game.

She wasn't sure what to do about it.

"Would you like to try this? It's delicious."

"Oh, no....... It's fine."

She would sit next to him and mumble about this and that.

"Well, if my wind is blocked by your protection, there's not much I can do about it, and I don't really know how to fight."

I think he's pretty sure he's going to lose. He's counting on the wind to create a long hand, but his opponent is Herriot, who knows how to use protection.

The girl who whined that she was going to lose because she had a bad match, even though she was a senior, was subtly cute.

While he might be pretending to be vulnerable and then suddenly revealing his hidden skills, he doubted that his fellow royals would go to such lengths.

From the looks of it, he didn't seem too keen on winning. Harriet was a little annoyed by the constant chatter, but she didn't hate it in the end.

"Not really....... You don't seem to be nervous."

"Nervous? Well, there's no reason to be, is there?"

She nibbled on a macaron, sipped her black tea, and smiled bashfully.

"Olivia's going to win Group C anyway."

With Olivia in the race, it seemed like she'd given up because there was no way she was going to win. Her reaction made me realize that she might have.

I didn't even see what was going on.

Most of the participants are capable of enchantment, but this one stands out.

She hadn't even used her main divine power. Everyone seemed to have given up after seeing Olivia's overwhelming power.

How I would have handled it.

Herriot thought about it, but couldn't come up with a good answer.

Olivia Ranze.

An unlimited tournament to try and beat her. She'd just seen Olivia Ranze's skills, and she didn't think she could beat her.

But first, she wanted to stand in front of him.

She has to make it all the way to the quarterfinals, the last match of Group C, to face Olivia. I won't be able to beat her, but I'm going to give her a run for her money.

I'm not sure why.

Olivia Ranchada, who is sure to be tougher than Ellen.

Favoritism was an emotion Herriot didn't have.

However, it's been around for a while.

The desire to be strong naturally becomes the desire not to lose.

As Harriet chatted with the contestants, she saw Olivia Ranze approaching in the distance. She's been at Temple for a long time, and she's smiling and chatting with the other contestants, who are now her competition.

Ellen said she didn't like him.

Herriot hates him, too.

Olivia walked over and made eye contact with Harriet.

"Hello?"

"......Hello."

"Um, you're a friend of Reinhard's, too, right? Nice to meet you."

Olivia smirked.

The word "you".

That word that puts someone before me.

Herriot resents that.

She's seen Olivia Lanchester's unnecessary confrontations with Ellen before, and she knows where that desire to challenge comes from.

Olivia doesn't like Ellen.

Ellen doesn't like Olivia either.

"You're amazing. I can't believe you're already that good as a freshman. Aren't you playing against your sister in the finals of Group C today?"

But Olivia doesn't hate Herriot.

The kind look and tone of voice, the lack of animosity.

Unabashed praise.

"How are you feeling, do you need me to cast a healing spell on you?"

Unnecessary consideration.

Herriot knows that his opponent is not wary of him at all.

That attitude that you don't need to show hostility to someone as small as you.

It's not even ignoring, which makes me feel even more ignored.

"Good luck, both of you."

I don't like you.

You don't hate me.

Herriot hates this situation because of the gap in their feelings for each other.

"I, I don't like her."

"......?"

And so it was that Herriot suddenly threw cold water on the cheerfulness. Olivia stared at her, then scratched her cheek.

"Oh....... Really?"

Olivia gave a subtle smile, as if reading something in Harriet's expression.

It's the look he sometimes gives Ellen when he sees her. It's a smile with a subtle sneer.

"So what?"

Harriet stares at Olivia, still.

Ellen was annoyed and upset that she was being hated for nothing.

You don't even know what it's like to be hated like that.

You can't imagine how frustrating it is to have someone you dislike do you a favor because you've been deemed unworthy of them.

So.

I'm going to make you hate me.

I'll make it impossible to ignore me.

"Just, no."

"Really? That's too bad."

At Harriet's words, Olivia beamed.

"I don't really care about you."

"......."

"For you". A phrase that implies he doesn't know anyone else but you, and that he's not really interested in you.

Again, he was intentionally ignoring himself.

You may not be able to win.

I won't let you ignore it any longer.

Harriet gritted her teeth as she watched Olivia's back.

\* \* \*

Herriot has grown by leaps and bounds.

It was the final Group C match of the tournament, and they squeaked through to the quarterfinals.

My opponent in the Round of 16 was a Royal Class 4, Wind-type psychic, and I lost. I blocked the wind and aimed five firebolts back at him, causing him to bow out. As if there was no point in trying.

She was the woman who told me to come to her if anything happened during the Mayotte incident. I never did, but I remembered her face.

In the end, it was a mismatch: a melee combat specialist who wanted to fight by blowing people away with the wind, and a magic specialist who was no match for him.

And just like that, the Group C final.

Unsurprisingly, Olivia made light work of her Round of 16 opponent and advanced to the Group C final.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

Olivia Ranze.

The winner of the two will advance to the quarterfinals, where they'll have a shot at the title tomorrow.

Despite two solid games, I and the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan eventually broke down again.

-MoonMoonMoon

"......just shake it off."

Ellen's face mask.

-Haah.......

-Honey, what's wrong?

-The opponent is not too bad.......

Likewise, the Grand Duke being confronted by Madame Saint-Antoine.

No matter how much Herriot has grown, Olivia Ranze is no match for her right now.

The only hope is that Olivia Ranze won't use her divine powers.

That slim advantage is the only way that Herriot can claim victory.

Everyone in the royal class, regardless of grade, was holding their breath.

Herriot doing well in an unlimited tournament despite being a magic major in his freshman year.

Olivia Ranze deserves the title of Temple Strongest.

They were facing each other on the field.

Episode 310.

Across from her, Olivia Ranze smiled weakly. Whereas Herriot's expression was tense, her opponent's was relaxed.

That arrogant attitude didn't sit well with Herriot.

"I wonder if I was once like that.

There was a time when everything in the world seemed smaller and more ridiculous than you.

Everything is determined at birth, and I don't understand why people are so desperate to be born.

There was a time when I would just laugh at them without trying to understand them. Even now, I don't think I've completely abandoned that part of myself, but I do realize that I need to work on it.

The opponent is arrogant.

Sure, she's known for her selflessness, as her nickname, Saint of Eredian, suggests, but for some reason she acts like a terrible person when it comes to Reinhardt.

I'd argue with Ellen.

Intentionally ignore yourself.

That look I get every time.

They put on a coy smile, hide their true colors, and try to provoke others.

Herriot knows the odds are stacked against him. He's seen that monster fight.

But that mask.

That abomination of a face, thick as hell.

Angry, frustrated, pissed off, whatever.

I'm going to rip that mask off for once.

I'm not going to let you look at me like that and ignore me forever.

-And now, the final match of the quarterfinals, Group C! Let's get started!

Olivia Ranze stares at Harriet.

"I hate sloppy work. I'll make it quick."

Olivia's body is covered in blue mana.

Dense mana surrounds her.

I hate clunky.

Herriot couldn't believe Olivia's words.

"That's not what someone who clings to a hated Reinhardt would say, is it?"

"Oh, that?"

Olivia smiles and slowly walks toward Harriet, not running.

"I like it so much that I have to do something I really don't like."

"......."

"You can't say that, can you?"

Olivia continues to approach Harriet with a dazzling smile.

Someone who is honest with their heart.

Someone you can be honest with.

Someone who is willing to push through, even if it hurts someone else because of their heart.

He accepts that in order to gain something, he must lose something, and so he tries to keep Reinhardt, even if it means hurting himself and Ellen.

Harriet felt a sudden surge of envy for Olivia.

But it's frighteningly infrequent. Your opponent is only provoking you.

That moment when Herriot tries to stop thinking about what the other person said to keep his cool.

She stomps her foot on the ground in a vicious manner.

-Tat!

The sound was light.

-shhhh!

However, the pace was not light.

-Chee!

Olivia's fist slammed into the blue force field as the protection activated before Herriot's eyes.

-Quack!

"!"

A fist was thrust in front of Herriot's nose as the protection collapsed.

-pot!

In the split second before she was about to strike, Herriot closed the distance with a blink. Olivia spun around and smiled at the sweating Herriot.

"That's fast."

Casting a blink scared the protection into collapse.

But unlike Olivia's laid-back demeanor, Harriet didn't have time to play around with Olivia.

-Flash!

A bolt of lightning slammed into Olivia's body.

This is the tactic I used in the first match. After creating distance with Blink, he unleashes a barrage of offensive magic to strip away the protection of Enchantment.

There are plenty of people who have gotten screwed in the qualifiers with this simple method.

If you're afraid of proximity, don't allow it.

Once a Lightning Bolt spell has been cast, the hit is almost instantaneous. This makes it nearly impossible to dodge. Of course, a normal person would be stunned or cut off by the blast, but an enchanted opponent is different.

It's better to make him incapacitated with a highly destructive fireball.

So far, so good.

But Olivia shrugged off the blow and charged at Harriet again, as if it hadn't happened. She didn't flinch, not even slightly.

Of course, Herriot expected this.

-Thump!

Herriot flicked his hand, and the arena floor rose, creating a stone wall.

Protection is easily breached.

If so, create a physical wall.

One, your opponent doesn't have a strategy.

"Lead."

I trust the overwhelming physics and push in.

"Are you going to stop me one bit?"

-Quack!

Olivia Ranze lunged at Herriot, smashing through the rising stone wall with her bare hands.

"I'm not trying to stop you.

In that short time, Herriot had already cast his spell.

There's no way a wall is going to stop Olivia.

Your opponent is overpowered.

If so, you don't need to win by force, you need to win by other means.

The idea behind building a wall is to disappear from your opponent's view.

The magic used is Hallucination. It causes hallucinations and prevents you from recognizing your own presence.

The magic is endless.

Confuse your opponent's perceptions, causing them to go on a rampage and lose the game.

Your opponent won't recognize you now. You've just broken through a wall and jumped out, and you've disappeared into thin air.

But.

Herriot felt it the moment he cast the spell.

'Resistance......?'

The spell cast at Olivia deflected.

Why.

This is intermediate, if not superlative, psychic magic.

It's not magic that can be so easily resisted.

Herriot could only watch as Olivia's fist flew toward him.

\* \* \*

The first set was taken by Olivia after a short battle.

After being re-called back into the arena, Herriot stared blankly at Olivia's smiling face.

Illusions above Illusion were not just less effective, they were not effective at all.

"I can see what you were trying to do."

Olivia speaks to Harriet with her hands on her hips, as if to give her special instructions.

"Most psychic magic doesn't work on me, sweetheart."

Hearing those words, Herriot's head seemed to freeze over.

Not surprisingly, it's not well known that Olivia Ranze has an immune level of resistance to mind-based magic.

It's not surprising that Herriot doesn't know this.

But the price of not knowing was that all of her plans were wiped out.

I was hoping that the solution would be to use spirit-based magic since I can't physically match him, but it turns out that it doesn't work against him at all.

There's no way that was a bluff. Herriot could clearly feel the spell not having the slightest effect.

I was expecting some anti-horsemanship, but I wasn't expecting it to be completely ineffective.

"What's with the look of disbelief on your face? Isn't that the way the world works? Everyone is born with something. This is a place where you're supposed to be a natural."

Temples.

The royal class is where they gather.

"Just as you're a nonsensical person in your own way, I'm bound to be a nonsensical person in my own way, right?"

The second set was about to start.

"If that's all you've got, just abstain."

Olivia is still smiling.

"Before I make myself even more miserable."

I realized that the number of tricks I had up my sleeve in unfavorable situations didn't work in the first set.

It was hopeless.

I thought there was only one other person with that talent, Scarlett from Class B, but it turns out there's more.

Herriot's mind was racing now that his only option was gone.

-Ma! Bam!

And then, through the chaos, a voice broke through.

One side of the bleachers.

I heard a familiar voice.

You don't have to look at it to know.

If you call yourself that, you're the only one in the world.

-Don't pout!

He was shouting at himself. Not to win, not to be strong.

It's just a way of saying, "Don't suck. That statement in and of itself is not encouraging at all.

But.

"Chit."

Herriot could see Olivia Ranze's expression twist slightly as she heard the same shout.

It's times like these that you root for the underdog, and Reinhardt certainly said so.

It was a little nerve-wracking to hear him say that when he was sure he was going to lose.

But.

At the end of the day, it's all about results.

Reinhardt is cheering himself on.

-Don't squirm, just go for it!

Reinhardt is rooting for Herriot de Sanctuan, not Olivia Lanze.

"I guess this is what you mean by feeling like a winner even when you lose."

"......."

Harriet laughed at Olivia's stony expression.

The smile vanished from Olivia's face. There was no playful taunt, no sarcastic remark.

Herriot's confused thoughts were drowned out by Reinhardt's shout, but as it turned out, something worse could have been in store for Herriot.

"This is, like, weird."

Olivia Ranze was angry now.

Dear Herriot.

To Reinhardt.

"This sucks, I'm done."

The start of the second set had already been announced.

Olivia pounces again.

Herriot didn't bother to protect this time. Suddenly, strings of blue power lines appeared on the back of Herriot's hand, glowing blue.

"Suck!"

-Quadruple!

"!"

In an instant, the stadium cracked and the whole thing collapsed.

"Boom!"

Taking advantage of an off-balance Olivia Ranze stumbling, Herriot spread her hands.

The spell you just cast is called Shockwave.

With that, the terrain collapsed.

It's not low-level magic by any means.

And then there's some higher-level magic.

One set.

There's no looking back. I'll take a set at all costs.

Herriot stretched both hands to the sky.

A giant fireball that can't be compared to a fireball.

"Take this!"

A flame strike rushed toward the staggering Olivia Ranze.

-Koo-koo-koo-koo!

A massive explosion of flames engulfed Olivia Ranze.

The backs of Herriot's hands and forearms glowed with blue energy lines.

\* \* \*

Suddenly, the stadium is blown to smithereens, and with it, a devastating flame strike.

The overwhelming spectacle left the audience speechless.

"It doesn't make sense."

Saviolin Tana, who had been watching the situation, spoke up briefly.

"I don't care how much of a genius Herriot de Saint-Etienne is, casting a spell of destruction on that scale and at that speed is simply impossible."

"......Are you saying I cheated or something?"

"Well....... But I don't think that's a normal way to use a spell at all. Just look at that symbol that suddenly appeared on the student's body......."

As Saviolin Tana had said, Herriot's hands had formed blue letters. They were gone now.

I cast a series of mass destruction spells. The time difference was almost non-existent. Ellen, me, Riana.

Everyone was stunned by the sight.

"No way....... Harriet is......."

I grabbed Ellen by the shoulders and shook her.

"Dude, does he have a tattoo now?"

"......?"

Herriot.

I don't know what it is, but it looks like a tattoo!

No, why not!

I can do it! I can do it! I can do it! Yes, I can!

"Does that matter to you right now?"

"Well, but!"

Riana's presence made me feel like crying. There were definitely guys here who knew what the hell that was.

"Louis, what the hell is going on, what has the Ministry of Magic done to our little bugger!"

At my near-scream, Louis turned to look at me from the front seat.

As if he had no idea I would react this way.

"Oh, no....... Why are you being so obnoxious?"

Louis sighed heavily, as if to calm himself.

"It's scroll magic."

"......What is that?"

Louis looks at Herriot, who is standing on one side of the half-destroyed arena.

"Herriot, you're writing a magic scroll in real time."

This is.......

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

\* \* \*

-What did the Ministry of Magic do to my pout!

It wasn't just Reinhardt who was confused, but the archduke and his wife as well.

So I didn't even pay attention to Reinhardt, who was calling his daughter a punk.

"My baby....... What is that?"

"Well....... I'm not sure."

Even the magical Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan couldn't figure out what his daughter had done to his body.

It was a sight that no one had ever heard of or seen before. Of course, the Archduke was not as horrified as Reinhardt.

He is a wizard before he is a high noble. As such, he lives with the mindset of a mage.

"Looks like my daughter has already done something to shock the world."

It doesn't matter if you win or lose this fight.

The Grand Duke of St. Thuan had a hunch that his daughter had developed a new system of magic that had never been seen before.

\* \* \*

Casting.

It's the beginning and end of the magic.

But casting still takes time, and no amount of speed can make that time zero. Magic is a great and convenient power, but if you're going to use it for combat, it's going to have a fatal flaw: casting time.

Given time, magic can destroy everything.

That said, with such a short preparation time for casting, there are times when Battlemages with such great skill can die for nothing.

Casting is a natural part of the process, and the idea of eliminating it is unthinkable.

Because that's like trying to give an answer without a formula.

But Herriot knows your story.

Royal Class 2-A, 1 Redina.

Talent is no-cast.

Call it a superpower, but Herriot has seen it happen.

Magic that manifests as soon as you think it.

If that's possible, what's not possible for you?

But you can't get superpowers.

Herriot worked to drastically reduce casting time, something many Battlemages have been working on.

Obviously, I didn't get any superpowers.

I just found a way to do it elsewhere.

At the Magic Institute, Herriot wracked his brains with everyone.

It wasn't Harriet who found the answer, but Louis. Louis Ankton understands magic, but can't use it.

As such, it has a different mindset than a typical wizard.

"Scroll magic can be cast instantly.

"That's right.

"A scroll is an enchanted piece of paper with a magic circle on it, right?

"Yes.

"But don't people already have magic in their bodies?

"Yeah, so?

"Can't I just draw a circle of magic on a person's body, assuming it's a scroll, and trigger it?

'......?'

"Huh?

Louis Ankton's response was that it was a bunch of nonsense.

But he wasn't exactly wrong.

Scrolls essentially require a magic circle to be drawn on an enchanted medium.

Enchanted Medium - Paper

Magic Circle - Formulas

It was a very intuitive understanding that if you put a human being as the medium and the formula on a human body, magic would happen. It was a bizarre argument that even Herriot, who had an intimate understanding of magic, had no clue about.

"Detomorian told me that the warriors of his tribe had their faces tattooed with the word Warpaint by shamans to draw on their extraordinary powers.

'I know witchcraft is the root of magic, but....... I don't know what that warpaint thing is, but it draws magic lines on people's bodies to draw power from them. What are you talking about?

"Yeah, I've heard it works, and if the warpaint harnesses the magic in a person's body, it's not all that different from what I was talking about after all, is it?

Louis was just saying. Using the human body as a scroll to reduce casting time, with the human itself functioning as a scroll.

It's too radical," Louis said, and Adelia shook her head.

"But assuming that works, if I can imprint a fireball spell circle and cast it, will that person only be able to use fireballs? If they try to use other spells, will they be able to use.......'

'I'm going to be covered in tattoos.......'

We all cringe, because even if we pretend, we know it's not going to be pretty.

And even if you did, you'd probably end up covered in tattoos if you tried to imprint all that magic on your body.

"And we can't learn scroll magic in the first place.

Christina said. The spells associated with the scrolls are top-secret and cannot be taught in the Temple, so whether it works or not, it's not something I can learn at this point.

"No.

But he shook his head at that.

"You don't need a magic circle, you need to imprint a 'language'.

Language.

Everyone was dumbfounded again by the noise.

"Once you've imprinted a language, there's a magical system that allows you to derive all sorts of magic just by putting together the right sequence of characters.

Once he said that, everyone knew what he was talking about.

Less ancient than witchcraft, but very ancient indeed, and the true source of magic.

"You just need to carve a rune.

With runes, you can create all the magic in the world.

Episode 311.

My body becomes a magic scroll.

You don't have to perform complicated maneuvers every time you cast a spell. You simply call upon the runes inscribed on your body and infuse them with magic.

The flesh is the paper, and the letters are the spellbook.

It's not quite casting-free, but it's close.

A never-before-seen magical system that combines runic and scroll magic with the human body.

Louis Ankton, who conceived of the first draft, nailed it when he said it wouldn't work.

Magic has evolved, and runes are overly primitive.

It was simply too inefficient to abandon the developed system and return to primitive methods to implement modern magic in an ancient magical language.

The first step was to reinterpret and translate modern magic into runes. A deep understanding of runes was a must.

Herriot could do that.

The Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan, a magical master, had emphasized the importance of runes from a very young age, so Herriot had a very deep understanding of the language, if not the level of a professional scholar who had spent a lifetime studying it.

But on top of that, I had to memorize a huge amount of runic formulas and activate and rearrange them whenever I needed to.

Herriot could do that too.

Memorization is too easy for Herriot.

As such, Herriot's body, not his mind, was now doing most of the actual work of manipulating magic after the fact. All that was required was to memorize a number of magical runic combinations.

A magical scroll that can be used indefinitely, as long as your body's magic allows.

So while she doesn't have the superpower of no-casting, she has gained an ability that rivals Redina's.

-currr

It wasn't over yet. Herriot reached for the acrid smoke rising from the collapsed stadium.

Blue lines of energy are etched into Herriot's right arm in the form of runes. The greater the scale of the magic, the greater the magnitude of the power lines that color his entire body.

Herriot now had runes glowing all over his right arm, upper and lower.

-currrrr

Magic that is reorganized into runes and triggered.

Thunder.

We'll end with a thunderbolt, not a lightning strike. Sudden darkness descends upon the otherwise clear sky, and the people begin to shout.

-Flash!

A flash of light struck the stadium.

-Crunch!

Soon after, a massive roar shook the stadium as the thunderbolt inflated the air.

In the places where the blows hit, there was silence for a while.

"......."

"ha......."

A moment later, she smiled at Olivia as she emerged from the rubble.

I didn't win or lose, but I was confident that I'd already hit the nail on the head.

Olivia Ranze emerged from the rubble of the collapsed stadium.

"Is this....... I'm really pissed at......?"

Herriot may have gotten the better of her, but that doesn't change the fact that Olivia Lanchester is a monster.

He survived a Flame Strike and a Thunderbolt with his bare body. Flame Strike is a large-scale destructive spell, while Thunderbolt is a small-range but powerful anti-personnel attack.

But Olivia survived both.

The audience was in awe that such high-level destructive magic could be cast, even at the unlimited level, and that there was an opponent who could withstand it.

The smile faded from Olivia's face.

As if the fun were over.

Herriot's right and left arms, which are hidden by his sleeves, begin to draw power lines once again.

The stadium collapsed, and over-the-counter became meaningless.

Herriot will lose if she allows just one attack, and Olivia Lance will lose if that ironclad barrier of enchantment is removed.

The playing field itself is in Herriot's favor.

For Olivia Ranze, who needs to get close, the collapsed and bumpy ground is a tough place to move.

But Olivia is immune to such mundane standards.

Olivia leaps off the ground like a bird and approaches without losing her footing.

Of course, Herriot, who has done the unprecedented thing of imprinting magic on his own flesh, is not by ordinary standards.

Herriot is the point from which Olivia leaps.

Cast a spell, facing the arena floor debris where you will land next.

Casting is a simple telekinesis.

-Puck!

With a dull thud, the rocks on the ground Olivia was supposed to be stepping on suddenly bounced to the right.

"!"

Suddenly, your foothold is gone, so to speak.

-Kwadang!

"Yuck!"

Olivia stumbled to the ground and went from bad to worse.

In the heat of battle, the last thing you want is to stumble and go off the rails.

However, Olivia falls forward in such a ridiculous way that it makes for a rather hilarious situation.

"......pub."

And Herriot, who had created the spectacle, laughed at Olivia for not casting an offensive spell.

"Wow....... Wow really......."

Olivia staggers to her feet and turns to look at Harriet, who has a sneer on her face.

Oops.

I never thought I would be laughed at like this.

For a kid like that.

Only.

I didn't think a wizard would do this to me.

"Really."

"Dog."

"Pissed off at......?"

A dark fire burns in Olivia's heart.

The tendons in the nape of her neck and forehead stand out, and Olivia Ranze grits her teeth and approaches Herriot once again, this time calmly. This time, the same trick didn't work. That was an unexpected attack.

Just being careful isn't enough to stop you from poking holes.

Olivia lunged at him, stabbing him in the back, and Herriot disappeared in a short spatial shift.

But just as he finished moving. Herriot found himself facing a crashing boulder.

Late.

You don't even have a second to cast.

-shhhh!

He dodged it not because of his quick reflexes, but purely because the trajectory of the flying rock missed him.

The velocity of the flying rock was such that if a normal person had been hit, their head would have been crushed to death.

"This doesn't fit."

Olivia's mouth watered with regret.

I knew that if I got too close, he'd spacewalk away for a short distance, so the rock was aimed at the moment he spacewalked away.

Luckily, it was far enough away that it didn't hit.

A chill ran down Herriot's spine.

Your opponent is learning to deal with the same pattern of attacks, loopholes, and avoidance behaviors.

That moment of spatial movement, the short gap between arrival and departure.

In the heat of the moment, your opponent might snipe at you with a rock.

Next time, you won't miss.

This is the last time.

You don't have much horsepower left anyway. You've already used a lot of powerful magic.

"You're starting to look like you're running out of steam, aren't you?"

And Olivia knew that Herriot was feeling it.

-Thump!

Watching Olivia advance, Herriot opted to use a terrain feature rather than an offensive spell.

Use telekinesis to lift and throw debris from the arena.

-Bang! Quack!

Olivia pushed forward, smashing through the rocky debris head-on.

Ellen at least smashed through the wall and cut through the door with her new sword called Ramen.

Olivia Lanze was doing it with her bare body. Throwing stadium debris at the ever-approaching Olivia can only go so far.

But as if it's the only way to go, Herriot throws up a pile of stadium debris, which Olivia crushes as she advances.

So, it's no surprise that the macabre dirt spiked.

Olivia gritted her teeth as she reached Herriot's nose, only to see Herriot slip away with another blink.

"Sucks."

Olivia guessed this was Herriot's intention as she watched the dirt block her view.

This makes it impossible to see which way the opponent has moved. It was so dusty that the audience couldn't see what was going on.

"Whoa......."

In an instant, the blue magic in Olivia's body suddenly exploded.

-Quack!

It's what Savior Tana did when she fought Charlotte the Dark One.

A magical shockwave exploded, blowing away the dirt that had been scattered.

Olivia blew the dust away like she was clearing a fog, and watched as Herriot appeared on the other side of her again.

The stadium was now beyond a mess and had disappeared.

"Nothing more to throw?"

From Olivia's perspective, Herriot's spatial movement seemed daunting, and he'd been using his telekinetic powers to throw large pieces of debris.

But Olivia smashed all the rock-sized pieces.

All that's left are the stones.

Gone are the days of short-range spatial travel and shallow, dirt-stirring escapes.

At this point, you've spent too much time with the little wizard.

"You don't have to throw it anymore."

But Herriot was smiling.

"I threw them all away."

"......what?"

I can't believe I threw it all away.

What the hell?

Suddenly, Olivia realized that despite her magical shockwave, there were stones all around her.

These rocks should have been pushed back by the shockwave, but they stayed put.

Olivia sees.

In the scattered shards, the bits and pieces of stone.

Although we don't know the details.

Anything found in the form of those fragments.

Eerie regularity.

"I've used up most of my magic, but I don't have to use my magic to do this."

Herriot threw the shard.

And he was arranging the scattering shards so Olivia wouldn't notice.

How to use Nature's Mana.

Reinhardt tried to get him to figure it out, but he still can't.

But there is a way to use natural mana in the first place.

In the form of a magic circle.

Magic circles are used for all sorts of things, but large-scale circles use mana from magic stones, but are essentially mana draws from nature.

In this short span of time, Herriot did the unthinkable: he set up a magic circle in the arena.

-Woof

"Holy......!"

Olivia watched, dumbfounded, as the magic circle, already set up over an area too large to escape, began to react.

"I win."

With a smile from Herriot.

Herriot's magic circle glows blue and takes on the form of a complete djinn.

The magic happens.

Inferno.

A fire-based destructive spell that ranks above Flame Strike.

It's too broad a spell to avoid.

Olivia has a hunch.

This is, well, screwed.

Olivia cried out in frustration as she watched the flames begin to rise at her feet.

"You'll see......! You'll see!"

"The wait and see is the scariest part!"

It was too juvenile for a conversation at the end of a long, intense fight.

-Crunch!

A roaring inferno engulfed Olivia and shot skyward.

Olivia couldn't resist the magic this time.

-He, Herriot de Saint-Ouen, takes the second set!

The audience stared in disbelief as the eerie flames licked at the sky like a snake's tongue.

\* \* \*

Herriot was unfamiliar with fighting, but he knew what was important in a fight.

Hide your information as much as possible.

Herriot hid his tricks well. He hid as much of what he could do as he could, and then let it slip away. By making it seem like throwing shards was all he had left, he hid his true intentions of setting up a massive magic circle on the ground.

But in the end, it's a mixed blessing.

Olivia looked down on Herriot too much, and Herriot took advantage of the trick.

Plus, of course, Olivia didn't use her holy power until the end. If she had, she could have survived the final Herriot attack.

In the end, Olivia outplayed her opponent with a lot of constraints.

Regardless of the outcome, the excitement in the crowd was palpable as the most spectacular fight of the tournament so far took place.

The set score is 1:1.

Olivia won't let her guard down now.

Herriot and Olivia have been summoned to the arena that was restored by the Restore spell.

Olivia glared at Harriet like she was going to eat her at any moment.

I will not be caught off guard, I will not be fooled, and I will not be tricked anymore.

So, looking at Olivia waiting for the match to start, Harriet threw up her hands.

"I'll abstain."

Not surprisingly, Olivia's complexion turned white.

"You, you, you, you, don't do it, don't abstain!"

"I'm tired, I can't do more."

Not having enough horsepower is not an excuse.

In Reinhardt's case, he was unable to recover from the effects of his enchantments, but his normal energy depletion could be addressed by a standby mage with a replenishment spell called Siphon Mana.

Declaring a pointless abstention.

-Get....... Well. Due to the withdrawal of Herriot de Saint-Ouen, Olivia Lanche is the winner of Group C of the main draw....... has been determined.

Of course, you can't force a player to fight more if they don't want to.

"Don't abstain! You! I said don't!"

Even when Olivia huffed and puffed, Harriet wasn't in the mood for more fighting.

Harriet can't beat Olivia.

"Yeah, one more set, one more set, and if you win the next set, you win, and I'll quit!"

"No. Why would I want to do that? I can't even fight you."

"Aaaahhhh!"

Her goal was never to beat Olivia, but to make her impossible to ignore.

Herriot succeeded in doing just that.

Episode 312.

Group C is over.

As such, neither Olivia, who advanced to tomorrow's tournament semifinals, nor Herriot, who was eliminated, had any business at the tournament site.

"You, you're such a bad girl, you're such a bad girl, you know you're a bad girl, right?"

"Only for my sister."

"That, that's......! That, but you're bad too!"

Olivia blushed bright red and followed Harriet inexorably. Olivia didn't win, she was defeated.

So I felt like I lost even though I won. No, I lost more because I won.

Harriet says, glancing at Olivia, who is giggling beside her as she follows.

"Shut up, the game is over, don't bother me, go on your way."

"......You! I'll get my revenge! You'll see!"

Olivia said something that sounded like a loser's excuse for a winning topic, then stormed out of the tournament.

Harriet smiled at the back of Olivia's head.

Still a bit.

I thought I was being self-controlled.

It looks like he's pissed off to the max, but when he's on the field, he's killing it, and now that he's out of the game, he's not touching a hair on his head.

If you're that upset, you might lose your cool and try to hurt yourself.

He ran away because he didn't think he could stand the minutes.

I'm sure he's a man of his word, but the way he's acting makes me think he's not at all.

'He's a weirdo.......'

For better or worse, Harriet still wasn't sure about Olivia Ranze.

Of course, you don't know if they're good or bad, but you know they're unpleasant.

We exited the main stadium. There was a crowd of first-year Royal Class students.

Reinhardt exclaimed.

"Bam, you did it, man!"

I lost.

Everyone was looking like they had won.

"I was believing?"

"......You didn't believe me the first time."

"Gah, hmm. Hmm. Hmmm!"

Reinhardt's excited shout made Ellen and the rest of the class stare at him.

Herriot knew Reinhardt was fidgeting with anxiety.

Everybody rallied around Herriot and said it was amazing. They said it was amazing.

Even if I didn't use my divine powers, even if Olivia was looking down on me, winning a set was huge.

The students weren't the only ones to welcome Herriot, of course.

"Baby!"

"Uh, uh, mom......."

Mrs. St. Thuan hugged Herriot fiercely. She knew her parents were in the audience, and she knew they would come for her, so she wasn't too upset.

But calling her a baby in front of everyone made her blush.

"That was great, sweetie. Are you hurt anywhere?"

"Oh, don't call me baby......."

Parents were there, and the students were sneaking off to watch.

Knowing that you're being treated like this at home makes the situation even more unbearable.

The Grand Duke of St. Thuan watched with a pleased expression on his face. He could see that his daughter, who had come a long way, was overwhelmed with pride.

Mrs. Saint-Antoine, who had spent a long time telling him he was fine and that he'd done a great job, held him in her arms and stared at him.

"But....... Mr. Reinhardt?"

"......Oh, yeah, it's been a while!"

Everyone was surprised that Mrs. Saint-Haëtien knew Reinhardt.

Long time no see?

Where and why would Reinhardt have any business seeing Harriet's mother in person?

And Reinhardt was frozen, his complexion white as a sheet.

"If I'm not mistaken,....... I think it's my baby who you're calling paktong......."

Reinhardt's white complexion turned almost green with the words.

Madame St. Thuan looks at Reinhardt with a kind and gentle smile.

"Is that right?"

"That, that....... That, that. That. That said......."

"Yes, that's right."

The answer came from neither Herriot nor Reinhardt, but from Ellen.

Reinhard froze and looked at Ellen.

Are you going to kill me?

Ellen's stare only served to distract her.

Ellen looked as if she'd had enough.

Mrs. St. Thuan's smile deepened. But it was an eerie smile, as if a thousand blades were lurking within it.

"Mr. Reinhardt, can we talk for a minute?"

"That, that. That's, that's, that's the story......."

-chuck

Then the Grand Duke of St. Thuan, who had been watching the proceedings with amusement, stepped forward and placed his hand on Reinhardt's shoulder.

"This is the kind of story that makes me want to call my daughter Paxton."

Archduke Saint-Thuan's face hardened into a grim line.

"Oh, that must be a great story, yeah."

It must be a great story, the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan was saying with his eyes.

"Kill me."

Reinhardt eventually paid up.

\* \* \*

I wasn't beaten back.

But when Mrs. Saint-Antoine patted me on the shoulder, saying she had no idea our daughter had such a cute nickname, I realized that a knife to the throat would be less creepy than that.

Herriot was stunned.

It would be weird to defend me or not defend me.

Yes.

I can't help but think that I'm now retroactively paying the price for teasing the daughter of an archduke and the princess of a country as a paktong.

The Grand Duke of St. Thuan did not say that if he ever called my daughter that again, he would kill her.

They just look at me with a cold stare.

It was even scarier when he didn't say anything.

"Lift."

"Oh, that. Yeah."

But.......

What am I doing here?

A restaurant inside a temple.

I was sitting with the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan and his family. The Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan exchanged a few words with Charlotte and Saviolin Tana, whom he was obviously familiar with, and then came over to dine with his daughter.

And.

Before I knew it, I was there.

I'm not trying to follow you.

I didn't ask you to follow me.

It's just that Mrs. St. Thuan naturally dragged me along. She didn't ask me to go out to eat, she just asked me to talk to her slowly on the way, and we ended up at the restaurant.

What is this?

What's going on?

Herriot was equally puzzled.

Why is she sitting here? No, why did mom bring him here?

He had that look on his face.

Feeling possessed by something, the menu came out and me and Harriet idly teased our forks and knives.

Don't say anything, don't ask any questions.

I feel like if I say the wrong thing, there's no turning back.

What it is.

Alone in Arnaria, meeting Harriet's parents, and now sitting here with them.

Even though Harriet and I are engaged to be married, isn't this a reversal of the order?

"Sweetie, when are you going to be able to do that again?"

"Yeah, I was wondering how that works."

Fortunately, neither Madame Saint-Antoine nor the Grand Duke seemed to have any spare time for my side of the story, and indeed neither did I.

The second set against Olivia. Her performance there was way beyond what I expected.

"Uhhh....... So I didn't give it a name, but I guess you could call it scroll magic applied to the human body."

Herriot rolled up his right sleeve. I didn't see any tattoos.

But as she concentrated, blue lines of energy began to form on her arms, taking the shape of letters.

Archduke Saint-Thuan looked at the complex string and nodded in understanding.

"It's a Rune."

"Yes."

"You mean you've translated modern magic into runes?"

"Yes."

Only the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan could truly know how difficult that would be, and so he stared blankly at his daughter's nonchalant yes.

Even though she was his daughter, he was clearly surprised that she had done such a ridiculous thing.

Herriot smiled subtly.

"I didn't do it alone, I had a lot of help from the Magical Research Society, and the idea came from another kid."

"If you're a magical researcher......."

Harriet looks in my direction.

"Yeah, the one he said we should make."

The words drew the gazes of Madame St. Thuan and the Grand Duke to me.

Your daughter has been raving about how she's going to do wonders for the world in her magical research.

It wasn't the way he wanted it to be, but Heriot had already done something outrageous. In collaboration with members of the Society for the Study of Magic.

In the end, I was right.

Archduke St. Thuan and Herriot discussed their new magic for a while.

Most of the time, I couldn't understand it at all. But I knew what it felt like because Louis told me.

You've turned your body into a living, breathing magic circle.

I couldn't figure out how to actually use magic and what making your body function as a circle of magic had to do with being able to reduce your casting speed so drastically.

"My daughter, this will be the only system of magic in the world that you will ever use. For an ordinary wizard, the act of translating modern magic into runes, memorizing all of it, and recalling it when needed would take much longer than the traditional casting method. While this method eliminates the manipulation of magic from the casting process, it does make the computational process longer."

"......Yes, I guess so."

In the end, it's just a case of hitting the nail on the head. It would be a disservice to the average wizard to use this method.

Increase the formula and skip the step of actually running the horsepower.

For Heriot, it's a way to use magic on the fly, but for other mages, it's a waste of time.

Anyway, I called him a genius, but he's a real genius and he's done something that's only possible because he's a genius.......

For what it's worth.

Hmmm.

I'm pretty sure I could lose to Ellen.

If I'm confident I can fight him, why shouldn't I?

"Why do you have the same face as your dad and mom? Gee, it's offensive......."

I'm pretty sure I and Archduke Saint-Antoine were making similar faces the whole time, and Herriot's expression turned sour.

Madame St. Thuan, the Archduke, and I.

Apparently, the three of them are feeling pretty much the same way right now.

\* \* \*

"How's it going, you're not choking or anything?"

"It's okay."

"......I have to hold my breath to wear something like this, and you don't even have that, and honestly, it's not fair, is it?"

Riana tried the dress on Ellen and stuck her tongue out at how easy it was to get pregnant and how nonchalant Ellen was in the tight garment.

The Miss Temple contest is right around the corner. It is the main event of the festival, along with the finals of the unlimited weight tournament.

So Ellen and Riana were doing one last check, and Riana was busy running back and forth between Ellen's room and Cliff's room.

So the busiest person at the festival was Riana.

Reinhardt's tournament is over, and so is Herriot's Unlimited.

Now, only Ellen and Cliff are left of the first year Royal Class to do anything. Looking at Ellen in the mirror, Riana touched her cheek.

"Straighten up. Is something wrong?"

"No, not really."

Ellen sees her expression in the mirror.

I don't think I look like I'm in a bad mood, even though I don't feel like I'm doing anything out of the ordinary. Ellen tried to force a smile, but it didn't work.

Smiling naturally is hard for you, so when you force yourself to smile, you end up with a weird expression. I wouldn't say it's ugly, but it's definitely not a smiling face.

But right now, I was having a harder time smiling than usual.

I couldn't stop thinking about Reinhardt today.

'ha.......'

'Ehh.......'

"Ma, aren't you worried?

'What if we lose ....... What if we lose, huh? No, losing is losing, but what if we lose badly?

"Don't you look like you're shaking!

'Okay! I'm not dropping! I'm not dropping!

"You shivered again? When?

The one who couldn't sit still for a second and sighed heavily with anxiety.

'Wow. That. What. No. What is that? That.'

"What the hell, what's going on?

'Come on, look, he did it!

"I was counting on it!

Reinhardt jumped for joy when he realized that Herriot was strong enough that he didn't have to worry.

I could tell he was genuinely concerned about her and was rooting for her.

Ellen was surprised, too, because even though she abstained, she still managed to give Olivia a run for her money.

If I were in that position, I wonder if I could have done as much as Herriot.

Probably not, Ellen thought.

Well, if I were in that position.

I wonder if Reinhard would worry about me like he does today.

I wonder if he would have cheered me on like he did today.

Maybe, I thought, I'd be worried, but not to the extent that I was fidgeting like I was today.

Reinhard doesn't like Herriot. Normally, he'd be worried about a subject like this.

You're good at what you do, so I wouldn't worry too much about it.

If you lose, I'm sure you'll be able to figure it out on your own.

She is more concerned and interested in Reinhardt than she is in Harriet. Seeing Reinhardt like this, Ellen had to admit that uncomfortable feelings were already building inside her.

Jealousy.

You're jealous of Herriot.

So, I couldn't get the biggest question of the day out of my head, the one that felt like a stone in my heart.

"Long time no see!

Reinhard seems to be acquainted with Herriot's parents. So does Archduke St. Thuan, and so does Madame St. Thuan.

Apparently, Herriot already knew that, because he didn't seem surprised at all.

How?

No, not how, but why?

Why was Reinhardt meeting with Harriet's parents?

Did you ever get together with Herriot, and why, and Reinhardt, and why.

You haven't told yourself that it's happened before, have you?

No, there's no reason for Reinhardt to tell himself that.

But.

Still.

I realize there's a lot I don't know about Reinhardt.

I don't want to know about this.

I don't want to find out this way.

Of course, you're not the only one with questions.

"By the way, it's a bit odd that the Archduke and Archduchess know Reinhardt."

Riana said it in passing as she smoothed Ellen's clothes and matched her accessories.

Everyone was surprised to see Reinhardt being grabbed and dragged by the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan in front of the stadium.

"You never know."

"Is that so?"

Ellen said she was the one who was most curious about why.

At some point, you start lying. Pretending not to be curious about something, pretending to be okay with something when you're not.

Ellen hated the way she was changing, little by little. Lying, hiding her feelings.

"But is Reinhardt close enough to the Archduke to even dine with him?"

"......."

Ellen gritted her teeth at Riana's words.

If he didn't, his face would be distorted in the mirror.

It's hard to smile.

Ellen managed to keep a straight face.

"I think that's it. I'll just go check on Cliff. He probably doesn't even know how to get dressed."

"Yes."

Only after Riana had left her room did Ellen relax her grip on her molars.

Ellen looks in the mirror.

She saw herself in a colorful dress, her shoulders bare, her necklace, earrings, bracelets, and other flashy accessories.

Not bad.

I think so myself, but Riana kept telling me that it would be weird for you to be this good and not be Miss Temple, and so on.

Let go of useless thoughts, jealousy, inferiority complexes, and doubts.

Because you're not doing yourself any favors.

Ellen didn't wonder about anything else.

If you see yourself dressed like this, you can imagine what Reinhardt would say and how he would look.

I'm just curious about that.

I'm a little surprised myself, but I'm sure Reinhardt would be, and I believe he would be.

I'm both terrified and a little excited to see what Reinhardt has to say after that.

Inside her room, away from Riana, Ellen looked in the mirror and tried to force a smile.

It still didn't work out, but it's possible to try.

I figured that alone might make me laugh at some point.

Ellen practiced smiling at herself in the mirror.

\* \* \*

"......."

Olivia Ranze was lying on her bed in her room.

Olivia may have won Group C of the main draw today, but we all know she was pretty dirty.

Olivia Ranze, A-0, 5th grade.

With a few exceptions, Olivia is still kind and gentle to everyone. She hasn't changed much.

But I knew Olivia would be a little sensitive today, so I didn't have any of her classmates come over to say congratulations to her, even though they're her younger siblings.

So, now Olivia was alone.

Lying on her back, Olivia stares blankly up at the ceiling of her dorm room.

Assuming he was using holy power, he could somehow survive the final magical attack.

No, we wouldn't have gotten there in the first place.

Divine magic isn't just about healing and protection.

In addition to that.

Olivia raises her hand and sees black smoke rising from it.

Corrupted Holy Power.

Olivia can use that too.

If there was a tiata there.

I wouldn't have been humiliated by a kid like that.

You lost because you won.

I'll never forget the look on her face as she declared her abstention.

He knew exactly what his victory would look like, complete with a disqualification.

You may have won, but you've lost.

You dropped a set that you should have won, and you won.

So, it's a lost cause.

Even if you win the tournament, it doesn't change the fact that you lost to Herriot.

There's no point in thinking about it. "What if?" and "What if?" are meaningless.

I lost to Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

That's all that remains.

You feel demoralized, but you can't shake it off.

After all, it wasn't about beating them up or beating them.

I need money.

Money.

If you win the tournament and are crowned Miss Temple, you will receive a cash prize.

That's the goal, so let's just focus on that. The tournament semifinal and final opponents won't be so easy.

And Miss Temple needs to get ready.

Olivia sobbed out of bed and opened her closet.

I sold everything but what I needed, so my wardrobe consisted of nothing but school uniforms and normal everyday clothes.

'I wish I had at least the dress I wore to the benefit.......'

I sold my things to help others. I sold all the dresses and jewelry that my foster parents had bought me and that I wore to various events.

There's no reason to do that.

I can't think of another reason not to.

I don't think my true needs are met by things.

Olivia did just that.

"Haha......."

So, Olivia stared at her closet, which was devoid of anything other than her school uniform.

\* \* \*

The Grand Duke and Duchess of St. Thuan dined that day and didn't return until evening. The Grand Duke is a busy man in many ways, and it's clear that he's been forced to take time off due to Herriot's tournament appearance today.

"Well."

After seeing off the Grand Duke and Duchess, Harriet said.

"What did you say ......, I didn't say anything?"

"It's time to say something, now, what are you going to say, say it early!"

You've been holding your tongue in front of the Grand Duke and Duchess, and now it's time to spit it out. Herriot's face is bright red.

"Uh, uh, uh, uh....... My mom is going to make fun of me for just calling her that...ah......."

His lips were pursed as he spoke, like, "You're such an asshole." Does he think I'm going to argue with him?

"What's the point of teasing, you're a kid."

"You're making fun of me again!"

I haven't had a good reaction in a long time.

You're going to make fun of me even if you don't want to, and you're not going to be able to stop yourself!

"Hey, come on. I'm sure you could have done it without me."

"I don't do it, I don't do it, I don't do it at home!"

Herriot's face flushed bright red and he snarled, "No, you certainly wouldn't, I know that, but you're far too susceptible to demagoguery and fabrication.

But I'm already a kid, stomping my feet in frustration.

It's funny how you get stronger, but your mind stays the same.

"What did I say?"

"I don't do that! Why would I do that at my age!"

......what.

Why is it so cute when a seventeen-year-old says, "At this age?

It's a real flirtation!

If I pushed him any further, he'd probably do something magical, so I restrained myself, but sometimes you have to play it safe.

On the way back to the Royal Class dorm.

The crowds were still there. It would only get more crowded by Friday.

Today's Group C final of the Unlimited tournament must have been quite the talk of the town. It was a fight like no other, even for me.

A first grader who spins magic at near-instant speed.

A fifth grader taking it all in and charging like a tank.

It was crazy because it took me away from everything else.

"But....... Is that weird?"

Herriot walked still, then muttered to himself.

"What's weird?"

"My mom calling me that. It's weird....... don't you think?"

What is.

Was she still thinking about it? She seemed genuinely ashamed of it. Well, maybe it's a problem for him.

Neither the Grand Duke nor the Grand Duchess of Saint-Thuan will continue to treat Harriet like a child.

But maybe that's just the way it is.

Looking at the embarrassed Harriet, I smirked.

"Why is it strange for parents to love their children?"

"......."

The Grand Duke, who acts stern and stern, but oozes love for his daughter.

The Grand Duchess continues to hug Harriet, not wanting to let her out of her arms.

I don't think Harriet liked the look of it, but I did.

Why I had to watch that spectacle from start to finish is a mystery.

"Of course, it's mostly assholes who come out of that environment, right?"

"You, what are you trying to say!"

"You're not exactly a dick, are you?"

It's clear that he was raised in the wrong place at the wrong time, but it's not a sin for a parent to love their child, and Herriot may have been in the original, but he's not now.

"If you think about it, the words are good, but why are you always like that, asshole? I, I've never heard such, such, such words in my life!"

Needless to say, he was not amused.

I think it's kind of funny that you're saying this because your parents are good people and you've had a good upbringing.

I wonder if I have some kind of disease that prevents me from being able to say nice things straight out of my mouth.

But when he gets all red and pouty, you can't stop watching him?

With that, we head back to our royal class dorm.

It's winter.

It was nighttime.

So, it was cold.

"It's cold."

"It's winter, silly, of course it's cold."

"Do I have to be called an idiot for saying "cold"?"

"I don't know about anyone else, but that's not something you should be saying, especially to me, after all the times you've teased me about this nonsense!"

Herriot starts up again. No, but this time you started it first.

The weather felt particularly cold today. It's the middle of winter, it's nighttime, and we're dressed very lightly. Herriot and I were both breathing white.

How much colder is it going to get?

Of course, we're not at the poles, and the weather isn't going to be that harsh.

Come to think of it, magic is God, right?

Just because it's cold doesn't mean it has to be cold.

I nudged Herriot, who was walking still beside me.

"Hey, it's cold."

"......what."

"It's cold."

"Whatever."

"Do something."

"Why would I?"

Harriet glares at me, demanding I come up with something.

Even on the desert island, Herriot summoned a heating sphere and put it in the kids' tent.

It's a spirit, it's Nabal, it's magic. Herriot pouted at my demand that she come up with something, then closed her eyes softly.

I thought you were going to summon the fever spheres from the desert island.

"......."

Herriot suddenly grabbed my hand.

He couldn't even look at me, his head hung low.

No.

This.

When I first awoke from my enchantment and asked to be put to bed because I was so sick, Herriot didn't perform a sleep spell, but instead sang me a lullaby.

When I realized it was a misunderstanding, I wondered if it was really dead.

Am I asking for magic and I'm getting it all wrong again?

"No, dude....... It's not this, it's magic......."

"I know."

The words made my head spin.

"I....... I'm not that stupid......."

His voice trembled so hard it sounded like it might break at any moment.

I took his hand, even though I knew he was asking for magic.

Her head down, she takes my hand and leads the way.

I wasn't gripping it too hard. I can't squeeze harder, and I can't let go. I let Harriet take my hand and lead the way.

"Hey, how was your day?"

Herriot asked.

"It was the best."

I said, sincerely, without pretense.

"......."

"......."

We didn't have any further conversation.

No words, just walking.

The dorm was quite a distance away, requiring a tram ride back.

However, Herriot walked right past the tram stop and kept walking.

As if I wanted to walk like this forever.

It's like you're hoping the place you need to go back to doesn't show up.

Episode 313.

Putting on a dress and applying makeup to get ready for Miss Temple isn't something you can do all day.

After taking off her dress and removing her makeup, Ellen took a shower.

Riana didn't just go over the dress code and makeup, she also had me practice my facial expressions. She says you have to be prepared.

It didn't seem like she had done much, but the unfamiliarity of it all made Ellen feel very tired now. Both physically and mentally.

That didn't mean I didn't like it.

I realized that I was discovering a completely different version of myself that I didn't even know I had, so I looked in the mirror and thought, "Is this me?" dozens of times a day.

Ellen dried all of her hair and laid back down on her bed.

Tomorrow is the start of the Miss Temple contest.

-curl

Ellen narrowed her eyes at the rumbling in her stomach.

Normally, it's time for a late-night snack with Reinhard. Ellen thinks of Riana's firm caution.

"You, don't pick up anything tonight.

"......Why?

"I know you're not gaining weight, but what if you eat something the night before and your face is puffy the next day?

"......I'm not sure.

"If you're not going to eat it anyway, don't eat it. Maybe another day, but not today.

"......Yes.

I'm not saying starve yourself, I'm saying don't eat late at night, but you can do that. I can handle it for a day.

But routines are scary.

-cough

"......."

When you don't eat at the time you usually eat something, and your body is telling you that you shouldn't.

What's more, when someone tells you not to do something, it makes you want to do it even more.

I've gone to bed without eating a midnight snack quite a few times, and now I'm even hungrier because I know I shouldn't be eating today.

Normally, Ellen is very self-controlled. But even when she does eat, she tends not to gain weight due to her physical activity and constitution, and there is always plenty of food in the Royal Class dormitory. She even stuck with Reinhardt, who would do anything for her.

Ellen realizes that she has rarely been able to resist eating lately.

Still, I must do better tomorrow. I can't keep my hunger down this long.

I'm trying to force myself to fall asleep, but I can't.

Maybe it was the moonlight streaming through the window. Ellen scrambled out of bed to draw the curtains.

And.

Holding the curtains closed, Ellen could see the street outside her dorm.

In the dark, under the moonlight.

You see two familiar faces.

Reinhard and Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

They were walking, hand in hand.

"......."

Ellen stays still, watching the scene from inside her room.

Harriet walking beside Reinhardt with her head down in shame, and Reinhardt walking beside her, holding her hand slightly.

Ellen watched the spectacle, frozen in place.

Hold hands.

What a special act that is.

I've held her hand as many times as I can, and I've hugged her as many times as I can.

I've done it myself. I've been friends with Reinhard for as long as I can remember.

So, it falls into the category of things that friends do, and that's how it should be understood.

You have to understand that it's perfectly acceptable.

But.

Ellen can't take her eyes off their clasped hands.

Already.

Was it taken away?

No.

A long time ago.

It's an illusion to think that there's something that only you can reach.

"Long time no see!

Actually, already.

A long time ago.

Is that what happened?

Why are those two.

Substitution.

A hand is something you can hold.

It's a hand I've held many times myself.

I thought it was my privilege to be able to touch Reinhardt, so when I saw that he and Harriet were merely holding hands.

My heart is like, why is this.

Is it precariously close to breaking.

'Me, me, you know....... Really, really....... sometimes.'

'I think you're really, really mean.......'

Something Herriot had said once echoed in Ellen's head.

Ellen suddenly realizes that Harriet has always felt this way.

In a place you don't know. Watching from afar as they create stories and memories you don't know.

You've created a relationship that you can't break.

You have to watch it, and you can't do anything about it.

So this is what it feels like.

You feel betrayed, you don't know what to do, you're angry, you're upset, and you're frustrated.

Herriot summarized this feeling in one word: cheesy.

I don't think that's the best way to put it.

Ellen sees them walking back to the dorm.

It may be too late.

She's doing what she has to do. There is no need or reason to hate her. To hate that, Ellen would have to have been hated by Herriot long ago.

Ellen tries to convince herself that Harriet is doing her own thing, and that she doesn't have to hate her for it.

So, you do what you need to do.

You just have to be good tomorrow. If Reinhardt sees himself tomorrow, he might be a little different than he is today.

We'll talk about this and that, and maybe we'll do things a little differently.

That's it.

Today is today, and tomorrow is tomorrow.

Ellen squeezed her eyes shut, trying to erase the lingering images of the two of them from her mind.

\* \* \*

That night.

I swung my sword in the smoke screen.

No Cliffhanger, no Ellen. So I banged on the scarecrow for the first time in a while. I could have asked Tana, the violinist, to teach me, but it was getting late, and I knew I wouldn't be able to get to bed on time if she did.

So, I swung my water sword at the scarecrow.

-Puck!

"......itis."

Your water sword is broken.

I don't think I've ever been that into swords as much as I am into trance.

What it is.

I forgot the time.

I was already well past my standard bedtime. It was time to call it a night, even with Saviolin Tana's lessons.

My whole body was drenched in sweat.

I gathered up the remains of my broken water lily sword and tossed it into the trash, then opened the window to the smokehouse.

A stinging cold breeze brushed against my cheeks and sweaty clothes.

Me Now.

Apparently, you're upset.

What should I do?

I couldn't figure it out.

It was well past my bedtime, and I knew I'd break it again if I tried to swing it, so I decided to get cleaned up and get some sleep.

I thought about doing something, but I didn't feel like doing anything by myself without Ellen.

"Uh."

I walked down the hallway and bumped into someone. He looked at me and scratched his head.

It wasn't anyone else who ran into me, but Bertus.

Aren't you busy managing your horsepower train? What's going on in the dorms at this hour?

"What, you're not going to bed until this time?"

Bertus said what I would have said.

"Some from the haze."

"...... Training late at night on a festival. That's amazing."

Bertus smirked.

"What about you?"

"Oh....... I've been working a bit, and now I'm going to take a break."

The festivities aren't over yet, are we done with the Zodiacal Horsepower Train?

Whether it was the vigil or too much work, Bertus had dark circles under his eyes. You shouldn't be praising me for training during the festival, shouldn't you? You're more uptight than usual.

"Oh, I heard you won the tournament. Congratulations."

"Uh....... Yeah."

Bertus patted me on the shoulder and walked toward his room. If the fatigue on his iron mask was any indication, he'd had a rough couple days.

He was about to go on his way, but then he looked back in my direction as if he suddenly remembered something.

"Oh....... Wait a minute."

"Uh....... Why?"

A cold sweat breaks out all over my body.

All the others passed with flying colors.

This one is not yet.

This is the first time he's seen me since he saw me cross-dressing.

Bertus narrows his eyes and glares at me.

No?

You're not recognizing me, are you? Honestly, I mean, we've met face-to-face, but it's been a quick glance.

"Hmmm......."

Bertus stared at me, frowning, and then shook his head.

"No, you look a little tired."

Bertus made a spine-chilling noise and went back into his room.

\* \* \*

Entering his dormitory room, Bertus dragged his heavy body through the water, bathed, and flopped down on his bed.

Manage the operation of horsepower trains during festivals.

I didn't think it was a big deal. The Horse Train is the most important mode of transportation on the Yellow Road, and even at this time of year, riders come from all continents.

Goro.

Some people have never seen or heard of a horsepower train in their lives.

Children cry because they see a monster running, and adults run away in a panic.

This one's for you.

Even in the far corners of the continent, there is such a thing as status.

If you're willing to travel all the way to the ecliptic to see the temple festival, you've got the money to pay for the warp gate.

That's why, in general, those who are more retarded in their own region come to the ecliptic.

Not to mention, there's a whole bunch of people who want to know why there's no noble carriage on the magic train. There are plenty of people who ask how they can use the same transportation as commoners.

It's almost laughable to think of ants doing sequencing, but Bertus had to be good at it.

It was stressful trying to resolve every incident and mishap as smoothly as possible.

I didn't even get a chance to rest, so I went back to my dorm, thinking I'd call it a night.

Bertus's head is about to explode.

But when I looked at Reinhardt, something clicked.

You're too caught up in work to think about it, but you remember the girl you ran into last time.

The moment I saw Reinhardt, I immediately thought of that silver-haired girl.

Unforgettable.

Bertus can't get the look off his face for the rest of his life when he makes the ridiculous mistake of spewing black tea in the face of a woman he's never met before.

'Looks alike, apparently.

I thought maybe I was mistaken because I was tired, but after thinking about it, there's a definite resemblance.

Of course, you'd have to stand them up next to each other to get the full picture.

There's no doubt that the silver-haired girl and Reinhardt look a lot alike.

But Bertus's thinking takes a strange turn.

First.

Bertus is busy and unaware of the festivities. At best, he knows that Reinhardt won the first grade tournament.

So we don't know who the silver-haired girl is, and we don't know that she competed in the Temple pageant.

So, to Bertus, a silver-haired girl is just a silver-haired girl.

Two very different things.

But it's similar.

He even looks like he's got a bit of a mouth.

I was curious about the silver hair, so I asked her about it, and she said it was dyed.

And Reinhardt is from the streets.

"Does Reinhardt have a brother or sister?

It's entirely possible that Reinhardt didn't know he had blood relatives, even if he did.

Just ask Reinhardt.

Do you have a younger brother or sister?

Of course, you'll get a don't know or a yes or no answer, but Reinhardt will wonder why you're even asking.

"Well, maybe not, maybe not.

I'm just wondering if it's possible to have an unnecessary human resemblance.

Reinhardt would be pretty disappointed if you told him that you met someone you thought was your brother or sister, when it wasn't.

'Let's talk about it.......'

You don't even have to tell Reinhardt.

If it's true, it could lead Reinhardt to his lost blood relatives.

If not, it's just a matter of returning the handkerchief that wasn't returned.

Thinking it was nothing more than a frivolous task, Bertus slowly became immersed in Suma.

第 314页

Friday.

Today we have the Miss Temple contest and the finals of the unlimited weight tournament.

Olivia Ranze, who has to participate in both, will be very busy. The Royal Class first-years didn't seem to have much interest in an unlimited tournament starting with the quarterfinals now that their classmates aren't competing.

Ellen, Riana, and Kliffman were busy preparing for the contest.

However, Ellen saw me in the morning and just stared at me.

"Today......."

You know what to say.

"Why don't you go?"

"......Yes."

Ellen watched all of my tournament matches. Even if she didn't, there's no reason she can't go to the Miss Temple contest today.

I'm still not sure what to do about Mr. Temple, though I'm sure I could write a retrospective and make Cliffman Mr. Temple.

There's no reason I shouldn't go to the contest. Ellen looks at me hesitantly, then with a look of determination on her face.

"...... come on."

"Okay, be prepared."

"Yes."

When the contest is over, I wonder if I'll have anything to say.

He had that look on his face.

Ellen left with those words and went off somewhere with Riana to get ready.

While the others were off to their own festivities, I decided to go it alone during the day.

Without anyone present.

Now I'm going to watch the finals of an unlimited tournament, away from the attention of my classmates. I'm sure some of them will be there, but I'm going alone.

Olivia has a lot to be sorry for. She's always there for me, and she'd do anything for me, but she always puts me down. Yesterday, she even cheered for Harriet in public.

Just because you're a jack-of-all-trades doesn't mean you're a master of none.

I don't know if any of you guys are going to watch the finals separately, but I was going to watch the finals of an unlimited tournament without going with anyone.

Even if you start with the quarterfinals, there are only three matches left. So even if you didn't have to sit for very long to watch the final, it would be quite short.

-Wow!

The cheers from the crowd were incredible.

It doesn't change the fact that Herriot lost.

But just because the result was what I thought it would be doesn't mean the process was what I thought it would be.

Just as my tournament had its own twists and turns, the Unlimited tournament had some upsets.

Olivia has only dropped one set so far, and that was the one that Herriot took.

I was waiting for the game to start when I heard someone calling out to me from behind.

"Reinhard, you're here for the finals too, right?"

"Oh, Charlotte."

It was Charlotte.

Even if I was watching it alone, it was zoned so I was bound to run into someone if they came by.

Why would Charlotte need to watch the finals anyway?

The reasoning behind this was simple.

"I see you're here too?"

"Yeah."

Apparently, it's not Charlotte, it's Saviolin Tana who misses her. She can't leave Charlotte's side, but she wants to see the final.

Charlotte's not stupid, so she probably read Tana's mood and said, "Let's go watch the finals.

"If you want to go, I'll go. Why are you here alone?"

"Oh, just."

"Really?"

I figured I'd rather see it on my own than bring someone with me, but I wasn't going to move my seat just because I ran into it.

Naturally, Charlotte and Saviolin Tana sat next to me.

Charlotte looked around and crossed her arms.

"Hmmm."

"Why?"

"Huh? No......."

This neighborhood is reserved for VIP seats in the Royal Class.

That said, there are other VIP seats available.

Just now, Charlotte was looking at the VIP seats for dignitaries.

"Lord Bolton."

"Bollton?"

I shook my head, and Saviolin Tana looked at me.

"Didn't we say hello at the last fundraiser?"

"You mean at the fundraiser?"

I'm sure there's a name or two I've forgotten after saying hello at a sponsorship event. Bolton? Who's that?

"Hmm.

"Hey, you have a bad memory.

For a moment, I see that thought pass through Saviolin Tana's eyes.

"Sir Elayon Bolton, the current leader of the Crusader Knights."

"Ah."

Right.

You've heard the name before. Elayon Bolton, the new leader of the Crusader Knights after Leviathan Lance was deposed.

I didn't know who he was, and he didn't sponsor me, so I forgot about him.

Charlotte gave a subtle smile.

"I looked to see if it came yesterday, and it didn't, but it did today. Well, it's finals, after all."

"You don't think ...... would want to see Olivia win?"

"Well, ....... I'm not sure what Lord Bolton thinks, but it's a bit of a sight to behold."

How would the current leader of the Crusader Knights feel about seeing a potential next religious leader renounce his faith and win a tournament without divine power?

This can't be good. I remembered the name and recognized the face.

Not quite the same as Levereer Ranze, but just as stern and stubborn. He was dressed in robes, not knightly armor of course, and surrounded by an entourage of what appeared to be paladins, all of whom stood still and watched the action.

Saviolin Tana, who had been listening to us, shook her head.

"I don't know about Olivia, but maybe she's rooting for the other side."

"The other one?"

"Final Four, don't you know?"

"I don't remember any of them, except for Olivia."

Charlotte laughed wryly, as if she didn't even remember something that had nothing to do with her.

"We have a finalist who is certain to join the Crusaders after graduation."

"Oh....... Really?"

"I suppose it's something you might want Olivia to win."

Olivia's abandonment of her faith is inevitable.

So, the next Crusader might want to take the win from Olivia, who doesn't even use holy power.

Certainly, there were a few wannabe paladins in the Unlimited tournament field. Most of them were a force to be reckoned with.

Jordan Windsor, Royal Class 6th Grade A-3.

Radia Schmidt, Royal Class 6th grade, B-2.

Radia Schmidt.

The person who wondered what Olivia and I were talking about.

Someone who seems like a good person, but has a strange feeling about them.

He was a prodigy, using holy power with magical enhancements.

By the way.

Olivia is also a year in, so Radia Schmidt and Olivia are actually friends who have been at Temple for a long time.

Do you think they have bad feelings for each other because Olivia left her faith or something?

It's entirely possible that Radia Schmidt would be jealous of Olivia if she were to join the Crusaders.

In many ways, it would have been a comparison. As good as Radia Schmidt is, she wouldn't have been able to beat Olivia in the end.

If Radia Schmidt had been a member of Grace, I would have seen her once, but my first encounter with her was a brief conversation in front of my dorm.

If there was always someone above you who was a perfect match for your talents, that would be a pain in the ass.

While we were chatting about this and that, the moderator started running the contest.

-Royal fifth grader who has only dropped one set so far! Olivia Ranze!

Olivia teleports onto the field as the crowd cheers.

Despite the slight mishap yesterday, Olivia had regained her easygoing smile.

The difference is that Olivia, who had been fighting with her bare fists, is now wielding a sword.

Maybe he realized that he didn't need to draw penalties in the semifinals. Or maybe they realized that if they let their guard down like they did yesterday, they could lose a set.

The quarterfinalists were two sixth graders from Royal and a fifth grader from Orbis.

The Royal Class side was all Temple High School seniors.

Olivia Ranze's quarterfinal opponent is a fifth grader from Orvis. Melan Beniere.

It must be heartbreaking to have your Orbis class disappear right before you graduate.

The Orbis class was the cradle of revolutionary forces, and most of the students and teachers involved either dropped out or left the teaching profession.

Those who remain are either those who have not been subsumed, or those who have been subsumed but have decided to remain in the temple.

Revolutionary Forces.

It makes my head spin every time I think about it.

Regardless of my concerns, the first match of the quarterfinals was about to begin.

The process wasn't that important.

3:0

Olivia Ranze won the match.

\* \* \*

Herriot only had a chance against Olivia because she was using magic, or because Olivia was stronger with a sword.

Her opponent seemed to struggle, but she was no match for Olivia.

Most importantly, my opponent looked frustrated, but not in a defeated way, as if he knew this was going to happen.

Next match in the quarterfinals.

Jordan Windsor, Royal Class 6th Grade A-3.

Radia Schmidt, Royal Class 6th grade, B-2.

They've made it to the quarterfinals, so there's nothing wrong with their skill. I've seen Radia Schmidt and Jordan Windsor play.

Radia Schmidt tends to lose with double buffs, and Jordan Windsor is pretty good even without access to holy power.

Obviously, they're very good players that I can't even compete with at this level, and I don't think Herriot would have been able to win against them.

Olivia is overly monstrous, but so are the other Royal Class upperclassmen.

It's a hand-picked group of people who have been honing their skills for six years. So even though Olivia is an off-the-shelf monster, they're monsters, too.

Talent doesn't run away with you.

Lastly, just because Erhi is surplus now doesn't mean he'll be surplus in six years. He seems to be trying these days, so there's a chance he'll awaken to the enchantment by year three, and another three years from there he'll be an unlimited tournament-ready monster.

Olivia Ranze was originally a classmate of the sixth graders, and would have been in Temple with them the entire time, except for the fifth grade when she left to serve in the Demon War.

So I was actually more like a sixth grader.

Your fellow Royal Class classmates face off in the finals of an unlimited tournament.

I thought it would be a fun and interesting experience.

If it weren't for the Gate debacle, I could see myself and Ellen facing off in the finals of an unlimited tournament when I moved up a grade.

......, but you'll probably lose.

I could see myself making it to the finals and losing to Ellen in the finals.......

Honestly, I didn't think it would be that offensive.

The second game of the quarterfinals was actually pretty exciting, despite my expectations.

-Take care, Radia.

-Take care of me too.

They smiled and greeted each other, wondering if things weren't so bad between them. Despite their different classes, they seemed to be in good spirits after spending so much time together.

But only for a moment.

Their faces hardened.

As if on cue, the jovial mood is gone, and a scavenger hunt begins.

Melan Beniere, the fifth-grader in Orbis who was just triple-teamed by Olivia, is probably a much better player than I am.

The two fighting there now are sixth graders at Temple.

This is the last time we'll see each other in a tournament like this.

Regardless of how they normally get along, this is the last time they'll be pitting their wits against each other on this kind of specialized battlefield.

So let's be real with each other.

-Woof!

Blue magic coursed through Jordan Windsor's body. It didn't feel like an explosion of flame like Ellen's.

That's the exact opposite.

It feels like we've gone all in on operational stability.

It feels like a well-honed blade, compressed and refined, without any unnecessary horsepower.

It's not about scale.

It's an extremely efficient form of disenchantment, using only the right amount of power where it's needed. Perhaps it's Jordan Windsor's style of enchantment that Ellen and I should emulate the most.

Radia Schmidt's case was a little different.

She slammed her sword down, suddenly, on the arena floor.

-Bam!

The metallic sword pierced the stone floor, and white threads of energy began to rise from the floor and wrap around the sword.

The white glow that enveloped her sword soon began to envelop her body as well.

That wasn't all.

Radia's body was emitting not only white light, but also blue magic power.

Divine power strengthens the body and supports magical enhancements.

A way to add strength to strength.

It's not my place to be self-suggestive, but that double entendre is absurd. Saviolin Tana watches the spectacle and says nothing.

"Divine Power of Als, the War God......."

I had already seen Radia Schmidt play, so I knew she was using the Holy Power of Als.

"The divine power of Als has....... nothing important."

"Yes."

I know, I know.

Als, the War God.

"Divine Power, unable to use the power of healing, instead focusing everything on offense......."

While Tuan's powers are not limited to healing, most divine powers can use healing to some degree.

However, the priests of Als, the war god, do not have the power to heal.

A power that specializes solely in destroying and crushing.

A destructive force that specializes in killing and slaughter.

That is the divine power of the War God.

Having absorbed enough of the divine power from the earth, Radia Schmidt draws her sword, a young sword of white light, and stares down her opponent, bathed in blue and white light.

-go.

-Yes.

They're not just superhuman, they're superhuman.

It's the epitome of royalty: two monsters clashing.

-Quack!

Sword clashed with sword, and I could practically see the shockwave as it cracked the atmosphere.

Given the level of confrontation, it was clear that the weapons issued were powerful artifact-level weapons that could withstand any fight.

And so it was a true battle of the superheroes.

\* \* \*

The second match of the quarterfinals was won by Radia Schmidt from Class B. The set score was 3:1.

While Jordan Windsor excelled at enchantment itself, Radia Schmidt was able to use the divine power of Als.

That was the biggest difference.

Divine Power's emphasis on destruction was enough to make me shudder. Jordan Windsor was defeated by Radia Schmidt, who was aided by divine power.

Since there is no change in the number of people between classes A and B, it is not uncommon for class B to overtake class A in senior year.

Still, it's kind of weird to see it with my own eyes.

I could see a defeated Jordan Windsor gritting his teeth.

Whatever their usual relationship, in the end, they had lost by a decisive margin, something they had practiced with all their might throughout their temple life.

Accepting defeat is hard for anyone.

I didn't really empathize with either of them. If anyone deserved it, it was Olivia today.

Of course, unlike me, the audience seemed to be satisfied with the spectacle, since there was nothing to take in in the first place.

But this one, can Olivia win?

Olivia can't use her divine powers, and Radia Schmidt is at full strength.

What is the relationship between Radia Schmidt and Olivia?

If Radia Schmidt had been jealous of Olivia her entire time at Temple, she would have wanted to defeat her with all her might.

With a little time to spare, the finals were just around the corner.

After all, it's a match between classmates.

Olivia Ranze, who was A-1.

And then B-3, Radia Schmidt.

The finals spectacle was a little different than I expected.

Olivia's usually easygoing smile had hardened, and Radia Schmidt was smiling.

-Olivia.

-......Yes.

The vibe between the two of them was cheesy.

When talking to Jordan Windsor before the game, Radia Schmidt's usual eyes and smile seemed a little different.

Radia Schmidt.

There was something in her eyes, something akin to madness.

-The divinity I sense in you is stronger than before.

-.......

-Return to the arms of God, Olivia, you were born to do so, you were made to do so, you were made to live outside of the arms of God.

-Ladia, I'm.......

-Come back. Olivia.

It wasn't the jealousy or inferiority complex I expected.

Radia Schmidt had completely different feelings for Olivia.

-Told you, I gave up on the whole thing. I kept saying....... I kept saying.......

-No, Olivia, your divine power, your talent, your character, all of it. You are the only one who can truly unite the Five Great Houses. You are the only one who can bring this long history of faith to a close and move it into the next era.

Radia Schmidt smiles and turns to Olivia.

Olivia covers the divine power of Tuan, and Radia Schmidt covers the divine power of Als.

Even the same five major gods are different faiths.

Still, Radia Schmidt was trying to bring Olivia back to the faith. Olivia's embarrassment was palpable.

-Come back, Olivia.

-Sorry, Radia, I'm not going back.

I realized that I didn't know the specifics of what life in Olia's temple was like.

Just as Olivia's talent was something Leverier Lancet didn't want to miss.

A lot of people cared about Olivia, not the least of which were her classmates, who had a soft spot for her.

You've heard stories like this ever since you gave up your faith. You've heard it from people in the religious community, and you've heard it from many of your former classmates.

Those who had gotten along so well when she was a believer would have done anything to convince her to change her mind once she renounced her faith.

Olivia is tired of it.

In the end, contrary to my expectations, Radia Schmidt was not jealous of Olivia Ranze, but rather one of her most ardent followers.

"What are you talking about?"

As I and Saviolin Tana focused on the two in the distance, Charlotte asked Saviolin Tana.

"...... is trying to convince Olivia to return to her faith."

"ah......."

Charlotte sighed.

"You must be tired, too."

"......."

Olivia's exhaustion bordered on despair.

You know you're going to have to deal with this for the rest of your life.

There was more to Olivia than I realized.

-I have only one answer, Radia, and that is that I have no intention of returning to the arms of God.

Radia closed her eyes for a moment at Olivia's words.

-I see....... Then brace yourself.

-......will?

-Yes. Determination.

Once again, Radia Schmidt slammed her sword into the arena floor.

-A willingness to endure sad things.

-Kagak!

Radia Schmidt didn't seem evil. I was just being unnecessarily nervous. She had a kind smile on her face when she spoke to me briefly.

But Radia Schmidt, the woman Olivia was talking to, was a strange person.

The smile is gone from Radia Schmidt's face, and it's clear she's not feeling the same way she did in the semifinals.

Madness and obsession.

-Everything that is going to happen from now on is the will of God to put you on the right path.

-Whoosh!

Divine power surged from the arena floor and enveloped Radia Schmidt.

第 315页

Increased holy power and magic.

Even if Radia Schmidt wins against Olivia, there's no reason for Olivia to regain her faith by saying, "I'm nothing without divine power.

-curl!

Olivia energizes, and the finals of the Unlimited Tournament begin.

"I feel....... kind of."

"I see."

As me and Saviolin Tana listened in on their conversation, we couldn't help but feel a sense of foreboding.

Radia Schmidt is trying to do something.

-Quack!

Contrary to my ominous premonition, I couldn't quite tell who had the upper hand.

Let's be clear, Radia Schmidt is also an incredible talent.

However, Olivia Ranze, who faces it with only a magic boost, is no match for it. That said, if you add Divine Power to the mix, Olivia's advantage becomes overwhelming.

No matter how offense-oriented Als' power is, Tuan's power has the power to reinforce it. If Olivia can use that, it should be easy for her to take the win over Radia Schmidt.

What the hell is Radia Schmidt going to do, force Olivia to use her divine powers when she realizes she's lost?

Olivia said that if that happened, she would be taken to the Inquisition.

So even in the face of losing a set to Herriot, I didn't use divine power.

"Just for ......'s sake, what happens when Olivia Senior uses her divine powers when she has officially renounced her faith?"

I asked because I had heard of it, but didn't really know it.

"You're not going to get a good look at ......."

Charlotte said in a negative tone.

"...... Those who use unauthorized divine power are treated as witches."

Saviolin Tana replied.

Priest or Paladin.

Whether you're ordained or not, you have a license to practice divine power. With the exception of this class of students, who are more like apprentices.

To monopolize divine power.

Olivia wasn't secretly healing people in a village in the middle of nowhere; she was called the Saint of Eredian.

If you give up faith, divine powers must disappear. The power comes from the belief in God.

But Olivia's divine powers didn't fade, they only grew stronger.

However, it must not be used. Divine power unused in the arms of a god is considered heresy.

"If that were to happen, Olivia wouldn't be considered a witch. But she would be put on trial."

If Olivia were to use holy power, she would be using unauthorized holy power in public. As such, there is a good chance that she could be framed under the guise of an Inquisition or Inquisition.

Radia Schmidt will try to force Olivia to use her divine powers.

But how?

Olivia didn't even use her holy power in the moment of her defeat by Herriot.

At the tournament, Olivia fights like it's a strength she doesn't have.

If you lose, you lose, and you're not going to be forced to use divine power.

-Bang! Quack!

A blow from Radia Schmidt sends a dull thud across the arena, and Olivia takes it with a single sword.

Not only was Olivia deflecting the destructive holy power with the power of her magical enhancements, but she was also counterattacking.

I don't know about anything else, but is that really a human fight?

I was like, "Oh, yeah.

"Great, both of you."

The world's greatest monster was standing next to me praising it.

It was an uphill battle.

Radia Schmidt fights with everything she's got.

Olivia Ranze only uses magic enhancements.

If it weren't for Olivia, Radia Schmidt would be in her place.

Radia was good enough to think that. But she wasn't jealous of Olivia, she was trying to put Olivia back where she belonged.

Obsession, not jealousy.

In the end, both are exhausting.

-Kurung!

A white glow emanated from the sword as Radia's divine power converged, and it slammed into the ground.

-Kookaburra!

I wondered if that was holy power. Divine power focused on destruction was more powerful than magic.

After Herriot, I could almost see the stadium, which had been reinforced even further, being ripped apart in real time.

That's a paladin.

In fact, I'm beginning to wonder if berserker might be a better word.

But Olivia's dealing with it was just as crazy.

He'd parry or dodge dangerously powerful attacks, and he'd poke out attacks just in time to keep Radia on her toes.

In terms of overall output, Radia is ahead.

Olivia, however, was a bit more sophisticated and pressured Radia with her predictable attacks and counters.

As such, the outcome of the match was somewhat predictable.

Radia is doing well, but Olivia will win.

I'm not belittling my opponent like I did with Herriot.

Olivia may not be using her divine powers, but she's still keeping her guard up.

Radia Schmidt has a trick up her sleeve.

If you're trying to force Olivia to use her holy power, how does that work?

Olivia attacked Radia with sharp, precise strikes.

-Bang! Quack! bang!

Olivia's onslaught didn't give Radia a chance to catch her breath.

Concatenation on concatenation.

Steadily attacking the divine and enchanted defenses, Olivia finally succeeded in creating a gap.

That's it.

Sensing her victory, Olivia plunged her sword into Radia Schmidt's chest.

Olivia takes the first set.

-Kurung!

I could see an explosion of red energy emanating from Radia Schmidt's body.

"That's......!"

Savior Tana was watching the scene wide-eyed, and Olivia took a big step back in embarrassment.

-Ladia! What are you doing!

-Olivia....... You have to win, right......? You need the money, so....... You're in a tournament, aren't you, kids, and you need to help?

Enveloped in a reddish aura, Radia smiles an eerie smile.

-Beat me with all your might. With all your might.

Radia Schmidt, bathed in an ominous red glow, was anything but normal. Saviolin Tana mumbled something incoherent, as if she knew what that red energy was.

"You're Berserk ....... Why, you're just a student, and you've got that kind of power......."

"What is that?"

"A power rarely used by the higher priests of Alth."

Berserk.

I don't know the details, but the word itself already gives it away. Olivia exclaimed, her face turning white.

-Ladia! Stop it, now!

"That's....... is the power of burning lives."

This is an extreme method used by the Paladins of Alth, who burn their lives to increase their power.

The Paladins of Alth were not berserkers, they were berserkers.

Radia Schmidt was using that power right now in the tournament final.

Radia knows why Olivia needs to win. She knows she's not in it for herself, she's in it for the prize money.

So she was doing this crazy thing where she was burning her own life to boost her power so that Olivia couldn't take her down unless she was at full strength.

You're doing all this to get Olivia to use her divine powers?

-Bang! Ka-kang! kang!

Radia Schmidt was in the middle of pushing Olivia backwards when she was overcome by a red aura.

Charlotte looks at Savior Tana with an uneasy expression.

"Shouldn't we stop it?"

"Yes, but Berserk is a very rare power among the priests of Alth. Even within the Order of Alth itself, there are very few who know how to use it. Olivia seems to know, but....... I wonder if the organizers know what's going on over there now......."

To the untrained eye, it would appear that Radia Schmidt, on the verge of defeat, has suddenly found her strength, unaware that the red energy is a life-burning force.

I glance over to the Crusader Knightmaster, Elayon Bolton, and see that he, too, is in turmoil.

Elayon Bolton was staring at the field with a grave expression on his face, and even the paladins with him were talking amongst themselves in bewilderment.

Even the most senior paladins with the Crusader Master have no idea what Radia Schmidt is doing right now.

Olivia gritted her teeth and fought off the onslaught of Radia Schmidt, who was unleashing a barrage of attacks.

The match should be stopped immediately.

However, if the organizers are unaware of the situation, the game will continue as is.

Olivia is being outclassed by Radia Schmidt, who is drawing on extreme strength. It would be best to defeat her once and for all, but that would require the use of divine power.

That's not an option to consider.

It is possible to hold out without using holy power, but Radia Schmidt, who has run out of life to draw from, will die on the spot.

That's why there's only one way to stop Radia Schmidt from burning lives.

Stop the match.

Or.

Olivia gives up the game.

It was just the two of them.

"Lord Tana, stop the game immediately, or I'll take the blame."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Charlotte said that with a serious look on her face, and Saviolin Tana nodded.

-Abstain.......

A puzzled Olivia abstained.

\* \* \*

Olivia was shivering in the athlete's waiting room, her hands clasped over her face.

Abstained.

"When I grow up, I want to be just like you!

"Hehe, your dreams are too small, you should try to be something much bigger than your sister.

"You're the prettiest, nicest, most amazing person I know.

"Dude, don't make it too high.

Abstained.

"Ms. Olivia, thank you as always.

"Whatever, it's what I have to do.

'But now that I'm in a position to do it, I'm not going to....... I hope you don't overdo it.'

'Abbot, I'm still good, because I think I'm going to win a lot of money at this year's Temple Festival.

"Prizes?

'Yes, the tournament and its....... and the other tournament....... Hmm. There is such a thing. Anyway!'

I abstained.

It was inevitable.

There is no such thing as a second place prize in a Temple tournament.

Most of the audience was stunned.

It was such a disappointing end to a highly anticipated final.

Very few people knew the details. Whether Radia Schmidt's behavior was disqualifying or not is up for debate.

So, for now, I had to wrap up the contest, albeit with a lukewarm reception.

Olivia didn't even think to watch the awards ceremony.

Although the prize is a prize.

She was disappointed that she didn't win, but more than that, Olivia's head felt like it was going to explode.

It was driving me crazy.

I can't figure out why I'm doing this to myself.

I don't know how long I've been sitting there in a daze.

"Olivia."

Radia Schmidt was walking toward Olivia.

-Turp!

She tossed away the gaudy trophy that was proof of her unlimited tournament wins, as if she didn't care about any of that.

Radia approached Olivia.

"Why did you abstain?"

"......."

"Money, you needed it."

Radia Schmidt's face didn't show the slightest hint of joy at her victory.

The only thing he wanted in exchange for the option of burning his life was to use his holy power in public.

When he was taken to the Inquisition, Radia Schmidt risked her life to force him to become a priest again. She risked her life because she knew she had to.

Divine Power could have taken out Radia Schmidt with Berserk.

But that's not what Olivia did.

If it stays that way, Radia Schmidt will be dead.

Olivia was forced to make a choice.

I was faced with a choice between feeding and clothing children who would otherwise go hungry because we had no budget, or forcing myself to live a religious life.

She was forced to choose, and she chose.

"This is not the Olivia I know."

Radia wasn't happy about the win at all. Rather, she glared angrily at Olivia.

"The Olivia I know, in that situation, would have taken me out in a heartbeat, won the prize, and helped people. Obviously, that's what she should have done."

In Radia Schmidt's mind, Olivia is not the kind of person who would abstain in such a situation. She was competing to help someone with her prize money, and in that situation, she should have used her divine power and not thought about herself.

The person everyone expects you to be.

Radia Schmidt was upset that they didn't.

Olivia was blue in the face and shaking.

"Yeah, I'm selfish. I'm going to be selfish now. I'm going to be selfish. I'm going to be that way. This is who I am. This is who I am now....... So. leave me, leave me alone."

"No, Olivia, no, you can't do this. You should have just used your holy power."

Radia Schmidt shakes her head emphatically.

He kneels down in front of Olivia and stares up at her, terrified.

Eyes as black as the abyss stared at Olivia.

"Olivia, you can be the right person again. Look at me, I risked my life, I didn't think about myself, I did this to help you. I wasn't always like this. Olivia, I've always admired the way you help people, and I'm trying to be that person. That's why I did this. So, Olivia, let me help you this time. Olivia, you're only making it harder on yourself. You're gonna have a harder time. No, it's already horribly harsh on you, this situation where you're falling further and further away from God. I didn't do this for nothing. This was the only way. This was the only way that no one would get hurt."

Olivia could barely hear Radia Schmidt, who was talking so fast.

I didn't even want to hear it in the first place.

Radia Schmidt thinks the object of her admiration is being destroyed.

That's why he thinks it's time for him to help Olivia.

"I, I never asked you to do that....... Please......."

"No. No, Olivia, I'm giving you my winnings. I don't want you to be a bad person. You can help the children, but promise me one thing. You'll come back to God. It's not too late. It's not too late."

No matter what you say to someone whose ears are closed, they won't hear you. Olivia squeezed her eyes shut, afraid to look into Radia Schmidt's eyes any longer.

Eventually, Olivia burst into tears.

"Please, don't do this to me....... Please....... Please leave me alone....... Please. Why me. Why does it have to be me....... Please....... Just leave me alone....... I don't think I'm doing anything wrong. I don't think I'm doing anything wrong......."

"No!"

Radia blurted out, as if she couldn't get over that.

"Olivia, you can't say that! You were chosen by the gods! A perfect person like you, born with the favor of all the five great gods, can't deny them! Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. That's right. It's called wandering. Oh, the gods are giving you these trials to make you more perfect. Oh, it's all part of their will to bring you to greater glory. So, take your time. Maybe start by going back to the temple. No, let's start slow by talking to people about grace........"

"That's a lot of fucking words."

Suddenly, a voice from the hallway made Radia and the crying Olivia turn their heads toward it.

"Why do you keep preaching to the choir when you don't like it, even street preachers don't stick around this long?"

It wasn't anyone else, but Reinhardt, who approached with rough steps. Reinhard lunged forward, grabbed Olivia's sobbing hand, and pulled her to her feet.

"I'd just smack you in the face if you were talking shit, but you're listening to all that bullshit?"

"......."

"It's none of your business, Reinhardt."

Radia Schmidt said to Reinhardt with a stern look.

"What the hell?"

Reinhardt pulled a shivering Olivia into his arms and tucked her behind me.

"It's not your place to be between us."

"......what?"

"Go fuck yourself."

Reinhardt grabbed Olivia's hand and started dragging her along.

"Uh, where are you going, I can't let go of Olivia, you can't do this!"

At Radia's cry, Reinhardt turned his icy gaze on Radia Schmidt.

"Leave me alone. Don't be an ass."

"......."

Olivia's head was bowed, and Reinhardt's hand pulled her away. Radia watched in disbelief as Olivia was dragged away.

Reinhardt.

That name is a thorn in the neck.

Olivia is glazed and gentle, but she's been stubborn since day one.

But I'm being very generous with him.

The Saint of Tuan, who is supposed to be chaste, acts as if she is in love with him.

No, it all started when Olivia became friends with a guy named Reinhardt.

He's the cause of all this.

We just need him to go away.

Everyone's focusing on the weird side.

You said he's not to be touched.

You're trying to sacrifice another poor child.

'Maggots, scum. The devil.'

In Radia Schmidt's eyes, Reinhardt was the one who corrupted Olivia, who was on the right path.

He shouldn't be there.

Only when he's gone will Olivia be able to get back on track.

You can get back on the right track.

Radia gritted her teeth and stared down the hallway where Olivia had disappeared.

'Yeah....... It's you.......'

I would do anything for Olivia.

'I'd rather have you dead than Adriana or that child, and Olivia will be fine without you....... She'll be fine without you....... Why, a child in the arms of God should be sacrificed for something like you....... No. It only takes one unbeliever like you.'

Radia Schmidt's eyes widened.

316

The leader of the Crusader Knights, Elayon Bolton, exited the stadium with his entourage.

"I thought you could make them use divine power, but that's all you did."

"......I guess they thought Olivia wouldn't abstain."

The paladin in training said briefly.

Radia Schmidt.

She may not be Olivia Ranze, but she's a powerful paladin with a promising future. As it is, she's more than ready for action, she's overflowing.

I didn't take her word for it.

Olivia said there was something I could do to help her regain her faith, and I just wanted it to be something.

Rather than watch her friend die in front of her, or use her divine powers to win, Olivia's resolve to abstain was evident.

Why did I think that would work?

No, it's not that I thought it would work, it's just that I felt like I had no choice but to try it.

As it turns out, Radia Schmidt was more extreme than Elion Bolton realized.

Regardless of your orientation, extremism is dangerous, and Elion Bolton knew it.

Elion Bolton could see the maddening obsession with Olivia in Radia Schmidt's eyes.

"I don't think Radia Schmidt is going to give up......."

"......I think so too."

It was clear that Radia Schmidt was going to do one more thing, and it wasn't going to be pretty. The attendant whispered discreetly in the Crusader's ear.

"By the way, what do you think is the likelihood that Radia Schmidt is connected to the unnamed order?"

"It's good fodder for extremists, but you don't want that level of extremism......."

They have an unintelligible conversation and walk away from the stadium.

If Olivia was using divine power, she had a job to do as the leader of the Crusaders, but that didn't happen.

As such, the Crusaders now had no business in the Temple.

\* \* \*

"...... I know it's not good, but how about this?"

"......No. Thanks."

I was hoping to find a secluded spot, but given the circumstances, there were none, so we ended up in a cafe with fewer people and I sat across from Olivia.

I felt like I was losing my mind, and losing it badly.

Charlotte and Saviolin Tana knew I was going to check on Olivia, so they told me to be nice to her.

If I waited any longer, Charlotte would have stopped playing, so I just had to be patient.

But Olivia couldn't possibly know that. If she continued to fight, Radia Schmidt would die at full health, and if she used her holy power, the Inquisition would be waiting.

So Olivia had no choice but to abstain.

The look on Radia Schmidt's face was horrifying.

He hadn't expected Olivia to abstain, and he looked stunned.

Apparently, he believed that Olivia would use her divine powers to subdue him.

In the end, the prize went to Radia Schmidt. Although she didn't seem to place any value on winning.

Olivia was sullen, her head hanging low, not even touching the car.

"Does this happen a lot?"

"......Yes."

"It's not just him....... Other people too?"

"Although there are differences in degree......."

Olivia seemed sad that I had learned of the many problems she had since leaving her faith.

Whether she was flirting with me or arguing with Ellen, Olivia always seemed to be in good spirits, even if she was a bit of a bitch.

Olivia wasn't getting along with her friends.

It wasn't just that he wanted to see me. It wasn't just because she wanted to see me.

I was running away from them.

Still, if others are persistently urged to return to their faith, Radia Schmidt's case seemed to be a bit extreme.

It was insanity.

I'm sure Olivia was just as shocked as I was because she never imagined she'd be experiencing this today.

What to say to comfort them.

What would be good for Olivia right now.

I've never been a believer, and I've never had to deal with the problems that come with giving it up, so I had no idea what Olivia was feeling.

He was expected by the whole world.

I abandoned it by my own choice, and people believe it was wrong.

I don't feel like I'm living the wrong life, but everyone around me is telling me I'm wrong.

It was like seeing a different side of Olivia, who was always cheerful and smiling.

You can't see his expression because his head is down.

It's just that she's had enough of the people around her. Just because Olivia can be angry and argumentative with Ellen doesn't mean she can be with anyone else. What is possible for one person to say and do, may not be possible for another.

So Olivia smiled vaguely, embarrassedly, and pushed away, rejecting the urgings of those around her, chipping away.

"I'm not sure......."

"......."

"Why are you doing this to me. I, I really don't know."

I've lived with so many expectations, and even though I've gotten away from my parents, who were the biggest ones, I still feel that pressure around me.

"I don't think I'm that great, but......."

He couldn't understand why people would be so obsessed with him.

When you think about it, there had to be a reason for the obsession, even if it wasn't Radia Schmidt.

If you think about it, Olivia is also the owner of Tiamata, even though they are co-owned.

Knowing that would have made it harder, not easier.

In the end, Olivia entered the tournament for the prize money, but didn't win because of Radia Schmidt.

"Actually, I wonder if it was different before."

Olivia, her head down, smiles wryly.

"I am what people want me to be. No one....... No one. If I'm not what they want or expect me to be, they're disappointed in me. They wonder if the daughter of a crusader knight is supposed to be like this, if this is how it's supposed to be. I was a doll that existed to fulfill other people's expectations."

That's probably how Olivia's life was.

Too much life, too many things required, too many things forbidden, too many things expected.

You've lived a life where even the slightest attempt at freedom is seen as an indulgence and a depravity.

"Finally, I know what my life is. I'm trying to live a life where it's okay to wonder about those things, where it's okay to want those things, and people still want something from me. They think I've gone astray, that I need to get back on the right track. They think I've helped others in the past, and now that I'm on the wrong path, I need to be helped. I don't think so. I don't think I'm wrong. People are trying to give me help I don't want, and people....... People around me, they don't even realize that it's not help at all."

They have a different worldview than those who believe that living in the arms of God is an absolute good. So, in some ways, we can't talk to them at all.

This is absolutely right. So it's good for you in the end. So everything I say is basically good.

You can't have a conversation with someone who starts with the absolute proposition that I'm right and you're wrong. The only people who can have a conversation with them are those who share the same worldview.

Olivia has gotten away from it, but for whatever reason, people try to force her to come back because they think you'll be happy if she does.

At the other extreme would be someone like Radia Schmidt.

Olivia isn't in this state simply because she's disappointed that she missed out on the prize money or because she's traumatized by what happened today.

I know this isn't the end of the story, which is why I'm struggling so much.

It's even harder when you don't know what's going to happen next.

I want to do something.

But I can't expel all of Olivia's classmates, and I can't go to each one of them and threaten them with two heads if they talk shit about her.

"Reinhardt."

"Yes."

Normally, I'm a bit of a prick, but now I've softened my demeanor.

I feel like if I stiffen up now, it will hurt more.

Olivia lifts her head and looks at me, struggling.

His eyes were red.

I felt like I was about to cry.

"I know it's bad form to say this at a time like this, but......."

"What is it. Tell me."

"Can I give you a hug?"

"......."

She looked like she was about to cry.

It was the look of someone who thinks they have no one on their side, wishing they had one.

Not because of any other emotion.

He seemed to be purely looking for comfort.

"No, no need. I'm sorry. Really. Bad. Me......."

When I seemed to hesitate, Olivia's lips quivered and she forced a smile.

"Okay."

Eventually, I made my way over to Olivia's side and gently put my arm around her shoulders.

Olivia buried her face in my shoulder.

Her shoulders heave. Little by little, slowly, like she's taking her first breath after birth.

Olivia cried, very quietly.

"Thanks....... Reinhardt."

I felt pathetic as I tried to figure out what to say to comfort him.

I realized that comfort is more than just words. I was reminded.

\* \* \*

Olivia cried for a long time and then ran out of the cafe.

"...... sold."

He was embarrassed that he was sobbing in front of everyone.

"Don't you think a puffy eye is embarrassing enough as it is?"

"Gee, really?!"

Olivia's complexion turned pensive at my words and she scratched her face. I don't have a mirror, so what's the point?

"Oh my God, I have to go to Miss Temple today, and I don't want my eyes to glaze over!"

"Don't worry, it doesn't look that way."

"But it's the subtleties that make the difference! I can't even win the tournament, so Miss Temple has to win the real thing! What are you gonna do, Reinhardt? If I don't win, I'm not gonna be able to......."

Olivia sobbed again, and then held it in, thinking that if she cried more, her eyes might swell even more.

I'm feeling better. I think I can feel things getting back to normal.

In the end, what's done is done.

The tournament was over, and Olivia now had her sights set on Miss Temple.

Now I don't know who I want to be Miss Temple. Olivia rubs her face, muttering in a desperate voice that the mention of her puffy eyes has bothered her so much.

"Hah....... I don't even have a dress and I'm going out looking like this......."

"Why don't you have a dress? You know, the one from the last fundraiser."

Olivia laughed in embarrassment at my comment.

"That's because....... I actually sold it to......."

"......."

I didn't have to ask why she'd sold it. Olivia was breaking out in a cold sweat, as if she thought I was going to come clean.

I don't even know what to say about this, that he was selling his property to help others.

"Can't I borrow that....... Can't I borrow it?"

"It's a lot of money to rent ......."

You'll probably look like you're going out in your school uniform, and you'll probably look like you didn't prepare and just went with your face, which is the perfect way to look like an asshole.

I think of Olivia standing in her school uniform, alone and without makeup, in a crowd of people dressed to the nines.

I don't know what that would actually look like, but somehow I knew it would be miserable.

I don't know if I would have won an unlimited tournament, but I did lose a forfeit in the final.

Dress.

Dresses.......

"......."

"...... Are you angry?"

"......No. Not that."

Dress.

No. No.

But I think we have similar body types, I'm taller, but I've been downsizing a bit since then.

I didn't want to throw it away, so I gave it to Elise to sell back.......

You probably haven't sold it yet.......

No, but it's possible that there's someone out there who does remember.

But it's like, "Well, there's got to be some sort of design," so what happens?

This is really dangerous.......

Wouldn't it be better to just give her money to buy a dress?

But honestly, it's not a dollar, and I don't have a lot of time, so I might as well just wear it instead of going to a boutique and trying to find the right size and design.

I realize there's no reason to do this.

Right now, Olivia was looking so much worse for wear.

I feel so bad for you and wish I could do something about it.

"Go to ...... and wait for me in the dorm."

"Huh?"

"Go ahead and wait anyway."

"Oh, okay......."

If you ask me where I got my dress, I have nothing to tell you.

Yeah, well, if you get caught doing that!

My sister looks like this.

I'll sell you some of that shit!

I have a lot to apologize for this time!

What are you going to do if you find out? Are you going to kill me?

I left the temple, leaving Olivia, who didn't speak English and was bewildered at being told to wait.

\* \* \*

"He lost in the final of a tournament."

"...... fell off?"

"Yeah, I don't know why, but he abstained?"

Ellen, who was getting ready for the Miss Temple contest, shook her head at Riana's comment.

Ellen's mouth dropped open slightly at the unexpected revelation that Olivia had vaguely thought she was going to win.

While the details of the situation are unknown, the audience seemed quite upset that the tournament final ended in such an unconvincing manner.

Abstain.

Someone who looked like a sure winner withdrew.

She had a vague idea that it was for some reason, but Ellen wondered what that reason was.

Reinhardt would have gone to the finals, but do you know why?

"Oh, there he is. Him."

Riana pointed out the window, and Ellen could see Olivia looking out the first floor window.

Olivia was alone.

Ellen finds herself somehow relieved by this fact.

Olivia didn't look happy, even if she tried to pretend. We don't know what caused her to abstain, but her eyes were wide open.

"Are you crying......?

I cried.

And he came back alone.

I thought Reinhardt might be next to me, but he wasn't.

"Look right here."

"Ah....... Yeah."

Riana turned Ellen's head and started touching her.

We don't know what happened to the tournament, but he'll be in Miss Temple soon enough.

We're not even going after Miss Temple.

Ellen made up her mind.

I'm going to put on a good show today. I practiced smiling in the mirror a lot. It didn't work, but I kept trying.

I'm going to stand in front of Reinhardt with a different look.

After the contest, regardless of the outcome, let's spend a little time together. We were too busy to spend time with each other during the festivities, and I'm sure Reinhardt would make time for you today.

Ellen doesn't know what Reinhardt's facial expression will be, and she doesn't know what she should be doing.

For today, Ellen decided to forget about everything else and just think about her heart.

Not Harriet, not Olivia, not anyone else.

For today, I decided not to think about anyone but Reinhardt.

Episode 317.

The Miss & Mr. Temple contest starts at 7 p.m. It's now 4pm.

I don't have much time left. It's possible that it might not fit, but I'm guessing it's pretty close based on eye contact. I didn't really care about the size of what I was wearing.

It's only been two days, so she probably hasn't sold it yet.

Olivia will actually need to get to the contest venue a bit sooner, as the contestants will need to gather beforehand. So we need to give her the dress before then.

If someone looks at your dress and points out that it was worn by a girl who won a pageant.......

......I don't know that.

I don't know! It'll work!

I'll sell you something!

No one died of embarrassment!

Not in a position to waste time, I hurriedly headed to the Aligarh shopping district, where Eleris' shop is located.

"......Crazy."

The fastest way to travel within the ecliptic is by horsepower train.

There were too many people on the ecliptic during the temple festival.

As such, the horse-drawn train was packed with people waiting to board. After sending three trains down the line, I was still unable to board.

It's not too late.

Still, a horsepower train is surely faster than walking or running, so I nervously waited for the train and boarded.

I don't know why in the world I have to take a hellraiser, but somehow I made it to the Aligarh shopping district.

Now all you have to do is go to Eleris's room under the ring and get the dress.

By the way.

I don't have eyes in the back of my head.

But now I have a feeling that serves as a kind of eye.

Discomfort.

There's an uncomfortable feeling behind your back. A feeling of something unpleasant, somehow sticky or sinister, clinging to your back.

You'll know it intuitively.

You're being followed.

"......If you're going to follow me, shouldn't you at least hide your body?"

In my school uniform, with no intention of hiding somewhere. In the middle of the crowded Aligarh shopping boulevard, Radia Schmidt stood still, watching me.

"......."

I thought she was a little bitch, but now she's following me. Radia Schmidt walks up to me with a coy smile on her face.

"Reinhard, I need to ask you a favor."

"What do you want?"

"Stay away from Olivia. Please."

Radia Schmidt's eyes were creepy to look at.

Olivia wondered if she'd ever seen an asshole with eyes like that, begging without even trying.

A little experience is bad enough, but this was happening all around me.

It's a wonder Olivia was still sane.

"It's all because of you. It's because of you that Olivia is the way she is, that she's fallen, that she's fallen away from God, and if you're gone, if you're gone, she'll be all right again. Don't you think so?"

"......, I think you're mistaken. Olivia had already decided to give up her faith before she met me, and it has nothing to do with me."

The order is reversed. Olivia was already that way before she met me, so it's ridiculous to blame it on me.

Radia Schmidt was staring at me as if mesmerized by something.

"No, it's you. Olivia was able to change her mind, up until then. Everything has been wrong since Olivia met you."

I can't talk to you because you've already made up your mind. You don't care that the Crusaders did something horrible to Olivia.

No, you'd say, that's the kind of thing you're supposed to do to keep people on the right path.

There's nothing I can do about everything you say and do after the fact.

This person will not be persuaded by my words.

"Please, Reinhardt. Stay away from Olivia. I'm begging you. Without you. Without you, Olivia will be able to get back on the right path. I'll get down on my knees, I'll do anything you ask. So let her go. Please, before something even sadder happens. Let her go. Before something irreparable happens."

This attitude that he hated me but would do anything for Olivia was foreign to me. This is a man who would kill himself for Olivia.

Why do we do this?

I find myself thinking what Olivia was thinking.

Just as Olivia couldn't figure out why she needed to do this, I couldn't either.

"Do me a favor. Leave my sister alone. Even if he's a genius who's not coming back in the century, there are people who are more faithful and capable than him, and why did you have to leave the damn thing with Olivia, who doesn't like it. I don't know what you want from her, but you're not the one who's going to get away with it, either, and I don't know what you want from her. Just do it. Isn't that right?"

"No! Olivia! Olivia is the only one! Olivia is the only one who deserves it! Olivia is meant to be!"

Radia Schmidt shouted, and passersby began to stare at the two of us.

It's as if they intuitively knew something wasn't right.

"Only Olivia is destined to unite our Five Great Houses, and become the Holy Emperor of the soon-to-be-established Millennial Empire."

"......what?"

My head seemed to stop spinning at the sudden bullshit.

A millennium?

What the hell is this?

"Olivia was meant to do that. She's the only one who deserves it. She's the only one who has the looks, the talent, the ability, the personality, and you're ruining it."

In Radia Schmidt's eyes, I could only read the abyss.

A man who believed in the divine, but I saw only darkness in his eyes.

Apparently, Radia Schmidt didn't just want Olivia to regain her faith.

It was clear that he wanted to be something bigger, the master of his own destiny.

But one word seemed to get stuck in my throat.

Thriving in the Millennium.

What the heck does this mean?

If Radia Schmidt was just a crazy person, then it was just a matter of dealing with her.

But there's something that should never be taken lightly.

"What's with the millennium?"

Radia Schmidt's face hardened again at my reverse question.

"...... I don't need to know anything about you."

They try to hide it, as if they've made a mistake.

It's not just bullshit.

There's something there. It means you got emotional and said something you shouldn't have. There's no point in covering it up if it's just a rant.

Some inferences can be made.

While some of the people urging Olivia to return to her faith may be doing so out of personal desire, Radia Schmidt says it means something different.

Now Radia Schmidt seems to be talking about the independence of the Five Great Houses. They are independent enough as it is, but the idea of creating an entire nation reads like this.

It's not impossible that it's just Radia Schmidt's delusions, but if there's a group of people who think that way, it complicates matters.

There is one more revolutionary force.

Then it's not just a matter of getting rid of one crazy bitch.

Of course, the heat had to be turned up even higher.

They end up imposing their ideas on Olivia.

Why do we have to force this?

I was disgusted by the look on his face, the way he didn't even think it was forced. The way he didn't even think about the rightness or wrongness of what he was doing, what he wanted to do, because it was the right thing to do.

Corrupted clerics are disgusting,

Fanatics are disgusting and unpleasant.

There was a lot I wanted to say.

A million things that could never be good went through my head, but I couldn't bring myself to say them.

I watch Radia Schmidt in silence.

He followed me on the sidewalk in public.

You can also see him subtly wringing his hands.

He would give his life to bring Olivia back.

That means he's willing to kill someone to get Olivia back.

You don't have to go there.

The anger, hatred, resentment, and other emotions directed at me, coupled with the uncomfortable, clingy stare, says it all.

Irreversible.

I said something sad might happen.

That's all it says, isn't it?

This person is trying to kill me.

It's a millennial empire, so I guess they have a sense of mission.

Whether anyone sees it or not, they'll try to kill me because they think it's justice. It's not hard to predict this madness, as we've seen it once before.

That's why he tried to talk me out of it.

Since that was denied, Radia Schmidt's next option is very likely to be to kill me.

You don't want to get into a fight on the sidewalk, but if they start using their hands, you're going to have to use yours.

High probability, if I fight this person, I die.

We've had a lot of good luck in the past, but there are no guarantees.

I wonder if they would react differently if they knew I was the owner of Tiamata.

For a fanatic like me, there's nothing quite like Tiamata.

But you can't rely on Tiamata alone.

If I were Tuan's champion, I'd probably ask him to convince Olivia to join him, or put another annoying bridle on him.

Radia Schmidt is too dangerous.

And there's a very good chance they know something even more dangerous.

First, we need to figure out what it is.

"I think you and I have a lot to talk about."

"If you don't stay away from Olivia, I have nothing more to say to you......."

"Why don't we go somewhere quiet and talk?"

"!"

Radia Schmidt's face hardened at my words.

Not because you're embarrassed, but because it's completely unexpected.

You're about to be killed whether people see you or not, and your prey suddenly asks you to go somewhere off the beaten path to talk.

You're ready to kill me, haul me off to jail, and stand trial for murder.

However, if you kill me in a secret place and hide the body, you won't be seen.

It's a complete crime, and the country can only make the eyesore go away.

"......I'm good."

Radia Schmidt smirks as if she's dreaming of perfect crime.

It gives me goosebumps all over, but I can't help it.

"But first, I need to take care of something. Let's take care of that first. It won't take long. You can come with me."

"Good."

You'll soon realize that if you wanted to kill me, you should have attacked me now.

Your utterly criminal greed will ruin everything.

I was quite surprised to find myself casually having these thoughts and conversations.

Toilets are a little different from the original toilets.

It doesn't make much of a difference. You're still going to find Elyse.

Radia Schmidt seems to think that the hunted are walking right into the trap.

\* \* \*

It's daytime, so she should be in the store by now.

The walk with Radia Schmidt didn't last long, as we had already arrived at the Aligarh Shopping Center.

Radia Schmidt didn't ask where she was going or what it was for. My job is done right now, and I'm sure you're thinking about what to do with me in a quiet place.

The hunter had no idea that he was now the hunted.

Okay, let's imagine.

I may be a freshman tournament winner, but Radia Schmidt has to be confident in her ability to take me down, and I know it.

No matter what I do, and even if I do notice and run away, I'm confident that they'll catch up with me.

-delay

"......a."

Elise, as usual, stretched out on the counter, surprised to see me come in, and again surprised to see a Temple girl behind me whom she had never seen before.

I'm sure she's a little embarrassed by this situation, but this is never a good time.

I say in the store that I'm in for a reason.

It actually has a purpose.

"Don't ask, don't tell, but put some noise canceling around it."

"Yes."

Eleris didn't know what was going on, but she did as she was told. The soundproofing spell unfolded, and Radia Schmidt narrowed her brow slightly as she sensed something odd in the air.

Yeah, there's no way to predict this.

You wouldn't expect to walk into a random store and start barking orders at the owner.

"And if you have any bind or incapacitate spells, use them on him. Something strong. This is no ordinary bet."

"Yes."

"......You!"

Elise still didn't understand the situation, but she followed the instructions exactly.

Radia Schmidt was about to take action when a look of defeat crossed her face, but Elise was faster.

-Kang! Ka-kang!

"Poof!"

With terrifying casting speed, a jet-black chain appeared out of thin air, binding Radia Schmidt's limbs.

-Kagak! Kagak!

Her arms were lifted to the sky, and her legs were bound to the ground. Radia Schmidt struggled with her divine power, but the chains Eleris had summoned didn't budge, except for a slight rattle.

"You, you asshole, what are you doing!"

No wonder Radia Schmidt is flustered: who would have thought it would suddenly look like this?

-click!

She even locked the door to the shop so that no one would see what she was doing. She did as she was told and didn't ask me anything.

"This, this....... I can't untie this right now! Who is he and what is he trying to do to me!"

Radia Schmidt couldn't understand the situation, but I had no intention of making her understand it, just as she had no intention of making me understand it.

"Loosen it! Loosen it!"

Just as she only said what she wanted to say to me, I will only say what I want to say to her.

-snarl

"This, do you recognize it?"

"T....... Tiamata? That, that....... that you....... how......?"

"Believe it or not, I am the master of Tiamata. The world calls me the Champion of Tuan....... or something like that."

The guy you're trying to kill suddenly traps you, or summons a Tiamata.

It's an unbelievable situation. But Radia will never think that the Tiamata in my hand is a fake. For no matter how long an object has been hidden from the world, it is impossible not to recognize the divinity that radiates from its appearance and from the holy object itself.

Radia Schmidt tried to convince me to stay away from Olivia before going to the extreme.

So, I give it a chance.

"So, you're going to have to be good at answering my questions from now on."

"If you stretch, stare, or talk bullshit......."

I slapped Radia Schmidt on the cheek, bound by Tiamata's sword face.

"Because the power of that god you love so much might split your skull open."

Radia Schmidt just stared at me, wide-eyed.

Episode 318.

It's weird to be a fanatic.

It seems helpless before God, but there is such a thing as free will.

Radia Schmidt tried to kill me. She didn't actually say that, but it was so obvious that I didn't even need to hear it from her mouth.

Radia Schmidt, who had followed me with such intentions, realized that it was actually the champion of Tuan she was trying to kill.

Radia Schmidt, who believed her faithfulness was second to none, was forced to admit that she did not recognize the champion of Tuan and tried to kill him.

Fanatics are not skeptical (懷疑) about God.

Usually, they don't even question themselves.

They seem to believe in God, but in the end, they believe in themselves.

You believe in the fact that you can't be wrong because you have faith in God.

But the facts didn't support his beliefs.

The man he was about to kill was actually the one chosen by the gods.

The moment Radia Schmidt admitted it, she had to admit she was wrong.

And fanatics can't do that. If they could, they wouldn't be fanatics in the first place.

Because.

Radia Schmidt can't admit that what she was about to do was the greatest sin against God.

Without denying or doubting God, she must create for herself the logic that she must not be wrong.

"That's supposed to be Olivia's! That's....... That's not supposed to be in your hands!"

Naturally, Radia Schmidt arbitrarily characterizes me as a usurper of the Holy Grail.

Olivia served Tuan, so the logic seems to be that Tuan's holy object, Tiamata, should belong to Olivia.

"...... is Olivia's."

"......what?"

"It's jointly owned. I can't show you right here, but this tiara is both mine and Olivia's. I guess you could say we were soul-bonded at the same time. Oh, she's not going to like me saying this....... But what can you do, so to speak......."

I chuckle and whisper in Radia Schmidt's ear.

"Olivia and I, we're like soul mates."

"Yi, yi, yi, yi, you impious, lowly maggot, how dare you speak such impure words to Tuan's deputy!"

Tuan's proxy.

One minute it's the Throne of the Millennium, the next it's Tuan's proxy?

What the hell does this crazy bitch think Olivia is?

It was as if the Goddess of Purity couldn't accept that I was in some sort of soul-bond with her.

"Devil! Give me back the Tiamata! It's not meant to be held by the likes of you! The Tiamata has been passed down from generation to generation to the priests and paladins of Tuan, not for unbelievers like you!"

"You're sure it's soundproof, right?"

"Yes, it is."

I found this quite amusing.

Deep down, I was thinking that if I showed him the Tiamata, he might fall down and apologize.

This reaction was not unexpected, but it was also interesting to see that the hatred of me was amplified by seeing Tiamata.

Radia Schmidt is not a faithful servant of God.

He's one of those people who just understands and accepts God on his own terms.

That's why they don't want to admit they're wrong, which is why they say such nonsense.

If I am unfit, why did Tuan allow me to become the master of Tiamata?

Then we have to admit that Tuan is incomplete.

Right now, Radia doesn't want to admit she's wrong, so she's saying that Tuan made a mistake.

Fanaticism is nothing more than self-suggestion.

Humans just need logic to defend themselves.

So maybe Radia Schmidt isn't so much acknowledging God as she is acknowledging her own beliefs that led her to kill me.

Fanaticism is not faithful, steadfast belief and faith, it is literally insane belief.

Fanaticism cannot be faithful.

I'm not going to get into a discussion about faith and God with Radia Schmidt, who has cognitive dissonance.

Radia Schmidt gave me a chance.

Stay away from Olivia.

Because I refused, Radia Schmidt tried to kill me.

I gave it the same chance.

I am the champion of Tuan, the one you seek to kill, and yet you do it.

Radia Schmidt claims I'm the one who stole Tiamata through some dirty trick, and she doesn't believe I co-own it with Olivia, and she'll be even crazier when she finds out.

I feel that my very existence is a threat to Olivia's innocence.

"I don't know by what dirty trick you stole the tiara that was supposed to be Olivia's, but there will be hell to pay!"

It's even convinced of it now. It will constantly create words and logic to defend itself.

"I'll make you regret it! I don't know what you did with that evil wizard......."

-Bam!

"Yuck!"

I smashed the head of a loud-mouthed Radia Schmidt with the sword face of Tiamata.

"Shut up. From now on, answer when I ask."

"......."

"A thousand-year empire. What is it?"

"......."

"You're a dumbass. You want a taste of power?"

"Do not discuss the power of God with your lowly and impious mouth!"

"...... doesn't make sense."

I glanced in Elise's direction.

"I'm sorry, Elise."

"Yes."

You're going to die anyway.

There's nothing to hide.

"Can't you get him to listen to me? I mean, even if he's not listening, he's so full of energy."

"......."

She stared at me for a moment, then walked softly toward me. She stood beside me, wordlessly, and pressed her face against the bound face of Radia Schmidt.

"Do I have to hide everything?"

I know what I'm talking about.

"Uh."

Elyse seemed to take a deep breath, then closed her eyes and opened them.

"!"

Bloodshot eyes and slit black pupils were revealed. Radia Schmidt's lips quivered in horror at the overwhelming sight.

"배....... 배....... Vampire....... Vampire......? Uh, how about....... How about....... How about......?"

Radia looks back and forth between me and Eleris. She still can't believe her eyes when she sees me with the Tiamata and a vampire as a minion.

Yes.

In fact, Radia Schmidt got a lot wrong, but she also got a lot right.

No, rather, it's scaled back.

You're the devil.

I'm not the devil, I'm the devil and worse.

I can only be worse than whatever Radia Schmidt imagines and defines as evil.

Radia had underestimated me.

Radia Schmidt was on the verge of losing her mind as things kept pushing the limits of her imagination.

After revealing her identity, Eleris brings her face as close as possible to Radia Schmidt's, and stares into her eyes.

"I am a Lord Vampire, and my name is Eleris, Lord of the Seven Nights."

"a....... ah....... ah......."

Radia Schmidt was already terrified of what was beyond her comprehension.

"Even if you don't tell me anything, I can turn you into my slave with a single drink of your blood and find out everything. No matter how strong your will, resistance will be futile."

"Ah....... ugh. Ugh....... Ugh....... Uh......."

"Do you want to live as a human with a secret that's going to come out anyway, or do you want to spend the rest of your life as a vampire because you're hiding it?"

Elise whispers, her eyes boring into Radia Schmidt's eyeballs.

"Select."

Secrets are meaningless in my presence.

Eleris hammers it into Radia Schmidt's head.

\* \* \*

"You, you are....... You. What the hell are you....... what?"

"You're right, it's not maggots, but something like the devil."

"Malo....... Maldo. Nonsense. Nonsense....... How....... a thing like you....... on the temple......."

"You're ridiculous. You call me the devil, and then you say I'm the devil, and then you say it doesn't make sense? What do you mean, you call me the devil when you know I'm not?"

"......."

You may have called me the devil, but you didn't really think it was anything like that.

The Lord Vampire, a mere minion of mine, was able to subdue him in one fell swoop. You think I'm even more formidable.

I didn't need to be told that she was much stronger than I was, although that's what she is.

"I'm going to ask you for the second time what the Millennium is, and if you don't tell me, I'm going to turn you into a vampire."

At my words, Radia Schmidt's complexion almost bleached out.

"Do you think you can kill yourself if you become a vampire? You live or die at the will of your master, and if you want to be a vampire priest or something, go ahead."

I don't know how vassalage and slavery actually work, but I'm just going by what I think.

Radia Schmidt is in a panic anyway, so she'll believe anything she's told, regardless of the facts.

What Radia was doing to me earlier was framing me, but now it's an illusion.

He's far more powerful than an active paladin, and yet he's so easily subdued, and that's all his minions can do.

Me with such a minion.

An unidentified being with a Tiamata who calls himself something akin to the Devil.

From now on, it's not an accusation, it's an illusion.

You'll start to think of me as something beyond your wildest dreams.

It's impossible to keep a secret.

Radia shuddered at the thought of being turned into a vampire.

You may have imagined yourself destroying such a being, but you may not have thought about yourself becoming one.

If you become a vampire, there's no point in trying to kill yourself. You'll be ruled by your thoughts.

From a promising Paladin of Alth to a creature that feeds on human blood and lives in the darkness of the night.

Radia shuddered, her whole body trembling with fear and shame at the mere thought of it.

Secrecy can be a powerful thing sometimes.

If you eventually realize there's no point in hiding it, it's too easy to admit it.

There are no exceptions, not even for secrets that are worthy of death.

"Chu, chu....... "The millennium is....... On the 'Priory with no name'....... The plan you are pursuing....... is......."

Before I knew it, Radia Schmidt was using superlatives.

\* \* \*

The Order of the Nameless.

Another unfamiliar concept was introduced, and the look on Radia Schmidt's face as she spoke it was a mixture of devastation, misery, and horror.

"What is this nameless order?"

"Meaningful....... A group of people from each of the five major sects and organizations....... faith communities......."

"So the purpose of this nameless order is to unite the forces of the Five Great Houses and establish a religious state. And you plan to make Olivia Ranze its first king?"

"To summarize, yes......."

He seemed to have a lot to say, but was afraid to say it out of fear.

Elise and I had to get serious.

"Doesn't that make them any different than Republicans, except for their temper?"

"I see......."

Within the Five Great Houses, a group of extremists called the Order of the Unnamed were attempting to establish a state separate from the Empire.

Judging by its success, I'm guessing they want to build an empire-like system.

"Do you know what the scale is?"

"......."

I clicked my tongue as Radia shook her head and pursed her lips.

"Don't try to sneak it in. If I don't think so, I'll turn you into a vampire to prove it."

"Oh, no, no, no, I will never, ever, ever mix lies!"

Radia shook her head wildly as she was bound, wondering if being a vampire was worse than dying.

"We're not a big force right now, but we're continuing to....... and growing. Internally, we will soon....... that we will have a power level equivalent to one of the Five Great Shinto sects....... we expect."

"......itis."

"That's a big deal."

Fortunately, it seems like they're still small, but the speed at which they're expanding their faction is staggering.

Soon, we'll be the size of a denomination.

And it's not just one denomination, it's within the Crusader Knights and the Great Houses. The radicals, minus the moderates, are already a group that has the power to influence the entirety of the Five Great Houses.

The situation was worse than we thought.

Revolutionary forces, then religious forces.

"This is crazy......."

I grabbed her by the hair, and she sighed as if the earth had gone to hell.

Empire is a myth.

If the revolutionary forces and this gun go off at the same time, the Empire will be torn in four.

Radia didn't seem to understand the situation.

I think you're pretty sure that me and Eleris are evil, but I can see that you're very uneasy about the situation with the Empire in crisis.

You'd be more surprised if you knew the truth.

The devil and his minions are scrambling to figure out what to do about the empire.

Still, it sounds like a crazy, crazy idea.

"How long has this nameless order been around, anyway?"

I get that it's a religious secret society, but I wanted to clarify whether it's a recent expansion or something that's been around for a while, like a revolutionary faction. If they've been around for a while, why the recent explosion?

"...... has only been up for a short time."

"Yeah, but why are there so many people there?"

"......because of religious repression."

What the hell is this?

At my words, Radia Schmidt grits her teeth and shakes her head.

"The former head of the Crusaders, Lord Revere Lance, has fallen from grace, and the Empire has begun a religious crackdown to keep the Crusaders in check....... Many members of the church believe this."

"Ah."

The words painted a picture.

To those who don't know the real story, the disappearance of war hero Leverier Ranze may seem like a big deal.

No.

"......Was it Leverier Lancet who created the nameless order?"

"......."

Radia Schmidt's silence says it all.

"I guess so."

That's already the answer.

"I don't think there are many members of the church who believe that, but I think that's what Leverier Ranze has been rumored to have done, and that he's done it because of political pressure, regardless of what he actually did."

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no!"

"Shut up. You're a Temple student, you know what's going on."

"It was an unavoidable....... to set a wavering Olivia back on the right path."

"Oh, shit. Shut up."

"......."

I believe that everything that Leverier Ranze did to Olivia was justified in the first place. I don't want to talk to Radia Schmidt anymore about this.

I was lost, I didn't know where I was or what I was doing, and I was creating secret societies and doing bullshit.

So, in the end, this is an inflection point in history, an event that happened because of Olivia Ranze's survival.

Yes.

After all, this shit is my shit too.

Darn.

So does Olivia, so does Charlotte.

Do people whose very existence is an inflection point in history have to go through these crises again?

If Levereer Lance had remained in his position as Crusader Master, nothing would have happened. That said, Leviathan Lance did indeed have ambitions to make the Five Great Houses independent of the Empire and establish a Holy Empire. But he wouldn't have been able to do it in a hurry, so it's not relevant to the main story.

But when he fell out of power, he turned to secret societies.

Leverier Ranche would have argued that his removal was a political crackdown on religion, which would have fueled a backlash from religious figures.

The logic of creating a country for religious people to escape the external pressures led them to form a secret society called the Order of the Unnamed.

Capitalizing on this sense of victimization, Levereer Ranze is now growing its ranks to frightening proportions.

It was also backed up by his own achievements as a hero of the Demon War.

At this rate, they'll create a faction the size of a sect of the Five Great Houses, and they'll be able to grab the Five Great Houses by the roots and shake them.

Levereer Ranze wants Olivia to be crowned High Priestess.

It's tempting to put yourself in that position, but it would be ridiculous.

If I create a Holy Empire and say I'm going to be its first Emperor, my sincerity will be questioned.

But if you have to build a country of gods and put a foster daughter in there who's talent, character, and ability may or may not make it to the continent once, and she's the only one who deserves it, then you have a rationale.

Also, the lottery for the Leviathan can only be won by Olivia's mouth.

If you deny that you were wronged by Revere Lance, all of Revere Lance's accusations will be framed by the Empire, regardless of the truth.

Having seen her in action, it's almost as if Olivia is a raison d'être.

He wants to sit himself, but he doesn't want to appear greedy, so he tries to make Olivia a success.

Perhaps the reason Leviathan is so obsessed with Olivia is that she is both a cause and a revenge for him.

"You son of a bitch."

As I spoke through clenched teeth, Radia Schmidt became even more frightened.

This can't be left alone.

The Leviathan, as well as the nameless Order, are the seeds of great turmoil.

We need to wipe them out. If you don't do it now, while they're still small, you won't be able to do anything about them later.

But in what way? If you get the imperial court to act by accusing them of conspiracy to rebel, you're actually creating a religious persecution that never happened.

The moderates would quickly turn into extremists.

The mere fact that imperial and governmental powers are involved in this is already a recipe for massive conflict.

First, you need to organize your thoughts. You need to think about how and where you want to dig in.

"Okay, last one. Was it the order of the nameless monks that tried to kill me?"

Radia Schmidt genuinely wanted to kill me. But he also wanted to kill me, and he may have been ordered to.

At my words, Radia Schmidt shook her head.

"Oh, no....... This is....... It's my dogma......."

"Are you sure you're not lying because you're afraid I'm going to fuck with them?"

"No, no, no, whoa, I had a different plan, it's my dogma!"

Radia Schmidt on how much she hates being a vampire.

"Yeah, so what's your plan?"

"......."

Radia Schmidt struggles to speak.

But eventually, because he knows what I'm going to say, he opens his mouth to spit it out.

"Adriana....... Adriana was a sophomore at Temple....... The Priory is taking her in......."

"......what?"

I felt like my head went white and blank when I saw a name I had never imagined.

Why would Adriana do that?

Why is Adriana being mentioned here?

Adriana's image flashed through my mind. The last memory of their walk together near the Artouan Monastery flashes through my mind.

What are they trying to do to Adriana?

No, what did I do?

"Tell me more."

If I had a leash of reason.

Just now, it broke.

\* \* \*

Olivia was in her dorm room.

It was getting close to the start time for the Miss Temple contest, and Olivia should have gotten to the venue early to get ready, but Reinhardt told her to wait in her room.

I don't know what he was trying to do, but he seemed to have an idea.

Still, she should leave soon, if not sooner. She didn't know what Reinhardt was going to do, but if she didn't hear anything in the next half hour or so, Olivia would leave for the tournament.

-Smart

A knock on the door made Olivia jump out of her seat.

"Reinhard, what the hell is......?"

"......?"

But it wasn't Reinhardt who knocked on Olivia's door, it was a dorm user.

"Oh, I'm sorry."

The maid smirked and handed Olivia something.

"I don't know who you're waiting for, but it's a letter, Miss Olivia."

"Oh....... Yeah."

Olivia took the letter from the maid and closed the visit.

There was no sender, just an address. Who would send a letter like this?

Olivia opened the envelope.

There were only two lines of text on it.

[Daughter, do you remember the name Adriana?]

[He's with me now].

"!"

The only person who can call herself a daughter is Levereer Ranze.

I don't know why, and I don't know how, but he has Adriana now.

Reinhardt, Adriana, and Ivia in first-year B class.

The three of them played a crucial role in saving his life. Now it's word of mouth and everyone knows about it.

This means that the three of them played a crucial role in Leverier Lance's demise.

Reinhard and Ivia are Temple students, which means they are dangerous to touch, and Adriana would have been relatively easy for Leviathan to reach.

Whatever the reason, revenge or otherwise, Leviathan has Adriana now.

The sender's name was not listed, only the address to which the letter was sent.

It must have meant come here.

Adriana is the bait, and Yangbu calls himself.

I don't know what he's trying to say, or what he's trying to do to Adriana.

The child who saved my life is now in danger for saving his own.

Olivia jumped out of her seat as if mesmerized and opened the dormitory door.

"What the heck....... Why the hell......."

What the heck do you expect from yourself.

Why do we do this.

Olivia clenched her teeth and ran down the hallway of her dorm.

I've already erased the whole Miss Temple thing from my mind.

Episode 319.

Adriana is in the care of an unnamed order.

To be precise, it's Levereer Lanchester.

Olivia wants to win the lottery by having Leverier Lanchester defend her, and secondly, she wants to establish Olivia Lanchester as a mascot to represent her desires.

Levereer Ranze had originally intended for Olivia to be the next Crusader Knight. Perhaps the Holy Empire was part of the plan.

Because of the unforeseen variable of disappearance, Levereer Ranze took the approach of creating a secret religious order.

Regardless of the truth, Leverier Lance's disappearance sparked a backlash in the religious community, and as a result, he remains influential and growing.

Adriana's departure from the Temple was detrimental to her safety.

Leviathan will try to lure Olivia away.

And Olivia won't be able to resist a deal that puts Adriana's life on the line.

Like the final against Radia Schmidt, there is no option to withdraw.

As long as Adriana is held hostage, Olivia will be a puppet of Leviathan.

The sun has gone down and it's already night.

I see Radia Schmidt, tied up and shaking her head, inside Elise's shop.

Today, Radia Schmidt unexpectedly used a dangerous power called Berserk in the final.

He kept trying to convince her to come back to God. But in the end, Olivia abstained.

As far as I'm concerned, it was a flimsy plan.

On top of that, Radia Schmidt kept telling Olivia that something even sadder was going to happen.

I thought it was some crazy person's ramblings.

Olivia had been warning her that Adriana would get hurt if she didn't come back quietly.

You said you'd bend your arms inward.

He didn't want Adriana, a member of the same Five Great Houses, to get hurt, so he resorted to unorthodox methods to dissuade Olivia.

And the one that tried to kill me.

It was probably because I wasn't a member of the Five Great Houses and she thought I was the one who had corrupted Olivia.

She had decided it was better for me to die than for Adriana.

That's how this weird thing happened today.

Adriana is in danger at this point.

You need to get your hands dirty as soon as possible.

"Levereer Ranze, where are you?"

"......."

It may be too late for the revolutionary forces, but the nameless order formed in the wake of Leverier Lance's disappearance is not yet very large.

If you don't stomp on it at this point, it's going to get out of hand.

Radia Schmidt thinks I am a very dangerous and evil being who cannot be known in its entirety.

You would think that Levereer Lanchester would be killed by me. So I cannot speak.

But if they won't talk, there are ways to force them to talk.

Tears welled up in the corners of Radia Schmidt's eyes.

"Please....... Please......."

She began to freak out, unable to say release, unable to say she couldn't speak.

"Just....... kill me......."

She would rather die. She knows we won't kill her gently, but her best option right now is for us to be merciful in the name of death.

"Please, please....... Death, a clean death....... Please......."

To reveal the location of the Leviathan would be a great betrayal, and she could not bear it.

But being a vampire is also unbearable.

That is why Radia Schmidt begs for death from both of us, the evil ones. In front of Radia Schmidt, bound and begging to be killed, I squatted.

"Why are you crying?"

I bring my hand to Radia Schmidt's sobbing cheek and gently wipe away her tears.

"Why is this a betrayal? I don't understand."

"......."

"I am Tuan's champion, and as such, my every action should represent Tuan's will above all else, not that of a power-mad Levereer Lance, who was removed from his position as head of the Crusade Knights and created a fringe organization within the Order of the Great Gods."

"Hmph, hmph....... Ugh......."

My sophistry is compounded by Radia Schmidt's misanthropy.

"God is omnipotent."

"I am evil, as you think, but if I were not worthy to hold the Tiamata, I would not be its owner. Whether I meet a miserable end, or an even greater hero comes along and takes it from me, it is all part of Tuan's plan, isn't it?"

"Because God is omnipotent."

"So. If I'm part of the plan of such an almighty being, then whatever happens to me, my every action is more in tune with the will of God than someone like Leviathan. Isn't that right?"

"So if my will is God's will, then that's what Tuan is hoping for right now."

"A nameless order is a heresy."

"So, it has to go away."

"Come on, senior. Don't cry. It's nothing to cry about, not at all."

"You're so blind to the fact that things are being done by the will of God."

"You're cooperating with the Champion of Tuan, not some mysterious, evil, strange entity. Why is that a betrayal?"

I wrap my hands around Radia Schmidt's face and smile at her. The despair in Radia Schmidt's eyes is palpable.

"You're just getting back on the right track. You were on the wrong path for a while, so it's not a betrayal."

I could read your inward denial of my words, but your desperate need to believe them.

Why is this a betrayal.

I'm not just saying that, I actually think so.

"Penitentiary."

Do penance.

Now get back on the right track.

Why would it be unfaithful to escape the clutches of the false prophet Leviathan and join the champions of Tuan?

I love the contradictions of being the apostle of a goddess of purity and having a vampire as his antithesis.

Once you accept that everything is Tuan's will, you can relax.

If this is all part of God's plan.

Once you acknowledge that.

You may not become a vampire.

If anything, it makes it all the more honorable.

"Hey, are you sure....... really....... such....... like that......?"

Radia Schmidt looks at me, sobbing, desperate for answers.

It's not about being persuaded.

It's fallen apart.

"Trust me, senior."

Replace one fanaticism with another.

"Because believing in me is no different than serving God."

Fear makes people crazy.

It's no different for someone who's already gone crazy.

Give in to me and Radia Schmidt will invent logic to defend me.

All the suspicions and questions I have. It's all part of being a champion of Tuan, so I'll swallow all my doubts with the idea that it's all God's will.

"May all of this....... May this really be what God has planned......."

Yes.

I am a god greater than the five great gods.

So when I say that believing in me is serving God, it's really not that different from the reality.

I stroked Radia Schmidt's hair as she knelt in front of me, chilled.

I gritted my teeth.

I was hoping that today would be the day.

At least for today.

I.

I had to go somewhere.

In front of a fainting Radia Schmidt, I turn my head and see Elise.

"Call for Sarkegar and Loyaar."

It's not something you can do on your own.

Even if you can do it alone, you shouldn't have to do it alone.

It's not just a matter of a nameless order.

Signs of division are everywhere.

Empires must not fall.

"They all go together."

"Yes."

This incident should have happened in Valier's name, not Reinhardt's.

The enemy of mankind must reappear.

\* \* \*

Miss Temple contestant waiting room.

Ellen was in her dress, undergoing a final inspection.

"It's the best."

"......That's great."

It was getting closer and closer to the start of the Miss Temple contest. The contest was on a different scale and in a different venue.

Even if it's not the main stadium that hosts the tournament finals, it's a huge concert hall.

Riana has come over to Ellen's side, having been looking out for Kliffman.

"But I didn't see him."

Riana shook her head as she fixed Ellen's makeup.

"It should be ......."

Either they'd already arrived and she hadn't seen them, or they'd be late. Ellen was more concerned about the other.

Reinhardt left the dorm in the morning and hasn't been seen all day.

As we were leaving, we saw off most of the Class A guys, as well as the Class B guys. Almost all of them were coming to watch the contest.

But there was no Reinhardt there.

"......."

"So, Reinhard, what's that asshole been doing all day anyway? I haven't seen a peep out of him."

Riana says grumpily.

"Well, if I don't see it, I'm the one who loses."

Riana eagerly applied Ellen's makeup, saying it would be a shame to miss out on seeing her so beautiful.

Ellen held the hem of her dress still.

It won't.

I know it is.

A strange feeling of unease tickled my chest.

It will definitely come.

I even asked him to come.

It won't come up.

Ellen took several deep breaths to calm her nerves.

\* \* \*

We convened everyone.

Elise, Sarkegar, and Loyaar.

We moved to Eleris' mass teleport.

I was still in my Temple uniform, so I changed into the civilian clothes I'd left at Eleris's house.

-Flash!

The location was outside the southern ecliptic. The location was quite far south of the ecliptic.

We landed in a small town in the southern part of the ecliptic.

It was a very small village, less than two dozen households, with only a few people living on the outskirts and farming.

It was one of those neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city, just one of those places.

We had just teleported to a hillbilly on the outskirts of the neighborhood that led to the main street.

"Great....... Teleport to......."

Radia Schmidt shudders in horror when she experiences mass teleportation.

"Is ...... okay?"

I nodded stiffly at Loyar's words.

I haven't explained the details yet. I just said we have a big fight and we need it.

Sarkozy may not have been able to convince me why I should risk the fragmentation of the empire, but I chose to believe him.

Above all, this is when we need Sarkegar the most.

Radia Schmidt didn't know if Loyar and Sarkegar still existed, and she was terrified. You'd think they'd be just as terrifying as Eleris.

First of all, the goal is not that town.

"If you go over the hill over there....... there's an abandoned monastery, where......."

"It's the temporary home of a nameless order."

"Yes."

Even though it's an internal faith community, eventually they won't be able to meet in public. So for now, until they have a strong enough following, their regular meetings will be held off-site, like this one.

If we get a little bigger, or if we really start to make a name for ourselves in the religious community, we might have a formal gathering, but we're not there yet.

It's about preemptively killing monsters with unmanageable growth.

Radia Schmidt was afraid of what would happen if she refused to submit to me, so she finally gave in.

Become a vampire.

You think this is the will of God.

I have a Tiamata, and it was a great thing for Radia Schmidt to rationalize to herself.

Radia Schmidt's disposition, once the affairs of the Order of the Nameless and the Leviathan were over.

"Is Adriana being held in a monastery?"

"Yes, I don't remember the exact location, but....... It was definitely there."

Adriana is the bait to lure Olivia in.

Radia Schmidt tried to attack me because she thought it would be better for me, a non-believer and the one responsible for Olivia's corruption, to die than for her to lure Olivia in exchange for Adriana's life.

The entire nameless order probably isn't in an abandoned monastery, but the key players are.

Libertarian Lance.

First, we need to kill the centerpiece of this bullshit, the Reverie Rancher.

No matter what.

We don't know if it will solve everything. But it's something we need to do right now.

"What's the power?"

"The resident population is about twenty high-ranking paladins......."

"How good are you?"

"All Demon War participants....... Chief....... Oh, no. These are Leviathan Lance's closest associates....... who resigned with him when he stepped down as leader......."

Levereer Ranze's closest advisors are veterans of the Great Demon War.

There are other powers, I'm sure, but there are twenty high-ranking paladins who've been through the wringer, and Leviathan Lance.

Eleris is a powerful mage, but she's also a vampire. Fighting against the paladins was clearly going to be a challenge.

We don't plan to go head-to-head.

"Okay, the plan isn't that complicated."

We need to get Adriana out of there first.

"Sarkegar, I want you to infiltrate and locate Adriana. If you can sneak her in, bring her back."

Sarkhegar's infiltration abilities allow him to locate Adriana first.

"If you can't get him, come back. If we can't, we'll find a way to get you out later, disguised as a Leviathan."

Radia Schmidt probably doesn't understand what the hell I'm talking about, but I don't have time to explain it to her.

"If we can get Adriana back safely, Eleris will tear the monastery apart with a massive destructive spell. Hopefully we can kill them all in one fell swoop, but maybe not, and then it's a battle."

Securing Adriana is a priority.

Kill the rest.

Eleris clenched her fists.

I didn't say I couldn't do it, and I wasn't in a position to.

If you leave it alone, it will cost you more.

She would have agreed that they needed to act now.

"And, while I'm at it, I should show you."

"You show me....... which......?"

It's important to know who is responsible for this.

What's going to happen today is not something that can be handled stealthily.

Fortunately, the region is outside the ecliptic. Even if there is a disturbance, the imperial family cannot act immediately. The presence of Radia Schmidt prevents them from speaking directly.

"Let's make sure we're seen."

Demon residue.

Reveal that it exists.

No revolutionary forces, no discontent from the High Patriarch. A public enemy reemerges, temporarily sealing the divisions of the Empire.

Sarkegar was still at a loss.

"What the hell is wrong with......."

"Wait."

Sarkegar was about to ask a question when Loyar suddenly raised a hand to stop him.

Loyard points to the bottom of the hill.

"Someone's coming."

There was a road leading into the village.

"Olivia......!"

Radia Schmidt's eyes widened, and so did mine.

Olivia is on her way.

She must have lured Adriana in with bait. An urgent-looking Olivia was running at a frightening pace, heading somewhere.

Even Olivia gets tangled up in it.

There's no time to delay.

"Sarkegar, get Adriana out, as well as that guy and that guy. Get in there, now."

"......Yes, I see."

Sarkhegar transformed into a sparrow and flew across the night sky.

My heart is beating like crazy.

Adriana and Olivia.

Neither should be involved in this fight.

Episode 320.

"Where the hell is this guy and what is he doing?"

Liana de Granz, arms folded, frowned and muttered.

The Miss & Mr. Temple contest has already started.

The students in Royal Class were all sitting in adjacent seats watching the contest.

"So......."

Herriot muttered to himself at Riana's nervous tone.

The contestants may have all been like that, but they were all good-looking, and if that wasn't enough, they all had great personalities.

Ellen's entry number is 9.

We've just finished turn 7, so it's time for Ellen's turn.

All my classmates are here, including Kono Lint, except Reinhardt.

Where and what are they doing.

Herriot had mixed feelings.

I don't know what happened to Reinhardt, but I thought he was going to come, but he didn't.

According to Riana, the fifth grader also kept not showing up in the waiting room for some reason.

What is it doing.

If he's supposed to be there, why isn't he?

I'm simultaneously thankful that Reinhardt isn't around, and I'm not.

Harriet knows it's cowardly of her to hope Reinhard doesn't come, but she's also afraid to see what Ellen looks like today.

Everyone was puzzled that Reinhardt was nowhere to be seen.

Herriot watched, anxious and nervous, not sure why he was nervous.

Contestant 7, who was a little nervous, but calmly completed the dance for the appeal time, and it was time for the next contestant, Contestant 8.

As the man's turn came and went, Herriot found himself growing impatient.

The 9th participant.

-And now we have a Royal Class contestant, and as you all know, Royal Classes are numbered in order of merit. This contestant is a Royal Class first-year A student, number two. Ms. Ellen!

To the sound of applause, Ellen walked out onto the stage.

"......."

Of course I knew that.

She's always in her school uniform or sweatpants. Harriet knows that Ellen has a very striking appearance.

However, the sight of Ellen in her full glory made Harriet's mouth drop open in disbelief.

It seems that Riana has been trying to figure out what color would look best on Ellen so far.

Ellen was now wearing a snowy white dress. Her hair was tied up and accented with a ribbon. Similarly, Ellen was wearing white heels, which Harriet thought made her stand out a bit too much from the other contestants.

Riana watched Ellen with satisfaction, while her classmates and the audience, who didn't know her, stared at her blankly.

I practiced smiling a lot, and by now I had perfected a pretty convincing smile.

That's it.

I'd say it's right up there with Olivia.

Herriot thought about it.

But no matter what the onlookers thought, Ellen just smiled and stared at the audience.

As if looking for something.

Looking for something, Ellen soon found herself locking eyes with someone she wasn't looking for: Harriet.

His eyes lock with hers, to be precise, and he scans the area. As if looking for someone who isn't there.

Eventually, the gaze returns to Herriot.

He gave me a questioning look.

He looked at me as if to ask if I hadn't found it.

Herriot's heart seemed to tighten, even though he wasn't in the room.

Ellen asks Harriet with a glare.

Where's Reinhardt?

Herriot didn't know what to say to that gaze. She couldn't laugh, and she couldn't cry.

For some reason, he seemed to have a very strange look on his face.

Ellen lets the snow fall.

As if Herriot's conundrum was an answer in itself.

-Ms. Ellen, was there a particular reason you wanted to participate in Miss Temple?

-A.......

Ellen purses her lips.

You wanted to say something.

Harriet sees that Ellen is shaking her head, still and trembling.

-Who in particular would you like to show this to today? Was there anyone like this?

-.......

When asked by the moderator, Ellen had no answer.

It was, in this situation, exactly what Ellen needed to hear.

She gritted her teeth as she watched Ellen agonize over what to say.

A moment ago, Herriot was glad Reinhardt hadn't shown up.

But when I saw Ellen in such a pathetic state, I had only one thought.

I feel like Ellen is going to break.

If nothing else, that was the last thing he wanted.

'Where are you.......'

Herriot clenched his fists involuntarily.

'Where are you and what are you doing.......'

Herriot resented Reinhardt for not coming.

\* \* \*

Sarkegar watched the situation from the outskirts of the abandoned monastery. The monastery was huge, but it had been abandoned for so long that it had an air of dilapidation about it.

Sarkegaard didn't quite understand the situation yet.

I'm just rushing in because I've been told there's something I need to do, and I don't really know what's going on here yet.

But there are people to rescue and enemies to defeat.

I don't know why they do it, but it's their way of making their presence known.

The goal is, as always, infiltration.

This time, it's a rescue, not a kidnapping.

Transformed into a sparrow, Sarkegar flew effortlessly over the outer walls of the monastery and made his way inside.

It wasn't heavily guarded, but there were a few troops stationed here and there.

The best of them, the ones that are a real threat, are in their twenties.

The lord told me to rescue two women.

A woman is locked up in a monastery.

Even the woman who just rushed into the monastery.

The number of armed men in the monastery who could use divine power would be greater than that.

Sarkegar is a member of the demon race.

As such, they are as incompatible with holy power as the undead Eleris, if not more so. As such, I wasn't too keen on the idea of infiltrating a place infested with high-ranking paladins.

However, there's no hoopla about doing the command.

Sarkegar enters the monastery and flies cautiously, keeping his eyes peeled for signs of activity.

-Where is Adriana?

Without having to look too closely, Sarkeghar could hear the angry voices coming from the clearing.

She has just arrived at the monastery.

-That's after you've answered the question.

-You know what the answer is going to be.

-Then you have a good idea of what's going to happen.

-What do you want?

Sarkegaard moved closer to the scene where he could hear the conversation.

A vacant lot in a monastery.

A middle-aged man sat in a worn chair around a campfire, accompanied by several paladins, and across from him was a young blonde woman in temple robes.

Sarkegaard knows that the middle-aged man is Leverier Ranze.

"Return to Tuan and recant all testimony you have given, and profess that you regret it."

"......."

"The Five Great Houses will break with the Empire and establish an independent Holy Empire, led by the Crusader Knights, and you will be its first Grand Prelate."

"What....... nonsense......."

Olivia stares at Leviathan.

Thriving.

Independent.

Just hearing those words made Olivia's breath catch in her throat.

"......If you can't do that?"

"You're going to start doing things you're going to regret."

"You mean you're going to kill Adriana? That little girl, not even a nun yet?"

"Let's call it an unavoidable sacrifice. God will understand."

The look on Olivia's face as she watched Leviathan raise the shield of the name of God in front of his evil deeds was one of clear contempt and disgust.

"...... Is this your father's way? To be so angry, so resentful of his loss of power. Is this your way, to abandon your faith and your humanity?"

"This is the only choice we have to counter the threat to the Five Great Houses, and you know full well that no one will be harmed if you promise to return."

"I'm not going back."

"What if something happened to the kid who saved you?"

"......."

Despair and anger flashes across Olivia's face.

While he believes in Olivia's vision of success, Leverrier Ranché is actually looking to rehabilitate his own reputation and redeem himself from the consequences of contradicting Olivia's words.

"Why me? Why me? Why me? If he wants to do something, he should just do it. I don't understand why he has to put me in front of him, like this....... I don't know why you're threatening me with someone else's life like this. I really don't......."

"Because, as I always say, there's no one better qualified than you."

"Don't try to rationalize it with words like that, please......."

Olivia finally breaks down in tears, overcome with grief.

"It's just, you want power, you want to put me out there and fulfill your own greed, so you've created this weird group. You want to reverse what I said to clear your name and get back in power......."

"Olivia, I don't expect you to understand what I mean. But there is a role, a destiny, and I live for it."

Levereer Ranze was like a toothpick wouldn't fit in his mouth.

"My role was previously to lead the Demon Kingdoms to victory in the Great War, and now it's to protect the Crusader Knights, the general body of the Five Great Houses, from the clutches of the Empire."

In front of Olivia, who is furious, Leverrier Ranze doesn't reveal any personal feelings.

"And you are my next. I have made you that way, I have raised you that way, and if it doesn't happen, I will make it happen."

"What the heck....... Why the hell......."

"If you refuse, do you think it will be a matter of Adriana alone?"

"!"

Olivia's eyes widened.

"You think Reinhardt is untouchable?"

"What the heck....... What the hell....... sound......?"

At the mention of Reinhardt's name, Sarkegaard, who has been watching the situation, stays still and watches Leviathan.

Sarkozy understood, if not completely, that the Leviathan should be removed.

He is a threat to Valerie. Sarkegaard watched Olivia's face twist at the mention of Reinhardt's name.

She is a clear ally of Reinhardt's. Sarkeghar is also convinced.

"If Adriana doesn't work, I'll just find someone else who means the world to you. Olivia, I brought you here to show you that this can't be the end."

"......."

"Give up, Olivia, before your little pain becomes a bigger pain and you hang on crying."

Olivia's eyes went dead at the words, as if her pulse had been knocked out of her.

Adriana is just the beginning.

If she doesn't give up, Levereer Ranze will destroy everything Olivia holds dear, one by one, by any means necessary.

Since threats and torture against Olivia herself will get him nowhere, he looks outside of himself for a way to shut her down.

You know you can't stand to see yourself hurt, but you can't stand to see those you care about hurt.

No stranger to sacrifice, Olivia knows she'd rather sacrifice herself than see her loved ones hurt.

Like when Radia Schmidt tried to self-destruct with a berserk, she made the sacrifice of forfeiting her win.

Rivera knew how to move Olivia.

"You are....... You're the devil......."

Olivia said in a desperate tone. The paladins around her flinch at the words, but Levereer Ranze holds up a hand to stop them from speaking.

"Yeah. If you can't get away from....... this must be it."

Olivia's body begins to burn with an explosion of holy light and blue mana.

Using both holy power and mana to strengthen her body, Olivia glares at Leviathan.

"If I die or you die, it's all over."

Rather than live under this hopeless compulsion, Olivia ultimately chose to resist rather than comply or succumb to it.

Because if you die, no one else will be sacrificed.

But first, if he could, he would kill the man who had done such a terrible thing. But Levereer Ranze remained calm in the face of Olivia, who was clearly enraged.

"Do you think I didn't know you would make that choice?"

Leviathan beckoned. Two paladins emerged from somewhere in the hallway.

"......!"

"The moment you try to fool around, you're going to see Adriana die."

"Senior......."

Adriana, looking miserable, was being dragged by the paladins to the clearing. Olivia stared wide-eyed at Leviathan.

"Holy....... Damn......!"

"Even if you try your hand here, you're going to end up dead, and you're going to have to see Adriana die first."

From the guilty look on Adriana's face, it was clear that she was well aware of what she was doing and what she was being used as bait for.

Olivia couldn't reach out after all. The moment Olivia tried anything, the sword at Adriana's throat would do its job.

"First of all, I don't know why you think this is a bad thing, all of this is the first step in doing things to protect the congregation. It's saving a lot of lives. You could save a lot of lives if you would just change your mind a little bit."

Olivia had no answer for Leverier Ranze's words.

No, it didn't.

The author believes so strongly in what he is saying that nothing he says makes sense. He doesn't doubt himself because he believes his path is truly just.

Olivia knows both of them well.

He's that kind of guy.

Always demanding, never persuaded.

"Mr. Senior....... I, never mind me!"

"Adriana......."

Held captive, Adriana turned to Olivia, a guilty look on her face.

The look on Adriana's face was one of disillusionment beyond disappointment. She was disappointed that this was all she could hope for, and she had lost the will to live.

"Sir...... I'm, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine. As you wish......."

"Adriana, don't say anything. I....... I......."

I.

Olivia couldn't finish her next sentence.

What can I do to save Adriana?

To save Adriana, you must stand in front of them.

You have to go after something you don't even want, whether it's a Holy Roman Empire or something.

Leviathan Lance may be able to become a crusader again, but he must lie and say that the harsh things he did to him were all lies.

Adriana is just the beginning.

Olivia thinks coldly.

For now, let's listen to them.

After listening, you realize that Adriana is safe and sound.

Let's die.

If you're dead, you're not going to bully anyone to change their mind, and you won't be able to bully yourself anymore.

His own death would be the greatest revenge on Leviathan, and the last thing he wants for those who would use him is to die.

Olivia thinks so, and decides to accept the offer for now.

Then.

-skuck!

"Boom!"

-Chak!

"Boom!"

Suddenly. Something happened.

The two paladins holding Adriana were suddenly decapitated.

The sudden fountain of blood caused Olivia's mouth to drop open, as well as Leviathan's.

In the darkness, a figure embraced Adriana's captive body, watching the two decapitated bodies struggle.

"What is a human being."

A dark shape, like a shadowy figure, murmurs in the darkness, its red gaping maw open.

"How wicked you are."

A dark figure, seemingly more evil than anything else in the world, smiles as it speaks of the wickedness of man.

-shhhh!

"!"

Shadows enveloped Olivia's entire body, the black form too terrifying to reach.

"Oh, no......!"

"Demon......?"

He stretches out his wings of shadowy membranes that look like a tangle of shadows, and soars into the sky.

-Whoosh!

"Hahahahahahahaha!"

The creature that had snatched Adriana disappeared into the sky in a flash, along with a bull that tore through the night sky. It happened so fast that Olivia was unable to resist, and she was caught in the creature's trap and left dangling in the night sky.

-What, what! Let go of me!

It was a soft, cutesy scream that didn't fit the serious, ominous mood.

"What is that!"

"I think it's a demon!"

"Uh, how can a demon be in the ecliptic......!"

No one knew what it was, though Revere Lance suddenly shouted at the mysterious demonic creature that had taken Olivia and Adriana away.

But it didn't take long for me to panic about the situation.

This is where things got even more confusing.

-Currrrrr!

Dark clouds hung in the night sky, and the darkness of the night was filled with light.

-Flash!

Suddenly, lightning starts raining down from the sky.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen summoned Thunderbolt in battle against Olivia Ranze.

They rain down, dozens and dozens of them.

-Currrrrr!

"Boom!"

"It's magic!"

The paladins who were struck by the light began to activate their holy powers to protect me, but those who didn't react quickly enough were charred and crumbled to dust.

The top-level destructive spell, Thunderstorm, has been cast.

"Demon attack!"

The paladins immediately recognized the situation and called out, but it was not good.

Thunderstorm wasn't the end of the story.

-chiyiying

There were several strange crackling noises as if the space around the monastery was being ripped apart, followed by massive shockwaves coming from the east, west, north, and south sides of the monastery.

-Quack, quack, quack!

Four chained explosions.

Explosion is cast four times in quick succession, and the already desolate monastery collapses and crumbles.

Paladins, priests, and covenanters who didn't use their shields strongly enough were already shattered.

It's a massacre.

The paladins are about to experience hell when a mysterious high level mage swoops in.

Lightning rained down, and the monastery was blown away by the explosion.

And.

-currrr

The earth trembles and flames begin to rise from the ground.

In the sky, a rain of lightning.

A storm of flames erupts from the earth.

The firestorm began to burn fiercely, threatening to sweep across the land.

"This is......."

Leviathan Lance watches as thunderbolts pummel his body and flames from the ground consume the paladins.

In front of the Crusader headquarters, a firestorm like this suddenly erupted.

A dragon appeared, and a mysterious lycanthrope wreaked havoc.

Revere Lance was not in charge of the succubus at the time, but he had heard the reports.

Isn't this, like, that feeling?

Unidentified Demon Attack.

As the wave of flames sweeps away, someone emerges through the flames and lightning.

As if the magic was deflecting itself, they were completely unaffected by this mess.

There was a lycanthrope, a wolf-like demon with a silver mane.

And next to it.

With fiery red hair and a pair of curved horns sprouting from its temples, it was something human, but not human.

-Crunch!

Lycanthrope and a mysterious demon appear in the center of the Inferno.

The demon was inside the wall of flames, a sword with a milky white hilt slung over its shoulder.

"Reverie Rancher."

The situation was one of incomprehensible consternation.

Leviathan cries out, even as he is hit by heat and thunderbolts.

"You are....... who are you!"

"Me?"

The demon boy comes toward you, dragging his sword across the ground.

"My name is Valerie."

"A foe of the demons."

"The rightful heir to the Darklands."

The boy aims his milky-white sword at Revere Lance.

Levereer Ranze's eyes widened as he couldn't help but recognize the sword for what it was.

"Uhhhhhhhhh!"

"Now....... you corrupt priest."

One through ten.

This situation didn't make any sense to him.

"Time to be punished."

But even if you don't understand it, it's happening.

A demon with a holy sword is trying to kill you.

Episode 321.

Humans need to realize that the Demon War is far from over.

Eleris understood, Loyaar didn't question, and Sarkegar didn't seem to know why he should, but he didn't argue.

Radia Schmidt will not be sent into battle. I've left her under Eleris' watch, in case she goes off on a tangent.

Things happened.

After seeing Sarkeghar take Olivia and Adriana away, he sprang into action.

Drop it somewhere safe, and they'll run away, though they'll question why you rescued them.

Today's mysterious massacre will be reported as the work of demons.

I had Sarkegar fly around a bit in his demonic form. We need witnesses to spread the word.

Of course, the guys on the ground can't be eyewitnesses.

They'll all die.

In the monastery that was destroyed by Eleris' magic, all of the remnants were killed by this hellish destructive spell.

These destructive spells have failed to harm me or Loyar. As great as these destructive spells are, the fact that they don't target anyone is already a testament to Eleris' skill as a mage.

Loyar and I are the only ones free from the heat that should have burned our skin to charcoal.

The remnants have left no corpses behind, and the survivors are forced to fight in extreme conditions of lightning storms and firestorms.

During the Demon Captivity incident, Eleris was able to create a firestorm, but she wasn't willing to kill anyone.

But this time, it's a spell that is cast to annihilate all enemies.

It seemed daunting for the paladins to use holy magic to protect themselves in the extreme heat.

What remains, however, are the most elite paladins, including Reverie Ranze.

-kooooooooooo!

Lycanthropized Loyar also fights, this time to kill his opponent.

-Bang! Quack! bang!

They weren't pushing the paladins away with their enchanted nails, they were picking them up, throwing them to the ground, grabbing them with both hands and tearing them apart.

-Quadruple!

-Crack!

Loyar bit off the head of one of the paladins, grabbing its torso and pulling it down, while simultaneously lifting its mouth upward.

-puddle!

-the......a.......

Loyar roughly chews on the decapitated paladin's head.

Blood trickled from the corners of the silver beast's mouth, and its eyes glistened with red.

Loyar.

I knew that, but Loyar's true colors were creepy.

But if you're strong, that's it.

It's not a full moon, but it's a near full night.

Elise will be at her peak, and so will Loyardo.

"Hmph!"

-Quack!

I take a few steps back, parrying Leviathan's downward slash.

An elite paladin, the key to the case and the enemy you must kill.

Libertarian Lance.

He was the one I was dealing with.

"How can a demon hold a tiara?"

"Because it's God's will."

Normally, I'm not a good choice to deal with.

However, I stood before him. His face twisted at my words of divine will.

"How dare a demonic people discuss divinity."

"Are you, in the face of the power of God, denying it?"

"Shut up, little devil, I don't know how you found it, but I can't stand to hear you insult the gods anymore!"

Leviathan Lance charges at me with his greatsword raised.

Captain of the Crusader Knights and veteran of veterans.

"Hmph!"

-Quang!

Even if I had strengthened my body with magical enhancements, it would be impossible for me to take on a veteran like this.

A single parting of the sword was enough to send me stumbling backward with a shock that felt like it would crush my entire body.

"That sucks, you really are the devil."

Levereer Ranchers are spending most of their energy protecting themselves.

Still, it's an overwhelming disadvantage.

No wonder.

Nevertheless, I stood in front of Leverier Ranze.

Only by standing before him.

Kidnapping Adriana, unable to let go of his obsession with Olivia, and standing in front of this bastard.

I would be able to draw out the true anger.

-Woof

"If this isn't the power of the gods, what is it?"

This is because it brings out the true power of Tiamata.

"Divine power....... Use it....... Demons......."

I see the gleam of horror and disgust in Leviathan's eyes.

-Flash!

The holy light explodes and engulfs me.

Magical enhancement followed by physical enhancement from divine power. The power of Olivia Lance imbues my body.

-Quack!

The greatsword and Tiamata clash, creating a fierce shockwave.

The white light of Reverie Lance's sword. He's not a Swordmaster, but he's not much different from one. At my current level, I should be overwhelmingly defeated a hundred times.

However, Leviathan Rancher can't just focus on fighting me.

He is now entering a furnace that could turn him from a piece of iron into a pile of flesh.

And I'd say Enchantment, followed by Self-Suggestion, and then Tiamata's Divine Power.

And the words.

"Fuck you!"

-Bam!

"Boom!"

Levereer Ranze, who had retreated from my blade, looked disbelieving.

He may be the heir to the throne, but he'll think he's a child, and he won't understand why he's stepping down.

I was just as overwhelmed.

The level of the spirits is too low for them to be able to draw their full power.

"Don't talk about God anymore. Young devil."

There is a cold fury in Leviathan's eyes.

I couldn't understand this situation, but I felt like I was becoming more and more focused on this fight. The divine power of Leviathan Ranze was overwhelming.

"Okay, whatever you are, we'll have to kill you before you become a more dangerous seed of evil."

-curl!

The white light within Leviathan's body explodes.

Tuan's divine power is most potent against unclean beings. The power of exorcism, so to speak.

But I am not a demon, so I am unaffected by Tuan's divine powers of exorcism.

-Quack!

"Boom!"

But that's just me.

He is outclassed by Revered Rancher in terms of power output, as well as in terms of holy power wielded through Tiamata.

If it weren't for the circumstances, I wouldn't have crossed swords with him more than a few times. Levereer Ranze looms over me like a giant.

"If you survive, you will live out the rest of your days in the dingy wallpaper of the Darklands. You're chasing after past fame."

Levereer Ranze looks at me the way he looks at a child who is about to strike.

I have a powerful mage, and a Lycanthrope, but I think he's already figured out that I'm not that powerful after all.

This is an epic battle.

But Revere Lance is the strongest paladin in his faction, and while I am a captain, I am weaker than my men.

So when I say I'm in the game, it's just a generalization.

I could draw on the power of Tiamata, but even so, I was gradually being pushed back.

With a determined look on his face, Levereer Ranze slams down one punch after another.

"Yes, there is no need for this organization. You have shown yourself well. If we kill you, the next flashpoint in the Demon War, and recover the Tuan Relic, we won't have to do any of this."

-Ka-ching!

"Poof!"

A single clash of swords was enough to send me bouncing backwards, almost rolling.

I could read a certain glee in Leverier Ranze's stony expression and eyes.

"This is Tuan's revelation to me."

He interprets the situation of the demon holding the holy sword in his own way.

Regardless of the cause and effect, he felt that he could claim the dual honor of being the one to slay the next Demon King and recover the Tuan's Relic.

When I show up with the Holy Sword of Tuan, they think I'm a pig trying to get into their house for money.

Now that I'm here, you don't need Olivia anymore.

He thinks Tuan is bringing him the holy relic and the young demon's head at the same time.

-Carded!

"!"

I couldn't push back the blunt thrusts of the sword, not even with sword to sword.

The illusion of Liberty Rancher is understandable. I'm not in a position to deal with him right now.

-Quack!

"Ugh!"

It was a struggle to even get the sword out of the way, and while my enchantments and protection prevented the sword from directly wounding me, I still felt the dull impact.

I felt like I'd been hit in the face with a sledgehammer and could barely think straight.

Several more intense attacks from Leviathan followed, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain my enchantments.

My opponent is too strong for me.

That much is immutable.

-Bang! ka-gak!

"Boom!"

They don't realize it's a one-size-fits-all. Even if you're up against Loyar, who is slaughtering paladins right now, you don't know what's going to happen.

But I'm not fighting this battle alone.

-Quack! Flash!

"Poof!"

His brow narrows and he takes a few steps back as four consecutive Thunderstorm strokes land on Leviathan's body.

I'm not alone. Eleris is unleashing mass destruction magic, buying me time to prevent Leviathan from landing the decisive blow.

However, even a blow to the brain, which would have reduced a normal person to ashes, could only slow Leviathan Lance's pace slightly.

-Quack! Quack!

"You may be worthless, but your subordinates are worth something!"

I wasn't going to argue with that statement.

Approaching steadfastly, Leviathan no longer looked human to my eyes.

This is the real power of paladins.

Can we really call them human? They are more monstrous than I, a demon.

By now.

and you're doing it.

If you go back now, it's too late.

Raising a furiously weeping Tiamata, I parry the slashing greatsword of the Leviathan that rushes toward me, from the bottom up.

"Get lost!"

-Bam!

With a loud crack, the Leviathan's pectorals are clearly visible, and I stab my Tiamata into his chest.

-Flash!

-Quack!

I felt a frighteningly dull rebound from my thrust, and Leviathan and I bounced off in different directions.

"You, what?"

Leviathan's expression hardened. As if he sensed I was using unnatural power.

"It's the devil."

Tiamata cries.

It's reacting to my anger.

The reason for the anger is not different.

"Because of you......."

I point my Tiamata at him.

"Miss Temple, I couldn't make it."

"......what?"

You don't need talent.

I'm not upset that I missed it.

You said you needed one vote.

That one vote, I can't give.

I was worried that if I went to a contest, I'd have to think about who to vote for.

I don't have to worry about that anymore.

Leberian doesn't understand what I'm talking about.

-Crack!

In the midst of a thunderstorm and a firestorm, I think about it.

I wonder what Ellen is thinking right now.

You're probably resenting me because I'm not here.

I asked him to come.

I'm not the kind of kid to say that, but I did.

Saying you had no choice doesn't mean anything.

Saying you couldn't help it doesn't solve anything. It just builds and builds and builds until it becomes resentment and sadness.

But I can't not come.

Because I can't go around in circles and end up leaving people in crisis because of me.

I've created another unavoidable thing, and I've made someone sad.

I'm sick and tired of this malice.

To the bastard who created this situation.

"So fuck you."

Rage.

So, enough with the outrage.

-Woof!

"I don't know what you're talking about, but I don't need to talk to you anymore."

-curl!

With a powerful stride, he approaches me, step by step, and brings his greatsword down, enveloped in divine power.

Dangerous.

With a strong gut warning that I would die if I took it, I flung myself to the side.

-Quadruple!

He threw himself sideways with all his might and didn't get caught, but the ground where he struck was torn up like it was being eaten by a giant beast.

In addition to being an unbreakable shield, it draws on a torrent of power to wield a powerful physical force.

Leverier Ranze is, after all, a family man in his field.

If it weren't for his magical assistance, he would have been cut to pieces with a single swipe of his sword.

"All you can do is run away."

"Yeah, and over time, your zombie-like vitality will wear off."

"How dare you compare this divine power to such a lowly, disgusting creature!"

To treat him as an undead would be the greatest insult to the paladin of Tuan.

-koooooooooooooo!

In the distance, Loyar's battle cry could be heard through the din.

Once again, the lightning-covered Leviathan lunges at me.

He points his greatsword at me, caught in another torrent of divine power.

"Suck!"

Reverie Ranze is a Paladin.

Overwhelmingly protective, with little concern for defense. They fight by putting blunt force into a single blow and putting up with their opponents.

He can certainly do that. I'm sure he'd be tickled to death with that kind of high level destructive magic.

Leviathan's blow is coming once more. He and I are about twenty paces apart. In place, he points his sword at me, channeling holy power into his blade.

It's not coming. As if it doesn't need to come.

Twenty paces away from me,

He spins in place and points his sword at me.

If you don't dodge, you die.

-Whoosh!

My vision turned white, and a torrent of physical, divine power swept over the spot where I'd been just moments before.

"Boom!"

I dodged, but it was too late: part of my left shoulder was literally ripped off, and there was an intense pain that felt like I was on fire.

The divine power surging from Tiamata was sealing the wound, but nearly half of his shoulder was blown off.

I can tolerate the pain, but I can't use my left arm.

Crazy.

We're way past the point of the sword on this one.

Just as Saviolin Tana has an auror coat of arms on her sword and uses magical shockwaves, Leviathan Ranze can strike far beyond the reach of his sword with something like an insane holy power injector.

At its worst, prosecutors do things that are not unlike magic, and the worst part is that my opponent is one of them.

"Your resolve is broken, Demon King."

Leviathan's power is no match for mine. Even with Eleris assisting with magic from as far away as she can, Leviathan's defense is still strong.

Loyardo was too busy being swarmed by five or more paladins to pay attention to my side.

Feel the wall.

The walls feel different than they did for Ellen.

Instead of feeling like I couldn't catch up, I felt like the wall of death was slowly closing in on me.

What was I supposed to do?

Should I have waited to see Adriana die, to see Olivia fall to this guy?

Should we have stood by and watched the empire fall apart?

I knew that I'd be facing an enemy that I could never defeat at my current level.

So you're saying you had to stand by and watch someone die and be sacrificed?

I realize that I can't make everyone happy.

Understanding it and accepting it are two different things, so I stood in front of Leverier Ranze in my true form.

It's what I thought I had to do.

The pain in his shoulder gradually fades, but Reverie Ranze once again slings his sword over his shoulder and begins to imbue it with divine power.

That Holy Power Injector is unstoppable at my level.

You don't know if you're going to be able to dodge an attack that's going to reach you this time, over a large area, with just a poke.

If I get hit in the shoulder and live, but it cuts off my head, heart, or body.

I die as I am.

That's not all.

Loyaar couldn't take on every paladin.

-Sir, I'm in!

One of the paladins who had escaped Loyar's assault was charging toward Leveri Lance, intent on joining him.

Leviathan Lance calls out as he looks back to see the paladin quickly joining him.

"It's enough to tie your feet for a while! Go, Rondell!"

"Old!"

It's hard enough with the Reverie Lance, but when it's a two-on-one, I'm done. Even if that paladin can hold me off for a while, he won't be able to stop a Reverie Lance strike.

The paladin, who had begun to join us in the distance, brushed past Leviathan and was about to charge at me.

-Fu Hak!

"K......!"

I watched in horror as the paladin's blackened fingernails poked out of Leviathan's back and through his chest.

The paladin shouts.

"Lower, the gods are here!"

That was a sarkegar, not a paladin.

Episode 322.

Sarkegar joined the fray, transforming into the form of one of the paladins, and stabbed Leviathan Lance in the back, pretending to join him.

It stabbed him right through the heart from the back.

Critical wound.

But then I saw something even more alarming ensue.

"K......breathe!"

-Quack!

Levereer Ranze shrugged off Sarkegar, who had pierced his heart with a divine force that was too much for him to comprehend. Sarkegar, who was no match for the divine power, bounced off into the distance and slowly picked himself up with a grunt.

He brings his hand to his own heart, which is throbbing with lifeblood.

-Woof

The wound is healing.

Whether it was a regenerated heart or a trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth, Reverie Ranze was coming back to life.

"Are you crazy....... Are you even human?"

"Devil. What are you talking about?"

The iron-faced Leviathan wipes his mouth, spitting out a handful of blood.

"This is human."

Leviathan Lance, mending his shattered heart and ready to fight once more, looks at me and says, "You're right.

"God accepts my faith and makes the impossible possible, which is only possible for humans. It is possible because the Most High loves human beings."

Levereer Lance seemed to think that divine power was the sole prerogative of humans.

"So it is my duty, my karma, to retrieve the holy relics from unholy beings like you as soon as possible. And a way to repay the love of the gods."

Leviathan's fanaticism was different from Radia's.

Radia Schmidt's fanaticism was fierce, but Leverier Ranze's was refined madness.

A cold fanaticism, so well chiseled and honed that there is no excitement, no nervousness, no anger. Leviathan sees Sarkegar disguised as a paladin, swept away by a torrent of divine power and now rising again.

"What a lowly servant you have, wearing the skin of another being."

"......."

I thought the strength of the Leviathan would be overwhelming.

But I didn't expect it to be this bad. Its heart is pierced and it recovers. That's a creature you can't kill unless you blow its head off.

Now I'm not sure it's even possible for that thing to run out of stamina under a hail of bullets.

That would mean joining me, Sarkegaard, and Loyaar, but is that still a possibility?

Paladin's Nastiness.

I was realizing it in the most unpleasant way possible.

They strengthen their bodies, defend themselves with protection, channel divine power into their swords, and even recover from injuries that should have killed them.

If that's not a zombie, I don't know what is.

Not all paladins are like this, but Leviathan Rancher was the pinnacle of paladins who fulfilled all of the aforementioned criteria.

Reverie Rancher comes out again and begins to attack Sarkhegar.

-Thump! Quack! Quack!

"Boom!"

The monsters are me and Sarkegar.

We were only concerned with dodging the onslaught, like a beast on the rampage.

-Crack!

Knowing that Sarkegar's attack could penetrate his defenses, Leverrier Lance did not allow the raid.

Sarkegar's blades, which he creates by transforming parts of his body, are able to pierce Leviathan's defenses.

However, it didn't make any difference if the attack was successful.

-Woof!

They never take critical hits, and if they do, they bounce back quickly.

I couldn't even begin to fathom the extent of his divine power.

The only way to win was in the long game, and I didn't know if I could survive the attack of Levi Lance until we got to the long game.

"Deterioration, you must also consider dodging!"

Sarkegar's shouts pierced my ears.

Yes.

We could end the mess and retreat. I know it's definitely a time to consider that.

I succeeded in rescuing Olivia and Adriana, and I did it in Valerie's name.

But the result is that Adriana and Olivia are in danger again.

As a result, it's clear that some people will doubt that the demons saved Adriana and Olivia. They don't know anything about it, but their misunderstanding and suspicions could lead to a much worse outcome.

Or maybe Leviathan will turn a blind eye to this and try to manipulate Olivia again.

If you don't kill Leviathan Rancher here and now, you'll have done nothing today.

"No, one of us has to die today, whether it's him or me."

So.

Don't back down.

"You think you're going to win. Demon."

Levereer Ranze looks at me thoughtfully.

"Okay. I'm not going to die here. I'll kill you, and I'll live."

"What makes you so sure of that?"

Like the fanaticism of Leviathan.

Such fanaticism exists in me too.

"It's just the way it is. This world."

It's a miracle that always seems to happen in my favor.

No wonder.

Self-implied?

Words?

I don't know about that.

It's just a fact, whether you believe it or not.

My second life is bees.

My punishment shouldn't be to be slaughtered by Levereer Lance in this place.

More.

There will be a bigger punishment.

I'll have to endure some more.

There will be more sorrow to come, more pain to be prepared.

If this is what gets me killed, barring a miracle.

I will be disappointed that my punishment is only this much.

"There are too many things in store for me to die."

You won't kill me until I've tasted it all.

Even if in the midst of it all, I get crushed or trampled or driven insane or killed.

Even if you can get through it all and find happiness.

It's just not there yet.

"Even if the Great Gods descended on this spot and tried to kill me, I would not die. Leviathan."

It's not a belief, it's not an insinuation, it's just a fact, and with that certainty, a different light shone in Levereer Ranze's eyes.

"Your blasphemy has crossed the line, demon."

Aversion.

A fanatic faces another fanatic and feels disgust. What I feel for him, he now feels.

I'm not going to die yet, because the deck is still stacked against me.

I will not allow Olivia to force her grief anymore.

I won't make Olivia go back to a life where she can't even wonder what it means to be herself under the shackles of sainthood.

To Adriana, to Olivia.

I'm really going to lift you up from the pit of God and faith and belief.

Every place we live, every area of human existence, is a shithole for its own reasons.

To recognize that the gutter isn't the only thing that exists.

I will set them both free.

I want you to live a life of deliberation and choice, of adapting and succumbing to what's forced upon you, not choosing to live a life of agony.

Adriana, Olivia.

Let's give them freedom in the truest sense of the word.

"I."

"Null."

"Kill."

I make the creepiest resolution I've ever made.

Leviathan mended his sword at my words.

I'm not saying that's even possible.

He seemed to sense something different in my demeanor.

It's happening again.

Miracles.

Come to me.

You still want a lot from me.

I have a lot of work to do.

Are you sending me up to drop me?

It's not all up yet.

A miracle of such magnitude that I can take the life of Leviathan Lance, an enemy I can never defeat at my current level.

Want.

Prepare for a miracle.

Anger.

To burn the fuel called anger, to produce the results called miracles.

I should be outraged.

It was always my will that pushed me beyond my practical limits.

Levereer Ranze is disgusted with me. As if he doesn't even want to talk anymore, he prepares to attack once more.

"Die, devil!"

-Carded!

A shockwave of earth-shattering force exploded with a single swipe of Leviathan's blade. I narrowly dodge the blow, but I'm forced to roll several times across the ground. Sarkegar fired as well, but he was only able to deal a few scratches, and the iron wall that was Reverie Ranze stood firm.

It's an iron wall that can be knocked down and rebuilt.

A blue and white light begins to focus from his sword.

Explosive bursts of magic and holy power. As Saviolin Tana showed me, mages aren't the only ones capable of AoE attacks. She would have killed me in a heartbeat and fled the area.

He prepares for the big one.

Though Tiamata is the source of my divine power, I cannot draw it from within myself.

Under limited conditions, I can harness the power of Tiamata.

Reverie Ranze, paladin of Tuan.

Tiamata, the holy relic of Tuan.

In the end, we're using the same kind of force, and I'm getting pushed out of the way.

It's an even match, so as long as I'm using the same class of power, I'm going to lose the power battle.

Whether he's a fallen priest or a crazed fanatic, the time and experience he's accumulated can't be faked.

"Fade away with the light."

That's what war heroes do when they return victorious from the Great Demon War.

You have to jump through the hoops of time that he's built up that can only be real.

He's a maniac who won't die unless you blow his head off.

Then, in the end, I have to rely on my own strength.

Anger.

And.

Faith (自己暗示) and words (言靈).

And the destiny that will be given to me.

It hasn't come yet, so I won't die.

A miracle that can kill this monster.

I know what it is.

As he prepares to fight, I grab my tiara with both hands.

While you can't hold it, you can't force it.

Say.

With determination and anger.

"Tiamata."

As he struck, a storm of physical and divine power threatened to engulf me.

Toward Tiamata, who unleashes boiling holy power in all directions.

command.

"Be a magic sword."

-Kurung!

"!"

The white light that burned in Tiamata became a burning darkness.

To kill an infinitely regenerating monster with Tuan's power, of course.

It's a no-brainer.

You need to be the antithesis of that.

-Currrrr!

It doesn't end with the burning. I walk through it, shrouded in darkness, with waves of light pouring over me.

"You......! What have you done to Tiamata!"

Toward the horrified cries of the Leviathan, he leaps.

I was right.

He can't defeat Leviathan with the same force, so he summons the opposite force, and breaks through with the opposite force.

With opposing forces, you can break through his ironclad defenses and cut him off at the knees.

You only get one chance.

Cut off his breath before he can figure out what's going on.

Through the rushing light.

Shrouded in a darkness that light could not penetrate, I quickly reached the sight of the astonished Leviathan.

I know that in a single moment, life and death are twisted, history is reversed.

The difference between life and death is a matter of seconds.

Retirement.

[Use 1,000 achievement points].

And.

Shielded by my demonic powers, I bite back my greatsword in response, shouting at the Leviathan as he tries to stab me.

Words.

"Stop!"

"Boom! This....... This is......!"

One step.

Takeaway.

It can be the difference between life and death.

Toward Reverie Ranze, whose movement is temporarily blocked by my words.

-POOF!

"K......!"

I succeeded in plunging the magic sword Tiamata into its heart.

\* \* \*

Transformed Tiamata into a magic sword.

That was the miracle I was hoping for.

He then used the power of the spirit to reinforce the power of his words, blocking Leviathan's movements at the crucial moment.

As a result.

Leverier Lance was mortally wounded.

This time it was truly a fatal wound.

"Crack, crack....... Kkkk!"

He grasped the magic sword Tiamata, which was plunged into his heart, only to spit out blood.

Already, the paladins were growing weaker by the hour. When they had had enough, they fled when they saw Leviathan Lance on his knees with his heart pierced.

You'd rather live to tell the tale than fight a losing battle.

"¯....... 큭....... 컥......."

"That sucks."

Even after his heart was pierced by a magic sword, Levereer Ranze did not die easily.

Judging by the clusters of white light all over his body, it was clear that he was holding on to the rope as tightly as he could with his divine power.

You can still use Tuan's power, albeit faintly, even if you've been struck by the full force of Shangguan.

I didn't expect it to be such a monster.

"Uh......that....... 게....... 티....... Tiamata......が......."

But even fighting a demonic force that erodes your entire body would be a challenge.

From the same being, but opposing forces.

Leviathan Lance could survive Sarkegar's attack, but he could not withstand the unholy power that flowed through the sword Tiamata.

It's just hanging on for dear life by the skin of its teeth.

I stare down at Reverie Ranze, kneeling before me, unable to move a finger as he attempts to pull the blade from his heart.

As I watched the end of Leviathan Lance, Loyar, in the form of Lycanthrope, approached me.

"Degradation. I'll track down the fleeing paladins."

"Good. Go with Sarkegar."

Sarkeghar was a bit horrified to see me fight with a holy sword turned into a magic sword, but he didn't lose sight of the task at hand.

"Don't miss a beat. No one must know I was carrying a tiara."

"Yes."

"Yes, degradation."

Technically, Olivia shouldn't have seen the demon with the holy sword. Sarkhegar would have dropped her off at a distance. There is no way Olivia could have seen this.

"Who are you....... Who are you......."

Leviathan mumbles to himself, the corner of his mouth bleeding.

"The Devil."

"Why are you calling me....... No....... Why did you attack us....... Did you attack....... Why did you....... Why did you kill Olivia......."

It wasn't until he was on his deathbed that Leverier Ranze seemed to have doubts.

Why the man who claims to be the Devil saved Olivia and Adriana. What the hell is this about Miss Temple.

He speaks in a dying voice.

"Let us cooperate...... Demon King......."

"......what?"

Leviathan speaks quietly in a dying voice.

"You are....... You want to rebuild the Demon World....... Not....... Then....... the division of the empire will benefit you....... will help you....... If we work together....... a common purpose....... For you too....... It would be an offer you could not refuse......."

I couldn't help but laugh at that.

"If you're going to say something like that, you should have said it sooner."

We're not talking about compromise until you're dead.

"I mean, it's like he's begging for his life."

"You too....... You will need me......."

If I had said this in my right mind, it would have seemed like a fanaticism that would betray men for the sake of the kingdom of God.

But with his life on the line, Leverier Lancet's words were merely a struggle.

He's throwing it all away now, in the middle of a crisis.

"Unchaste in the sense that they beg for their lives from their enemies because their lives are at stake."

"It's not that you're not willing to do whatever it takes to get there, but your intentions aren't pure because your means change depending on the situation."

"Leviathan Lance, you are disqualified in too many ways to serve Tuan."

At my words, Leviathan stares at me with dying eyes.

"You....... Really, you think you're the champion of Tuan......."

"So, you don't think so?"

Levereer Ranze looks up at me with difficulty.

He looks me in the eye.

"Such and such...... is......."

As if he's trying to find something in my eyes that he's lost.

"Yeah....... The Champion of Tuan was essentially....... to punish humans."

Champion of Tuan.

They were originally human hunters, not demons or the undead.

They have been in charge of slaying fallen warlocks and cultists for generations, and the last champion of Tuan before me was also killed fighting the cultists.

Tuan's champions are not demons or undead by nature, but human slayers.

"The Demon King is the champion of Tuan's....... In fact....... Maybe it's not so strange....... I don't know......."

He looks up at me.

Only at the point of death did he accept that I was the champion of Tuan.

His defeat has convinced him of everything, and he believes that his defeat is Tuan's will.

God is right.

Therefore, I die because God has forsaken me.

As it turns out, I was wrong.

His fanaticism was steadfast even in the face of death.

Even Tiamata, who had been transformed into a magic sword, seemed to have no choice but to accept it in the face of death.

If Tuan was truly on his side, he wouldn't have lost.

For all the questions he had for me, he finally had to admit that I was the champion of Tuan.

I pulled the Tiamata out of his heart and pointed it at the kneeling Leviathan's throat.

He says.

"I, I believed I was pure."

It was a plea, but it wasn't a plea.

It is the Champion of Tuan with the Tiamata who has come to kill the paladin who serves the God of Purity, and nothing else.

That's why the last excuse is that you believed you were pure.

He may have been truly innocent.

You may have believed that your definition was the right one.

That's why he leaves an excuse as his last will and testament.

-Scissors!

I slammed the tiamaata from top to bottom, completely taking the breath out of Leviathan.

The life of a corrupted priest, taken by a corrupted holy object.

In the end, Leverier Ranze fell twice to the same man.

I stood still, dumbfounded, in the abandoned abbey.

It was a place where the earth was shaking.

But for now, the world was lit only by scorched ruins, billowing smoke, and the pale winter moonlight.

Looking away from the decapitated body of the former Crusader Knight Commander and his helplessly rolling head, I stare up at the sky in disbelief.

In the end, I wasn't where I needed to be.

What to say.

Again, if you say you couldn't be there because of something unspeakable.

What would Ellen say.

No, I don't know if I've earned the right to say that.

To prevent the Empire from splintering, you planned and accomplished a monstrous task: the destruction of a former Crusader Knight Commander and a secret religious order.

I try to figure out what excuse to give Ellen.

This is supposed to be funny, but it didn't feel funny at all.

"......."

As I stood under the winter night, a message popped into my mind.

[Special Achievement - Turning Point in History].

[Confirmed death of a key character (Reverie Lance) who was supposed to be in the original worldline].

An inflection point in history caused by killing someone.

That was a first.

[Gained the "Apostle" trait as a special achievement reward].

Trait: Apostle

Description: You have become the true master of your Tiamata.

It was simple.

I thought I knew what this meant.

Tiamata as a magic sword, Tiamata as a holy sword.

I became a true champion of Tuan, the first person in history to be able to handle both.

\* \* \*

Late at night.

A thunderous cheer erupted from the still heated Miss & Mr. Temple contest venue.

The long, long contest was over, and all that remained was to announce the winner.

Glistening pollen drifted from the ceiling of the auditorium.

Olivia Ranze, who was considered a strong favorite to win, did not participate.

Reason for absence unknown.

-This year's Miss Temple is a freshman in the Royal Class! This is Miss Ellen!

But Ellen beat out all the other strong candidates to be crowned this year's Miss Temple.

Amidst the applause and cheers, a wreath and bouquet of flowers were presented to Ellen in a white dress.

Her Royal Class classmates were also clapping in congratulations for Ellen.

However, Ellen's expression was stony as she accepted the honor. Holding the colorful wreath and bouquet of flowers that signified her victory, Ellen could only stare blankly down.

Ellen, who only needed one vote, got a bunch of them.

Most of the votes, except for that one.

So many people chose you.

Ellen couldn't help but feel like the world had abandoned her.

Episode 323.

"Sir, what the hell is this....... What's going on?"

"I don't know. The point is, we shouldn't have gotten involved in that."

Olivia and Adriana were making their way through the forest. Olivia was leading the way, holding on to Adriana's hand in case she lost it.

When some sort of demonic entity kidnapped Adriana out of nowhere, she thought she had made a bad situation worse.

And when he realized the demon had taken hold of him, his heart sank.

As she was being dragged through the air like she was being kidnapped, I waited and watched, knowing that if I used my divine powers, Adriana might crash without my knowledge.

And.

When the demon dropped him and Adriana off in a forest far, far away, he couldn't help but panic.

I thought it was a given that I'd end up in some kind of trouble or with my life threatened.

Without another word, the demon released Adriana and Olivia, flapping its massive black wings and flying off into the distance.

In my head, I'm trying to figure out how to fight this demon I've never seen before. I don't even have a chance to fight it.

I was wondering if I should pull out Tiamata, but the moment never came.

When thunderstorms rolled in from the distance, lightning flashed, and a roaring firestorm erupted, I knew I was in trouble.

As much as she wanted to see what was going on, it was purely because of Adriana that Olivia didn't head in that direction.

We don't know what's going on, but we need to make sure Adriana is safe.

That's why Olivia was walking diligently to get away from the scene.

Adriana didn't understand the situation either.

"Listen, Adriana."

"Yes, sir."

"What happened to us. You can't tell anyone."

"Yes."

Adriana knows why Olivia is saying this.

"I don't know what it is, but if someone finds out about this, it's not going to go over well."

"It's ......."

Given the circumstances, it's inevitable that even the outer reaches of the ecliptic will soon be heavily scrutinized for the mayhem that took place there.

For some inexplicable reason, the devil had rescued them. If they did, they would never see the light of day, or worse, they would be labeled as the devil's agents.

And their silence will only be effective if all the paladins there are dead.

Olivia didn't realize what was happening.

However.

You need to get out of this place.

Olivia kept walking, and walking, and walking, with a firm grip on Adriana's hand.

\* \* \*

If it was a small disturbance, there would be an uproar, and troops would be sent to investigate.

"Are you done?"

"Yes."

As such, we rallied far from the wastewater plant.

Me, Sarkegaard, Loyaar, Elise, and a trembling Radia Schmidt. Radia Schmidt hadn't seen the whole story.

But I've also seen demons flying through the night sky, road vampires unleashing mass destruction magic, and the silver beast Loyar.

I watched as the four of them slaughtered the best of the Crusaders, including Leviathan Ranze.

It was a fight that could not have been won if I had fought at my best and been fully prepared.

Normally, I would be no match for Leviathan Ranze. He was supposed to be fighting in a place with top-tier destructive magic that could reduce a man to ashes in an instant, and he was killed by an unexpected variable: Tiamata's demonization.

So technically, it's just a fluke that I created with Chugo and Magical Sword Tiamata, and not a massive increase in my skill.

However, it doesn't change the fact that I faced and killed the Leviathan.

The fleeing paladins were taken care of by Loyaar and Sarkegar.

"Da, you are....... You replace......."

Radia Schmidt could not help but think that in the midst of this inscrutable situation, I and my minions must seem like the absolutes of an inscrutable world.

So, now it was time to decide what to do with the terrified Radia Schmidt.

The information we needed was the whereabouts of Leverier Ranze, and we got it, solving the case.

So Radia Schmidt is useless. You stare at Radia Schmidt in horror.

The other three didn't call me degrading, so Radia Schmidt doesn't know my full identity yet.

However, since I'm raising demons, you probably already have some idea of who I am.

The demon reappeared.

We can't let Radia Schmidt go quietly.

I learned a lot of things I wasn't supposed to know.

Kill them, or turn them into vampires.

You must choose one of two options.

"Degradation."

However, Elise called out to me.

"This child, can you leave him with me?"

"You're taking over for ......?"

Eleris doesn't like killing.

Today, however, Eleris unleashed a series of mass destruction spells at my command.

The elite were killed by Loyar, but all those who weren't elite and couldn't defend themselves were slaughtered by Eleris.

That's why Elise's expression was so unhappy.

He didn't protest that he couldn't do that, he just did what he was told.

But you can't help but feel the pain.

So, if we don't need to do any more killing, we don't want to do it.

"I'll be in charge, and I'll make him harmless to us."

"!"

Radia was horrified by this.

"Please, please....... Please...... please. Lord, kill me....... Please kill me, please......."

Radia crouches down, sobbing and shaking. Eleris looks at Radia, and her expression is forlorn.

"I don't mean to make it a right."

"Well, then....... then."

"That's something we'll have to work on."

Faced with the choice of killing Radia or turning her into a vampire, Eleris seemed to think she had a better solution.

"......OK, I believe it."

"Thank you, degradation."

Eleris forced a trembling Radia to her feet. Loyaar and Sarkegar seemed to have nothing to say to her.

If I were Eleris, I'd do something that didn't kill Radia.

At least it's better than leaving it to Loyard and Sarkegar.

On top of all that, Radia Schmidt is the most elite paladin left in the city. Having an ally at your disposal can't hurt.

\* \* \*

We returned to the ecliptic via Eleris' mass teleport.

Eleris held Radia Schmidt down. Radia's face was white with fear of what was about to happen to her, but she couldn't think to resist.

Where was the zealot, and what was left was a man shivering in fear of being bitten by a vampire?

What is Eleris going to do to Radia and how is she going to do it?

I wasn't sure, but it seemed like there was always a way around it. We'd have to wait and see how she handled it.

Leaving the two in Eleris' subterranean chamber, I, Loyaar, and Sarkegar took to the streets.

"Lowly, why is it necessary for the Empire to know of our existence?"

Sarkegaard asks the question he's been burying.

"A sense of crisis will unite humanity, and I don't think that unity can do us any good."

It's a valid question.

"I think so, too."

Loyardo, who had been silent, said.

I did what I was told, but I can't help but wonder. As for Tiamata, I didn't question him because he had mentioned it in the context of catching up.

"I have an idea, and I'll explain it to you soon."

"......."

"......."

"I'm a little busy right now."

Sarkegar shut up as if he understood, and Loyaar seemed to have gotten over it.

If I thought hard enough, I could come up with an excuse, I could convince myself, but I didn't have time for that right now.

"Here we go."

All I could think about was getting back to my templates.

\* \* \*

The time was already close to midnight.

The official part of the festival wrapped up today, Friday.

The winner of the Miss Temple contest is Ellen.

Unfortunately, Cliff wasn't the winner of the Mr. Temple contest, but he did manage to get enough votes from the girls on stage to take third place.

After the contest, there was even a parade featuring Miss & Mr. Temple.

Ellen hadn't realized there was such a thing, but it was nice.

Reinhardt was nowhere to be seen, not in the main event, not in the parade.

Ellen changed her clothes with Riana's help.

"Something must have happened."

"......."

Riana was in no hurry to say it, just blurted it out. Ellen understood, because she wasn't stupid enough not to know what she was talking about.

Many of my classmates who said congratulations looked at me as if they felt sorry for me.

She knew why he was looking at her that way.

Herriot hugged her wordlessly. Herriot seemed genuinely sad, and that made Ellen feel even more miserable.

It was a day that everyone deserved to celebrate, but Ellen couldn't remember a single thing she'd heard or said.

I felt like my soul had escaped and returned.

Today, what happened.

What did I do.

For a moment, I thought I was dreaming.

Dreams.

Vain and vain.

Because the moments I spent working toward it were in vain.

Ellen sat dazedly on the bed after Riana returned, having removed her makeup and showered.

The cheers and applause of the crowd rang out like a distant echo.

There was someone who wanted to win.

I had a vote I wanted to get.

But.

Neither was there.

"......."

I wonder if they're together.

Ellen felt miserable for thinking about it.

I was cheered on by everyone, I was praised by everyone.

Somehow.

I felt like I had failed at everything.

Ellen sees a trophy in the room, proof that she won Miss Temple.

I didn't need that.

They say it can't hurt, but it's definitely proof of someone's recognition.

Ellen stared at the trophy, then opened the door.

I thought I'd cheer myself up.

Ellen opened the visit.

I'm just going for a walk.

I want to go for a walk.

There's no other reason. I'm looking around the hallways, I'm looking around the lobby.

Who's back. Looking to see who's not there.

Thinking I was just trying to make myself feel better.

Ellen scans the A-class dormitory in silence, heading out the door.

She was wearing lightweight sweatpants. It didn't seem like much had changed, but Ellen was curious to see her reflection in the window.

Dressing up seems to be very important.

Ellen finds herself back in her sweatpants, looking through the window.

The gap between who I was not too long ago and who I am now is huge.

Even when I was dressed up in a fancy dress and heavy makeup, I felt miserable.

Now that it was back to its original form, it looked even more miserable than before.

I wanted to show you.

What a look on your face when you see me.

I was wondering.

I was trying to figure out what to say with that look.

With that thought stuck in her head, Ellen heads out of the dorm.

I'm not coming back today.

Just in case, something bad happened.

Even when she tried not to think about it, the thoughts kept coming, confusing Ellen.

You asked them to come, and they didn't, so there must be some excuse.

Then, as always, something dangerous has happened, and you should be worried about it, not happy that it didn't.

I shouldn't have to go looking for it.

Feeling her imagination run wild, Ellen heads for the dorm entrance.

And, from there, view it.

Rear view.

I caught a glimpse of a familiar backside at the bottom of the dorm entrance stairs.

The back of his head was familiar, though he wore his Temple uniform.

"......."

A lot of the confusion, questions, and disappointment in your head will subside for a while.

Ellen moves closer.

"What are you doing?"

"Uh-huh!"

At the call from behind, a startled Reinhardt jumped to his feet, almost rolling forward.

"Uh, uh....... that....... that."

It's a cold day.

Reinhardt, his face red from how long he had been sitting, looked at himself with a dumbfounded expression.

My fingertips, face, and nose were red.

Why am I sitting on the stairs of my dorm room, not inside.

Ellen looks at Reinhardt and shakes her head.

"Aren't you cold?"

"That....... that......."

"......."

It was cold, but I couldn't get in.

I should have gotten in, but I couldn't.

I'm going to have to say something, but I don't think I can make him understand.

On such a cold night, Reinhardt still hadn't gotten back to his dorm, even though he'd been gone for a while.

Because you wouldn't know what to say if you ran into him. You might run into yourself in your dorm lobby or wherever you are.

So you're sitting outside your dorm, undecided whether to come in or not.

Ellen looks at Reinhardt, who is fidgeting.

Reinhardt isn't shivering because he's cold, but for a different reason.

It looked, well, silly.

"Aren't you cold?"

"Uh....... some?"

"I'd like to go for a walk."

Reinhardt shakes his head at Ellen's words.

"No, it's not cold at all. It's about as cold as it gets."

Ellen looked at Reinhardt and smirked.

"Let's go."

As if it were an entrapment.

Ellen led the way, Reinhardt followed.

Episode 324.

Sinners have no words.

That's why Reinhardt didn't say anything.

Ellen walked along without a word.

So they walked a good distance apart, Ellen a little ahead, Reinhardt behind.

The festival runs through the weekend. So even though the crowds were down at night, the main street was brightly lit. They walked up the hill near the Royal Class, taking in the night view.

They walked for a while.

They didn't run together, but it was a route they took every morning, so they were familiar with it at night, and they both knew where it led.

They walk a path they both know well.

On a bench at the top of the hill with a view, Ellen sat down first, and Reinhardt sat down carefully next to her.

"I didn't ask you to sit down."

"Uh, uh, uh."

At Ellen's words, Reinhardt jumped to his feet, too scared to stick his butt in.

Ellen laughed at Reinhardt's horrified expression.

"What does it matter if I tell you to sit down or not?"

"That....... that....... that."

"Just sit down."

They look uncharacteristically serious. As if you've done something terribly wrong.

Ellen stares out at the night view of the Temple as Reinhardt sits next to her, sulking.

Was Reinhardt really that wrong?

Why that's wrong.

Ellen couldn't quite put her finger on why.

But she felt like the world had abandoned her. I felt lonely and sad.

Not true.

Rather, the whole world had chosen him, and only one had abandoned him.

Why did he feel like the world had abandoned him?

That's because Reinhardt is his whole world.

Ellen sees a flower falling in front of her.

No.

It wasn't a flower.

"eye......."

"......Yes."

Before I knew it, it was snowing.

Snowflakes, like white flowers, dot the ground.

It's not a pretty picture.

We don't know what to say to each other, and if we say the wrong thing, we might hurt each other.

Reinhardt doesn't know how to explain his situation.

Ellen doesn't know how to describe her hurt.

They both know that if they say the wrong thing, they'll end up in a big fight, so they just don't say anything.

Eventually.

What are you.

For what you are.

What the heck are we.

When those words start coming out, we know we're going to hurt each other.

They can't say anything.

A snowy winter night.

Ellen and Reinhard sit on the bench and lock eyes.

It was cold, and the snow on the ground hadn't melted.

Snow that's too scary to fall to the ground goes somewhere when the wind blows.

And just like that, they are blown away by the wind and piled up in the corner.

That's what eyes are for.

"......."

"......."

What we are.

How did this happen?

What did I do wrong to get to this point?

Elle thought about it, but she couldn't figure out where it had started.

When Reinhardt is knocked out in the first duel of swordsmanship class by a blow to the head with his own training sword?

When Reinhardt wakes up from his fainting spell and asks you to join him for lunch, something strange and unheard of?

When Reinhardt caught himself eating something in the middle of the night?

The first time you fed yourself?

Or when he got fed up with all the interference and started teaching himself swordplay?

Or after going to the Darklands and seeing all the horrible things that happened?

Ellen retraces her steps, one by one, and finally realizes.

The beginnings are scattered all over the place, and they pile up and pile up until they become something.

The snow is piling up.

You just need to clear the snow.

You can't get rid of time.

So, there's a lot of time in the mind that's been labeled Reinhardt.

Stacked and stacked.

Ellen's mind was filled with hours labeled with Reinhardt's name.

Now, I'd rather hate it.

That didn't work out so well for Ellen.

I could fill the margins of my mind with hatred and bitterness toward Reinhardt, but there's only so much space I can fill.

I want to hate it, but I can't.

And it was weird.

You already know.

Reinhardt can't tell you, but he's very sorry.

It's just killing time outside, with your hands and face burning bright red.

He can't explain anything to you about making you feel bad about yourself again, so he's just doing it because he's sorry.

I'm the one who's upset.

For some reason, it seemed to Ellen that Reinhardt was having a harder time.

I could tell he was in pain because he couldn't even say sorry.

Ellen wondered what was bothering Reinhard. But as always, Reinhard wouldn't tell her.

"You didn't have to come see it."

"......?"

Ellen says

"You didn't have to come see me, you didn't."

Ellen says, "No. They have no such obligation to each other.

"So....... Don't feel so sorry for yourself......."

There is no reason for Reinhardt to feel obligated to Ellen's words, and no reason for Reinhardt to feel so guilty for failing to honor them. There is no reason for Ellen to feel sorry for him.

Reinhard stares at Ellen for a moment.

It's not that I don't care.

I stare at Ellen, who pretends not to notice.

-Warlock

"Ah."

Reinhard suddenly pulled Ellen into a hug.

"Just....... get mad......."

"......."

"What you're putting up with....... more scary and....... because I feel more sorry for you......."

"......."

My head tells me that I have no reason to be angry, but my heart tells me that I can't help but feel angry and sad.

Are we even supposed to be mad at each other for these things?

Ellen wasn't sure.

But Reinhardt was hugging him.

If anything, it was colder.

Her body and hands were chilled from being outside for so long, and Ellen felt colder in her arms.

However, Reinhardt hugs him as he shivers in the cold.

I don't know what happened, but you should be so sorry.

You're going to have a harder time.

If it was this bad, it must have been unavoidable.

Ellen convinces herself.

People don't understand things they can understand.

Understand what you want to understand.

Ellen wants to understand Reinhardt now, so she inwardly understands that something important must have happened.

I try to convince myself that there must have been something important going on.

In Reinhard's cold embrace, Ellen gritted her teeth.

Reinhardt's shirt is getting a little wet.

"Seowoon...... did......."

"I'm sorry."

"I....... Heat....... hard....... hard....... ready...... to go."

Reinhardt held her close as she sobbed, little by little, shaking, breathlessly, incoherently.

"No matter how....... No matter how hard I try, I can't find...... uh. no....... I don't have....... no....... Black....... Ugh....... by all means....... Please come to...... do, did....... 했잖아아......."

"Sorry......."

Ellen cries and thinks.

If anyone should be consoled, it should be Reinhardt, not me.

Still, I couldn't hold back the tears.

Tears, that's what they do.

\* \* \*

It was deep, dark night.

After sobbing for a while, Ellen fell out of Reinhard's arms.

Then he looked down at the temple in a daze.

"......."

Reinhardt never told her what happened, and Ellen didn't bother to ask.

Understandably, Reinhardt was getting restless.

After crying for a while, Ellen suddenly stopped and just stared off into the night. I wondered if she hadn't gotten over it yet and what I should do.

The reality is quite the opposite.

Ellen gritted her teeth.

Not because of anything else, but because of embarrassment.

After the emotional release, he realized what he had done.

You're at a beauty pageant and you're crying like the world is ending because your friend didn't show up. After crying for a while, she realized what she had done.

It might not come.

When I finally felt better, it was Ellen who found the situation unbearable.

That's why Ellen can't say this or that, she's just staring at the night sky with a blank expression on her face.

I don't know why I felt like I had lost the whole world over something like this, but I don't understand it now.

There was no Reinhardt.

It made him feel like the world had abandoned him.

Reinhardt is next to me now.

That's all it took to make it work.

Ellen glares at Reinhardt.

It's okay, now I'm just grumpy for no reason.

"Uh, that....... why. Do you have something...... to say?"

I still feel like I'll do anything Reinhardt tells me to do.

'I have to have you.

All the grumpiness she'd been holding onto for no good reason was released just by seeing that face again. Ellen rose from the bench.

It's snowing.

Considering Reinhardt's icy body, he can't be outside anymore.

"It's cold, isn't it?"

"It's okay, this much."

As they walked back, Ellen glanced at Reinhardt.

"You've been outside the whole time."

I was waiting outside to keep an eye on things, and it would have been colder to walk around outside.

Reinhardt just walked away, as if he was fine.

"You can come in if you're cold."

Ellen says this because she thinks Reinhard might catch a cold.

"......I just want to do this with you."

"Ah."

The words made Ellen's heart skip a beat.

It's just something that doesn't seem like a big deal.

I think I've said that before.

It's easy to say anything and think anything.

Ellen wondered if she had lost her mind.

It wasn't long ago that I felt lonely and alone, like I'd been abandoned by the world.

It was a strange feeling, like I had the whole world to myself.

I wonder if it's okay for people to have mood swings like this.

Is it okay to feel like one person is my everything?

If he laughs, so do I.

If he likes me, I like him.

Is it okay to let someone else be in charge of my life and not me?

They walk down the street on a snowy night.

At the bottom of the hill, Reinhard glances at Ellen and says, "I'm not sure what to do.

"Watch out, you're gonna slip and fall in the kitchen!"

-Bang!

"????"

When Reinhardt fell backwards down the slope after trying to warn him not to slip, Ellen tried to help him up.

-Slide!

"!"

-Bam!

And then he slipped and fell on his ass.

"......What are you doing, you or me?"

"Sure......."

They stood up and patted their asses.

Keeping a reasonable distance, they walk through the snowy night.

At the bottom of the hill, I could hear the sounds of people milling about amidst the colorful nightlife of Main Street.

The store is open 24 hours a day, even at night, selling food. Ellen stays still, alternating between the distant night view and Reinhardt.

"Do you want to go to ......?"

Ellen nodded, her cheeks flushed.

"......Yes."

Ellen says.

You don't want to be at this time of day, you want to be at this time of day.

First snowy night.

Because we're together.

"If you want to go, go."

The festivities were winding down.

Not the last, but close to the last night.

But Ellen was feeling like the festivities were just beginning.

It's only now, at the end, that she and Reinhardt are alone. Ellen realizes the festivities.

\* \* \*

It was after midnight, but the main street was packed with people.

Drinking is not allowed inside the temple, but since it's a festival, there's plenty to see and do even on a late night.

Of course.

-Omnomnomnom

In Ellen's case, it was limited to food.

"This is delicious."

"Uh, yeah."

Ellen handed Reinhard a skewer of rice cakes with a fat look on her face, and he ate them without a word.

Something like anger, but not anger, had been released. But Reinhardt still thought he was a sinner, and he followed Ellen silently by her side.

I wasn't exactly thrilled.

They would walk the streets, checking out the sights, watching street performers, and buying food from street vendors.

Of course, Ellen was a little special today.

-Isn't that him or her?

-Eh? Sure.

Reinhardt couldn't help but hear the chatter around him.

As a group of men and women in the street cautiously approached and blocked his way, Reinhardt frowned in the same tune.

"I was on my way to work when I saw this......."

"Aren't you Miss Temple?!"

Reinhardt stiffened at the sudden outburst, and Ellen nodded nonchalantly.

"Yes."

"What?"

"Uh, somehow....... I think I'm glowing even in plain clothes!"

Reinhardt freezes, looking at Ellen, who nonchalantly admits that she recognized him, and the crowd, who are also making a fuss.

"Are you....... elected?"

Reinhard mumbled something that sounded like he'd never imagined such a thing, and Ellen's jaw dropped as she watched Reinhard's shocked reaction.

"......Why not?"

"Oh, no, that's not it."

With her mouth agape, Ellen pouted and started walking ahead.

\* \* \*

A warm cup of lemon tea was all Reinhardt needed to soothe a sulking Ellen.

"No, of course I didn't know it was going to fall, but you didn't say anything, so I thought....... I thought it had fallen."

"Okay."

They were sitting on a bench, sipping hot lemon tea. Not only were they at the contest site, but they were actually on the parade route, so there were quite a few people on the street with good eyesight who recognized Ellen in plain clothes.

There were plenty of people who walked by and chatted, even if no one spoke to them directly.

-Miss Temple?

-I guess so.

-Who's next to you? Is it your boyfriend?

-......Damn.

-......No, I'm sorry, what are you going to do about it?

-No, who says?

-Come on, it's Miss Temple, and she's even royalty.

-Really?

As we walked by, everyone looked at Ellen and said something, and I couldn't help but listen to Reinhardt next to me.

Ellen's mouth was hanging open in a different way than it had just been.

"It's annoying."

It seemed to bother her that people recognized her. Ellen didn't see the point in that at all.

They think they're just being annoying because people recognize them.

This year's Miss Temple, who walked down the aisle in a sheer white dress to cheers and applause from a crowd of people, wandered down a winter street later that night in black sweatpants. She's not bothered to be recognized.

Ellen stares at Reinhardt.

"It's all because of you."

"Ugh....... Uh, sorry......."

Reinhardt was stunned by the stares, as if he hadn't gotten what he wanted, but had gotten a side effect.

Tired of people recognizing them and stopping to chat, Ellen and Reinhardt turned off Main Street.

It was also nighttime, so the crowds were very thin once you got off the main street.

It was snowing, so there was a little bit of snow on their heads and shoulders.

"Miss Temple....... You've been crowned. Congratulations."

"...... That doesn't mean anything."

"......Yes."

Ellen was competing for something else, so she didn't need to be congratulated, especially not from me. Especially not from me.

The longer they walk, the more snow piles up on their shoulders and heads.

"Hold still."

"......?"

After walking for a while, Reinhardt stopped Ellen for some reason and brushed the snow off her shoulders and head.

As she turned to walk away, Ellen glanced at Reinhardt's shoulder.

There, too, there was snow.

He brushes the snow off his own shoulders and head, not bothering to shake it off.

Probably, I didn't even think about it.

She can see the snow on Ellen's head and shoulders, but she doesn't realize that it's also on her shoulders.

That's why we look at Reinhardt, who can't shake it off, and we look at Ellen.

"......Why?"

"......."

Ellen remained still, brushing the snow off Reinhardt's shoulders and out of his hair, this time by herself.

Then Ellen says, in a low voice.

"You're an idiot."

"......Suddenly?"

Reinhardt, suddenly dumbfounded, walked alongside Ellen as she walked ahead of him.

Reinhardt is a weird guy.

"You're weird."

"I hear ...... a lot."

Ellen walks still.

"I thought he was weird from the beginning, and I still think he's weird."

"......Yes."

Ellen blows out a white-hot breath and takes a sip of her lemon tea.

I'd been carrying it around for a while, so it had cooled down a bit.

"But the weirdness of when I first thought you were weird, and the weirdness of when I think you're weird now....... are so different."

"......."

Reinhardt was weird, bumping into things and arguing.

But over time, as I've gotten to know more of Reinhardt, he's been a very strange man in a different sense than he was then.

"I wish you weren't such a weirdo. I sometimes think that, but......."

Ellen exhales with a sigh and looks at Reinhardt.

"If you weren't weird, this wouldn't be happening."

Ellen muttered to herself. Ellen looks away from Reinhardt and back to the road ahead.

"Today, did you even want to come?"

"Of course......."

"Don't be vague."

Ellen stops walking and turns Reinhardt around.

Then he looks Reinhardt in the eye.

Ellen looks to Reinhardt for clarification.

It's a relationship filled with vague language.

I've always said that when something becomes certain, something breaks. Reinhard and Ellen had a strange relationship, one that was both something and nothing at the same time.

I was trying to make something clear, but Reinhardt couldn't make it, so it got fuzzy.

But I wanted to make sure this was clear.

Ellen looked Reinhardt straight in the eye, as if to say don't dodge the answer.

It's a straightforward question.

"Did you miss me today?"

"......."

I'm not going to count the ones that didn't make it.

I won't even ask what happened.

I won't speak of my sorrows and grief anymore.

Ellen demands a definitive answer.

"Uh."

Reinhardt nods.

But Ellen has no intention of stopping there.

"How much?"

Reinhardt stares at Ellen as he asks the question.

Reinhardt thought about it for a while, but finally decided he couldn't win.

Open your mouth like a confession.

"......I'm going to regret for the rest of my life that I didn't go today."

"......."

Lifetime.

Regrets.

Regret is not a nice word, but the combination of those two words has a pretty good ring to it.

Lifetime.

You are someone who can influence my entire life.

It was as if I'd been told that.

"Do you want me to show you?"

"Uh."

Ellen couldn't help but laugh at Reinhardt's immediate response.

I looked so dumbfounded.

You really wanted to come.

You really had no choice but to come.

You don't need a bunch of excuses and reasons.

A blurted out answer and a dumbfounded look at the word show.

That look wiped out every last bit of resentment in Ellen.

\* \* \*

They returned to the dorm.

"That's weird."

-......How weird is that?

"I can't wear it alone."

-a....... That's right.

In her room, Ellen tries to put on the dress she wore today by herself and makes a mess of it.

I couldn't even tighten the corset by myself, so the dress looked like it had been thrown on and off.

I told her I'd show her, but on the way home, she realized something was wrong.

It's the dress she helped Riana put on in the first place. So on the way home, Ellen realized she couldn't wear it at all.

Thinking it would work, she went back to her dorm and tried to crawl into the dress she wore today in her room, only to realize it was impossible.

It wasn't Reinhardt who was swayed by the atmosphere, but Ellen.

I couldn't put on makeup and my hair was all out of place.

It's not something you can wear alone.

It's dawn, and you can't wake up Riana, who's probably asleep.

You look in the mirror and see yourself in a mess, your clothes literally draped over your body.

This could not be shown.

"......."

I thought I'd see how it worked out, but this is what I ended up with.

Doesn't show.

Ellen was needlessly upset.

Decomposition.

I slammed my foot down on the floor.

-Thump! Thump!

-Why, what's wrong?!

"No."

In a fit of frustration, Ellen ripped off her dress, which she had worn only loosely at best.

Of course, dresses are hard to put on and hard to take off.

-Bam!

Eventually, Ellen tripped and fell.

"......."

-What's going on?

Episode 325.

Ellen changed back into her sweatpants.

Ellen was furious as hell.

The whole situation made me so grumpy that I couldn't stand it.

Most of all, I was annoyed that Reinhardt seemed to find the situation amusing when I couldn't show him what I wanted to show him.

It's so much fun to watch her promise to show you how she looks in a dress, only to realize she can't put it on by herself.

But Ellen was a little curious.

Reinhardt's response to her statement about not being able to wear the dress alone has been more of a "I guess so" than a "why".

As if you've ever tried it on.

Of course, that's never going to happen.

Anyway, Reinhardt seemed to understand that it was inevitable that he couldn't show it.

They were now in a restaurant.

It's been a while since we've had a midnight snack with each other since we were both busy during the festivities.

"What do you want to eat?"

So Reinhardt brought Ellen to the diner, saying, "Let's do something about this.

"Beef stew."

Frustrated, Ellen orders something that takes too long and is a pain in the ass.

"Yeah."

But Reinhard nodded obediently, as if he would do anything for her today. Ellen was a little surprised; she'd expected him to say no, but he didn't.

Ellen watches Reinhardt as he walks into the kitchen and starts preparing something.

I wanted to show it to you, but I couldn't.

But does it really matter?

-plump

Ellen smiles as she watches Reinhardt begin to chop. Ellen watches Reinhard as he cooks.

-Haaaaaahhh.

It wasn't long before a sound from the hallway made her turn her head.

-Uh, Ellen?

A very tired-looking Herriot caught sight of himself as he walked down the hall. She was working late in the magic lab.

Spotting Ellen sitting in the dining room, Harriet slowly approaches her.

"So far, so good......."

She was about to say something, but her eyes widened as she looked toward the kitchen.

"Reinhardt?"

A moment of panic.

Ellen could see Herriot's eyes widen.

"Hey!"

-Uh, huh?

Herriot strode briskly to the kitchen and called out in a cheerful voice.

-You! Where have you been today?

-u....... Uh? What. Go, why all of a sudden?

-Where have you been running around without talking to me? Why didn't you come to the contest?

-u....... Oh, no. That. That....... you know?

-What, say it fast!

-there was....... was.......

-What's your excuse, you asshole!

-Ah, ah, ah, ah! Why are you hitting me? Why are you hitting me? I, I'm holding a knife, huh? I'm holding a knife....... Aah!

-You bad, bad, bastard, ah!

Ellen watches as Herriot slaps Reinhardt on the back, red in the face. Ellen watches in disbelief.

I should be the one who's angry.

Instead, Herriot's face was bright red and he was fuming.

-Wow, you're really doing this with power! I've been getting hit a lot lately, so I'm just going to go ahead and hit you. Show me some strength, huh?

-Here....... Shouldn't we be thankful that we're only using our strength? Make it your specialty? Make it your specialty? Make it your specialty? Stick with me?

-Ah, no....... That's not right.......

-Yes! You're right! It doesn't hurt when I hit you anyway!

-Gye, won't it hurt if I keep hitting you?

Herriot is furious.

Perhaps Herriot should have hoped Reinhardt wouldn't come. Ellen thinks so, but Herriot is in the midst of a heartfelt tirade against Reinhardt.

That's weird.

Ellen could see why Harriet was so upset.

As much as Harriet cares about Reinhardt, she cares about the hurt he's caused her today.

So, instead of congratulating her on being crowned Miss Temple, Harriet gave her a consoling hug.

Ellen wasn't too upset.

Herriot is being angry on Ellen's behalf.

I thought it was funny to see.

Thanks again.

And I'm sorry.

I'm so sorry.

Ellen laughed.

Smiling.

I don't know why I have tears in my eyes.

Ellen laughed, silently stealing a tear.

\* \* \*

"I hit you a little bit and now you're just going to eat me, is that what you developed that for?"

"Of course."

Soon the three of them were sitting around a pot of beef stew in the center of the room. By chance, Harriet joined them, but Ellen didn't mind.

"It's snowing."

Herriot says, looking out the dining room window. You've just gotten back from a long day of snowball fights, but Herriot's been locked away in his magic lab.

"Do you want to go out on the terrace and eat?"

Herriot could picture eating a warm stew while watching a snowy landscape.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen is a bit of a romantic.

"Sure."

It didn't seem like a bad idea, so they went out to the restaurant terrace and set the pot of stew on a table there.

The night breeze was chilly, but not too cold. The three of us sit at the terrace table, scooping up bowls of stew and nibbling at it.

It's not heavy snow, but it's light snow.

It's been down for a while, so there's quite a pile of it now.

"I remember making a snowman."

Herriot said, and smiled at the memory.

"It wasn't a man, it was a giant."

"You're an idiot anyway."

Ellen made human eyes and Herriot made a giant snow giant.

She reenters the castle, Epiax, and realizes that it is haunted. Herriot's face brightens as if he's suddenly remembered, and he glances back and forth between Reinhard and Ellen.

"But you know what's funny?"

"No? I don't know?"

"Can you refute that with a straight face, it's so annoying!"

"Why are you so cranky lately, it's an illness, too?"

Herriot blushed at Reinhardt's criticism.

"Seriously, do you have to scratch someone's insides once a day, what's wrong with you?"

"......Technically, it's you, but it's only you, not me. I can't be anything but you for this."

"Don't use that word like that, it's so annoying!"

Harriet's lips quiver. The look on Reinhardt's face when he's being mean to Herriot is intoxicating to watch. Even though he's not doing it to her, sometimes it makes her fists clench.

"So what's so funny?"

"I don't know, you pissed me off and I forgot!"

Herriot grunted and scooped up a spoonful of stew.

"!!!"

Naturally, having eaten the very hot stew without letting it cool properly, Harriet's eyes glazed over and she couldn't spit it out, flailing her arms up and down and stomping her feet.

"Spit it out! What are you doing?"

"!!"

Reinhardt gave her a pathetic look, and Harriet swallowed hard, not daring to spit out her food in the dignity of an archduchess.

"The roof of my mouth is gone......."

Herriot's mouth hung open in disbelief.

"You must be hot, have something cold."

"What are you doing, getting me some water....... Hey. What, what are you doing......."

"Something cold."

Herriot paled as he watched Reinhardt shovel the snow from the terrace railing into bundles for something cold to drink.

"What are you doing....... No, no, no, you can't be....... No way......."

Herriot has such a thing.

I can do the math in my head about what crazy things Reinhardt is trying to do.

Still, I'm Nande.

There were times when I didn't react at all because I didn't think he would go that far with me.

And Reinhardt is a madman who does it without reservation.

-Pak!

"Bam!"

Herriot let out a shriek of horror as a clump of snow was planted squarely in his mouth.

"Cool, right?"

"You, Gee, now. You, Jeezy. Give me....... What....... to me?"

I can't even get mad for a second when I'm doing the unthinkable, and this is my match.

For a while, of course.

With a trembling hand, Herriot wiped the snow from the corner of his mouth and reached out to Reinhardt, who was blushing bright red.

"I'm dying!"

-Bam!

"Eek!"

-Pull!

A blue line of energy appeared on Herriot's forearm, and the shockwave sent Reinhardt flying off the terrace and crashing to the ground.

\* \* \*

"He must be crazy!"

"No, if it's hot, you have to put something cold in it. Isn't that right?"

After bouncing off the ground floor and clinging to the terrace railing, Reinhardt sat back down.

Herriot brushed off Reinhardt's snow-covered clothes, despite his nerves.

"By the way, if it's hot, spit it out. Do you force yourself to eat it or not?"

"Because I'm not from the streets like everyone else, and I was taught to live with dignity."

"Really? Did you just say ewww! Is it classy to say "ewww!" while talking shit?"

"G....... You....... What the fuck? You, you what....... Ha. Gee, real....... Real....... And when was I ever like you!"

When Reinhardt mimicked what Herriot had just done with an exaggerated twisting of his body, Herriot got even more high and began to whimper again.

When they were together, they could talk for hours on end about nothing. Their ramblings had no nutritional value, but it was a great way to pass the time.

Eventually, after a while, they both got tired of each other and started eating the stew in silence.

"Pretty......."

Herriot muttered to himself as he looked out over the snowy landscape.

"Thank you."

"I didn't say that to you....... Whoa, whoa....... It's not gonna work. I'm not getting hooked."

It's a shame that after a while, as if he's developed an immunity, he'll react to anything you throw at him.

Festive night.

It wasn't that fancy.

In the end, it's just the three of us sitting around eating beef stew on a quiet, snowy night.

This happens all the time, it's not a special occasion.

But of course, Ellen knows that these moments don't last forever. There will come a day when she won't be able to do this anymore.

Then, remembering back to that time.

You'll think that every day we spent together was special.

Ellen has a vague idea.

I'm just saying, maybe that's all there is to it.

As it has been, and will continue to be.

I wonder if it's enough to keep me going.

Not greedy, not wanting more. Ellen finds herself happy enough as it is.

No need to get any closer.

Maybe I just need to get further away.

"Hey, get me some water."

"Zee, are you asking me....... or something?"

"Then who are you?"

"Don't tell me what to do!"

"What the hell, you're just gobbling up everything I've done for you and you can't fetch water?"

"Ew, ew, it should float!"

Reinhardt must be the only person in the world who could be so disrespectful to a grand duchess. Her reaction to him was cute, even if Ellen was watching.

Grand Duchess.

As she thought about it, Ellen remembered a question she'd forgotten.

"By the way, I have a question for you."

Ellen shakes her head in disbelief.

"Any questions?"

Harriet grabbed her water bottle and stared at Ellen as if she had a question.

"How did Harriet's parents know about Reinhardt?"

"Ah."

"Oh....... That, that......."

The subtlety of their reactions made Ellen shake her head.

\* \* \*

Ellen nodded as Reinhard relayed the details to her.

"Oh....... The senior?"

"Uh."

Ellen knew about Adriana's abrupt departure, but she didn't know the details.

Of course, Reinhardt didn't explain the situation either, just that he had to go to the Duchy of St. Thuan for something, and on his way back, he stopped by the White Palace of Arnaria for a warp gate issue, and they've been acquainted ever since.

Reinhardt's complexion darkened slightly at the mention of Adriana's name, but Ellen could only assume it was worry.

Herriot turns to Ellen with a gleeful look on his face.

"Isn't he a weirdo, even if he's in the same royal class as me? You think you can just show up at my palace, knock on my door, and ask for priority access to the warp gate?"

"......Yes."

Arnaria is not the kind of place you'd go to a friend's house, and even if it were, it would be rude to show up at that hour.

But it wasn't a friend's house, it was a palace in a country.

"No, when I was absent without telling you....... I thought you guys were going to try and kill me......."

Reinhardt pleads in a small voice.

Ellen was even more surprised that the Grand Duke opened the door and greeted the entire family.

It was a bit of a surprise to Ellen that Adriana's problem was involved, though she had a feeling it was something else.

Now that I think about it, Ellen had a pretty good idea of when Reinhardt had last been to the Duchy of St. Thuan.

Still, I can't believe I traveled that far in a day.

Ellen found Reinhardt's behavior mysterious. With their questions resolved, the three returned to their stew.

"Uh, over there......."

But then Herriot spotted something in the landscape outside on the terrace and pointed it out.

First-year dorms are on the first floor.

And because it was a terrace, I had a clearer view of the outside.

Where Herriot pointed, Ellen could see the man who had ended the day.

"......his senior."

And it gets even weirder.

The senior I just mentioned who dropped out was there.

Adriana.

Olivia was walking with Adriana to the Royal Class dormitory.

Reinhardt jerked out of his seat and looked at them both.

Some strange emotion flashed through Reinhardt's eyes, and Ellen didn't know what it was.

Olivia and Adriana couldn't help but make eye contact with the three of them watching them from the terrace.

-Ah, Reinhardt.......

Olivia Ranze.

-Junior.......

Adriana.

-Mian, I'm a little busy right now. Let's talk later.

Before Reinhardt could say anything, Olivia pulled Adriana along with her and hurried toward the dormitory entrance.

Herriot and Ellen shook their heads at the sight, and Reinhardt sat back down.

The tournament ends with a runner-up.

Miss Temple didn't even get to participate.

He returned to the temple in the middle of the night with Adriana, who had abruptly dropped out.

"......My sister, what happened today?"

"......Yes."

Reinhardt takes a sip of water.

"......I'll have to ask him later."

Reinhardt said, and took a sip of water.

That's how Ellen sees Reinhardt.

Reinhardt traveled all the way to the Duchy of St. Thuan when he heard that Adriana was dropping out.

He's not going to sit still for Reinhardt's later comments.

Reinhardt is not that kind of guy.

Ellen sees Reinhardt staring in the direction Adriana and Olivia went.

Reinhardt is on to something.

I didn't intentionally try to figure it out, but I know Reinhardt too well.

Ellen naturally realized that.

Episode 326.

The next day.

There was a huge uproar in the ecliptic.

Rumors of a battle in the southern outskirts of the ecliptic last night had come in quickly.

Monstrous creatures, presumably demons, have been flying through the night sky, and destructive spells have been cast on a large enough scale to affect the weather.

"There's a demon!"

Naturally, such rumors quickly find their way to the temple.

I watched as Kono Lint rambled on about rumors he'd picked up on the street.

"Demons? What kind of demons, all of a sudden?"

"Demons showed up in the southern part of the ecliptic yesterday, and it was a mess."

"What's going on?"

"I didn't hear the details either, they just said there were demons......."

It happened last night, so we don't know the details yet. The children were understandably shaken by the sudden news of a demon in the middle of their festivities.

It's breakfast time, and Ellen is looking at me with a serious look on her face.

"Could it be the same demons?"

"...... Probably."

"What is it this time?"

"Well......."

Ellen, Harriet, Riana, and all of their classmates were dumbfounded by the news of a demon out of nowhere.

I can't do that unless I want to be suspected.

It's a leap to think I was involved in that raid, even if I didn't tell you what I did yesterday.

It makes no sense to suspect that your friend might be a demon in the first place.

At best, Ellen would be suspicious of the possibility of being involved in a crime through the Rotary Club.

Some things just don't make sense, so they go unsuspected.

It's clear that Charlotte and Bertus are going to be busy again, and the bottom line is this.

A state of emergency would be declared in the ecliptic, and the festival would be unsustainable.

\* \* \*

As I suspected, Charlotte was gone, and neither Saviolin Tana, who had been acting as interim governess, nor I, who had returned to the palace, were to be found in the dormitory.

The slaughter of elite paladins near the ecliptic makes sense.

If they had attacked the ecliptic instead of the southern ecliptic, the loss of life would have been staggering.

If even a single top-tier destructive spell had been sent into the ecliptic during a time of high population density, tens of thousands of units would have been killed.

So, the feast is over.

It's time for everyone to go home.

Top floor of a dorm, empty frat house.

I was sitting there with Olivia and Adriana.

Last night, Adriana said she stayed in Olivia's room. Normally, this would be impossible, but since it was a festival, she was able to sneak into the temple.

"How are you, junior......?"

"Yeah, it's just me......."

Adriana made the excuse that she was just playing, but her dark complexion gave her a look that she couldn't hide that something was wrong.

For Olivia, it wasn't much different.

I tried to use Adriana as bait to lure Olivia out.

He must have been traumatized. He was already growing distrustful of people of faith, and the monastic life was supposed to erase that, but even there he was met with further disappointment.

Adriana is not in her right mind.

I saved Olivia and Adriana, but they don't know it.

I don't want to make a big deal out of it, and I can't.

Olivia's expression was a mixture of sullenness and apology. She's probably thinking that I cheated on her yesterday.

Olivia looks at Adriana.

I could see Adriana nodding her head slightly, as if to ask for approval.

"Did you hear about the demon attack....... about the demon raid?"

"I don't know the details, but, yeah."

Olivia trusts me.

"We were there when the demons attacked....... We were there."

Instead of waiting for an excuse, Olivia seemed to want to tell me everything.

\* \* \*

I was embarrassed to hear Olivia say something I already knew. It was harder than I thought to feign surprise.

Of course, it wasn't a long story.

The abbot of the Artouan monastery where Adriana was staying was a member of a secret religious order called the Order of the Nameless, and had turned himself in to Leverier Lance.

Even the abbot was fooled. He had no idea that Adriana would be used as bait.

Adriana had to be dragged away, she said, because she knew that if she said anything wrong on the spot, she would endanger herself and the abbot.

Predictably, the Crusader leader managed to lure Olivia out, and she headed to the field as soon as she received the letter.

While there, I was arguing with Reverie Ranze, when suddenly demons appeared.

"The strange thing is....... is that those demons saved us....... saved us......."

Confusion was written all over Olivia and Adriana's faces.

As she was being taken away by a frightening, grotesque-looking demon, Olivia was thinking about the battle after Adriana was safe.

But strangely enough, the demon left them far away from the wastewater plant and walked away.

Olivia and Adriana were forced to flee in panic when they saw a massive magical attack on the monastery.

"I don't understand ......."

Adriana and Olivia nodded at my words.

It was hard to keep my head above water and pretend to be surprised. However, the situation was serious enough that it wasn't hard to take it seriously.

I'm glad you told me. I can discuss alternatives with you.

"I don't know about anything else, but I think it's best not to tell anyone."

"......We think so, too."

"I don't know why the demons did what they did, but once it's known, we might be accused of being in league with them....... If that's the case, there shouldn't be any paladins left alive......."

There are no survivors. Some may have seen the demons flying in the distance, but those caught up in the battle were strictly instructed to leave no survivors, and any fleeing paladins were taken care of.

The rumors currently circulating in the ecliptic aren't from people who saw the battle firsthand, but rather eyewitness accounts from afar of demons flying and massive magical attacks.

It is not yet known to the civilian population that it was paladins who were involved in the battle.

"I'm not sure about that."

Olivia and Adriana don't know exactly what the battle will look like, so it's no wonder they're saying this.

"But for now, let's assume that the paladins were wiped out on the spot."

But there are no witnesses to the battle. I look at Adriana.

"Will others realize that there were seniors there?"

It's a problem if nameless members of the Order in other parts of the world know that Adriana and Olivia were there yesterday.

If a group of demons attacked and killed everyone in the room, and they asked you how you're still alive, you don't have an excuse.

"I'm not sure......."

Olivia says, biting her lip.

"I don't know about anyone else, but....... The abbot knows....... knows that I was with a group of nameless monks......."

Adriana says with a dark look on her face.

The man who handed Adriana over to Leviathan himself.

We don't know, but knowing that the nameless order was wiped out in a demonic attack would cast doubt on Adriana's survival.

You will inevitably face the question of how did you survive when everyone else was dead?

"......, I don't think you should go back to the monastery."

"...... Of course."

The inexplicable situation of being protected by demons is bad enough for law enforcement, wherever they may be.

So, if she chooses to remain silent, Adriana should not return to the monastery.

Adriana would rather be known to have died on the spot.

We should be grateful that this world is less developed in terms of communication and media.

The news of the Zodiac is slow to reach the monastery of Artouan in the Duchy of Saint Thuan. It would take a very long time for the news to reach the provincial cities of the Duchy of Saint Thuan.

There's no real-time information sharing, so Adriana doesn't have to live in hiding, but she'll have to live a quiet life far away from public power and influence.

"I don't think it's a good idea for you to stay at the Temple, so you should come with me for a while, I can find you a place to stay."

Rotary Club headquarters.

We should leave Adriana under Loyar's protection for a while and think about her whereabouts.

"Junior how?"

"...... Really?"

Neither of them know that I belong to an organization called the Rotary Club.

"I don't want to bother explaining it, so I guess it's just that."

"......Yes. Thanks, junior."

I didn't feel the need to brag about my affiliation with a criminal, if not criminal, organization, so neither of them know my background.

When I think about it, all I know about my connection to the Rotary Club is Harriet and Ellen and the Prince and the Princess.

And the Ganodab triplets who made fun of me for being a beggar.

"Let's move."

Keeping Adriana in the temple longer is not a good idea.

I immediately led the two of them out of the temple.

\* \* \*

The atmosphere in the ecliptic was turbulent.

People were hustling and bustling to get somewhere.

-Demons have appeared.......

-I need to get back.

-The gate queue is backed up, and it's a mess.

-Don't you think the demons are attacking the ecliptic too?

-Maybe.

Rumors of a demonic presence in the southern ecliptic had already spread.

The horse-drawn trains were even more crowded during the festive season, making it impossible to consider them as a mode of transportation in the first place.

"I'll have to walk."

"Yes."

"I guess so."

There was no such fuss.

This is not the crowd that wandered around the ecliptic during the festival.

With the massive rush to get out of the ecliptic as quickly as possible, there was a commotion near the massive warp gate, not to mention the horsepower train.

-Please join the queue, there is no such thing as priority!

There were far more troops than usual controlling the gate queues, and even the small and medium warp gates were overcrowded.

-Let's go off the ecliptic and come back when it's quiet.

-Yes.

There seemed to be a significant number of people looking to move away from the ecliptic.

When the commotion died down, it seemed to be thinking about returning to the ecliptic and traveling home via a giant warp gate.

Yesterday's mayhem had every tourist in the ecliptic panicking.

I broke out in a cold sweat.

It was scary to realize that so many people were affected by my actions.

I killed Leviathan.

I still believe it was necessary, but it felt like the world was literally being turned upside down by my actions.

Demons.

And the devil.

I realized how much influence it had in this no man's land.

The Demon War is over.

After that, people would have had to gradually forget about demons and devils.

-The Demon King....... He's back.......

-Don't be an asshole, asshole!

-The demon is avenging himself! He's not dead yet! Artorius didn't kill him!

-No...... it won't.......

But because of my behavior yesterday, people were making assumptions and turning them into assumptions.

The devil is not dead.

Or, the next great demon is taking revenge.

Either that, or the surviving remnants of demons will continue to wreak havoc on the continent.

Many myths take on a life of their own and multiply.

Fear paralyzes people's rationality.

If the demons were truly seeking revenge, they should have attacked the ecliptic or the imperial palace, not the wasteland south of the ecliptic.

But no one talks about it.

-If the Devil is indeed resurrected....... Who kills the devil?

I was just worried that someone would have to kill the new demon for me, and who that would be.

Adriana and Olivia follow me wordlessly. As the ones who were saved by the demons, they should be the ones feeling the most confused by this situation.

\* \* \*

This took quite a bit of time since we were traveling on foot.

It would take more than a day for people to ebb and flow out of the crowded ecliptic.

The gated side was crowded, and the other side was relatively deserted.

"But why....... Why did the demons....... Crusader Knights?"

"......don't know."

At Adriana's question, Olivia shook her head in disbelief.

They don't know why the demons saved them, and they don't know what their purpose was. It's too strange to even speculate.

It's not out of the question to speculate that the man walking ahead of you is actually the son of the Devil, and that you're raiding an unnamed order of monks instead of the Crusaders because you've used your minions to save them.

"The demons attacked the Crusaders last time."

"Yes....... That's right."

"I wonder if it's a vendetta......."

Adriana doesn't know it, but Olivia knows the truth about the last raid.

The corruption and depravity of the Crusaders, including their demonic captives.

I know the demonic attack was to free succubus prisoners. They're not attacking a nameless order, they're taking revenge on the former leader of the Crusader Knights, Reverie Lance.

You don't have to go there. The leader of the Crusader Legion, Revere Lance, is a war hero of the Demon War, and as such, an enemy of the demons.

He's out of power and weakened. So it makes perfect sense for Leviathan to attack at a time when he's out of power and weakened.

"Is the plural......."

Olivia's reasoning is logical in its own way.

Olivia understands that what happened yesterday was a raid to kill Revere Lance, not a nameless order.

Although the reality is anything but.

If Olivia can interpret the demons' intentions in that way, I'll be happy.

Of course, even if you think so, it's still a strange thing to have rescued Adriana and Olivia. Olivia murmurs, as if realizing something.

"It's a leap, but......."

"What is it?"

Olivia says, looking at me and Adriana.

"If the demons....... If you did what you did yesterday to get back at the Crusaders....... If they left us alone because....... because we were outsiders?"

"Is that ......?"

Adriana tilted her head at Olivia's comment.

"No, you don't. The place itself is inhospitable to outsiders....... The only reason they took us out is because....... The only reason I can think of is to prevent non-targets from being harmed......."

Olivia's reasoning is reversed. The attack came first and the rescue came later.

There's no reason to raid the Crusaders if your goal is to harm humans. So the intent is to attack the Crusaders.

But then you get this inference that they found outsiders there, and they didn't want to get them involved, so they pulled them out.

"Do demons....... care about such things?"

To the demons, all humans are enemies. Adriana didn't seem to understand what Olivia was saying.

It's almost as if the demons are good.

It's common knowledge that demons hate humans unconditionally and want to kill them. Naturally, that's what Adriana thinks.

But the demons did save them.

"So....... is a little weird."

"......I don't know."

Neither Adriana nor Olivia.

Overcoming deeply ingrained preconceptions seemed difficult.

Of course, saving those two came first, so whatever Olivia's reasoning is, it must be wrong.

So Olivia was left wondering what the heck happened yesterday and thinking it would be cute to write an impression.

Episode 327.

Rotary Club headquarters are located in the southern ecliptic.

There are very few people in the neighborhood, and the property is quite large, so if you stay quiet, you're unlikely to have anyone come by, and it's not the best place to live completely hidden, but if you're determined, you can live completely unnoticed.

"You want me to take care of people?"

"Yes. She's my senior. Adriana."

"Oh, hello......."

Adriana looked at Loyar and ducked her head.

Adriana may not have grown up pretty, but she's not from the Zodiac, and she kept to herself until her time in the Temple, so it's unlikely you've ever heard of someone with the name Irine's Hound.

Olivia was the same way, so she was seeing Loyar for the first time.

It may not be a black organization, but the workings of these places are only known to those in the know.

They're both looking at the Rotary Club boss with the gray hair for the first time in their lives.

Even in his human form, Loyar is a great man who, because of the way he carries himself, is a beast even when he is still.

So Olivia and Adriana both froze slightly at the sight of a type of human they'd never seen before.

He was even more surprised when he realized that I had a boss like this.

In fact, Loyard is one of the people responsible for making the ecliptic so noisy right now.

The mastermind of the Paladin Raid. Demon Valier.

Accomplice. Lycanthrope Loyar.

Of course they don't recognize each other. Sarkegar is the one who rescued them, so Loyardo doesn't recognize them either.

"I'm going to need to stay here for a while for work, is that okay?"

"......Why not?"

Loyar looked Adriana up and down, and she flinched under his gaze as if she'd been electrocuted.

"I don't have a room, but I can make one up, and there's only you guys here."

The members of the club have gotten better, so they're walking around looking like people. Only Loyar, the boss, is still living like a beggar, even though things have gotten better.

Still, Loyar was worried about the rough and tumble people who had seen it all.

"Don't worry, I'm more than capable of getting ahead."

"Yeah, whatever. A Temple-trained kid might look sloppy, but he's got some fists."

Loyar didn't bother to ask what was going on, because he knew he was involved in yesterday's events. I looked at Adriana.

As Loyar said, it's entirely possible that the place could be unbearable for Adriana.

I don't actually know what everyone in my organization is like.

"If you're not comfortable here, I can find you somewhere else."

"Oh, no, it's okay....... Thanks, Reinhard."

Unable to be more indebted, Adriana nodded rather than ask where she was and what she was doing.

Loyaar seemed to understand what Adriana meant by keeping quiet here.

"Hmmm....... Where should I give the room......."

Loyar seemed to consider for a moment. He looks like he's sick of the world.

When I said there were no vacancies, but I could create one, it sounded like I was kicking someone out who was doing well.

Isn't this a bit of a sorry state of affairs?

Loyar seemed to consider for a moment, then motioned for Adriana to follow him and opened the door to the back of his office.

-delay

"Write here."

"......?"

"?"

Loyar rattled off what was obviously his room. Olivia, Adriana, and even I were surprised by the suddenness of the decision.

"That....... That....... I don't know what to call him, but....... sister....... room, isn't it......?"

"......Sister?"

"Oh, that....... Well, excuse me, but how do you......."

His eyes widening at the mention of big sister, Loyar grabbed Adriana's hand and dragged her into the room.

"No, you have to write it here."

"Is that ......?"

"Let me know if you need anything, and I'll get it ready for you."

With that, Loyar placed his hands on both of Adriana's shoulders.

"And I'll always call you sister."

After seeing Ellen, whom he always called Auntie, Loyar seemed to like Adriana, whom he initially called Sister.

"Oh...... yes. My sister."

"Heh."

I thought I could see Loyar's non-existent tail wagging furiously.

Apparently, listening to Ellen yell at me all this time has sent my training in a weird direction.

\* \* \*

Ellen's been scratching and clawing all this time, and Loyar's fallen victim to his sister's words, but a good thing is a good thing.

I was nervous about leaving her alone in the middle of nowhere, but it was for the best. Adriana doesn't need to be out in the open right now.

Drop Adriana off at the club headquarters and head back.

"What is the world coming to......."

Olivia says, staring blankly at the sky.

"I didn't mean to imply that once the demon is dead, everything will be fine."

"......."

"Still, I thought it would stop so many people from being dragged off to war and dying for nothing......."

Having seen the devastation of war firsthand, Olivia knew better than anyone how terrifying it can be.

Olivia doesn't know about the revolutionary forces.

However, I knew that the Five Great Houses and the Empire were fanning the flames of war by setting up another confrontation.

"I'd rather the devil not be dead, and humans not be killing each other."

Olivia seemed to hope that the rumors of the people gossiping about the demon were true, to some extent.

It's always the outside that stops the division. Olivia seemed to have self-righteously conceded the need for a demon to some extent.

"That's weird. Don't go telling anyone that I said this."

Olivia smiles at me.

"What's the point of me telling you that?"

Adriana is in the care of the Rotary Club for now, but she'll have to find another home soon. The ecliptic is not absolutely safe, after all.

Far, far away.

For example, if you're in the Edina Archipelago, where Airi is located, you can rest easy.

Even if I do send them there, how do I explain that I have ties to that faraway island nation? I didn't think today was going to be convincing in the first place.

"Reinhard, what the hell were you doing there today, anyway?"

Olivia had the same question and asked me about the Rotary Club.

"It's like a homecoming from the streets."

I explained, briefly, about the Rotary Club.

On how he got here from a beggar organization.

"I see....... That's good."

Olivia smiles when I tell her that the beggars under the bridge are now living in a nice building with a roof over their heads.

The problem is that the boss, Loyar, is still an asshole.

"I'm also surprised, Reinhard, that you're involved in some sort of criminal organization."

I've been involved with them in the past, and the Thieves' Guild isn't without its connections, but I didn't correct Olivia on that idea.

In fact, we're now officially doing business with the Merchant Guild, so it's kind of an imperial thing behind the scenes.

"Hah......."

Olivia sighed anxiously.

She's got a lot on her mind, Adriana's problems, her own problems. With Levi Lance dead, I doubt anyone would try to make Olivia Lance a success, but it was a possibility. Throw in the demons, and it's going to be complicated.

And again.

Olivia didn't end up winning the tournament or being crowned Miss Temple.

Needing money, Olivia got caught up in all sorts of things and missed out on everything she wanted.

She's the one who's had the worst luck at the festival. She's probably stressed about a lot of other things, but this money thing is really bothering her.

We can't solve all of Olivia's problems.

However, I wanted to empower Olivia a little bit.

"You know what?"

"What do you mean?"

"A nursery school sponsored by a senior."

"ah......."

"That's on the ecliptic, right?"

"Ah....... Yeah. Right."

"Let's go there."

Olivia heard me and shook her head in exasperation.

"No, no, Reinhardt, you don't have to do that. It's my problem....... I don't need you to spend money......."

"Who's spending money?"

"......?"

He seemed to think I was going to pay for what he couldn't. Of course, it's natural to think that.

But alas, I'm not willing to spend the money.

"I'm not there to make a donation, just give me a tour."

"Huh? Ah....... Yeah."

Olivia hesitantly led the way.

\* \* \*

There are orphanages that Olivia personally sponsors.

First of all, it's not one.

He had been paying his pocket money to Leverier Ranze, but when his finances got tight, he had no way to pay.

This meant that Olivia was only supporting organizations that she could afford to support. She's not going to support everything she can afford.

Without Olivia's generous donations, the organization would not be able to operate.

"There are two other places besides here?"

"Yes."

I was standing in front of a nursery school building in the middle of nowhere on the eastern outskirts of the ecliptic.

It's not a crumbling building. But the building itself was old and the facilities were dilapidated.

However, the grounds were quite large, with children playing in a central clearing between three buildings.

The nursery was unfenced, so all the children could see us approaching.

-Huh? Sister!

-Sister's home!

-Olivia!

"Ah...... guys."

The children flocked to Olivia as she often did.

"Sis, my leg is healed!"

"Mmm, Billy. Glad to hear it."

Olivia was dealing with an onslaught of kids asking her about this and that.

Olivia seemed like someone who knew how to love children.

"Sis, she got in a fight with Will again! You have to punish her!"

"Really? You, dude. Didn't I tell you not to fight with your friends?"

"But she started it, and she said I don't have a mom, and I don't have a map!"

"I do, dumbass, it's just that my mom is busy and can't come!"

"You're kidding, I know where your mom's grave is!"

"This!"

"Hey, man, I told you not to say nasty things."

But even though their conversations are at a younger level, there are some things they say to each other that really mess with each other's minds, like this.......

That's right.

Kids tend to do padlips surprisingly easily.......

It was the first time I'd ever seen Olivia so stern, so calm, so loving in the midst of the children's verbal abuse.

I had a feeling it was going to be like that, but it was kind of exciting to see it actually look like that.

For a moment, I was overwhelmed by Olivia's sudden appearance.

They started to focus on me.

"But who is this brother?"

"Is that your sister's boyfriend?"

"Huh? Oh, no, no, no....... A junior. A close junior."

Olivia blushed and shook her head.

I thought he was going to be like, "Of course he's my boyfriend," but he was so shy, and I could tell.

Why does this guy have a different personality here.

"Sis, you like this guy, you're blushing."

"Huh? Huh? Oh, no. No, no, this guy. Do you want to make fun of your sister?"

When Olivia blurted out, the girls giggled and asked what was so great about it, and the boys started giving me the cold shoulder.

I can tell by the look in your eyes.

What are you, asshole?

It's a look that may or may not actually say this, but doesn't mean much.

"What's your brother?"

"You go to the temple too?"

"Are you a good fighter?"

Under the young eyes of the boys' enemy, I was embarrassed.

My classmates are already kids by my standards, and this is even worse.

I don't know about Olivia, but I don't like kids and I don't know how to handle them.

Children are too far away from me.

As I stare at them and say nothing, they start whispering.

-I don't think you're good at fighting.

-Scary.

-No, they don't fight like that.

Dizzy.

I didn't come here to watch the kids.

I wonder if it's just boys.

Girls whisper, too.

-He's totally my kind of guy.

-You're gonna live off your face? You're an asshole. You can see it. That's the kind of guy that sucks up a girl and throws her away? A man should have money. Money is everything.

-You might have a lot of money.

-No, that's just natural dog hair. That's what contemplation does.

-You'd marry a bald fat old man if you had enough money, wouldn't you?

-That's good, I'm not going to die soon, and I'll pay for it.

-......Huh?

-And then you're going to stab one of those dudes in the face, you idiot.

-......Getting married again?

-Why can't I do it three times?

Kids who are exceptionally precocious talk about things that even my peers won't talk about.

What are these?

-But he's so my kind of guy.......

-Come on, you're a guy.

-She says she doesn't like him.

-Ugh, asshole. A lie, of course.

What is it?

What are they watching, listening to, and learning that's going to make them so stupid already?

I'm not here to play. I try to ignore the whispers as much as possible and watch the kids.

Tattered clothes.

It wasn't rags, but it was enough to tell me that I wasn't in an environment where I had a lot of extra clothes.

All in all, the kids dried up.

His nutritional status is also judged to be poor.

I realized that it was definitely an orphanage with poor conditions.

It's understandable that Olivia would want to keep her donations up at all costs, as even a small decrease in donations will have an impact.

"Hey, Olivia, student. It's been a while."

"Ah, yes. Sir."

As the children gathered, a middle-aged woman in a white dress stepped out into the clearing to greet Olivia.

He seemed like a nice guy, and after greeting Olivia, his eyes naturally turned to me.

"Ah, Reinhard. Greetings. This is Ms. Bell, the headmistress of the Cradle of Sunshine."

"Oh, hello. Are you a friend of Olivia's student......?"

"Yes, it's called Reinhardt."

She held out her hand to me, and I took it. It was a soft hand.

Obviously, you don't want to be alone here, so there were a few adults coming and going.

Ledger of the Cradle of Sunshine.

I don't like kids and I don't know how to deal with them. I don't know what to do with them. I'm lucky if it doesn't ring.

I'm not here for the kids.

I'm not here to make a donation.

I look at Olivia and say.

"Hey, why don't you take the kids over there?"

"......?"

"I need to talk to the director."

Olivia looked a little confused, but she herded the kids and headed the other way. Like the Pied Piper, when Olivia moved, the kids, boys and girls alike, followed.

A ledger who introduced herself as Belle.

"Ah, Mr. Reinhardt, is there something you want to talk to me about?"

"Yeah. Let's just. Let's go somewhere quiet."

This is not a story to tell in public, so I followed Ms. Bell's lead into the ledger room.

I didn't want anyone to hear it.

"What could it be, Mr. Reinhardt?"

In front of Ms. Bell, who had a nice smile on her face, I smirked.

"Explain that to me."

"Is that ......?"

"What hole are we supposed to shove the money down so the kids can look like that?"

After the Demon War, the imperial government immediately began to provide maximum support to the orphanage program for war orphans.

"We're spending so much money on our kids that we should be worried about their obesity."

Underfunded?

I know there's no way that could have happened to a nursery on the ecliptic, let alone anywhere else.

Episode 328.

You can't tell a person's goodness or evil from their appearance. The person in front of you who looks like he could crush an ant to death might actually be a demon who sucks the blood of children.

Ms. Bell looked genuinely perplexed.

"Mmm, I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't think I'd be able to say that out of the blue......."

The answer is, of course, no.

"I don't know what the child care funding looks like, and I don't know how that money is given out. I don't know. I'm not a part of it."

I let out a deep sigh.

After the victory in the Demon Kingdoms War, the government immediately started a support program for the many orphans that were created.

In fact, when I landed in the ecliptic, I seriously considered whether I should just go into a daycare or something. That's because I knew I would definitely have support in that area.

There was also a set-up where war orphans who showed promise would be accepted into the temple and educated for free, even if they weren't in the royal class.

So first of all, it doesn't make sense that there are nursery school kids in the zodiac with no money, no clothes, and bellyaches.

They're starving because they're missing a hole somewhere.

It's clear that things that should rightfully belong to the children are being siphoned off.

In the first place, the organizations that Olivia supports are all just funneling money down the middle and not really helping the people who need it.

So when I told Olivia about this, I didn't say anything about her sponsorship per se, but I knew there was something going on.

Speaking of which, I'm going to use my hands.

I crossed my arms over my chest as I looked at Ms. Bell, who had a world-weary look on her face.

I don't know how the nursery business works.

This person may actually be innocent.

"Teacher, I won first grade at this Temple tournament."

"How about that......?"

"The winners of the Temple Tournament have a chance to meet the Emperor."

"!"

I watch Mr. Bell's face go white. I smirk.

"What do you think would happen if you told the Emperor that this nursery was stealing your money and funneling it down another hole somewhere?"

"What the hell, do you think we're going to be okay with that?"

"As long as you're strong, you'll be fine."

"What are you talking about, student! I, I would never....... Me, not at all......."

Mr. Bell's complexion turned pale and he began to tremble. If I tell the Emperor this story, he may or may not give me instructions.

But the mere fact that I was talking scared him.

Sins that don't exist may be created, and sins that do exist are bound to be exposed.

Is this man of integrity?

Just by looking at that look on his face, like he was going to die right then and there, I just knew that he was playing with the kids' plates.

"Ha, student. Spare me just once. Ha, just once....... It won't happen again......."

-Pak!

"Ouch!"

I shook off Mr. Bell, who grabbed my crotch and hung on.

"Why do I get to decide if you live or die?"

I look down at the middle-aged woman, a good-natured-looking woman, lying on her stomach.

How many people have been fooled by good intentions?

I don't know what they did to the money that was supposed to go to the kids.

All of Olivia's money from selling her personal items would have been siphoned off in this way, and if she had won the prize money and donated it to the orphanage, it would have gone somewhere.

"That's Imperial law, not me."

Outside the window, the kids and Olivia were giggling and playing.

I was in the director's office, watching the director of the nursery kneel before me.

I didn't think Olivia needed to know this.

He didn't want Olivia to realize that what he'd been doing all this time was really just floating the wrong boat.

It's already hard enough.

I didn't want to make it harder for them.

\* \* \*

After watching Olivia and the kids play for a while, we left the nursery.

The kids were disappointed, and Ms. Bell didn't dare go anywhere near where I was.

"What did you talk about?"

"When does the support policy start, blah, blah, blah."

"Hmm, yeah? I hope it starts soon."

It had been in place for a while. We've been fooling backers like Olivia all this time with the excuse that we're not eligible for support.

I didn't think it was necessary to tell you this. I don't know how much of a void I would feel if I found out. I would feel betrayed.

You don't need to know the whole truth.

Sometimes you don't need to know the truth if it's going to hurt you, and Olivia has already been hurt too many times.

I may not be able to punish them myself, but I will be able to press charges. I don't know what punishment everyone will face, but I'm going to find out about the other orphanages Olivia sponsors.

If Olivia wants her children to be well fed and well clothed, it will happen.

"Reinhardt, you're a great guy, but the kids are really struggling."

"......I hate kids."

"Hmmm. I didn't realize you had a weakness like that."

"Why is disliking something a weakness?"

"A weakness, then. Normally I'd expect you to say something harsh like, "Wow!" or something."

I can tell because he's not kicking me out with his usual harsh words.

"Hehe, do you still have to play nice with my kid?"

"No, what are you talking about?"

Smiling at the bash, Olivia seemed to be in a pretty good mood.

That's it.

\* \* \*

"Eat."

-cringe

"......."

"It's for human consumption."

"Well, that's just me....... I know."

Radia Schmidt carefully took the bread and milk offered by the vampire and set it aside.

It was given to her to eat, but she couldn't get her hands on it.

Radia Schmidt crouched in a corner of the ring, shivering.

The vampire nonchalantly walked away and returned.

He could have tried to run away, but he didn't. He was too afraid to let himself get away so easily.

'Okay, you're not a stupid kid, thank goodness.'

The vampire who brought her bread and milk even stroked her hair gently, as if he knew she hadn't tried to escape.

Everything was scary, but Radia was most afraid that it was broad daylight.

"How do vampires....... How do you get to....... during the day?"

It's common knowledge that vampires only move at night.

Yesterday, when I was disguised as an ordinary merchant, it was still indoors, and when the battle took place, it was night.

But there was a vampire strolling around in plain daylight.

He even bought bread and milk.

The vampire smiled at a stunned Radia.

"There are no absolutes in this world."

It was an oddly kindly smile. Yesterday's eerie glare, murderous words, and a series of spells of massive destruction I'd never seen before seemed to have vanished.

In front of you is a vampire mage who can slaughter hundreds of thousands with a wave of his hand.

Reinhardt with minions of this caliber.

Demon.

Radia now knows that Reinhardt is such a person.

Radia doesn't know why the demon is the owner of Tiamata.

But now he was terrified and could only hope that it would kill him without turning him into a vampire.

What does this vampire want to do to himself?

Radia doesn't know. She can only pray to God that she can die peacefully.

The vampire looks at himself.

"Hmmm....... ?"

"......."

"It's winter, it must be cold....... We don't have any heating......."

She puts her hands on the floor and shakes her head.

-Bam!

The heating element was summoned, and the room began to warm up.

"How is it, is it warm?"

"......."

Radia could only cringe harder.

What the hell did he want with her, she couldn't tell. All she could do was tremble in fear, not knowing what the terrifying vampire was trying to make of her.

The vampire sighs heavily. He stares at Radia.

"Don't be too scared. Let me know if you need anything."

"......."

As if to reassure her not to be afraid, the vampire walks over to her, sits down, and puts a hand on Radia's trembling shoulder.

"I understand that you're scared because of the situation, but you don't have to be that scared."

"......."

"It won't hurt you, so don't worry about it."

The more affectionate the vampire became, the more Radia's fear intensified.

"Hey, you want me to....... What do you want......?"

So Radia pushed through her fear and summoned all the courage she could muster to say so. At her question, the vampire shakes his head.

"Nothing?"

"Then....... Why are you keeping me like this....... like this?"

"I will not make you a vassal or a clan because you do not want to be, and because the Lord does not yet trust you."

Radia Schmidt looks at Eleris in despair at the words.

"If you kill me....... Why not....... normally."

Knowing Reinhardt's identity, Radia couldn't even formulate words to defend herself.

Fearful of becoming a vampire, he betrayed his comrades in arms.

Even if Demon King was an apostle of Tuan, his sins are deep.

So Radia is deeply guilty, and now she just wants a clean death.

"I can't do that because I don't like it."

Trapped in this dark basement forever. Until the words to become a vampire come out of his mouth, unable to die.

I feel like a human being being fed to a vampire.

Seeing the look on Radia's face, Elise shook her head, as if she knew something.

"You can't go back to the temple, but you can still go out. Of course, you'll have to come with me wherever we go."

"......?"

"I'll tinker with your appearance a bit, in case anyone recognizes you, but if you want to go somewhere, say so, if you want something to eat, say so. If you want a change of scenery, I can even teleport you somewhere far away, never mind the distance."

Radia Schmidt realized there was something off about this vampire.

"If you have family, you can go see them. Of course, I'll have to be nearby to keep an eye on them, but I'm sure you can understand that, right?"

"Oh, no...... family is....... so......."

"Oh, right, sorry."

"Oh, no, not......, I mean......."

Is this what it means to be bred?

Radia had a sneaking suspicion that she had made a huge mistake.

A vampire in front of you.

And Reinhardt.

Radia had no idea what was going on.

\* \* \*

The central imperial palace tetra of Emperor Emperatos.

Returning from an urgent meeting with his ministers, the emperor sat in his study with the prince and princess in front of him.

Bertus and Charlotte weren't at each other's throats as usual.

This is because they know it's a bad situation.

The last thing you want to do now is offend the emperor.

"Last night, Revere Lance was found dead along with a number of elite paladins in an abandoned monastery in the southern outskirts of the ecliptic."

The Imperial Emperor, Neliod de Gradias, delivers the facts in a straightforward manner.

"We believe it was caused by demons."

"Is there a connection between what happened last time and....... with what happened last time?"

At Bertus's question, the emperor nodded.

"I can't say for sure, but the circumstances seem to indicate that's the case."

The Demon War is over, but powerful demons survive. They are capable of unleashing massive raids on the ecliptic.

Last time there were no casualties, but this time there are.

Leviathan Lance, leader of the former Crusader Knights and one of the heroes of the Demon War, has died.

But the emperor, the empress, and the three princes had strange looks on their faces.

"......God help the empire."

At the Emperor's words, both Charlotte and Bertus could only nod, albeit shakily.

The arrival of super demons in the ecliptic was the worst of all possible worlds, but the three of them knew that while it was disconcerting, it was good in the long run.

"What died in that place....... Leviathan, as well as the heads of the nameless order?"

"I don't know the exact configuration, but it should be."

At Charlotte's question, the Emperor nodded again.

A secret religious order organized by Leviathan. The nameless order's coffin was already known to the Empire.

However, we were unable to do anything about it because it would have caused a lot of uproar in the sensitive religious community.

Assassinations are also difficult. Not only was Levereer Ranze himself a skilled man, but his lieutenants were veterans who were used to fighting.

Even if the assassination is successful, it's a given that the imperial family will be blamed.

And so it was that the imperial family was left wondering how to deal with the growing seeds of division.

Then, overnight, they were wiped out.

An unspecified number of civilians have even seen flying demons flying in the neighborhood. The imperial family is not behind this, nor can it be mistaken for one.

The rise of the Demon Remnant is bad enough, but the Empire has been left with its hands tied.

"Do you have any idea why the demons attacked the Leviathan and not the Crusaders?"

"Other than wondering if there was a personal vendetta against Leverier Lance....... I'm not sure."

That's all Bertus could come up with.

"I think it's more about whether the demons knew about the nameless order and attacked."

"If I had known, I would have left them alone......."

"That's right."

If the demons knew the purpose of the Nameless Order, they would realize that leaving them alone would weaken the empire, so they must not know about it, they concluded, and they were right.

Even in the heart of the empire, we don't know what's going on, because we can't assume that the demons are trying to protect the empire.

So I was left in the dark.

The louse is gone, but the louse has been replaced by another louse.

Very powerful demons are alive and well, and can attack the ecliptic at any time.

We don't know if the demon is truly resurrected, or if it has a successor.

However, everyone in the Empire has come to realize that the Demon War is far from over.

They knew it would be good for the empire for a while.

\* \* \*

A hallway in the Tetra of the Central Palace, after you've finished enlightening the Emperor.

Bertus and Charlotte were walking down the hallway to leave the Central Palace.

"What do you think, brother."

"......what."

"The kid you're looking for. Possibly involved in this."

"I don't want to hear any bullshit."

Despite her words, Charlotte had a lot on her mind.

"Unless he's the son of the devil or something......."

"Shut up."

Charlotte looks up at Bertus with sullen eyes.

"What are you trying to say? I'm the reason the devil's son is alive and living with you, so this whole situation is because of me. I should have died a peaceful death at your hands. Is that what you want to say?"

Bertus shook his head and smiled at the mingled words of Charlotte's enemy.

"No? I'm just saying that I'm so glad that's not the case. I mean, you could have made a really fatal mistake, couldn't you?"

Without an empire, competition is meaningless.

The look of malice on his face made Charlotte feel sick.

Someone needs to hear this conversation, and there's no one else who can hear it.

It doesn't make any difference who hears it.

"...... asshole."

Bertus' comment about wishing the child was the son of the devil or something like that makes sense.

Charlotte knows what you're thinking.

Even if a remnant of demons remain, they cannot bring down the Empire. The Darklands are practically destroyed, and the Demon Castle has fallen.

The remaining demons can't do much more than guerrilla warfare.

So when the remnant demons find a focal point and stir up a ruckus, the empire will be disrupted, but not torn apart.

From that perspective, Bertus wants to see a successor to the Demon King.

Charlotte knows that.

This situation, while incomprehensible, is ultimately good for the empire.

Is this child really related to the devil?

He was just an overly normal kid with no real talent.

But she also knew that she couldn't completely deny the possibility.

Episode 329.

Zodiac took immediate action.

While the festival itself is over, temples that were supposed to be open until the end of the week immediately began controlling crowds, and measures were immediately imposed across the zodiac.

With the military in control of all the gates of the ecliptic, measures were being taken to restore order.

Of course, all of that was happening outside of the temple, so I only felt like the temple festivities ended a day early.

"It's quiet."

"Sure."

Ellen and I were walking around the temple, which was once again deserted.

Ellen is just Ellen, even if she was elected Miss Temple.

It wasn't much different than usual, and I didn't seem to pay much attention to it. If anything, it bothered me.

The festivities are over.

Now that the tournament is over, I'm sure I'll be able to enlighten the Emperor, but given the circumstances, I might not get that chance.

The issue of misappropriation of childcare subsidies will be addressed at a later date.

In the end, they didn't make it to the contest, but Ellen was crowned Miss Temple and Kliffman said she made the cut.

I don't know if it solved the confidence or human cringe issues.

It sounded like Riana was being berated by Ellen about how she got elected and you didn't.

Isn't this a case of not recovering from a bout of depression, but just having a new person in charge?

There's also Radia Schmidt's work.

Radia Schmidt is missing. She may be about to graduate, but Radia Schmidt is a no-limit tournament winner and still a Temple student.

The question of her disappearance will also soon become visible.

Elise, who had her, would take care of it, but Radia Schmidt was a member of an unnamed order. She would surely be a key witness in the case.

For now, we'll just have to hope she keeps it hidden.

Goro.

"It's a vacation."

"Right."

Winter break is here.

The imperial court will be in an uproar, but I've done what I had to do by killing Leviathan.

"What are you doing this vacation?"

Ellen looks at me and asks.

"Well, there's nowhere else to go, so he's probably at the temple."

It's a lot to do.

Negotiations with the Vampire Council.

Recontact with the Black Order.

Obtain information about Cantus Magna.

Determine Adriana's housing situation.

Contacts and actions against revolutionary forces.

It's not my job, but it's the job of the Magical Research Council.

If anything, I feel like I've been putting off things that I didn't get to do during the semester until after the break, so I can't really say, but I've been busier since the break.

Ellen walks still beside me.

"I'm going home."

"......home?"

"Yes, home."

Sure enough, Ellen's parents are alive and well. Since she hasn't been home all year, it seems like she's going home for winter break.

I didn't go into a lot of detail about Ellen's family situation or anything like that. She's not exactly a noble, she's a commoner.

The warrior Lagan Artorius grew up in an ordinary village, in an ordinary family, and became an adventurer.

So her sister, Ellen, is also a girl who grew up in an ordinary family in an ordinary town.

Ellen is always a soft-spoken person, but she never talks about her hometown. Of course, it's not that she doesn't want to talk about it, but it's more like she doesn't see a reason to.

I never asked in the first place.

I purposely don't ask because if I start asking, she'll ask, and then I'll have nothing to say.

By the way, if you're going home, are you going to stay back for the entire vacation because you're going to be with your family for the first time in a while?

"If I go to ......, when will it come?"

"I don't know."

He didn't seem to have any thoughts or plans other than to go home and spend time with his family.

Are you going to be back for the next school year after the break?

So how many months?

If I come back in March, I'll be gone from Temple for two months.

"......Why?"

I don't know what my expression was, but Ellen looked at me and shook her head.

"Can't wait to get here?"

No you don't!

You can do this by saying uh!

What's that thing that comes out of nowhere?

Are you sad to see me gone?

He stares at me with that look on his face.

You.......

You are the real.......

"......."

In the end, I said so, feeling like I'd rather die than suffer.

No.

If I don't see it for too long, I get worried.

Even if you're at home, you don't know people.

Isn't that right?

It's not that I'd miss him if he wasn't there.

Probably not....... Probably.

Ellen looks thoughtful for a moment, then shakes her head.

"You want to come with me then?"

"......?"

"My house. Do you want to come?"

I was momentarily interrupted by the words again.

Something like, if you think you're going to miss me while I'm gone, just come with me.

It's something.......

I'm not sure what's what with him and me anymore.......

I said I had nothing to do, so I'll go with you, but I don't really have anything to say.

Why I'd go there is beyond me, as I'm the one who walked into Arnaria without Heriot.

"Not if you don't want to."

Ellen walks away as if that's enough. She doesn't seem particularly upset or anything, but.......

Are you sure he's not angry? Because when he's angry, he talks out of his ass, and he doesn't seem to be.

By the way.

Ellen's parents.

They are also the parents of the warrior Lagan Artorius.

I'm curious.

I just made her a warrior and a warrior's sister, so I didn't have to explain what her parents were like.

I wonder if it's because of who their parents are that they're both monsters.

No, let's leave that behind and just use.......

I also wonder what kind of environment Ellen grew up in.

However, I had a lot of work to do this vacation.

I can't get away.

"......Sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about."

There's no reason to feel bad about not being there.

Ellen shrugged, as if that was okay.

\* \* \*

Adriana had been struggling for a few days.

Of course, that was a far cry from the plight of being held captive by a nameless order.

"Hey, do you need anything?"

"No....... It's okay, sis."

Reinhardt had dropped it, and now this mysterious organization boss was hovering over him.

"Heh. Yeah. If you need anything, just let me know, I'm always here."

The top floor of a building. It was her job to sit sprawled out on the couch in what she called her home office and do nothing. Adriana spent all day in the back room.

"By the way, if you give me the room, I'm going to....... Where is your sister sleeping....... Last time, on the floor......."

"Me? I don't really care about that stuff."

I didn't really use the room much in the first place, just stayed near the office.

Yesterday, Adriana freaked out when she went to the bathroom in the middle of the night.

He saw his boss, who had given him a room, sleeping on a stool on the floor of his office.

Give yourself a room and sleep on the floor.

He was so freaked out that when I told him he shouldn't be sleeping in this place, he scratched his belly and said, "This is how I sleep," and rolled over again.

He doesn't seem like a bad guy.

Being the kind of person who sees things as they happen, Adriana felt weird whenever Loyar was around.

"What are you doing?

"Aren't you bored?

"Want to go for a walk?

"Anything you want to eat?

"Are you comfortable?

If you're meditating in a room, they're going to be circling you and talking to you.

Adriana doesn't think it's a hassle.

Rather, it's more like a puppy, constantly circling around and asking questions.

Even though she knew it was rude to think about it, Adriana couldn't help but feel like a large dog was hovering around her, subtly cute in a way that made her feel weird whenever she saw her boss, who was always so lanky.

'I wonder what he's doing.......'

Adriana doesn't really know what she's doing here, and she doesn't know why the boss is the biggest asshole in the place.

Other people wear well-worn, if not expensive, clothes and wash them well.

This person is always sloppy, like an unwashed dog in the rain, with hair going everywhere.

Adriana lived in a monastery.

It's a life centered on self-discipline, self-care is a given, and I was very strict about cleanliness, not to mention keeping my surroundings clean.

Adriana, who has lived the life of a cloistered monk, realizes for the first time in her life that she has a strange compulsion for Loyar.

Regardless of who Loyard is.

Regardless of how scary he is.

It's a little overwhelming to see someone like that.

"I'm....... sister."

"Huh? Why? What?"

Adriana backed away from Loyar, a little squeamish, as he leaned in closer.

"That....... might want to wash up a bit......."

"Wash? Why?"

"That's, that's....... And it looks good doing that....... And it doesn't smell weird....... Don't you think......? Oh, no! I'm not saying you smell weird! I'm just saying....... I thought it might be good for your health......."

Loyaar shakes his head, then sniffs his arm.

"Do you smell that? Is that my body odor?"

"That, that can't be body odor......! Ew, ew."

It's a lie to say it doesn't smell.

Adriana pursed her lips, but that didn't mean she couldn't tell him he smelled like a rain-soaked dog.

Adriana takes a moment to think about what to say and how to say it.

"Then I'll just have to wash it."

Loyard said, "That'll do," and wandered off somewhere.

"......."

And when the gray-haired woman appeared, dripping water from her wet hair, Adriana stood still, staring at Loyar.

"I washed it. Do you still smell it?"

Apparently, it was just watered down.

He was even wearing the same raggedy clothes he'd just put on, and he was like, "I washed them, they're good to go.

Adriana felt like something important inside her had been shattered.

Adriana could somewhat understand why Reinhardt, at times, would lunge forward like a crazed lunatic without thinking things through.

So this is what it feels like.

-Pak!

"Huh?"

"Follow me."

Adriana began to drag a dazed-looking Loyar away.

\* \* \*

-Wudangtang!

-Oh, I hate this smell!

-I mean, what if you don't like the smell of soap!

-Yuck! Don't put that on! It's slippery!

-Hold still!

The Rotary Club members all scratched their heads at the sounds coming from the shower.

"What is it?"

"You know, the girl Reinhard brought in the other day."

"Why is she?"

"She's washing her sister."

"Your sister?"

-Come here!

-No! No! I'm out!

-You're not going to get out of here naked, are you coming back soon?!

-Kudangtang!

Club members walking up and down the hallway had their mouths agape.

Someone is trying to force Irine's dogs to wash. From the sounds of it, someone inside is grabbing someone like a mouse, but it's not Adriana who's being held, it's the boss.

Their sister hates being bothered the most in the world, and she finds it very difficult to wash or change her clothes.

This is the person who splashes water on their face and claims to have washed it.

-Don't do it! Don't do it!

-Why don't you get over here?

Loyar is being washed by a woman who claims to be from the temple. Loyar tries to escape by squirming and making noises that sound like a dog being grabbed, but eventually he is grabbed and forced to grunt as he is being washed.

"I guess a temple is a temple after all."

"You're right. My sister can't move."

Everyone commented on what an interesting place the temple was.

\* \* \*

Cleaning up after a mangy dog is a laborious task. Naturally, it's a lot of work for the person doing the washing.

Adriana's hair was soaked through, as were her clothes. Of course, Loyar, the washed party, had changed into new clothes, and Adriana was carefully towel drying his wet hair.

"Look, how nice it is to wash."

"......, right?"

Looking at his reflection in the mirror, Loyaar's face was grim.

After drying her scattered hair, Adriana ran a comb through Loyar's hair.

Loyar didn't know any better, and the feel of the comb gently scratching his scalp and hair was pleasant, so he leaned into Adriana's touch and closed his eyes.

Her gray hair was tangled and frizzy, but under Adriana's hands, it was transformed.

Of course, my hair wasn't shiny and silky, as it hadn't been maintained at all, but it didn't look like an unmanaged wild dog, either.

"In the future, you should wash your hands better."

"Uhhh....... I don't know."

Loyaar patted himself on the head.

"Brush my hair a little more."

"......."

Adriana ended up brushing my hair for a while longer.

The club members were stunned to see Loyar in human form for the first time.

-You're human.

-So be it.

"What are you talking about, you bastards!"

Everyone nodded in agreement that she was indeed human.

\* \* \*

Tourists from all over the ecliptic were quickly exiting the ecliptic under control. In an orderly fashion, the sense of crisis hovering over the ecliptic remained, but the chaotic atmosphere was gradually subsiding.

The Imperial Household had to make an announcement to prevent rumors from spreading unchecked among the general populace.

Demons have appeared in the southern part of the ecliptic, slaughtering members of the Five Great Houses, including former Crusader Legionnaire Revere Lance, who were meeting in a nearby abandoned monastery.

It's unclear who the attacking demons are, and the imperial government is investigating the incident to the best of its ability.

It's an emergency, but don't be confused by the rumors about the devil.

To summarize the imperial announcement, it went something like this.

There was nothing particularly false about it. There was no reason to mix it up.

In a situation where a confrontation with the forces of the Five Great Houses could have resulted in a large-scale uprising, the demons turned their noses up at them instead.

The enmity of the Five Great Houses against the Empire turns to enmity against the demons.

I sat still, now, in a darkened underground channel.

With one bonfire lit.

-Jerbuck

Footsteps sounded in the distance and someone appeared.

It was Count Argon Ponteius who made his appearance.

Sarkegaard.

"Hey."

"Yes, degradation."

"Sit."

"Yes."

Sarkegar sat down across from me.

Soon after, Elise appeared out of thin air.

"And Radia?"

"I'm in my room. I'm not going to run away, rest assured."

Elise sat quietly to one side of the campfire.

I was about to call all my men to a place that used to be the home of the Rotary Club because we had some stories to tell.

When Loyar arrives, we can start talking.

I don't know how long I waited, but then I heard footsteps and someone appeared.

"......?"

"?"

"What is it?"

And when we saw who it was, all three of us could only shake our heads.

"......?"

We all looked puzzled, and the person who came to see us shook his head.

"Loyaar......?"

"I don't think so."

It's not like gray hair is common.

Loyar was right, but it was so out of character that all three of us were stumped.

Normally, Loyar is always a beggar, so when he gets close to me, I stay away from him, but now he's dressed and hair is in order.

No.

Did Loyar look like that?

Surprisingly, it's fine, right?

"Did you wash up?"

At Eleris's question, Loyaar nodded.

"Why not?"

"Why?"

Sarkeghar and Elise are horrified that she has bathed and changed.

Loyar.

What kind of life have you been living?

And why did you wash it?

It's already ridiculous to be surprised that someone would wash up.

Loyaar shuddered.

"The child you entrusted to me has been washed."

"......Adriana?"

"Yes."

It's also pretty weird to hear someone say with a straight face that they've been bathed.

Maybe he's actually a dog?

Episode 330.

Has Adriana gotten to know Loyar well enough to bathe him herself?

Loyar seemed to like Adriana.

"You look great. I always thought I couldn't stand the smell of a dog in the rain."

Eleris smirks and says so, and Loyaar glares at her.

"Whether I wash it or not."

"When you go back, buy some insecticide and spray him. He's probably got fleas and lice from your body."

"Really? What are you doing to me? I don't have fleas or lice!"

"Without it, it's even weirder. Was it so filthy that no fleas or lice could live in it?"

"Shut up!"

Eleris is surprisingly prone to snapping at Loyar. Loyar responds quite well to the snark.

I wonder if it's akin to me punching a heriot.

Anyway, we were joined by Loyar, a gray-haired beast who had gone from dog to man in the rain.

"Okay, I didn't do a very good job of explaining last time because I was in a hurry, but I'm here to clear things up."

Last time, I did what I had to do without fully explaining the circumstances and intentions. After that, I had to go back to the temple and we didn't talk.

Sarkegar, among others.

Elise and Loyard didn't know, but Sarkegar needed to understand the situation.

"You were trying to save Olivia last time, and you were trying to save Adriana."

All three were silent at my words.

"Olivia shares the Tiamata with me, and she's the one who imprints the sacred magic on it, so I don't want her to disappear. Of course, I wouldn't do it just to take advantage of her, because Adriana, Olivia, and I are all important to me."

"Degrading....... too much affection for humans....... not."

Sarkegar looked worried and started to say something, but then fell silent. It was as if he realized he couldn't convince me on this point and gave up.

"What you want to know most right now is, why did you let the humans know we exist?"

"Yes, Jae-hyung, once the humans realize that a new demon exists, they will rally and try to find us somehow."

A demonic remnant rises to prevent the empire from splitting.

It's a good thing for the Empire, but for Sarkhegar, who dreams of rebuilding the Demon Realm, it's a handshake of handshakes.

But reasons are often made up.

"Sarkegar, I want to tell you something fun."

"What is it?"

"Leviathan Rancher, just before he died, asked me to join him."

"!"

The look of horror on Elise and Sarkegar's faces was priceless.

"If your faction wreaks havoc on the empire, you're good, and it's better to join hands."

"The leader of the Crusader Knights said....... such a thing......."

"That's what humans are for."

I lower my voice.

"They are willing to join hands with non-humans to kill humans for their own gain."

Human wickedness and selfishness.

I talk about it.

"Then....... Shouldn't we have just held hands......?"

"I told you, they wanted two things I couldn't give in to, so I couldn't negotiate with them."

I'm also not going to hide that Adriana and Olivia are very important to me.

"We're still a weak force right now, and if the humans split now, the Empire can take care of it, and by the time the Empire really needs to split, it could be all wrapped up."

"......."

"It's just not the right time, and the picture is that we're going to blow them up one by one when we've built up enough of a base, when we're all ready, and it's like a revolution, or the start of a Holy Roman Empire."

Sarkegar's expression changes slightly at my words.

It's a look that goes from doubt and questioning to searching for answers.

"The Holy Empire isn't going away just because Leviathan is dead. There are factions within the Great Houses that want to break away, and they may find another rallying point besides Leviathan."

"And they work with us when they need to."

"The Revolutionaries? They're no different. The Empire is a huge monster, and the monsters they have to deal with are big and powerful. The Revolutionaries? Of course they'd want to join forces with us if a new demonic force could shake the Empire."

"Of course, back in the days of the Ancestor Demons, they would never join hands with us. They're just trying to use us."

"We can only join hands now, when we're both underdogs, so to speak. To take on the monster that is the Empire."

"So, we're not here to bring humanity together."

"To let the anti-Imperial forces know we exist."

"So, we approach them one by one, and we exchange our utility value with them, so that we can discuss in detail the timing and timing of tearing their empire apart."

"So whether it's a revolution, the start of the Holy Empire, or the rebuilding of the Demon Realm, it's better for their purposes if they happen at the same time instead of sequentially at different times, right? It's an offer they can't refuse."

"This is the beginning of an anti-imperial coalition, so to speak."

The purpose is to show humanity that the Demons are still alive and well, and to stop their division.

However, depending on how you slice it, it's also possible to say that it's to reveal our existence in order to join forces with anti-imperial forces, and use them to our advantage.

Anti-Imperial Alliance.

It's all in the telling.

At my words, Eleris looked at me with a puzzled expression.

Even Elise, who knows my true intentions, is horrified. She thinks I'm lying about the future, and that this might be my true purpose.

Even Elise, who I told everything to, is surprised.

"Thank you for your wisdom....... to your wisdom......!"

Not to mention Sarkegar.

His question was answered.

It's bound to unravel.

It's a bit of an explanation, but I can do it if I really want to. If our priority is to bring down the empire, the revolutionary forces will take our hand.

They'll try to cut our throats after the empire falls, but it makes sense to join hands now with enemies later out of necessity.

First you take down the biggest enemy at hand, then you take down the smaller ones you've been working on.

If you try to do that, it can really happen.

"Any contact with the revolutionary forces will be in the name of the Darklands."

"Okay, degradation......."

Sarkeghar exclaimed, as if he hadn't realized how grandiose my plans were.

Actually, it's all a lie.

Revolutionary forces and the work of the Holy Empire.

While I'm in contact with those key players and exchanging information, all I have to say is, "It's not time yet," not revolution or empire collapse.

It's just a matter of stalling for time before the gate blows.

For the next year or so.

In the meantime, if I keep my feet tied, my purpose is accomplished. I just have to put off what happens next.

I feel like my head is going to explode just dealing with the gate situation, and I can't even begin to think about what my actions will lead to down the road when it hasn't even been properly resolved.

I was done explaining my intentions. Most importantly, I wanted Sarkegar to be convinced, and I think he was.

Sarkeghar left, eager to find a way to contact the revolutionary forces as soon as possible.

I don't worry about him because he's very good at what he does.

"Do you have anything to say?"

"Only if you say so, ......."

Loyar listened to the whole story, but he just sat there blankly. His mind must have been somewhere else entirely.

I'm done talking about it anyway.

"How's Adriana, how's she doing? She's doing better than I expected, seeing as she's even giving me a bath."

At the point where he says he's been washed, not that he's washing someone much younger than him, Loyar is in trouble.

"She's an angel compared to that brat, she's well-behaved, she's nice, she keeps offering to help me with things, and she's a pain in the ass."

I'm smiling just thinking about Adriana, even though she's not talking.

My sister is neutralized with a single blow.

Is this too easy?

Yeah....... I guess that's what dogs are for.......

Technically, Ellen's personality is that of a cat. She doesn't show emotion easily, pretends to be completely uninterested, and then suddenly sneaks up on you and sits in your lap.

I wonder if Ellen and Loyar were never meant to be together.

Adriana was wondering if she should be sent somewhere else.

It's only been a few days, and seeing Loyar like that makes me wonder if Adriana is doing well.

Of course, that's just Loyar's opinion, and Adriana's might be different, so I'll have to find out for myself later.

After Loyar exited the sewers, his gait somehow lighter, I took one last look at Eleris.

"What about Radia?"

"Hmm, she's very scared of me. I guess I can't help it, but, well, if you leave it to me....... I'm sure something good will happen soon."

Radia Schmidt was originally intended to be killed, but was spared at Eleris' request, so he trusts her to take care of herself.

\* \* \*

Tuesday.

The commotion had died down somewhat. Most of the people who were going to get out had gotten out, and while the investigation seemed to be moving forward, it was in vain.

There would be no trace or traceability.

I was now in the student body president's office.

The student body president and vice president. These are the same people we saw last time we had a club budget funding issue.

Lane Carley, 5th year, Temple Student Council President.

Vice President, Hermann von Rogarius, 4th year.

They were both feeling liberated that the temple festival was over, but it was clear that they were still tired.

"You are about to go to see the Emperor."

Tournament winners are eligible for Emperor Enlightenment. I thought this might be a reason to cancel the Emperor Announcement, but it seems not.

Six players for the first through sixth grade tournament.

One unlimited tournament winner.

And it's unusual.

This time, Mr. Temple and Miss Temple are the emperors.

So it wasn't just me, but Ellen, who was there to hear about the process and the caveats of knowing the emperor now.

Mr. Temple is a stranger. He's an awfully handsome guy from the common class. He's in the fourth grade.

Not interested.

Despite the caveats, student body president Lane Carley seemed to have something on his mind.

I know what it is without you telling me.

Seven tournament winners.

Miss Temple, and Mr. Temple.

There should be nine people in total, but there are only eight at this table.

No Unlimited tournament winner, Radia Schmidt.

The disappearance of Radia Schmidt.

That was going to be a major problem, too.

The Imperials might assume that Radia Schmidt is a member of an unnamed order, and that she died in the last incident.

But missing is missing.

Those who know anything about the nameless order will know that the search for Radia Schmidt is also tied to this case.

If there are people who saw me and Radia Schmidt in the Aligarh shopping district, and there are people who remember it, the problem becomes complicated.

In a way, I also took a risk to save Adriana and Olivia.

If that's a problem, then let Radia Schmidt go free and make her commit perjury.

Maybe Eleris' choice not to kill Radia Schmidt will somehow come back to bite me in the ass.

The Road to Knowing the Emperor.

But there's one person who should be there.

Escorted by the imperial guards, we left the temple.

Originally, only tournament winners had the honor of announcing the emperor.

The reason we're calling out Miss Temple and Mr. Temple this time is pretty obvious.

"......I'm hungry."

It's probably because Ellen, who's sitting next to you, mumbling something about being hungry with a fierce look on her face, has been crowned Miss Temple.

She is the younger sister of Lagan Artorius and a classmate of Bertus and Charlotte.

You're probably wondering what Ellen is like.

And the Emperor knows that I have improved Charlotte's condition.

Saviolin Tana told me that one day the Emperor would call on me.

It was a bit unexpected to be the winner of a tournament, and to be sent to meet the emperor, even with Ellen.

Since I was on my way to meet the emperor, I was accompanied by the royal guard, so my transportation was a little different than usual.

Instead of taking the magic train, I was able to use the warp gate beyond the temple exit to go directly to the gate at the entrance to the Imperial Palace.

Ellen didn't seem too impressed with the whole situation.

As if the emperor wanted to see you. His usual scorched-earth look.

I know, I'm a little bored, but it was fun to see Ellen being a bit of a dork for the first time in a while.

......No.

But when I think about it, shouldn't I fear this situation the most in the world?

The only thing I can think of is that I'm more of a douchebag than Ellen.

Thinking nothing of it, we walked into the Yellow Castle.

Just as we did last time, we piled into the waiting tram and began our journey to the Imperial Palace.

Everyone was in awe as it would be their first time riding a tram inside the Yellow City.

"There's a tram."

Ellen seemed a little curious if it was the same for her.

"It's big, so it should be."

I was rather unimpressed. Without it, it would be rather inconvenient to move around inside the planet as it is.

"Did you see that?"

Ellen's question made my breath catch in my throat.

"No?"

Here we have the imperial guards and students who don't know any better.

No one should know that I once came to Imperial Emperatos on business about the Palace of Spring.

I don't want Bertus to know that I was instrumental in saving Charlotte's life.

Ellen nods at my words and looks out the window.

The Winter Palace and the Spring Palace could be seen in the distance. I wonder if Charlotte and Bertus are there.

On the tram that stopped at the Central Palace Tetra, we all hopped off and walked in formation.

The main gates of the central palace were wide open. Everyone seemed to be overwhelmed by the solemn, majestic, if unspectacular, appearance of the Central Imperial Tetra. Again, it was a palace whose simplicity made it seem majestic.

As I walked through the palace's main hall and into the alcove, I saw a line of nobles and commoners alike, and in the deepest part of the alcove in the center, someone sat on a throne atop five daises.

A middle-aged man with a golden crown and scepter and a red cape.

There was the imperial emperor Neliod de Gradias.

Episode 331.

The alignment process wasn't too complicated.

The deputies applauded us in welcome, and we knelt before the emperor to listen to his speech.

I don't know if it was prepared or off the cuff, but it was all a facade.

It's good to see the quality of people we've trained at the Temple, the institution that prepares the future of the Empire, and I hope they will continue to lead the Empire in the future.

It's like the principal's discipline speech.

The emperor stood us up and shook our hands once to say, "Keep up the good work," and of course, we got to see the obvious.

-to move forward.

-Cough, cough! This is the honor of a lifetime, Emperor!

-Umm, well.

There were crybabies.

No, that was the majority of the reaction, and rightly so.

-to move forward.

-This honor and glory, I will engrave on my soul and engage in empire for the rest of my life!

-Good.

Even the one who looks like he's got something to say.

Anyway, they were all basking in their glory. That's the normal reaction.

"Go forth."

"Yes."

Ellen nods once, as if shaking hands with the emperor and answering to a teacher.

"Go forth."

"Thank you."

I thought about trying to sound as glorious as possible, but I didn't think it was an honor anyway, so I kept it simple.

My reaction and Ellen's was the strangest axis.

The Emperor was informed that Radia Schmidt was not present, but he didn't bother to point it out.

After that, a luncheon with the emperor was scheduled.

At the luncheon, the Temple students and the Emperor were seated at a long table.

Like our last meal at the Palace of Spring, we started with appetizers, and the food came out plate by plate, course by course.

-Omnom

"?"

Ellen took a bite, whimpered, and stared at her plate.

What is.

Why is this the only one.

I feel like this.

For Ellen, who gets impatient when it comes to food, a course meal is a meal where the wait is too long. She likes to order everything, eat it all, and then order more.

When a plate of food is served, they gobble it up and then sit back, and when a plate of food is served, they gobble it up and then sit back and stare at their plate.

Come to think of it, did you mumble something about being hungry earlier?

Naturally, the emperor was eating while watching the students.

The emperor whispered a few words to the maid who was serving the meal.

......Since then, Ellen's share has been three servings.

I think he saw me eating and gave me a secret instruction. He might be embarrassed if I told him.

-Omnomnomnom

The meal was hearty enough that Ellen could eat in time with the others.

Of course, Ellen didn't question the sudden increase in volume.

Just eating it.

"Why?"

I glared at her, and she shook her head.

"I, sometimes....... that you're a little....... Yeah."

"What?"

"Never mind."

I'm not ashamed to admit it.

His appetite was so voracious that he was favored by the emperor.

I know it's nothing to be ashamed of, but I'm ashamed of me!

Everyone was nervous to be in front of the emperor, and they looked at Ellen, who was eating a lot, and at me, who was giving them pints, as if to say, "Oh, my God, you're so funny.

No, I'm the weirder one, right?

\* \* \*

After the luncheon, we took a quick tour of the Central Palace Tetra.

We didn't make it to the Emperor's bedroom, but we did get a full tour, including the ballroom, the guards' quarters, and the galleries. I expected the tour to end with an informal luncheon, but since it was an official event, the Emperor seemed to have quite a bit of time on his hands.

Everyone was stiff and nervous, waiting for the emperor to speak to them, but he didn't speak to me or Ellen.

It didn't take long to realize why.

When all was said and done, the students, including us, were being escorted out by the guards.

"You guys come here."

Xavier Tana, dressed in the uniform of Shanapelle, called out to me and Ellen.

"Do you remember me?"

"Yes, Mr. Chanapelle."

Ellen remembered Saviolin Tana's face, too, because she'd seen it when she was a first-year dorm warden, though she'd never met her.

"Very well, you two have been summoned separately by the Emperor, follow me."

The other students left, and Ellen and I headed off somewhere, led by Saviolin Tana.

-Smart

"Your Majesty, I have brought them to you."

-Come in.

"Yes."

Saviolin Tana comes out and sees Ellen.

"I trust it to take care of itself."

"Yes."

-nod

Knowing my rebellious side, Saviolin Tana was worried about me, even though she didn't know Ellen.

I'm not going to walk out in front of the emperor saying I'm crazy.

Saviolin Tana opened the door and was greeted by high ceilings and books lining the walls.

At a wooden table set by the window, the emperor sat in a backlit chair.

The Emperor's office, or study.

That seemed to be the place to go.

On the armchair next to him lay the cloak, scepter, and crown he had been wearing. They'd be cumbersome, and he wouldn't wear them unless he was on official business.

Casual clothes that are classy but not fancy.

When Neliod de Gradias took off his cloak, scepter, and crown, he looked like a scholar.

-Dalcock

"Come closer. You don't have to be on your knees."

Ellen and I followed his instructions and took a few steps in front of the Emperor.

The Emperor looks at me and Ellen.

"You two, how much do you know about each other?"

It's a silly question, but I know what it means.

Ellen is hiding the fact that she is Artorius' sister.

I'm also hiding the fact that I'm the owner of Tiamata.

We're asking each other if we know it. If they don't, it's because they want to keep our secret.

"There's a lot we don't know, but we know enough to know each other."

Before I could say anything, Ellen spoke up.

There's a lot we don't know, but we know enough.

I felt like I was digging my heels into my chest for nothing.

"That makes it easier to talk to you, good."

The Emperor stares at us in silence.

"As Emperor of the Empire, it is an honor to meet the Champion of Tuan and the Apostle of Mensis."

The emperor is the first to do so, and we are puzzled. The Emperor rises from his seat and stares out the window.

"The gods don't choose champions for nothing."

We don't know if he is a follower of the Five Great Houses or not.

But since we can't deny the existence of God, he must be talking about divine providence itself.

"Champions have always had a role to play, and there are things in the world that need them, which is why there are holy relics and their champions."

"......."

"......."

"Ellen Artorius."

"Yes."

"Alsbringer is held by the Empire."

Alsbringer, the sword of the war god Als, belongs to Ellen's brother.

"I thought so."

Ellen just nodded, not really surprised.

"If Alsbringer chooses a champion, the world will have three of the five gods' artifacts."

Three holy relics have entered the world. Two have already chosen champions, and Alsbringer's whereabouts are certain.

"Even during the Demon War, there were only two holy items in the world: the Alsbringer and the Rament, which belonged to Lagan Artorius. And only the Alsbringer was actually used."

The emperor just stares out the window.

"But what do you think this phenomenon of having one more holy object now that the Demon War is over is telling us?"

"Does this mean that more dangerous things are going to happen?"

"......maybe."

To the Emperor's words, Ellen replied.

The gods don't leave holy objects lying around in the world.

Even in the greatest crisis of humanity, the Demon War, there were only two holy objects, and now there is one more.

The emperor seemed to interpret it as a red flag for the fate of humanity.

But that's a misconception.

The Five Great Gods are not gods for humans. It seems clear that even the emperor cannot escape such preconceptions.

The Emperor turns and looks at me and Ellen.

"I'm sure you're aware of the rumors that have been swirling around the ecliptic lately."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Yes."

"Nearly two dozen elite paladins, including the former leader of the Crusader Legion, Revere Lance, were slain by an unidentified group of demons. All of them were war heroes who served with distinction in the Demon War."

It's no secret, but it's refreshing to hear it from the mouth of an imperial emperor.

As the person who did it.

"It would be easy to assume that this is the work of simple demonic remnants, but the Imperials have the worst in mind."

"......."

"Maybe the devil isn't dead, or maybe he has a successor."

Ellen swallowed nervously at the words.

Demon.

For Ellen, the names are inseparable.

As the younger sister of a warrior and even more gifted than Ragan Artorius, Ellen must have always envisioned herself being forced to become a warrior.

"You are very valuable people, with holy relics. But you are also young."

They are the buds that have the qualities to become warriors, but are not yet able to become warriors.

"But even later, are you ready to fight against the devil?"

At the Emperor's question, I and Ellen were silent.

I don't think you can say no.

But Ellen said she didn't want to live that life if she could save the world with her life.

I told myself I wouldn't make the same choices as my brother.

But at the same time, I risked my life to stop innocent people from dying in the Darklands.

Ellen is not the same Ellen she was at the beginning of the semester.

"If the devil's desire is the destruction of humanity, if his goal is to destroy everything I love......."

Ellen says calmly.

"Yes. I'm going to fight the devil."

Unlike the original, Ellen has made a lot of precious things.

Even without that, Ellen still risked her life for the world, but it meant something very different now.

If the devil's purpose is to destroy all of humanity, I'll kill him.

Ellen says

The Emperor sees me this time.

"Me neither."

You're not slaying the devil.

I am prepared to fight for it, and I am fighting for it now. The Emperor looked back and forth between Ellen and I, who had both said the same thing, albeit with different meanings, and nodded with a stony expression.

"Thank you."

Coming from the mouth of an emperor, these words of gratitude were bound to catch me off guard to some extent.

"From now on, the Empire promises you its utmost protection and cooperation."

To the Emperor, we are a weapon to defeat the Demon. Therefore, for as long as it takes for us to become strong, we promise you not only our protection as Temple students, but also unlimited cooperation at the Imperial level.

Unaware that the object of their cooperation is the demon they so desperately want to find.

"And Reinhardt."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

The emperor's eyes showed a slightly different emotion than before.

If you've been discussing the future of the Empire and humanity, your eyes are a little more emotional.

"Thank you for saving my daughter."

Something that should be called paternalism.

"......?"

Naturally, Ellen didn't know what this meant, so she scratched her head.

\* \* \*

After exchanging such words with the Emperor, Ellen and I were escorted out of the palace by the guards.

The emperor let Ellen go first, then said.

"Soon, there may be something you need to do for Charlotte.

'......Yes.'

"I'm not sure what that is yet, but can you do that for me?

The answer was obvious.

"Yes.

'......Thanks. Reinhardt.'

There was something deeply resonant in the emperor's pure gratitude that I hadn't expected.

What to do for Charlotte.

We don't know what it is.

But if it's for Charlotte's sake, it will have to be done.

Of course, that's an afterthought, and the emperor had a different agenda.

As the bearers of the holy artifact, the Emperor deemed my safety and that of Ellen Artorius to be of the utmost importance to the Empire in the face of the possible return of the Devil.

Later, in exchange for promising to risk his life in the fight against the Demon, he received nearly unlimited support from the Empire.

Ellen and I put our respective items in our arms.

It was an imperial coat of arms, the same one I had briefly received from Charlotte.

With this, the Emperor explained, we are no longer merely students of the Temple Royal class, but have been granted immense powers that surpass even the greatest nobles.

I was told that I would be treated like royalty everywhere, and if the situation was serious enough, troops could be called in.

To put it simply.

Now we're talking about a free pass to the Warp Gate.

Of course, neither I nor Ellen realized that right now.

"Explain to me what's going on."

Ellen, alone with the man, asked bluntly.

I had no choice but to explain the situation to Ellen.

From what happened at the Palace of Spring, to Charlotte's outbursts, to the fight at the Palace of Spring with Savior Tana.

Ellen heard the date, remembered the few days I hadn't returned to the Temple, and seemed to recognize when it was.

"You said you've never been to the palace."

"......Sorry."

"You lied again."

Now, on the subject of not having been to the palace today, while talking to the Emperor, it was revealed that he had been to the palace and even saved Charlotte's life.

"That's because it's....... I don't want anyone to hear about it......."

"......."

"Not that you shouldn't hear it, but....... Well, there was someone else."

Ellen shook her head.

"Yeah, well, it's not your problem, it's Charlotte's problem, and for you to feel free to tell me that....... I'm talking about an imperial secret, and it must be hard to tell."

Ellen nodded in understanding. It wasn't something I could decide to tell anyone. Ellen seemed to be thinking about it.

You pause, wondering whether to say something, then look up.

"Can I be sad?"

"......?"

"I shouldn't be sad about this, I'm sad."

"That's, that's....... It's your mind......."

I'm guessing you're just trying to get permission to be sad.

"Well, I feel bad for you."

Ellen's mouth started to water as she said that.

"I'm sorry....... Sorry......."

"You always say you're sorry."

Ellen grumbles and kicks a rolling stone in vain.

"I want to hear what else you have to say."

What the other words were, Ellen didn't say. As if she was being distracted, Ellen turned her head away.

He stares at the main entrance to the Imperial Palace of Emperatos behind him, and then holds out the imperial crest he received from the Emperor.

"You said we're treated like royalty now, right?"

"Not really royalty, but hey....... You did say that, didn't you?"

"So, can we just go in there?"

Ellen shakes her head.

"Well......? Why not?"

Treating people like royalty is not something an emperor would do.

The Emperor sees us as weapons to fight the Demon in the future. Since we are champions who have chosen to dedicate our lives to the fight against the Demon, we will be given the utmost protection and treatment until we are strong enough.

Ellen stares blankly at the entrance to the palace.

I'm not sure why you'd want to know that.

"Let's go back."

Ellen walks briskly.

Not on the temple side.

"You want to use a gate?"

"Yeah, you can use it."

Ellen was heading toward the warp gate.

I wasn't the only one who thought of it as a warp gate high pass ticket.

In a way, being treated like royalty means that the thing you're going to use most often is warp gate priority.

It doesn't seem like a big deal, but it felt like a huge entitlement to me.

No.

Even real royalty, Charlotte, rode a horse-drawn train in the Yellow Peril.

I don't like how we're using warp gates willy-nilly.

Isn't that annoying?

Of course, even as I did so, I followed Ellen to the warp gate at a brisk pace.

If it's a pain in the ass and it works, I'll use it.

I got a big pat on the back for that attitude.

Episode 332.

You have a demon to kill, so focus on getting stronger while we buy you as much time as we can, and the Empire will give you as much support as we can.

It's funny, but it's the way things are. Actually, that's me, and it's not fair.

Emperor's Day has come and gone, vacation has begun, and the last days of the year are upon us.

At the end of the day, a group of like-minded individuals gathered in the Class A dormitory to party a bit.

I cooked the food, and everyone was there except Bertus. For once, we hung out in the dining room with all the Ganodab death squads and Kliffman.

I did the food, and Ellen sat next to me.

"Oh, no....... Reinhardt you....... done with this?"

"What can't you do?"

The dog's eyes widened as it was the first time he had ever tasted my food. He wasn't too fazed, though, as he's been known to eat off to the side.

It was one of those days where you just eat and play.

Of course, our veritable douchebag, Liana de Granz, went on a booze-fetching spree at the Duchess.

"Boo-rah-rah-rah!"

"Drink up!"

Of course, no one else drank it, just me and Riana, and we got really drunk, and then I was subdued by Ellen and Riana was subdued by Harriet.

We were subdued early, and luckily, we didn't get caught by the inspectors.

\* \* \*

It's a new year.

We've decided to stay in the ecliptic because we don't know when Sarkegar will make contact with the revolutionaries and when Eleris will ask us about the Vampire Council.

As much as I'd love to follow Ellen to her hometown, I can't.

What a shame.

"You can go alone."

"Who doesn't know that?"

I was walking next to Ellen, who was dragging her huge trunk along.

I'm not sure when Ellen will return from her trip back home, but she'll be gone for at least a few weeks.

The Temple is indeed out, and all Ellen has to do is enter the giant gate in front of it.

You can even get a free pass with an imperial coat of arms, so you don't have to wait in line.

It's great if you can get through the gate quickly.

What to say.

It's a shame, really.

They say they'll be gone as soon as school starts.

Ellen's hometown is a literal backwater that doesn't even exist on a map.

Ellen tilts her head at me from where she's dragging her trunk and the gate is in the distance.

"I'll be there."

"......."

Ellen shakes her head when she realizes I'm staring at her.

"Shall I go?"

"......?"

"If you tell me not to go, I won't go."

I'm going to lose my mind.

I told you not to come in like this!

"No, you should go. Your parents will be worried, they haven't seen your face in a long time."

Ellen's parents are probably worried about how their daughter is doing. I have a lot of work to do, and I may be gone from the ecliptic for days at a time, so it doesn't make sense to ask Ellen to stay away.

Ellen stared at the gate for a moment, then at me for a moment, then at the door.

Suddenly, he pointed to a cafe down the street.

"How about I stay a little later?"

Ellen says there's no rush, and she can kill some time.

"Uh."

Ellen smirked at my knife-like response.

I ended up ordering a drink at a cafe and wandering around, delaying my departure by almost six hours.

It wasn't like we were talking about anything really interesting, we were just sitting there, watching people walk by, and if we were hungry, ordering dessert or something.

"......."

"......."

This is it.

A soldier on leave is ambiguously killing his girlfriend because he doesn't want to break up with her when he gets back. Of course, the roles are reversed, as Ellen is the one going and I'm the one staying.

Ellen shakes her head in disbelief as their vision blurs.

"Hey, why don't we just go tomorrow?"

I swallowed the lump in my throat that was about to come out in favor of that answer.

"......No, this is clearly a picture of me leaving the day after tomorrow, so just go."

"......."

Ellen's mouth pops open.

"No, I'm not saying this in the sense that I want you to go fast, but it's definitely going to happen."

"I know what you mean."

After wasting time, Ellen stood at the gate.

"I'll be back."

"Yeah, be careful."

I don't know what you're looking out for, but that's what the horse said.

"You be careful, too. Whatever."

Ellen nodded and walked toward the giant warp gate.

Wistfully, I watched Ellen as she walked through the gate.

Ellen looked back in my direction just before she entered the gate, gave me a quick wave, stayed still, and then floated through the gate.

What to say.

Him and me.

They're really getting on each other's nerves.......

Not that that's a bad thing, but.......

\* \* \*

"Can I try this?"

"We haven't done any stability testing yet. What if something goes wrong?"

"Are you kidding me?"

"Yeah, I might die."

"Well, yeah......."

I lifted the vial of mysterious blue reagent to my mouth and set it down.

Magical Research Society Mansion.

I had just come to check on the progress of the moonshine and power cartridges.

It's like I'm some kind of overseer, and it's not really that different from that. I'm also the president of the Society for the Study of Magic.

Christina, the alchemy major, says she thinks she's got a handle on it now, and I was going to taste it, but she said it might kill me if I got it wrong, so I put it down.

"So when do you think it will be finished?"

"Well, I'm not sure, because I'm honestly thinking it's a miracle I made it this far......."

Christina is already thinking that what she's gleaned doesn't make sense. After all, the Society for the Study of Magic is less than half a year old.

But even in the original, this is a very fast-moving object. So I'm sure it will be finished before the end of this vacation.

"It's funny....... I know it's funny to say this, but....... I should say fateful. There is such a thing."

She was ordered to make something that didn't make sense. But in the process of figuring out what to do, she seemed to feel a sense of fateful dissonance.

"Well, that's good."

"Yes."

I can't even get to the part about me knowing the future.

Christina has no problem.

The problem is the other way around.

"Reinhardt......."

"......Uh, why."

"Would you like to try this......?"

Anna De Guerna.

She's one of the main players in the alchemy experiment with Christina. Anna gives me a sullen look and thrusts a mysterious pink fluorescent substance at me.

"This....... What is this?"

"It's good for you......."

"Oh, no. I, I'm healthy enough, I don't need to get better....... Me, sorry."

I'm so scared of him!

Every time I come here, he's trying to sneak something in, but his intentions never seem pure!

I can't do anything to her in the same way I can't with Riana. She seems to have some kind of favor with me, but I don't know what I'll do to her if that favor turns to malice.

"Anna! Didn't I tell you to stop trying to feed Reinhardt weird things?"

Fortunately, Christina restrained her, and Anna put the vial back in her arms with a sulky look.

"Chet......."

I'm really scared.......

Every time I come here, I remind myself not to accidentally eat anything.

\* \* \*

Next up, of course, were the power cartridges. Moonshine and Power Cartridges are key to the purpose of the Magical Research Society.

-Woof

In a safe room in the mansion's basement, designed to withstand as much impact as possible, I could see Herriot clutching an artifact of blue ore, eyes narrowed in concentration.

-Woof!

The bluish artifact vibrates, glowing and pulsating.

Me, Adelia, and the little senior, Redina, watched it with bated breath.

The vibrations felt by the bluish artifact gradually intensify.

-Quack!

-Bam!

Eventually, the power cartridge exploded and shattered. Herriot was unharmed by the protective field he'd deployed around himself, but the blast was enough to blow off an arm if he'd been caught unawares.

"...... blew up again."

Adelia sighed, as if the earth had gone out from under her.

"Does it happen often?"

"Almost."

Herriot emerged from the safe room with his hair sticking up in a ponytail, though the blast had been deflected by protection.

"Why risk it?"

"If ...... doesn't do it, what the heck does it do?"

As if to say, "Come up with another way to get in my face," Harriet prodded, her hands on her hips.

"Well, I don't have anything to say about that, but....... No, but you're still worried."

"I know you're worried, but this is the only way to go."

In the Magic Institute, Heriot is the best at manipulating mana. As such, she is the only one who can attempt to manipulate the mana inside the unstable cartridge and use it as if it were mana in her body.

If a clumsy guy fails, it's hard to tell if it's because he's clumsy with his horsemanship or if the cartridge itself is faulty.

That's why he said he always does the power cartridge experiments.

In recent years, it seems like they've succeeded in putting horsepower into cartridges, but they're having trouble running them.

Every time a cartridge blows up, so does your budget.

"What's the problem?"

"I can feel the artifact's mana synchronizing with my body, but it's still weak, so I don't think the circuitry will hold up if I try to cast a spell."

"Is it a matter of durability?"

"I don't think it's necessarily that."

"Juniors, let's review the circuit design again!"

I can't even understand what three magic majors are saying, but it's not like they're not making progress at all, and it seems like they've finally gotten to the halfway point.

Moonshine and power cartridges.

I have a feeling it won't be finished until next year.

Honestly, I don't care if it's not finished until next year.

Both of these are things that were helpful enough after the gate debacle, so if we can get them done before the gate debacle, that would be a huge boost.

Heriot has succeeded in drastically reducing the time it takes to cast spells. So all you need is magic power.

When the power cartridge is complete, it will be a force to be reckoned with.

And the one that inspired Herriot to awaken a new way to use magic.

"I think you should use open-ended."

"Do you think so?"

"I'll take it or leave it!"

Little Ledina.

Herriot mimics Redina's talent.

With Redina's no-casting talent, the true power of the Power Cartridge would be unleashed.

Things are going well, but eventually the bitter water rises.

It's just that I think what we're doing here is leading to war.

Because these kids are about to go into a fight that's going to kill and be killed, and somebody's going to die.

I don't want to deny that it's necessary, but I don't feel good about the fact that everyone is going to get hurt in the end.

After some back-and-forth, the trio decided that once they had a direction to go, Adelia would design a power cartridge based on the new blueprint.

"Hey."

"Why?"

"I'm heading out of the temple for a bit, do you have a minute?"

Herriot was up to something.

"Researching dimensional magic, we should get started."

Herriot's original role is to research dimensional magic.

Now that the tournament was over and I was on vacation, I felt like I could really get back to researching dimensional magic.

"You do it, why not me?"

"Just come on in, you idiot!"

Herriot dragged me along as if to tell me to shut up and follow him.

\* \* \*

Harriet and I walked out of the Magical Research Society mansion. Herriot wore a small backpack. I don't know what was in it.

"How's Ellen doing?"

"I suppose."

We all know that Ellen went back to her hometown.

"I'm kind of curious about what Ellen's hometown is like. Right?"

"It's a small town, what do you want to know?"

"Well, it's also the hometown of Lagan Artorius......."

a.

Come to think of it, Ellen's hometown is also the hometown of Lagan Artorius.

Think of it as a visit to a warrior's birthplace.

However, it is not known to the general public what village Lagan Artorius is from, because if it were, it wouldn't be a village anymore.

Leaving aside the question of whether or not Lagan Artorius' sacrifice was deserved, it's clear that Herriot has a personal liking and respect for the warrior. Who wouldn't?

"Do you want me to ask her if we can hang out later?"

"...... That's your choice, but remember, it's a rural area."

"Why not? It sounds like a nice, quiet place, like a fairy tale."

"What the hell, you think turning a faucet in a place like that is going to produce water?"

"......a."

Don't think that anywhere on the continent, the base of life is going to be similar to the ecliptic. When I pointed that out, she got a little freaked out because she hadn't thought of that.

"You'll be lucky if you don't pass out in a conventional restroom."

"Conventional......? What's that?"

Harriet shakes her head, as if she's never heard such a word in her life.

Yeah, there's no reason for you to get the importance of a toilet seat into your head.

"Hmmm, I never thought I'd see the day when I'd have to explain to you about a poop bucket, so listen up, poop bucket."

"Well, well, well, if you're going to talk dirty, don't!"

"In a neighborhood that doesn't have water and sewer, you just dig up the ground and bury a giant barrel or something, and then you put a toilet on top of it, and then you go to work......."

"Ha, don't do it!"

"Of course, the feces don't go down the drain, they pile up. Every time you go in, you look down and see all the traces of life that have accumulated over the years......."

"Don't, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't!"

"But when it's all piled up, it's scooped up into a big pile, and then mixed with straw and aged......."

-Bam!

"Stop it!"

Eventually, she was punched. Herriot has a vivid imagination.

It was like I was trying to imagine if what I had heard had finally stuck.

"No, no, no....... Nonsense....... Smell....... Don't you?"

"Why not?"

"Then how do you....... work....... work?"

"I'll put up with it."

"Ugh, woo....... ugh......."

Herriot is a wreck. Even if you've seen the worst on a desert island, it's still going to be traumatizing.

You'll pass out the moment you walk into a conventional restroom, apparently.

"Just because you live in a fairy tale doesn't mean you live in a fairy tale."

"You are so evil!"

Harriet, annoyed that I was shattering her illusion when I didn't have to, took the lead.

"I thought you didn't go to places like that?"

"I didn't know!"

"Are you feeling sorry for Ellen right now?"

"Shut up!"

Herriot eventually broke down and begged me to shut up.

\* \* \*

Harriet and I emerged near the massive warp gate at the Temple entrance. The atmosphere of the Ecliptic was still turbulent, but the commotion had died down, so it wasn't as overwhelmingly crowded as it had been, except for the queue at the warp gate.

"Dimension Magic......."

Despite the lame excuse of "wanting to go to the otherworld," it seems that Herriot had been working on his dimensional magic research in the meantime, as I had asked.

Of course, I was busy with other things, so I didn't get much done.

"First of all, remember when I said that dimensional magic is being used in bits and pieces for this and that?"

"Right."

"Do you know the difference between dimensional magic and spatial magic?"

"Do I know."

I know there's magic, but I don't know how it works, so I'm not sure I'd understand it if Harriet explained it to me.

Herriot and I took me to a secluded clearing outside the temple.

The Temple's warp gate was visible in the distance.

"I can't use teleport yet, but I'm sure you've seen me use blink."

"Right."

"Here, look."

Herriot seemed to focus, and soon he was three steps to the right of his spot, with a whimper.

"This is Blink."

"Uh, yeah."

I think I found a place off the beaten path so people wouldn't panic if I used magic.

"It's a concept of moving my body, not unlike teleportation. The concept of swapping the spatial coordinates of my body with a targeted location....... You don't understand, do you?"

"Uh, not at all."

He must have seen my eyes go out of focus as I explained, because he sighed in frustration.

"After all, teleportation and blink are spatial magic."

"Isn't that similar to space and dimensionality?"

"umm....... Similar, but a little different. In magic, dimension is a higher concept."

Herriot points to a warp gate in the distance.

"The warp gate system is not a spatial magic, it's a dimensional magic."

"What exactly is different?"

"Ummm....... I don't know how to explain it, there's a lot of magic involved with portals and gates, but it's basically just gluing space and space together."

Herriot spreads his right and left hands wide.

"Imagine that my left hand and right hand are each a gate of the same family, and the magic that allows these spaces to be connected in one or both directions, as if they were actually separated but attached. That's a gate."

"What....... Sure."

It's not like I haven't been on a warp gate, either. A warp gate is a portal that creates a space that functions as if it were attached to another space.

"My body moving, creating a portal between space and space, do you understand the difference?"

"Is this because there's a higher magic to connecting spaces together?"

"I don't know if it's right to call it higher, but the basic premise is completely different. The spatial movement series is about accurately calculating my spatial coordinate points and the target coordinate points, and the gate is about creating a portal between two spaces that are separated."

Traveling through space is like a warp gate or teleportation, but the basic concept is completely different.

"Of course, it's not necessarily wrong to call teleportation-type magic dimensional magic, but gate-type magic is a more subtle form of dimensional interference."

We've talked about how the idea of dimensional magic is rare. This is because most magical systems use it to some degree.

"It's actually not that hard to figure out how to get to the otherworld you're wondering about."

"...... is it?"

Easy? What are you talking about?

"With infinite horsepower and the right knowledge, it could be done."

"You mean no?"

"If we knew exactly where the Otherworld was, we could somehow open a portal to it with infinite magic. Not a normal portal, of course."

"You mean no?"

"Yes."

Herriot's answer was straightforward. The method itself is easy.

It's just that there's no such thing as infinite magic power, and we don't know where the otherworld is, so we can't do anything about it.

However, in the end, having infinite horsepower is the least necessary of the two conditions.

Warp gates are supposed to be connected to the otherworld anyway, which means they don't have to fulfill the requirement of infinite magic power.

Aside from my own little epiphany, Herriot was staring at the warp gate in the distance.

"But then I realized, in my own research, that it's a warp gate."

"Uh."

"It's a much more advanced form of magic than I expected, and it's highly classified. Very little is known to the public, and it's closely guarded by the Magic Society and the Imperial Family."

"I suppose so?"

"Of course not. Just anyone can't build a warp gate."

A warp gate would be a critical piece of infrastructure for humanity, so it would be well-maintained and its technology would be highly secretive. Herriot looks at the warp gate and scratches his head.

"So I was kind of curious."

"What?"

"I wonder if I can create a private warp gate, and if I do, can I link it to that warp gate. If someone can interfere with the warp gate system's own portal....... That's a bit of a problem, isn't it?"

Herriot didn't foresee the Gate debacle.

However, they did seem to recognize the dangers of the warp gate itself.

Episode 333.

To use a modern analogy, Herriot seemed to be thinking about the possibility of someone hacking into the Warp Gate server.

It shouldn't be impossible. If you have knowledge of warp gate design, you should be able to create a private warp gate and it should function exactly like an existing warp gate.

Also, a warp gate is connected to all warp gates.

Let's say you can create a warp gate that connects to the otherworld.

This leads to the conclusion that by creating a single gate, we can scatter everyone through it to the continents.

It's entirely possible that you don't need to create one.

If you make a single warp gate a warp gate to an alternate universe.

Any warp gate on the continent can cause an outpouring of otherworldly monsters.

I felt like I was walking on thin ice.

How to open a portal to the Otherworld.

How to hack a warp gate system.

All they need to know is that the continent is ready for a gate crisis at any moment.

"So, eventually, I think I'll have a better understanding of dimensional magic once I have a better understanding of the warp gate system, but, you know, that's classified, and I can't find out....... I'm not sure I can do that on my own."

Herriot sighed heavily. I do have information, but it's top secret, and I can't access it. Herriot's status is very high, but what he wants is top secret, both imperial and magical.

"......That, I think I can help you with."

"You?"

I pulled the imperial crest from my bosom.

"What. Why would you want to......."

"I got it a few days ago."

Imperial Coat of Arms.

Wherever you go, you will have the full cooperation of the Empire and be treated as if you were royalty. Herriot was surprised and embarrassed to see me carrying the imperial crest.

"What can I do with this?"

There's a good chance it won't work, but it's at least something to talk about.

I can't ask him to teach me the warp gate system itself, but I can ask him to share his knowledge of dimensional magic.

For a moment, Herriot is frozen, but then his face lights up.

"Gee, really? Is it working?"

"That's something I don't know yet."

"Go, uh, come on, let's do something, anything, quick!"

Herriot is a wizard.

He was more excited than I was about the new knowledge he was going to gain.

\* \* \*

I don't know if the Imperials will ever give me the top-secret information about the Warp Gate, but I always have an open line of communication.

Bertus seemed to be staying in the Winter Palace for the holidays on top of this, while Charlotte was back in her Royal Class dormitory.

You don't know when you're going to get sick, and you want to be as close as possible to what you can do about it.

So naturally, Saviolin Tana was also back in the Royal Class dormitory as warden, just in case.

So naturally, it would be Charlotte, not Bertus, that I and Harriet would visit.

"Dimensional magic research?"

"Uh, for academic reasons, he wants to do some research, and the Empire has a lot of knowledge about that, doesn't it?"

Naturally, I didn't tell Charlotte about the otherworldly bullshit.

"Hmm, so what's in the temple isn't enough?"

Charlotte is not a mage, so it didn't make sense for her to seek imperial cooperation in this area.

I explained this to a confused Harriet.

There is a great deal of research on dimensional magic, but it is highly classified and inaccessible to the Imperial Family and the Magic Society, which developed the Warp Gate system.

"If it's classified, there's probably a reason it's classified, so I don't think it's something I can easily determine. But I might be able to ask the Imperial Ministry of Magic for some cooperation."

"Me, really?!"

Herriot bounced in place with delight.

Even if you're a princess of the magical Duchy of Saint-Thuan, it's not every day that you get access to classified imperial research.

In the break room, Charlotte scribbled on a piece of paper and handed it to Harriet.

"I'll tell you what, but not right away, but tomorrow you can take this to the Imperial Ministry of Magic."

"Thanks, Huang....... Thanks, Huang....... Oh, no, Charlotte!"

"Hmmm. Something like that."

Charlotte looked at me and gave me a coy smile, like she was doing it for the look on my face.

"Reinhard, come see me later."

"Yeah."

Charlotte asked if she had anything to say.

Harriet is dumbfounded the entire way back to her A-level dorm because she had gotten the permit so easily. After staring at the permit for a while, Charlotte folds it up in her arms and gives me a questioning look.

"But come to think of it, are you the Empress....... I mean, why are you so close to Charlotte?"

Harriet seemed to be thinking about it. She seemed to realize that there was no reason for me and Charlotte to be friends when we were in different classes. She even asked to talk to me in private.

But isn't it a little late to ask that?

"Handsome."

"...... How the hell am I supposed to respond to that?"

Herriot looked genuinely annoyed.

and.

This guy is a real dick.

Harriet stares at me like I'm not kidding, like I need to tell her the real reason.

"Hey, why are you and I so close?"

"Huh?"

At my reverse question, Herriot's brow furrowed in thought, as if he was thinking about the old days.

I can see so much of the past flashing by like a zooming light.

It started with me getting a slap on the wrist for saying something to a crazy classmate who was talking down to the seniors.

Afterward, you'll remember all the times you've been nicknamed Pikachu and cried in the street.

And the memories that follow.

"Well, yeah......."

Herriot's complexion began to pale.

"Me....... like you....... What the hell....... why did we get friendly......?"

A man with a high ego, noble origins and great talent, who was teased by a street beggar as a punk, befriended him.

They don't think this makes sense, even to themselves.

"There are people in the world who like to be bullied, and I guess that's you."

"No, no, no, no, you idiot!"

Herriot's face fell at my point.

"Really, really how did I. How did I. How did I. How did I....... How did I get to......?"

"Yeah, whatever you say."

"What?"

Honestly, I didn't set out to befriend Herriot, it was just one of those things that happened.

It's one thing to tease her and think she's cute, and then feel bad when she cries, so you're nice to her.

Not everything is going to go as planned, and some of the things that don't go as planned are good things.

"It's no different than Charlotte."

Just like how I became friends with you, how Charlotte and I became friends can only be described as accidental.

There was no way I could get to know Charlotte when I was in a different class, hiding the fact that I was Valerie. Charlotte was the first to approach me about finding Valerie.

"......something like that."

Herriot mumbled something to himself.

And a while later.

-Pak! Pah-pah-pah!

"I'm so mad at you! You! You really did this to me! Why did you do this to me! Why!"

"Aww, you're always hitting me these days!"

Harriet blushed and patted me on the shoulder.

It didn't hurt at all, which is kind of sad.

\* \* \*

Herriot will continue his research into dimensional magic with the cooperation of the Imperial Ministry of Magic. I'm not sure what he'll discover along the way, but if he knows one thing about magic, he knows ten, so there's a good chance he'll find something.

Just talking to you today has given me a few clues.

The gate situation is a dangerous clue that this is a very easy thing to break if you know how.

After a while, I headed back to the Class B dorm because Charlotte said we needed to talk.

"Hello?"

"Uh."

Charlotte was waiting for me in the dorm common room.

No one was in the break room to see what the others were doing. It was a big departure from the original.

Saviolin Tana took up residence, and Ludwig's desire to be strong was awakened.

So while Ludwig would normally be traveling during this break, it seems that he has decided to spend this winter break training with Saviolin Tana.

Good is good, and this is better than the original plot. Charlotte poured me a cup of black tea, and I sipped it, still not recognizing the flavor.

Charlotte sipped her tea and looked out the break room window at the winter sun.

"I've seen the king. With Ellen."

"I did."

"And you have an imperial coat of arms?"

"Right."

Charlotte set her teacup down and carefully placed her hand over mine, which was still clutching it.

"......."

There was a certain emotion in Charlotte's eyes.

It was a light of sorrow. I'm sure Charlotte knows what it means for me and Ellen to be given the imperial crest.

I'll give you unlimited privileges, so put your life on the line in the fight against the devil.

I know that's what it means, and so does Ellen, and so does Charlotte.

"He might be behind this. I'm thinking about it."

"...... is it?"

Charlotte already knows that Valier is no ordinary person.

Despite knowing that, I didn't make any further contact with them to cut them off unsuspectingly.

If Valerie was behind this, Charlotte, who knew Eleris' whereabouts, could try to capture her at any moment. Of course, it wouldn't be easy.

Charlotte stares out the window.

He was still holding my hand still.

"If that child is indeed the heir to the surviving Demon King, what am I supposed to do?"

"......."

Charlotte looks at me.

There were tears in his eyes.

"That you have to fight for your life with him. I hate that."

Charlotte's grief was coming from a place I didn't expect.

Bali is important to me too.

As the master of Tiamata, I have been chosen to stand with Ellen against the Devil.

Not wanting Valier to get hurt, Charlotte was still keeping Eleris's whereabouts a secret. If she suspected Valerie of being behind it, she could have gone after her at any time, but she didn't.

But things are different now.

I was horrified to think that since I had been chosen to be the Devil's arch-enemy, I might one day die fighting for my life against him.

Me and Valerie.

You think you're at a crossroads where you have to choose one or the other.

Charlotte's sadness is understandable, since we don't know that they're both the same thing.

For me, I need to find Valerie. At the very least, he should be able to confirm whether or not he's guilty.

But Charlotte couldn't do anything about it because she was afraid she'd find out something she couldn't take back.

Eleris must either leave the ecliptic or relocate.

For now, that much is certain.

I trust Charlotte, but her trust in Valerie is shaky.

Because of me, the same being.

"I'll tell that wizard to run far, far away."

"......?"

"That should do it."

Charlotte was stunned, as if she had heard something unexpected.

"I don't believe for a moment that the heirs of such a shattered Demon Realm and Demon King will become a force strong enough to threaten the Empire in such a short time."

"At most, there are a few strong demons alive, but what can we do with them?"

"I'm the one who will fight the demon if it later proves to be dangerous, and I'm entitled to make that decision."

"And we don't even know if the kid really had anything to do with it yet, so don't feel too guilty."

It's all a lie.

I have to tell that white lie in front of Charlotte without changing my complexion.

You're not sacrificing, but you're pretending to.

Charlotte looks at me blankly.

My way of saying you don't have to go after him right now, because I'll take the risk later.

When Charlotte finally hears the words, she begins to sob in front of me.

"Sorry, Reinhard......."

Charlotte seemed to feel so sorry for me, knowing what the right choice was for me, but not being able to make that decision easily.

Than Charlotte is sorry for me.

A guilt a dozen times greater than that was weighing on my mind.

"And now....... about that child....... I'll forget about him completely......."

Charlotte says this is her last favor and mercy to Valier. From now on, she will always stand by Reinhardt's side.

Valerie Reinhardt told me.

\* \* \*

I hadn't thought about this issue.

Charlotte is aware of Valerie's suspicions, but she doesn't expect Charlotte to dig into them.

But it was unexpected that his faith in Bali would be shaken by his concern for me. This was after the Emperor had given me and Ellen our imperial crests.

Given the prominence of the demonic forces, it was inevitable that Charlotte would try to learn more about Bali's whereabouts at some point, if only for my sake.

That's why I immediately went to see Eleris.

"You should move your residence to....... ."

"We're going to have to be careful about contacting people on the ecliptic. We're going to do most of our communications through the Rotary Club. There will be a delay in communication, but I don't think it's worth it."

"Yes, degradation, I see what you mean."

Eleris' subterranean chambers.

Eleris understood well enough that the circumstances that had changed since my announcement to the Emperor and Charlotte's state of mind required a change of residence.

Normally, that would have been the end of it, but there were other things to worry about in Eleris's lair these days.

"It would be a shame to keep this child locked up here like this, so maybe he should go somewhere where he can be more free."

-cringe

"I didn't say anything, what do you care?"

None other than Radia Schmidt.

Radia shuddered at my gaze.

I was the only Temple student who happened to know that I was the heir to the Demon King. Elise wouldn't have bullied or abused me, given her personality, but Radia had a very bad complexion and was withdrawn.

"Well, I was able to save Olivia by doing something stupid anyway......."

Call it self-serving.

If Radia Schmidt hadn't pulled her stunt, I would have had to watch with open eyes as Olivia made an extreme choice and fell into the clutches of Rivera Ranze. Or not even realize that Adriana is dead.

Radia was cowering on the floor, shaking as she watched me.

The look that says you'd rather be dead.

I don't have any feelings for Radia Schmidt anymore, but I can't do that if I'm going to let her go.

There's a limit to how much you can be swayed by a little recognition, and Radia Schmidt knew too much she shouldn't have known.

"So, what are you going to do?"

"Well, I think he should go to the council side for now, where he'll be able to....... He won't be able to run away, so he'll have a little more freedom, and a meeting might be called soon."

Vampire Council.

Known to humans as High Epiax.

Elise seemed to be thinking of taking Radia Schmidt there to stay for a while. It wouldn't take long to organize the shop.

"Is that a date?"

"I'm sure it will be soon, and I'll pass along the schedule to the club when I have more details, so if you're there at the appointed time, I'll be there to pick you up."

"Okay, okay."

Radia won't know what's going on. I squatted down in front of a terrified Radia Schmidt.

"Senior."

"Yes, yes......."

Radia Schmidt on the brink of snowfall.

He was a fanatic, but his determination and faith were easily shattered by the mere mention of vampirization.

Even if they wanted to trust me because I was an apostle of God, that was impossible now that they knew I was the devil.

Radia Schmidt has no choice but to break.

"Elise isn't such a bad...... thing."

"......."

"At least he's better than me, so you can be more comfortable."

-tuk-tuk

I patted Radia Schmidt on the shoulder and stood up.

Radia intends to leave it to Elise.

If it's broken, it's broken, and if you adapt and get used to it, it's just that.

"Here we go."

"Take a look, degradation."

Elysees crosses the ecliptic.

I felt like things were finally starting to come together.

In fact, rather than being in full swing, I'm afraid we've gone full circle.

The thought kept coming back to me.

Episode 334.

Her actions were swift. Realizing that Charlotte de Gradias might be on her trail, she moved in that direction.

"It's going to be cold, you should dress warmly."

Of course, since it's winter and they're headed to the polar regions, Elise dresses Radia Schmidt in a thick coat and snowsuit.

Other than that, Elise packed only the very important things she needed to take with her.

Eleris wasn't thrilled about leaving the ecliptic. It was a place she could always return to.

But his heart was heavy, knowing that his return to the Vampire Council was the beginning of something bigger.

Something is about to start.

Not knowing if it would save the world or destroy it.

Hoping Valier's words are true. Eleris casts Mass Teleport.

-huiuiui

Known to humans as Castle Epiax, but originally used as a meeting place for the Lord Vampire Houses.

Eleris arrived at the snowy castle with Radia Schmidt.

"...... here?"

"Have you been here before? The last time I spoke to him, he said you were on a group mission to the Temple."

"No, I'm new to......."

"There's probably no one there but us....... but don't stray far from me, just in case."

Radia followed Eleris, who led the way with a grunt. Eleris pushed open the side door to the cold, barren castle.

-hhhblack....... 흐흑.......

"Whoa, whoa. Who's there! There's......?"

Radia was stunned by the sobs coming from all directions.

"It's a ghost."

They're just lowly bugs, but they're getting on her nerves. Radia Schmidt's face turns blue as she watches the ghosts tear through the walls at will.

What the hell am I doing here.

Normally, one would feel compelled to destroy the unholy, but the fear deeply embedded in Radia Schmidt's consciousness made her weak.

Eleris's calm footsteps echoed in the cool, dreary hallway.

"I'm not going to keep a close eye on you from now on. You don't know where you are, and even if you did, there's no one around here for hundreds of kilometers. If you run away, I'll come after you, but remember, I'm not doing it to punish you, I'm doing it because I'm afraid you're going to die."

Radia Schmidt could only nod in response to Elise's words.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure you have something to eat, something to wear, and a place to sleep."

Only a mage with access to teleportation could even reach this environment. So if I left Radia here and Eleris went away, she would be left to dry up and die.

"But if you kill yourself because I'm not monitoring you, I'm going to turn you into a vampire for crying out loud."

Elise looks back at Radia with those words.

"Got it?"

"It's ......."

"When we determine that you are safe, and with his permission, we will release you unharmed. We don't know when that will be, but it won't be forever."

The words seemed to ignite a small spark of hope in Radia's heart.

The vampire in front of him wasn't the evil vampire he'd imagined, at least.

They may be evil in being, but they are not evil in disposition.

Radia Schmidt is finally convinced in the face of Elise's kind, sad smile at her.

That's why Radia Schmidt is hopeful.

Hope.

Not realizing that it's always a recipe for greater despair.

-Jerbuck

Then, Eleris stopped walking at the sound of distant footsteps.

"There must have been a sailor....... there."

Someone, other than a ghost, is in EpiAxis.

Eleris stops in the hallway of the castle and sees someone walking in the darkness of the hallway. Eleris looks toward Radia and brings her index finger to her lips.

"Don't say anything. Don't even look at me."

At the words, which sounded like a warning somehow, Radia nodded and bowed her head, her expression stern.

Someone approaching from the hallway soon emerged from the darkness.

Gray hair, black eyes. An elderly gentleman dressed in a black suit and carrying an old-fashioned, patinaed wooden cane.

"It's been a while, Elise."

"......It's been a while, Antirrhinus."

To Chuck, the old man in front of him looked much older, but to Radia Schmidt, the respectful deference he showed to Elise, who could only be a young woman, was foreign.

"I heard there was a meeting going on, so I came in a little early to hang out, but....... You've brought something out of the ordinary."

The man called Antrianus looks at Radia Schmidt, who is trembling with her mouth closed behind Elise.

"And now you're going to bring something even worse?"

"Don't describe it as grotesque. He's my lord."

The words brought a smile to the old man's lips, who was called Antirrhinus.

"Lord....... Lord......."

"......."

Eleris's expression hardened at the disbelief.

"Does the young devil know who you are?"

"You don't know, and you never will."

"Oh no, then everyone on the council will have to keep their mouths shut."

Radia Schmidt didn't know what was being said.

"They will soon begin to gather one by one. When we are all here, this meeting called by the Lord of Tuesday will begin."

With a questioning smile, the old man called Antirianus slowly walked away from them. Eleris looked at Radia.

"Radia."

"......."

"You can talk, now."

"Oh, yeah......."

As if she'd been told to be quiet and knew she'd get in trouble if she spoke, Radia only opened her mouth after Eleris' words.

"I don't think anyone is going to harm you, but I don't think you should talk to any beings other than me."

Elise looks at Radia and says.

"Remember. You're the only human here."

Eleris cautioned firmly.

\* \* \*

Southwest of Cernstadt, Second Empire, Alteration Zone near the border.

A place where most people don't even know such a town exists.

Rizaira, a mountain village.

Home of Lagan Artorius and Ellen.

After a long absence, Ellen returned to her home village of Rizaira. The villagers are happy to see her, and she's comfortable with her hair tied up in a loose bun, just like she used to.

I talked to friends from back home who I hadn't seen in a long time and told them about the ecliptic.

Everything that didn't excite Ellen was amazing to Rizaira's children. Like the magic train, for example.

The village celebrated Ellen's return from vacation with a feast. There was a feast of meat and bread.

After the feast, which was very large for a mountain village, Ellen went for a night walk with her parents for the first time in a long time.

On a ridge north of Rizaira where night had fallen, Ellen sat in the center of her mother and father.

Ellen talked about this and that.

Stories about her time at the Temple, and the many new friends she made.

The parents were very happy that Ellen was doing well, pure and simple.

Such.

Ellen's heart was growing heavier and heavier as she recounted all the things that were nothing, but could not be nothing after all.

I started with the lighter stories, but when you take those away, you end up with the heavier ones.

I don't want to talk about it, but I have to.

Ellen is back in her hometown for vacation.

She came back to rest, but Ellen had something to tell her parents.

What to say.

The full moon shone brightly in the winter night sky.

After sitting still for a while, Ellen spoke up.

"I think the demon is not dead, or a new one has appeared."

"......."

"......."

At that, both of Ellen's parents' faces hardened. For just as Ellen had lost her brother to the Demon, they had lost their son to the Demon.

The name Demon was never one I was comfortable with.

"I met His Majesty the Emperor the other day."

Ellen's parents listened to the story in silence.

"Do you think you can fight the devil....... I heard something like that."

Ellen's mother gently took her hand. Her father put his arm around her shoulders.

"Me, I still don't understand you."

"Still, if it's the Devil who wants the things I love to disappear, if it's the Devil who wants that."

"I'm going to fight the devil, that's what I said."

Ellen looks at her parents.

"I'm sorry."

They had lost their son in a battle with a demon, and now they might have to lose their daughter in the next battle with a demon. Ellen didn't want to cause her parents such grief.

But Ellen knows.

If only Ragan Artorius could stand up to the Demon, only he could stand up to the next Demon.

You're not alone there.

Ellen can make that decision because she has people to fight with.

If the world is going to force him to defeat the devil, he might as well accept his fate. In front of a daughter apologizing to her parents.

In front of her daughter, who decided to fight for her life at such a young age.

Ellen's mother and father stare at each other for a moment.

"Ellen, may I speak with your mom and dad privately for a moment?"

"Yes."

"Hold on a second."

As if they had something to talk about, Ellen's mother and father left her sitting still and headed off somewhere.

Ellen stood still and looked up at the sky.

When her brother was outside doing this or that, Ellen didn't know what her mother and father said about him.

Other times, he would return briefly in the middle of the night, quietly stroke Ellen's hair as she slept on the bed, and then leave.

He always shared the important things with his mother and father, and he wasn't always there.

Ellen doesn't know what her parents thought about her brother's decisions and behavior.

However, I do remember getting a slap on the wrist from my dad, who was always very kind to me, when I made a bad comment about my last brother's appearance.

It was a rainy day.

Mommy and Daddy would have been sadder.

Ellen still hated herself for it.

Now, years later, the parents see their daughter making the same choices as their son.

She didn't know what that would feel like.

Will my parents object.

I lost my son to that, and I don't want to send my daughter into that kind of danger.

So what should we do?

If you don't fight, Reinhardt will have to fight alone. Of course, Reinhardt won't be alone, but if you're left out of the equation when there should be at least one more person with the Holy Grail.

If the world wants a second warrior, and there's no Ellen.

Reinhard will be forced to become a second warrior.

Keeping Reinhardt out of a fight with an unidentified powerful entity makes him even more dangerous in an already dangerous fight.

Therefore, Ellen didn't have the option of avoiding the fight.

After a while, my parents returned.

The mother takes Ellen's hand.

"My daughter."

Ellen meets her mom's sad eyes.

"Can I change my mind?"

"......."

Naturally, you would be against it. I've already lost my son, and the thought of doing the same to my daughter would be devastating.

Ellen looks down at the snow.

"......Sorry Mom. Dad."

You have no choice but to fight.

If I were alone, I wouldn't know.

If he doesn't jump in, Reinhardt will be left standing alone before the devil.

This made Ellen feel even more guilty in the face of her parents' sad request. Neither mother nor father spoke for a while.

It didn't take much convincing or begging.

If she's talking like this, you know she's going to be stubborn.

Parents know their children best.

"Well, can I go somewhere with Mom and Dad for a minute?"

"Where?"

"You'll know when you get there."

The mother takes Ellen's hand and helps her up, leading the way.

Both Ellen's mother and father were accustomed to walking in the mountains, so even in the middle of the night, they never got lost.

Ellen's family arrived in a valley near Rizaira.

It's a familiar spot for Ellen. It's where she always went to play in the water as a child.

She slowly approached the valley's fairly large frozen waterfall and stroked its still, frozen walls.

"......?"

Ellen couldn't help but be baffled by the scene before her.

Suddenly, the center of the frozen waterfall cracked open, as if space itself had warped.

The ice hasn't broken, it's just pushed through the space itself, creating a gap.

"This, this....... What is this?"

Ellen was bewildered by the sight and couldn't find the words to speak. But her mother and father nonchalantly took her hand and led her into the center of the falls.

This is Ellen, who has lived here her whole life.

But this was the first time I'd ever seen a space like this behind a waterfall I'd often visited.

I've also seen a few times where the back of the waterfall is blocked in the first place.

But behind it was a cave.

"Ellen, follow me for now."

Mother led the way, while Father manipulated something beside her. An eerie glow began to fill the cave.

In the pale blue light, Ellen walked slowly into the cave, following her parents' lead, not understanding the situation.

"Your brother was never meant to be an adventurer in the first place."

"What....... is that?"

"Originally, we were going out of town to find 'some stuff' because Ragan was good at it, and that's what the town meeting decided."

Ellen didn't know any of that.

I thought Lagan Artorius was just being adventurous and shooting around, but that's not what he was doing at all.

What kind of place is Lizaira.

Ellen realized she had no idea where she had lived her entire life.

"So you see a lot of people, you go through a lot of things, you make a lot of friends, and in the end, you realize that the things of the world are more important than the things of the village....... kind of thing."

"That's....... What is that? My town is....... What is that?"

"Later."

The mother grabs Ellen's hand.

"I'll tell you later, my dear."

It was my mother's words.

"One of the things Ragan set out to find, Ellen, is the ramen you have."

My father's words.

The cave soon began to take on the structure of a building.

In a hallway with manicured walls, the pale light revealed countless passageways and corridors to Ellen's eyes.

Ellen couldn't see what was there. As if they had been told exactly where to go, in a cave inside the waterfall, Ellen's parents headed for a certain place.

-pot!

The cavity lit up, and Ellen could see something in the center of the otherwise empty cavity.

There, his cloak glowed like a blazing flame.

"This....... This is......."

Ellen's eyes widened to tears when she saw it.

"This, along with your ramen, is one of the two things Lagan went to find."

Cloak of the Sun God.

Shalam's Relic.

Lapelt.

There it was in front of Ellen's eyes.

Mother, holding the Sun God's cloak, slowly approached and carefully draped it over Ellen's shoulders.

"May the favor of the moon and the sun be with you."

With that, she kissed Ellen lightly on the forehead.

Episode 335.

It's been a week since school started.

Herriot had almost stamped in at the Imperial Ministry of Magic for his research on dimensional magic. I didn't visit the Magical Research Council too often, as I knew I'd only get in the way if I checked in on them.

Elise has left the ecliptic.

According to the Rotary Club, the Vampire Council would be meeting a week from now. Elise would be back in time, and if she went to the Rotary Club around that date, she could attend the Vampire Council meeting.

Five vampire families.

If you can get them to cooperate, you've got a goldmine.

We need to win their power, whether through intimidation or persuasion, and it remains to be seen if that will be possible.

We don't know how to persuade and intimidate those who didn't cooperate in the Demon War.

The Black Order will be in contact with you again, and you should be prepared to extract information about Cantus Magna in order to negotiate with them.

If you can't get that information from the Vampire Council, you may have to do something crazy like use sobriety to lure out the Cantus Magna.

We were also gaining some sensitivity to the gate event through information about the warp gate itself.

Charlotte's brooch is already a clue.

Passing through the Ecliptic Warp Gate with the Brooch Artifact activated will take you to the Warp Gate in the basement of the Palace of Spring.

The exact process is unknown.

Importantly, magical technology already exists that can interfere with the warp gate system.

Of course, this is an authorized artifact.

The important thing is that we've gotten the information that no matter how the warp gate has set up its path, there are magical techniques that can interfere with it.

The existence of Charlotte's artifact had already suggested one possibility.

So.

This is where I started to really get into the world-saving stuff.

My head feels like it's going to explode, I don't have time to think, and there's a good chance I'll be found out, not to mention the consequences could be life or death.

Of course, there were a lot of little things along the way.

-Kang! Kagak!

"Whoa."

"Not bad."

After sharing the sword with Olivia, I hung it in its cradle with a tingling sensation in my grip.

Without Ellen, I have no one to practice swordsmanship with. As a result, I'm practicing swordsmanship with Olivia in the training center.

I could play Cliffman, but after all, he hasn't awakened his Enchantment yet, so he's not someone I can go all out against.

Of course, if you go to Savior Tana, she'll be happy to teach you swordsmanship, but you're better off focusing on teaching Ludwig.

So now I was practicing swordplay with Olivia.

Olivia flicks her training sword around and slings it over her shoulder.

It wasn't until this tournament that I really realized how good Olivia was. Until then, Olivia hadn't said anything to me about teaching me swordsmanship.

Of course, when I asked, he said, "Sure, why not?" and came to the stage.

Olivia's skill set is clearly immense.

Neither the power and stability of the enchantments nor the skill of the swordsmanship itself can compare to mine.

I put all my energy into my moods, self-suggestion, and enchantments, but I felt like I couldn't keep up.

I couldn't help but realize that it was a combination of achievement points, words, and circumstantial luck that allowed me to kill Reverie Ranze.

"Shall we try again?"

"Sure."

Olivia looks at me, her sword raised, her eyes serene.

I pull out my training sword again and start energizing.

-Quack! Card gain!

Olivia lunges at me in a panic, thrusting my dueling swords roughly.

"Gap!"

-side!

"!"

My chest flaps open as I push my sword away, and instantly Olivia is there, hugging the nape of my neck and kissing my cheek.

"Oh, come on. Can you please not do this?"

"If you don't like it, are you stronger than me?"

All good.

It was a problem because it did some crazy things sometimes.

\* \* \*

After a long struggle, I collapsed to the floor of the smokehouse, almost sagging.

While my stamina is much better than it used to be, I still feel a bit more drained when I'm fighting with my Enchantments.

Burnout in a slightly different sense than exhaustion.

The good news is that I've noticed very little damage to my magic circuitry from using Magic Enhancement. Besides the increase in pure power, I already have two talents for manipulating and sensitizing power to begin with.

If you don't get used to it quickly, it's weird.

"You're a wimp, Reinhardt."

"...... is weird, this."

"Wouldn't it be nice to be especially weird in a royal class full of weird kids?"

"I guess that's true."

Olivia, squatting next to me on the practice floor, poked me in the cheek.

"You said he went down to his hometown."

"Yes."

"Chet, you really need to realize that you're being too hard on me."

I was at a loss for words when she pointed out that she was looking for me because Ellen wasn't there.

"You must be sorry, seeing as how you can't say anything."

Olivia would say that, but she didn't sound very angry or argumentative.

Olivia has a lot to be sorry for.

Still.

They don't know that I risked so much to save Olivia and Adriana. I don't want them to know.

I guess I'm not a very nice person, though. I'd like to forget about it gracefully, but that doesn't work.

I'm kind of pissed off that I can't make a face with this, I'm not going to say it, but this whole situation of not being able to make a face is just pissing me off!

You took a risk for your sister that's barely above getting busted at a cross-dressing contest. If you're feeling sorry for me, you're not alone. This!

"Reinhardt."

"It's ......."

"Did you do this?"

"Is that ......?"

What's that?

Are we on to something?

There's no way Olivia would have any evidence or clue that I'm a demon.

Olivia smiles sadly at me, seeing the look on my face like I'm having a brain freeze.

"The nursery school I used to sponsor....... The director and the teachers....... were taken away."

"......a."

The thief's got me.

I was talking about something else entirely, which is weird because there's a lot of poking and prodding.

Yeah, that's what I did.

I couldn't tell the Emperor, but I did tell Charlotte that things had worked out for me in terms of getting Eleris out of harm's way, and I asked her to help me with the problem with the nursery.

I already knew about the orphanages that Olivia was personally sponsoring, and I thought it was weird that they were poor when they couldn't be poor.

It was only a few days ago, and Charlotte seemed to have acted on it immediately. Olivia seems to have noticed, too.

Olivia looks at me with a sad expression.

"Did you....... did, right?"

"Yes."

"......."

I was hoping Olivia wouldn't find out, but in the end, she can't help but find out.

"We already do a lot of work with war orphans in the ecliptic, so it just didn't make sense to me that there were orphanages with financial problems."

Olivia didn't look pleased. She couldn't possibly be happy.

The children may have a better life with more care, but Olivia has been betrayed by the people she trusted.

Olivia slumped to the floor of the training center.

"I didn't think they'd do it. I never even suspected it. I didn't think any human being would do something like ....... that kind of money in the middle."

Trust in humans.

Trust in human goodness.

There was such humanity in Olivia. After being disappointed in religion and faith, I wondered if Olivia was now disappointed in people.

Olivia was silent for a moment, then spoke up.

"The funeral is being held today."

"If it's a funeral......."

"Yes, my foster father."

Libertarian Lance.

His death is a big deal, not only for the religious community, but for the empire itself.

The death of a war hero is a war hero's death, no matter how you slice it. Even those who died in battle against demons.

So whatever the story behind it and whatever issues are actually involved, on the surface, his death is a very unfortunate event for the public. And so, now that the dust has settled, a funeral is being held to mourn the passing of Levereer Lance.

"Reinhard, can you go somewhere with me for a minute?"

I couldn't refuse Olivia's request.

\* \* \*

I couldn't feel it inside the temple, but I could tell that the funeral of Leverier Lancet was a state funeral. Every house on the street had black flags as a sign of condolence, and there were vendors selling flowers on the street.

The funeral procession would make its way from the abandoned monastery where the body was recovered to the Crusader headquarters.

At the southern edge of the ecliptic, a funeral procession was entering and the road to the Crusader Legion was being controlled by guards.

-Maybe this is good.......

-Looks like a bunch of demons to kill.......

Many of the people who gathered to watch the funeral procession would have been followers of the Five Great Patriarchs, while others would have been civilians grieving the death of a war hero.

The hatred of demons and the fear of demigods were widespread among the people.

It doesn't matter why Leviathan was in that place, on that date, at that time.

People believed that Leviathan had died in a fierce battle with demonic remnants, which was eventually true.

You just don't know the story behind it.

No one knows the true story of Leviathan Lance, who blackmailed his foster daughter to regain his usurped power, and ultimately tried to work with the devil himself when his life was in danger to divide the empire.

Olivia would be thrilled with this situation.

You're safe, thanks to the demons' attack.

It's hard to accept that Leviathan Lance, the man who blackmailed Adriana for her life, is now a hero in death.

At the mouth of the road to the south, a grand funeral procession emerged.

Paladins and priests escorted the funeral procession.

Dozens of ornately decorated coffins followed the wagons they pulled. These were the coffins of Leviathan Rancher, his paladins, and the unnamed members of the Order.

Leveri Lance was decapitated by me. I don't know what happened to his body, torn and broken by Loyaar, bursting and burning with magic.

I don't know what the opinion of the entire Crusader Order is, but I can see Elayon Bolton leading the procession from the vanguard on his white horse.

Neither the Empire nor Elion Bolton would be happy with this situation.

Nevertheless, for the sake of the grief of the ignorant citizens, he feigns sorrow and leads the funeral procession with a solemn expression.

When the funeral procession appeared, there were many people crying about what was so sad.

-Aigoo!

The tears that began to spread, starting with a few cries, were quite strange.

They don't know Libertarian Lance.

But I don't know why they are so sad, even tearful, over the death. I don't know if it's because they're religious or not.

But I have no right to question their tears.

I'm the most inhuman person in the room.

Whether or not they deserved to die, I'm a crazy person for attending the funerals of people I killed.

There were quite a few people who weren't crying in the midst of the mourners.

But the people who weren't crying looked a little troubled.

I was fidgeting like a sinner for not crying.

Tears are like involuntary muscles.

Unless you've practiced, you can't cry just because you want to cry. Tears come down, not up.

Olivia watched with a calm gaze as the funeral procession drew closer and closer.

"Reinhardt."

"Yes."

"I think this whole thing is so disgusting. Am I too bad?"

Olivia says as she watches the coffin that will contain their bodies approach.

All of this is just for show, after all.

People don't know what they need to know. They're only doing it because it's a good picture to make a hero out of a dead Leviathan.

Olivia hates Leviathan, but she also hates this situation where her death is being used against her.

From all of this, Olivia is disgusted.

"I think we can do that."

Olivia shakes her head at my words.

As the funeral procession gradually approached and began to enter through the boulevards of the southern part of the ecliptic, the surroundings became noisier with the wailing of the people.

Led by Elayon Bolton, they will make their way to the Crusader headquarters. Flowers will be thrown and tears will be shed by those who have gathered to watch the long, long procession.

We were watching the spectacle.

-me, over there.......

-Saint over there....... No?

-If you were a saint,......?

-You're the boss's daughter!

I've been watching for too long.

Olivia was a recognizable face.

So there were enough people who recognized Olivia.

In a sea of tears, someone waved to Olivia, and in an instant, all eyes were on her.

Saint of Eredian.

He's the guy who made Libertarian Lance disappear, but people don't care about that right now.

A former Crusader Knight Commander and war hero who died honorably while fighting demons.

It was important for his daughter to be here.

-Saint Iago!

"......."

Olivia's expression hardened, and in an instant, the crowd around us began to crowd around her and me.

"Oh holy saint, maybe this is good, maybe this is good!"

"You have to get revenge on those dirty, ugly demons!"

"In honor of your father, you must lead the fight against demons!"

"Oh saint, I'm so scared I can't live!"

"Saint!"

"A saint must save us!"

"How can I do this when the warrior is not here!"

The neighborhood quickly turned into chaos.

As if Olivia were some kind of god, countless people knelt before her and cried out.

They don't know why Levereer Ranze disappeared, nor do they know that Olivia has abandoned her faith.

The devil is back.

However, there are no more warriors.

Someone has to stand up to the devil.

Someone else, not me, someone else who is great and brave and good and powerful.

May you defeat the devil for me.

People want it.

-We must defeat the devil, saint!

-Saint!

-Aigo! Saint, save us!

They don't know what Olivia is really capable of.

You may only know that she had very powerful divine powers and was a saint.

A lot of people think they're kings.

Seeing them on their knees, begging, telling them to die in their place.

Seeing so many people openly begging to sacrifice for us.

I watched as Olivia's eyes lost focus.

Olivia was feeling overwhelmed.

Restore Your Faith He suffered in the midst of a crowd of bullies.

I've seen the abhorrent behavior of people willing to take the lives of others for their own use, and I've seen their deaths celebrated.

Teachers were stealing the donations we had been squeezing out of our pockets.

Beyond issues of faith and religion.

Now, in a place that has nothing to do with faith and religion, I see people crying out and openly asking to die in their place.

Watching people try to nonchalantly push someone to their death with tears as a shield.

Olivia felt like something important had been broken, something that was all that was left of her heart.

"Why would I?"

Olivia's voice was emotionless and cold.

"Why would I do that?"

Olivia, broken.

Episode 336.

Why should I die for you.

Olivia pushed her way through the mourners, who had frozen at her words, and out of sight.

"Disgusting."

Olivia said with a stern look on her face.

"Being human, it's so disgusting."

With her last shreds of humanity gone, Olivia covered her mouth and muttered, "I'm sorry.

After being confronted with humanity's ugly nature so many times, Olivia seemed to have lost what little compassion she had left for the human race.

"Don't be so hard on them, they don't know what they're doing."

"......."

Olivia clicks her tongue.

"Yes, you did. It would have been different."

Olivia looks at me.

"I would have said she must be a dirty, filthy bitch to be saved by demons, and that she should be burned at the stake."

Olivia's eyes changed.

In Olivia's eyes, which always looked a little sad, I could see an abyss. It was similar to the look in Radia Schmidt's eyes.

The malice and disgust of humans eventually broke Olivia.

I couldn't argue with Olivia's statement.

I couldn't argue with Olivia's statement that humans are disgusting when they don't know and disgusting when they do know.

"Demons? Yeah, I don't know why they saved me. But if he's really trying to recreate the demon world and kill everyone."

Olivia squeezes my hand.

"I fight to protect the people I love, a few of them. I would never fight for those things."

Olivia pulled me into a hug.

Like Ellen did.

Olivia decided to fight, too.

However, the underlying reason for this was a very different attitude from Olivia's.

And so, it was bound to be different.

\* \* \*

Olivia was an outgoing person to say the least. She was sweet and kind to many people, but she was also very determined.

But even they break when pushed to their limits.

He was getting tired of gently rejecting and pushing away the many people who clung to him.

Recent events have pushed Olivia to a psychological breaking point.

Olivia felt betrayed when she realized that the orphanage she had been supporting was embezzling funds and starving children.

And at the end, I faced people who used tears as a weapon to force me to be a scapegoat.

Realizing that there is absolutely no reason to live a life for such people, Olivia is transformed.

If she had to fight a demon, she would, but it wouldn't be for humans, Olivia said.

If I felt that way, I'd probably join forces with the next devil for the destruction of mankind, and if I knew it was me, I'd come around.

But I didn't want to take advantage of Olivia's brokenness. I didn't want to give her some weird mission to accomplish, to someone who would be a pity to leave alone.

After all, it's not like I want the world to end.

Of course, Olivia's behavior wasn't all that different from her usual self.

-off. Don't be annoying.

-Neh, neh? Uh, sister, what are you doing......?

-What do you mean, I've told you several times I'm not going, and you don't get it? Are you an idiot?

-Gram....... nothing....... what....... Uh, sister......?

-If you're an idiot, why do you keep making me say the same thing dozens of times. Hey, look me in the eye. Look me in the eye.

-Uh, you're scaring me. Go, why are you suddenly.......

Since then, I've seen Olivia fire off a few harsh words at someone.

Radia Schmidt wasn't the only one calling for a return to religion.

Perhaps it was the fact that Olivia had been responding to such demands with an embarrassed refusal up until this point, that made her respond to such words and demands with more than just a cut and dry refusal.

I think that's a good thing.

-Ah, Reinhardt, would you like to have lunch?

But when I see him bullying a junior like that, and then smiling broadly at me.

You know, the one that comes running out of nowhere, smiling and throwing his arms around you.......

What to say.

Because my sister seems to have become an even crazier bitch than before.......

Some....... I'm afraid.

\* \* \*

My sister is different.

Still, on the surface, the changes seemed positive.

It's because Olivia is such a nice person that people who try to push themselves on her, even when they don't feel like it, keep sticking around and won't let go.

In a good way, it makes you look human.

When Olivia stormed out, no one seemed to dare to speak to her, even if they were afraid to.

Olivia doesn't use force against anyone. If you try to do something with force, you're going to get your ass kicked.

So I thought it would be in Olivia's best interest to come out strong.

One day during one of those vacations.

"Are you ready?"

"Yeah."

I met Elise in the forest south of where the Rotary Club headquarters are located.

"I'm going to explain the council to him now, and I want you to remember it well."

Meeting with the Vampire Council.

To that end, she began to give me a list of things to watch out for.

The outcome of today's meeting will make a big difference in the future.

So, there was no room for error.

\* \* \*

-Flash!

Teleporting back to Castle Epiax, the winds were blowing harder than before.

The castle, in the midst of a bitter blizzard, seemed even more eerie than before, perhaps because of the beings within.

"And Radia?"

"I told them not to leave the room while the meeting was happening."

"Good."

Sickness.

He doesn't really care for her, but now that she's with him, he does. He's scared out of his mind, and now that he's here, he can't afford to make a fool of himself.

-Snarl

I use Sarkhegar's ring to return to my Valerie form.

The second thing you do in the name of Valier, not Reinhardt.

Attending the Vampire Council.

A meeting of the heads of the five Lord Vampire families.

The last time I was in a Temple group mission, we were meeting in a mafia game, and it was both terrifying and hilarious to think that the same place was now home to the Lord Vampires, a group of people who could turn an entire continent on its head if they showed up.

I opened the door to the conference room and walked in to find four people already seated at a round table.

They weren't part of the demonic realm, so they didn't exactly bow to me.

Some looked intrigued, some looked disinterested, some looked condescending, and some couldn't guess the intent.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Bali."

I'm old, and I'm not part of the demonic world.

So I decided to call them by their honorifics, if not as politely as possible.

And a chuckle echoed through the chilly conference room that made me afraid to take a seat.

"The master of the non-existent is here."

Something that doesn't exist.

He was referring to Darkland, which was long gone. I didn't bother to respond to the taunt.

The vampire who laughed at me.

She was a pale stranger with luscious red lips.

Beauty aside, there was something distinctive about her.

I wasn't too surprised, as I had already heard it from Elise.

"Nice to meet you, my name is Lerouen, Gazoo, Thursday of the Seven Nights."

Waiting ears.

There's only one thing it says.

She's an elf.

A long-extinct elf was alive, labeled a vampire.

The idea that road vampires are ancient beings was realized just by speaking to the first road vampire.

An elf is an elf.

Even more surprising was what was next to him.

"Good to see you, little devil."

A gravelly voice came from the man sitting next to her.

"Gazoo, Galash, the Friday of the seven nights."

Huge, with skin as hard as a rock.

Red eyes and tusk-like teeth protruding above the lower lip.

Galarsh the Orc Vampire.

It was a weird feeling to hear, but it was also very intimidating.

The Lord Vampires are supposed to be brilliant wizards, but you look like you should be wielding a stone axe, not a vampire.

Then there was the vampire, looking at me curiously.

"Hello Archdemon! I'm Gazoo Lucinil of Wednesday, and I'll take care of you! I'm the older one, so I'll be easier to talk to. Okay?"

"......Yes, whatever."

A vampire with somehow high tension.

She looks and acts like a little girl.

'They're all unique in their own way, but they're not ferocious. They've been around for a while.......... They're all pretty mild-mannered, as far as demand goes....... I think it's safe to say they're harmless.'

She has the appearance of a young girl vampire, but.......

They're not human in the first place.

Obviously.

I heard it was a homunculus.

It was unthinkable that a homunculus could become a vampire. I'm not sure who made that homunculus, and I'm not sure how it became a vampire.

Lucinil is perhaps the most unusual of the Lord Vampires here. Lucinil was looking at me curiously.

And finally.

"It is an honor to meet a great man."

An elderly gentleman removes his bowler hat and bows deeply to me.

"I am Antirrhinus, the Gazoo of the Saturday of the Seven Nights."

He stared at me with a smile whose intentions were unclear.

He was human, I was told.

Aside from Eleris, Antirrhynchus is the most normal-looking person in the room, or rather, the least normal.

In fact, Eleris warned me to be wary of Antirrhinus. His intentions were unknown.

Tuesday's Elise.

Lucinyl in demand.

Thursday's Lerouen.

Friday's Galash.

And Antirrhinus on Saturday.

Five of the seven nights would be the current power of the Vampire Council.

"Okay, let's go ahead and run the meeting with the Archdemon in attendance."

Antirrhinus declared the last day open.

Episode 337.

The heads of all five vampire families look at me.

"There's no getting around it, we need your help."

They were probably right.

Because that's all the last heir to a fallen state has to say to a fringe faction.

Lerouen opens his mouth to speak.

"I'm sure the Heir to the Demon Realm is aware that we did not participate in the Great Demon War?"

"I know."

The corner of Lerouen's mouth twitches.

"The Vampire Council did not join the Demon War when the former Archdemon, Demon King Valier, the most powerful being in the world, was alive. Why would we, who did not cooperate even when the Demon World was strong, join hands now that it has fallen?"

You know I didn't help you when your house was still standing, and now that it's fallen, I have no reason to help you.

That was the sound. Lerouen looked at the prince of a world that didn't exist with a sneer.

Galarsh stares at me, too.

"The Vampire Council owes the Darklands nothing in the first place. Our existence and yours were never necessary or beneficial to each other. Even the uncanny power of the Archdemon could not dominate us, and so the demons of old have left us alone, and we have stayed out of the affairs of the Darklands. It was a longstanding unwritten rule, though not codified. Until the lords of Huayo swore allegiance to the Darklands."

Galarsh wasn't laughing at me like Lerouen, but he saw no reason to cooperate.

The next person to speak was Lucinil, the little vampire, if not a child.

"Archdemon, what do you intend to do with rebuilding the Demon Realm anyway?"

Rusinil asks a more innocent question, one that gets to the heart of the matter.

"You're going to kill all the humans? You can't do that. They say it doesn't have to be human blood, but there's nothing like human blood. I don't want to die in tasteless blood."

"I don't intend to kill all humans, and I don't think it's possible."

"Really? So you're saying you kill half of them?"

Why are you so obsessed with killing this and that?

"I could spend the rest of my life just trying to get Darklands back to some semblance of strength, and even if I wanted to, it would be difficult."

"Hmm, I guess so. I mean, it's not like they're going to be able to get away with it....... Even if Archdemons outlive mere mortals, they'll never be as good as that last Darkland....... Hmmm......."

Lucinil says this, and then starts to scratch his head as if he's thinking about something. Finally, Antrianus of Toyo looks at me and smiles gently.

"Isn't it absurd, Great One, that you don't dream of war, yet you need power?"

"Without the power to protect ourselves, rebuilding wouldn't even be possible."

"Demon wars were started to defend themselves, not to destroy each other, although humans did start the invasions."

The idea of self-defense is really just an excuse.

"If the humans see the reunited Darklands, they will crush them, and we will have to bleed to protect the still-fragile forces of the Darklands. How and why we must do so is a matter of....... I'm not sure I understand."

Lerouen nodded his head in agreement, which was echoed by Galarsh.

Rusinil didn't seem to be listening to the back-and-forth conversation about what she was thinking.

"No matter how you slice it, we have nothing to gain by cooperating with the Archdemon, and even if we did want something, there's no way he could give it to us."

Lerouen has a point. I don't like the sneer, but I can't help it.

There is no reason for the Vampire Council to cooperate with me, and they have nothing to gain from me. If I have an alliance with them and they need help, I don't see why they shouldn't.

I have nothing to give, and they have nothing to gain.

"That's a different story. Can I try that?"

At my words, Antirrhinus smiled gently and nodded.

"There's time left for immortals, so let's do it."

"It seems that the Great Demon War is over, and the Five Great Houses are now seeking independence."

Lerouen and the others were dumbfounded.

"What was that supposed to do?"

"Humans banded together for the Great Demon War, but once it was over, various factions and interests didn't disband and started to have other ideas, most notably the Crusader Knights, who wanted to create an independent state of the Five Great Houses."

Formation of the independent state of the Five Great Houses.

Lerouen and Galarsh's faces hardened at the words. Divine power is an antithesis to vampires, and the mention of a religious nation seemed to make them nervous.

"Of course, the last time I was here, I killed a man named Leviathan Lance, the former head of the Crusader Knights and a key member of the faction seeking independence, along with Eleris here."

There was a threat, but it's gone.

Lerouen shakes his head at my comment.

"I've already eliminated the threat of the council, so if you want to show your appreciation, you can cooperate....... Is that what you're saying?"

I shake my head, wondering if Lerouen meant to imply that I owed him a favor for taking care of an enemy you'll have to fear in the future.

"That's not true at all, if I said that, you'd just wipe your mouth and say what the hell?"

"Yeah, right?"

Lerouen watched me with a narrowed brow.

"But that's what Leviathan Lance said before he died, that he was willing to work with me. That if he wanted the Empire to be weak, he should have left himself alone."

"I see, that's what I've been wondering, too. You would have benefited greatly from letting the anti-Imperial forces go."

It's all in the details.

Just like seeking the cooperation of the Vampire Council under the guise of rebuilding the Demon Realm when you're not interested in rebuilding the Demon Realm, you'll end up with a whole bunch of stuff.

The reason for killing Reverie Rancher is all about tacking on.

"If I leave it alone, the independent state of the Five Great Houses will belong to Leviathan, so why would I let that happen?"

"......?"

"That's what I'm supposed to eat, right?"

I said, and this time they all looked confused.

Except for Eleris.

Eleris's mouth dropped open in shock. She realized what I was talking about.

"......Eating the power of the Five Great Houses. What does that mean?"

When asked how the devil could come up with such an outlandish idea and if I thought it would work, I put my hand on the table.

-Snarl

"I am, the champion of Tuan."

The vampires' pale complexions turned white as they realized they were holding something in their hands.

"Ugh, ugh, ugh, ugh, ugh, ugh, ugh, ugh, ugh, ugh, ugh, ugh!"

-Bam!

Lucinil leapt in place, and then fell backwards into the water.

\* \* \*

Tiamata is like the undead's equivalent of a seizure button.

Elise freaked out when she first saw it, and she still can't look at it properly.

Lucinil grew aggravated, Lerouen drew back in horror, and Galarsh frowned grimly.

"Ho, ho, champion of Tuan."

Only Antirrhinus was looking at the Tiamata in my hand with a rather curious expression.

It's not going to happen, but for the sake of road vampires who might have a heart attack, I've back-summoned Tiamata.

"I didn't mean to threaten you, but you know what I mean."

The undead had had enough of seeing the last thing they wanted to see.

"You thought your heart was going to fall out of your chest, asshole!"

Rusinil was furious, pacing in place and screaming at the top of her lungs.

"I'm sorry, but if you don't show it, you can't prove it, right?"

"If there's such a thing, you should at least give me a heads up that there's such a thing! Tiamatarani, ugh, that's so offensive!"

He even holds out his arm to Lerouen to show her, saying he feels like he has chicken pox all over his body.

"Tsk, tsk, that's not possible, Lucinil."

At that, Lerouen clicked his tongue briefly and patted Lucinil on the head.

"It's sprouting, it's sprouting, it's sprouting!"

Anyway.

With the exception of Antirrhinus, it was clear that Tiamata's arrival had caught everyone off guard. Even Elysse's heart sank.

"It's a particularly dangerous object for an undead like us, but I can see what you're saying. Are you saying that with your status as Champion of Tuan, you will be able to become the master of the Great Lord's forces?"

"I don't think it's impossible."

Leverier Ranze wanted Olivia at his side, but he didn't think it was impossible to unite the forces of the Five Lords in Reinhardt's name and become their master.

"Okay, Great One, so why did you seek a council when you could have just as easily maneuvered them behind the scenes, actually become their master, or forged a united front with them?"

Now we get down to business.

I cross my arms and stare them in the face.

"Because if I were a representative of the Five Great Lords or something like that, I'd wipe you all out for not cooperating."

This time, Antirrhinus's expression hardened.

"It's a nice picture, isn't it?"

"The Champion of Tuan, the God of Purity, creates a force uniting the Five Great Houses in a new name to exterminate the vampire faction, and becomes its leader."

"The purpose is the extermination of the undead. The first targets are the Lord Vampire families."

"If a large group of Crusader Templars came to crush your faction, one by one, do you think you could handle that?"

This is not a threat as a demon, but as a champion of Tuan.

"You're threatening me, little devil."

Galarsh looks at me with fury in his eyes.

"You're right, I have nothing to offer you, so you're a hundred times right that we shouldn't be doing business in the first place."

"I can't give you anything, but I need your help, so what can I do?"

"It's blackmail."

"I'm sorry. Do you think I want to do this to the elderly? All the beams in the house have been ripped out and blown away, but I have to do what I can."

-Snarl

Once again summoning Tiamata, I placed it on the table.

"I need your help, or I'm going to kill you all."

The smile finally faded from Lerouen's face as he sneered at me.

"Wow, what a ridiculously cool asshole."

Rusinil chuckled in disbelief.

Episode 338.

The already chilly atmosphere was made even colder by the bombshell that if you don't cooperate, I'm going to be attached to the Five Great Houses, and I'm going to start hunting Lord Vampires with a vengeance.

Lucinil stares at me, arms crossed in disbelief.

"You think you're going to get out of here alive if you talk like that? You don't value your life? You think even if you had a Tiamata, we wouldn't be able to rip your head off with our eyes closed?"

"I'm sure she'll figure it out, because she's always done it no matter what."

"Me, degradation!"

The one who was most surprised by my comment was Elise herself.

I don't think I was expecting it to go this way at all.

"......Now, aren't you trying to eat life too raw?"

"Don't you think you should try? You're free to try to kill me, but if I somehow escape, you'd better be prepared for what happens next."

The words are fierce, but I have no real intention of fighting, so I summon Tiamata back.

I know enough to know that stroking their egos is not a good idea.

But in the end, I didn't have much more than blackmail to play.

There's nothing to give and no reason for them to cooperate.

If I can get them to help me by swallowing my pride and getting down on the floor and begging, I'll do it.

But that's not going to get you cooperation.

So the best I can do is this.

"Well, technically, the Five Great Patriarchs are more powerful and bigger, so it's to my advantage to join them, but I came to the council first because I thought it would be polite to come here first, since we're closer neighbors, and if I wear the mask of Tuan's Champion and become the Five Great Patriarchs' mascot, I'll inevitably be forced to make a relationship with them."

I think it's a bit of a cop-out to say that we're here first because we have bigger clients, but we're here because we care.

Galarsch didn't hide his displeasure, and neither did Lerouen.

They already seemed to resent me for making such an outlandish statement. Lucinil was the same way.

"Let's work together."

But.

Out of the blue, Antony has expressed a willingness to cooperate.

Everyone panicked.

"......? Yes? What?"

However, I was the one who panicked the most.

No.

Why?

"Why are you surprised? You said you wanted cooperation, and I will cooperate, Great One."

Antirrhinus is looking at me with a questioning smile. Lucinil glances nervously at the old gentleman.

"Antirrhinus, what else are you up to?"

"Just, isn't it interesting that one of the holy relics of the Five Lords, even that Tiamata, has fallen into the hands of an Archdemon?"

The old gentleman looks at me and smiles.

"I mean, can't you sense the malice of the gods?"

For the first time in history, a demon became the master of Tiamata. Even an Archdemon.

"Even if you lose everything for nothing, even if you achieve everything you dream of, how can you not go along for the ride when there's nothing but fun to be had?"

There was a dark malice in Antirrhinus's eyes.

Other people's misery, happiness, sadness, and joy.

Such wickedness, that by watching it, they would appease the free gift of eternal life.

"Are you insane? Antirrhinus."

At Galarsch's words, Antirrhinus only smirked.

I could see why Elise had warned me to be wary of Antrianus. He was the only Lord Vampire who'd ever told me he'd cooperate with me, and it made my skin crawl.

I'm glad to hear they're working together, but I didn't expect it to be in such a bizarre context.

"If someone who has lived this long is sane, that's more of a problem."

Antirrhinus' statement that he had lived long enough to be insane, and that every decision he made was the same as that of a madman, was surprisingly persuasive.

"Well, I, Antirianus, head of the Toyo clan and household, will cooperate with the Demon King, and I'm sure there's more fun to be had than a Demon War, so if you mess with the Demon King, I'll consider you messing with me."

"I really don't know what she's thinking, do you, Lerouen?"

"......is it a day or two?"

Apparently this was not the first time Antirrhinus had done this. Antirrhinus decided to cooperate, and slammed his index finger on the table.

"Anyway, as immortals, we have a lot of time, and we don't have to decide everything in one sitting, so why don't we take a few days to talk about it?"

Antirrhinus stares at me and says, "Yes.

I could see the intention was to take a break, clear my head, and have a conversation.

That's a good thing for me.

There's nothing scarier than a favor for no reason.

I feel like he's breathing down my neck all the more because I'm being showered with favors for no reason.

I felt this weird pressure.

"You, you sneaky little Archdemon, need to talk to me."

Lucinil wagged a finger at me as if to say, "That's good. Eleris looked at me and nodded in approval.

I feel like the nicest kid in the room just turned into the one who hates me the most.

\* \* \*

Antony's intervention brought the council to a halt, and whatever his intentions, it's clear that his decision to cooperate had a ripple effect that changed the mood.

Leaving the conference room, Rusinil motioned for me to follow him and led the way without a word.

A homunculus vampire with silver hair and red eyes.

Gazoo of demand.

Eleris had said that Lucinyl would be the most harmless of the three, but it was clear that she was the most upsetting once it was revealed.

"Where did you learn to be so mean, did the devil teach you that?"

I ate a padlip or something like that, but I didn't actually think anything of the Ancestral Demon King, so I wasn't upset.

"It's in my nature."

Lucinil led the way, then turned to look back at me from the window, where I could see the blizzard raging outside.

"You're not doing yourself any favors by doing that."

Lucinil stares at me, still, and says nothing.

"I don't care if it's Antrianus or me who decided to cooperate with you, Lerouen or Galarsch must be really upset."

"I'm sure you did, but so what, it's all I can do."

"It's the rebuilding of the Demon Realm, it's Nabal, and I might die before then."

It's a ridiculous ending, with the Lord Vampire himself being killed while threatening the Lord Vampire's family, but Lucinil's cautionary tone, rather than anger, convinces me that Eleris wasn't so far off after all.

"I was intrigued by the idea of you being Valerie's successor, but I'll always remember you as a very arrogant, clueless, and overconfident weirdo on a subject that you have no clue about."

Being a flawed personality, Lucinil seemed to have developed a very negative perception of me.

"By the way, I want you to know that the reason I chose to work with you after such a bad first impression is not because you're pretty, but because I personally owe Elise a favor."

But apart from that, Rusinil seemed to have decided to work with me.

A debt to Elise.

I didn't bother to ask what it was. I didn't expect her to answer. Lucinil bit her lip in annoyance and glared at me.

"Chet, Eleris must have known I was going to do this."

I don't know what she owes me. But I do know that Elise let me into the Vampire Council because she knew that Lucinil's debt to me would make me reluctant to cooperate. I think that's what she meant when she said it would be harmless.

Gazoo on Wednesday and Saturday.

Both promised to cooperate with me for their own reasons. Lucinil crosses her arms and shakes her head.

"Anyway, you've got the cooperation of three out of five families now, so why don't you go home and stop making a big deal out of this?"

Apparently, they decided that my continued presence at the council would do nothing but get on Lerouen and Galarsh's nerves.

"If we're going to do this, shouldn't we try to convince them?"

"I had a feeling he would. What a shameless bastard."

Lucinil clicked her tongue, kicked it, and sighed.

"Follow me."

Rusinil pulled me back, as if to say this wasn't the place to talk about it.

Leaving the palace building, Lucinil walked through the snow, her feet sinking in.

-Whoooooooo

Needless to say, my feet got stuck in the snow when I tried to walk through the snow on a tiny subject.

"Erai."

-Bam!

Lucinil stretched out her hand once, and a shockwave exploded, blasting the snow in all directions.

"The council must have built it in the wrong place. Why did they build a palace in this place where it snows all year round, I don't understand?"

"......The Lord of Demand wasn't around when this palace was built, was he?"

"This place was built so long ago that there was a Sunday and a Monday, and I'm not even sure when that was. They've done a lot of renovations, of course. It must have been really crude in the beginning."

Rusinil grumbles that he has nothing to do with the council's positioning. He leads the way through the blizzard, and I follow.

"I don't know if this is the right way to put it, but I'd like to know your career order. Can you give me that?"

"Experience? Oh, you mean age?"

"Yes."

Rusinil holds up a finger as if it's no secret.

"As you can see, Lerouen is first. Then Galarsh, then Elyse, then me, and finally Antrianus."

Lucinil and I left the main palace and arrived at a space that we could call the Outer Palace.

"Ugh, this place is haunted by ghosts. What's wrong with this place?"

-Uhhhhhh.......

Lucinil clapped her hands together, as if frantic with the ghostly cries coming from all directions, and the ghosts scattered and vanished into thin air.

A vampire saying it's a bad place to live is a bit of a stretch.

"It's not a one-day thing, and even if you kick it out, it keeps coming back."

A parlor-like room in a star palace. Lucinil sat on a worn couch, and I sat across from him.

"I don't know what Antirrhinus is up to, but whatever it is, he wants to convince Lerouen and Galarsch, right?"

"If you can."

"We've all lived so long that we can't fathom a little deviation, can we, little Archdemon?"

"Right?"

"How did we all end up as vampires?"

You can't be born a vampire.

All of them have states before they became vampires. Lerouen would have been an elf, Galarsh would have been an orc, and Lucien would have been a homunculus.

"That's all different, isn't it?"

"They can't all be the same."

Leaning her chin on the armrest of the couch, Lucinille stares at me.

"Because I don't want to die."

The five great road vampires.

The only reason they became vampires is because they didn't want to die.

I wasn't expecting there to be a big reason, but it felt a little odd that they ended up converging on that reason.

"Antirrhinus said he became a vampire because he couldn't decide whether to be a lich or a vampire. He said he thought it would be more uncomfortable to be a skeleton than to never see the sun, but now that he's a road vampire, if he wants to see the sun, he can, albeit painfully, so he's pretty lucky. Anyway, I became a vampire because I didn't want to die."

No.

That's kind of creepy in its own way, but yeah.

"I was a homunculus. A homunculus is an unstable magical creature. I was exceptionally stable, but I didn't have a concrete lifespan, and I knew that death would come at some point, and I was terrified of facing it, so I tried everything I could think of to keep from dying, and the last thing I did was vampirize, because I didn't want to die, either."

Lucinil looks at me.

He started to say something, then shut up.

"Anyway, everyone has their own specific reasons, but at the end of the day, I became a vampire because I didn't want to die."

The circumstances of Lerouen, Galarsh, and Eleris are not explained, but Lucinil suggests that their escape from death was vampirization.

"So in a way, your threat is the one that works best for us, because the thing we fear most is death."

The only way to get through to the immortals, who have had almost everything they've ever wanted in their long lives, is to threaten them with death, for they fear death.

"But that's only to a certain extent, after all. We've been around for a very, very long time, and it's not like we've been the only family for generations, and the family has changed hands a few times. How do you think that happened?"

"......I don't know, it's just me."

"There's no way vampires of our size could have been hunted down and killed."

I read something in Lucinil's eyes.

"Is it suicide?"

"Yes."

Boredom.

"Most of the time, that's what happens when five families change heads. Well, there are other times, but that's none of your business."

Powerful vampires hiding in places far from the world can't be killed. They're not powerful, and they don't reveal their existence to the world.

So there's no way for them to be replaced other than by giving up their lives.

"What, does that mean I'm not afraid of death after all?"

You become a vampire because you don't want to lose your life, but if you're a road vampire because you've lived so long that you're bored with life, then you can't get anything out of risking your life, right?

"No, on the contrary."

Lucinil smiles coyly.

"I've lived so long, I'm about to get tired of living......."

There is sadness in the vampire's eyes.

"You still have a reason to live."

So I'm going to come back and say that these people must have a reason to live.

The fact that you haven't given up on life yet is proof enough.

Lucinil was giving me information.

Episode 339.

A life so long inevitably involves boredom, and so the Lord Vampires, tired of living, turned their backs on the world.

So for the five families still clinging to this life that is sure to be torturous, there must be at least one reason to live, Lucinil said.

So for them, life still matters.

"Of course, it's only a nuisance if you kill us, but if it's really possible, Leruen and Galarsh might be willing to cooperate. After all, your lifetime is only a short time in our eyes, and when you consider that we'll be spared the trouble of helping you in the meantime, and we'll have one less debt to pay to the Darklands, it's not such a bad deal."

The Demon Realm and the Council have had a rocky relationship, but in exchange for helping to rebuild the Demon Realm, the Council is indebted to the Darklands.

They even have a Tiamata, so they can do whatever they want to bother you with. I've even already had three lords promise to cooperate with me.

Lerouen and Galarsch are now in the minority. Lucinil narrows her eyes at me.

"So, since I'm going to cooperate with you, things are going to take care of themselves and work out in your favor, so don't pull any weird shit like you did earlier. Got it?"

"Don't worry, I'm not the kind of guy to do that for nothing."

"No, you're just being a jerk, it's called contemplation."

......How did you know?

Are there any traces of what you've done and said on Valerie's face, and is it okay for a vampire from Homunculus to rhyme?

Anyway, thanks to Elise, it looks like Lucinil is going to be on my side in the first place, and Antrianus is going to be on my side too.

And what do you know.

As for the other road vampires, I honestly don't know yet.......

"How did Eleris end up with this guy as her lord....... Ugh."

Why is he so nice?

It's a bit of a chatterbox, but in the end, he explains things to me and gives me advice, so it's more than harmless, it's endearing.

Rather embarrassed by my overzealous favor or not, Lucinil flopped down on the couch and crossed her arms as if she didn't care anymore.

He told the other road vampires that he had a reason to live.

That's like admitting that Lucinyl has at least one reason to live.

"I don't know if I should ask you this."

"When in doubt, it's polite not to do it, Archdemon."

"What's Lucinyl's raison d'etre?"

"You're doing it again, you're really not that smart."

Lucinil looks at me with a frown.

"Why, if I tell you, will you do something for me?"

"We can at least think about it together, right?"

"Horses are liquid gold. Horses."

Lucinil crosses her arms and stares up at the castle ceiling. Lucinil murmurs to herself, not exactly a secret.

"I want a soul."

I felt my breath catch in my throat at that vague statement.

With those words, I felt an immeasurable sense of woe about my long, long life as a homunculus and my life as a vampire.

I want a soul.

What does that mean.

I don't want to be human, I don't want to be something else, I want to have a soul.

We don't know if only intelligent races have souls, or if some creatures do and others don't.

Just to be clear.

As a created being, a homunculus would have no soul.

Lucinil wants what he lacks. He turns his head toward me and laughs.

"Is it pathetic, that a being of this caliber would even dream of such a thing?"

"......No, not really?"

I'm sure it's a desperate problem. I can't completely empathize, of course.

I want to have a soul.

Rusinil didn't explain why he wanted it.

"It's just something. It's not like it's going to kill me."

The way he said it was condescending. I can only hope for that, he said, as if he had no great aspirations or desires.

But.

Lucinil must have lived an unfathomably long time with that one desire.

\* \* \*

While Valier was talking to Lucinil in the Star Palace, Eleris was talking to Antirrhinus.

"Antirrhinus."

"Yes, Elise."

"What are you up to?"

At that, the old gentleman merely smiled in embarrassment.

"The Devil says you need help, so I offer to help, but you ask me what I'm up to, so I don't know what to tell you. Heh."

"In the meeting during the Demonic War, you said that you didn't intend to cooperate without even thinking about it, but this time you're willing to cooperate, doesn't that make you suspicious?"

Lerouen and Galarsch's reaction was understandable.

That's why it's strange that Antirrhinus didn't think twice about helping.

"That's right......."

The old gentleman still wore his gentle, kindly smile.

"Demon Kingdoms wasn't fun, and this looks like fun."

"......Funny?"

"Yes, fun."

Antirrhinus, who had been smiling the whole time, cautiously opens his eyes.

The vampire's red eyes stare at Eleris.

"If you're going to endure a grueling long day, don't you think you should have a little entertainment once in a while?"

"Entertainment......?"

No matter how much they agreed to cooperate, Antirrhinus was approaching this as a time-killing exercise, and it was Eleris's idea of a backlash.

"You'll have to say....... You'll have to go to....... Antirrhinus."

"Ah, my apologies, Elise. I didn't mean to belittle or disrespect you....... But what's there to be upset about, whether I'm cooperating out of the goodness of my heart or because it's entertainment."

-Taktak

The old gentleman taps the floor of the castle with the tip of his cane and smiles.

"It's true you want to help, isn't it?"

With those words, the old gentleman brushed past her. Eleris stared at the back of Antirrhinus' head.

With the help of a council, it's like having a thousand horses in Bali.

Is it really right to hold the hand of that sinister vampire?

Eleris wasn't so sure about that.

\* \* \*

While the council is in session, there is time for it to be properly concluded. That's why I had to stay in the castle of Epirus for at least a few days.

"Hey, Archdemon."

"...... Why?"

Now that he had my attention, he started following me down the hallway whenever I got up.

"Honestly, don't you appreciate me offering to help?"

"......Thanks, but why is that?"

Lucinil stares at me.

"I'm just curious about the taste of arc-demon blood. Do you mind if I suck a little?"

"What, what are you talking about!"

I almost had a seizure at the suddenness of the words.

Is it okay to say something like, "I'm going to get a glass of water"?

"No, you think I'm going to turn you into a vampire? I'm just going to give you a taste. Just a little. Oh, I'm really curious. Really. Can't you do that too?"

"No! What are you talking about!"

"Oh, just a little bit, really just a little bit, huh? I'm just curious. Who's eating it?"

It's scary.

No, before that, if he tries to turn me into a vampire for real, will it be real?

I'm so scared.

It was then that I realized I was face-to-face with the best of the vampires.

I'm not doing anything wrong here, am I?

He seems like a nice guy, but he's really nice, right? He's not going to suddenly bite me on the head and say, "You're my slave from now on," is he?

Well, by the way.......

He's still a kid, though.

I think it's kind of like, if he bites me, I'll draw a little bit of blood or something.

Suddenly, I was imagining myself being bitten by Galarsh around the nape of the neck.

That is.

It's not fast, it's eaten......?

b.

I wonder if I made a mistake coming here.

"Awww, are you really going to be an Archdemon and do this for me?"

"Don't say things that don't make sense!"

I raced through the castle's corridors, Lucinil pestering me with short-distance spatial travel at will.

"Hey, just give it to me! Give it to me!"

It was clinging to my waist, making strange noises.

Eventually.

I slung the Lucinyl around my waist and went to find Elise.

"Lucinil......."

Eleris looked down at the younger vampire, sickened that Lucinil wanted my blood.

"I really want to know!"

Lucinil insisted on drinking the arc-demon blood.

"Degradation....... If you don't actually vampire, but you put the blood in some kind of container and make them drink it....... I can give him a taste, but....... If the wounds on his body are....... I don't think that's a very good idea."

a.

There was a way to do that. Lucinil looked at me with an "Ohhhh!" when she heard how.

"Oh, that works! Yay! Just like that."

"No, what blood did you leave behind?"

Demand is real in a different way than I'm used to.

We argued for a while, and I was the one who finally gave up.

At this rate, they're going to sink their teeth into my neck in my sleep.

Honestly, I gave up in frustration.

"I don't know why I'm doing this, but I'm doing it because you said you'd help me."

"Yes."

In the end, I stabbed myself in the flesh and bled into the treat Lucinil had brought me. Elise looked at me nervously, as if she was afraid something might happen.

The funny thing is, I've come to realize that I don't mind this level of pain.

"Me, degradation. The wound is...... ugh! Ugh, you, it's too deep!"

I was fine, but she was getting restless.

I gave her a few drops of my blood, and she licked the plate and looked at me.

He looks a bit puzzled.

"Empty."

That was all I could think of to say.

I couldn't figure out why he was upset that my blood was tasteless.

I'm pissed off for nothing.

\* \* \*

The wound on his arm was stitched up by Eleris. Tiamata's divine powers were not normally available to her.

Lucinil muttered something about how Arcdemon blood tasted fishy, and went off somewhere to finish his business.

We were going to be here for a few days, so we had to eat.

And it turns out I wasn't the only one who needed a meal here.

And then there's Radia Schmidt.

I dined with Radia Schmidt on the preserved food Elise had airlifted in. Radia froze when she saw me, but when I told her I was here to eat, she ate without a word.

"What do you have now?"

Radia's room was quite spacious, as if she had picked and chose where she wanted to stay.

There was a crackling fire in the fireplace, a bonfire burning, the room was smoky, and there were things that shouldn't have been there, including a bed, a couch, and a desk.

I was going to be lonely in a remote location, and Elise seemed to want to make sure I had everything I needed.

It's a polar environment.

The size of the room itself and the standard of living would make you believe it's royalty.

In fact, this is a palace.

"Once the council is finalized, you'll be able to move around freely. For now, bear with the inconvenience."

"It's ......."

Radia stared at Eleris and nibbled at a piece of bread.

Episode 340.

It's a frightening night in High Epirus.

The blizzard never stopped. However, the suspiciously well-paid EpiAxes are not draught-proof.

Of course, that doesn't mean the castle isn't smoky, and it's in Epiax that it gets even colder and chillier at night.

However, the actual owners of the place are unaffected by the cold.

Night of the Ephex.

The elven vampire Leruen and the orc vampire Galarsh sat across from each other in the conference room.

"Lucinil will probably cooperate, right?"

"Yes, because I've been apologizing to Elyse for not being able to join her in the Demon King Battle."

"Hmmm. Well, it's Lucinyl, but......."

Lerouen looked toward the hallway with a narrowed brow.

"I don't know what the hell Antony was thinking."

Lerouen's long ears twitched downward. Vampire councils don't convene often, but they've been around for a very long time.

Though they don't see each other often, they've seen each other for a very long time. Except for Antrianus, who had been in Gazoo for a relatively short time.

That's why Galarsh knew that Leruen's long ears drooped when he was troubled, when he was sullen.

"He's an inscrutable bastard, and it's questionable what his succession actually looked like."

Lerouen's ears perked up at Galarsh's words.

"......That's what you were thinking, too."

"Wasn't that what you were thinking on some level?"

"Well, I've heard of Antony doing some questionable things, but I can't say for sure......."

Galarsh nodded at Lerouen's seemingly reserved response.

"Maybe, but I'm pretty sure."

Galarsh's red eyes stare at Lerouen.

"He must have killed Toyo's squadron leader, Gaju."

"...... Is there a reason for that?"

"If Maximilian had chosen his own death, as Antony had said, and Antony was the next in line, then Maximilian would have created the Stone of Wisdom, but there was no such thing."

"...... did."

Reason to live.

The goal of the former House of Toyo was to create the Sage Stone, an illusory object that is said to be the pinnacle of alchemy. To do so, they became vampires and became the House of Toyo.

After Maximilian's sudden death, Antony appeared, asking to be his successor. Under suspicious circumstances, Gallus was suspicious of Antony from the beginning.

Maximilla would not have chosen her own death, but would have been killed by Antony.

Lerouen shakes his head at Galarsh's words.

"By the way, is it even possible for the clan to kill the patriarch in the first place? That would be impossible."

"Antirrhinus was a sorcerer before he was a vampire."

"...... did."

"Maybe there was a way, a way not to be dominated."

Galarsh mumbles to himself, crossing his muscular arms over his chest.

"Antirrhinus became Lord of Toyo twenty years after becoming a vampire. Now, that's got to be suspicious."

"......It should be."

Twenty years is a long time, but to them it's only a moment. In their eyes, a member of the Toyo named Antrianus has made the province too dangerous to enter.

Antirrhinus is suspected of killing his predecessor and taking over.

It's their business, after all, and they have no reason to interfere. Even if they did, it would be an internal family matter.

But regardless of the facts, we both agree that Antirrhinus' intentions are unknown and dangerous.

That's why she's wary of Antony's willingness to cooperate.

"But this time, cooperate with the devil......."

Galarsh mumbles to himself, a serious look on his face.

The seriousness of an orc's expression is very different from that of a human.

From a human perspective, that looks like trying to decide who to chew to death.

"Who knows, maybe he's planning to kill the Demon King and make himself the new Demon King when the Darklands are restored."

"...... Oh, no, he's not an Archdemon."

Lerouen shakes his head as if to say that's a far-fetched idea. To Lerouen, Galarsh murmurs softly.

"There are plenty of ways to do it."

The words sent chills down Lerouen's spine and his ears perked up. To have an Archdemon would be to have a demon. Whether or not Antrianus had a reason to do so, if he wanted to, there would be a way.

Galarsh crossed his arms and considered, then his eyes narrowed as if he had made a decision.

"I will cooperate. If only to keep an eye on Antrianus."

"......Yes?!"

Lerouen's eyes widened at the sudden decision.

"I can't stand by and watch his shady behavior any longer."

"......I didn't realize Galarsh hated Antony that much."

"Lerouen, I hate you even more. Why do I have to keep explaining things to you when you've forgotten everything?"

Oblivion.

Lerouen laughed at that.

"That's how you stand the test of time."

In 200-year increments, Lerouen erases his memories except for the most necessary ones.

This is why they are the longest-lived of all road vampires and can exist without going insane.

This is why Galarsh is so frustrated when he has to explain things to Lerouen, who sometimes forgets what happened in the past.

It's not like they don't want to talk about it because it was a long time ago. They actively ask about what happened in the past. As if they find it very interesting to hear about things they didn't know they did.

Galarsh is sick of it.

"Do you know why Maximilia wanted to make the Sage Stone?"

"I don't know....... Oh, right. Was that it? Lucinyl?"

"Yeah."

Galarsh says still.

"To give Lucinil a soul."

A wise man's stone that can perform any miracle.

The end of alchemy, the object of every alchemist's dreams, even though everyone knows it doesn't exist. Maximillia, the High Priestess of Toyo, sought it.

That's why Galarsch doesn't believe Antrianus when he tells him that the former lord of Toyo has taken his own life.

If Antirrhinus killed Maximilla.

"Hmmm."

Lerouen's ears perked up, and she smiled coyly.

"Is it because you're worried about Lucinil, after all, and not the devil or the demon world?"

Galarsh frowned at that coy smile, as if it wasn't worth a damn.

"Maximilia and I had what you might call a friendship."

His expression alone was enough to stun a half-dozen Zhang Zhengs, but Lerouen's expression was as if he were teasing a child.

"That's it."

Galarsh nailed it firmly, as if not to be misunderstood. At that, Leruen looked at Galarsh with a look that seemed to sparkle.

"What about me?"

"It's just an annoyance."

"Seo Canal......."

Lerouen's ears drooped sullenly.

\* \* \*

I took Lucinil's advice and, as long as things were going in my favor, I didn't bother to say more bullshit or say anything that would provoke Galarsh and Lerouen.

I'd already gotten the cooperation of two of the Lord Vampires, which is quite an accomplishment. If Galarsh and Leruen ultimately refused to cooperate, I wasn't going to attack them.

"I'll cooperate."

But the next morning, I was surprised when Galarsh said he would cooperate.

What is it?

Did he have a change of heart overnight?

Why?

But it didn't look like the gruff orc vampire had caved in to the death threats, and it didn't look like he'd gained any favors I didn't already have.

I feel the same way as Antirrhinus. Why do I feel cheap for helping?

"After all, work is best done together!"

Lucinil jumped up and down excitedly, clinging to Galarsh's strong arms.

There was something the size of a rat clinging to his arm, like a cicada.

"Don't bother."

-Pak!

"Yuck!"

Of course, with a sweep of Galarsh's arm, Lucinil was sent sprawling to the ground.

"Ouch, that hurts, you freak!"

"You know me, I don't like people clinging to me, and I'm a monster."

Lucinil chirped beside him, but Galarsh was ignoring him, as he often did.

I feel like this.

One of the oldest Lord Vampires in the world is acting like a real child, and the other old vampires, except for Galarsh, are watching it like they're watching their granddaughter, and Galarsh is the only one who finds it repulsive.

This.

I wonder if it's just an old man with too much age.......

It's called the Vampire Council.......

Maybe not so formal.......

I felt like I was watching some kind of bizarre roleplay, and it was starting to get a little distressing.

You have a group of elderly people living alone, and one of them has severe dementia and is just acting like an asshole.

I don't know about Elyse, of course, but I'm pretty sure she's a road vampire with a posse back home, so she's not living alone.

"In any case, I will cooperate fully with you."

"Then....... That naturally leaves one."

At Antony's words, everyone's eyes naturally turned to one last person.

Leruen, an elven vampire.

"......How did I end up in the minority, in one day?"

As I scoffed at the arrival of the King of Nonexistent Things, I had only Elise by my side.

Regardless of the specifics, Lerouen is now a lame duck in the Nakdong River.

"Oh, no....... If I say I'm going to cooperate here, you'll think I'm getting carried away and acting out of character......."

Lerouen narrowed his brow in annoyance, stamped his foot, and sighed heavily.

"Whoa....... Well, Galarsh said yesterday that he'd side with them, and I've been thinking about it, and I've been thinking about it, and I've been thinking......."

Lerouen shrugged.

"I'm here to help, but you should know that I'm not going to swear allegiance to you with my life, and I'm not going to ask you to be a vassal, or anything like that."

Loose cooperation, not loyalty.

But it's enough for the opponent. Antirrhinus smiled wryly at me.

"With this, you hold the power of the five vampire families, great one."

I'm the one who asked for help, and I'm the one who got it.

But somehow, I kept getting the odd feeling that things were working out the way Antony wanted them to.

Still, an achievement is an achievement.

I succeeded in forging an alliance with the five Lord Vampire families of the Vampire Council with my bare mouth.

\* \* \*

I didn't think it would turn out this well. I thought I would have been successful if I could get at least one or two willing to cooperate, but I managed to get all the Lord Vampires to cooperate.

The point is, their cooperation is good, but don't get too optimistic. Don't assume that they'll be completely on your side.

It's not a partnership, it's a collaboration.

Antirrhinus, who calls me a great man, is the most off-putting of them all.

Of course, I didn't just get the power of road vampires.

You've gained the power they have.

Antirrhinus explained to me the clans of each family.

The council is a meeting place, not a place where they live.

Lerouen said the clan's stronghold was in the northwestern part of the continent, in a large coniferous forest called the Linewood.

Galarsh makes his home in the southern part of the continent, in a desert region called Gelkorgis.

Antirrhinus said he was based in a provincial town in a country called Alpinera, one of the empire's tributary provinces.

The three of them had clans, whether close or distant from the human world.

"As I'm sure you're expecting to some extent, I'm alone."

Eleris said that she is the only member of the clan. This is what we've been expecting since Eleris is the head of Hwayo, but hasn't mentioned a clan.

"Me neither."

Lucinil was one of those who didn't have a clan. This was somewhat to be expected, as she was not the type to lead a group.

The mighty Lord Vampires, and their clans.

I felt like I had an army with a few words.

I was shaking in my boots because I knew I was dipping my toe in the water, and I was getting somewhere.

Now, I can really go to war.

The weight of the thought is suffocating. But I couldn't dwell on it. I decided to stop the gate at all costs.

"I sought you out because I needed knowledge, not force, technically."

Everyone stares at me as if to ask what that is.

This could be the key.

If the key is right, I'm free of everything that's been bothering me.

Hopefully this can be the start of it.

"One, if you know how to open a portal to the Otherworld."

I ask the Lord Vampire and powerful sorcerers for the secret that will save me from a terrible fate.

"Second, if you don't know, do you know of any magical orders that might know of such a thing and their whereabouts, such as the Black Ord or Cantus Magna."

Not to mention the look of horror on everyone's face.

"Portal to the Otherworld?"

Lerouen shook his head.

"Why do you want to know that?"

Galarsh showed me what an orc looks like when he's panicking.

"...... I've never heard such a bizarre thing in my life."

Rusinil seemed to have given up on understanding.

"Isekera......."

Antirrhinus looks intrigued.

In the end, it came down to why would I want to know that, apart from anything else.

They won't believe you when you say you're doing it to save the world, and you've gotten their cooperation in the first place in the name of rebuilding the demon world.

"The Darklands have lost a lot of power, almost irreparable losses, and even with your help, it will be difficult to bring down the empire."

I don't know if I've ever sounded more hollow, but I had to.

"So I'm trying to reach out to otherworldly beings."

It's not like I'm going to call in an army from another world, because there are too few people in the real world to raise my hand.

I couldn't help but notice that their faces got even more bizarre as I spoke.

\* \* \*

There was an uproar.

Why would they help me when I'm not even sure the otherworld exists?

Lerouen and Galarsh, in particular, were horrified, saying that while they thought I was weird, I must be crazy.

He says things that make so little sense that they're almost scary now.

Lucinil opens her eyes and looks at me.

This kid is crazy.

This is how we've come to think of it.

Antirrhinus even chuckled at how surprised he was by my comment.

It's kind of creepy to laugh at that.

"If it can't be done, it can't be done, and there's nothing to lose by doing it. Who says there's no other way?"

Something that can't hurt to try.

It's just something that we can discuss, and it's not something that we can say yes or no to, but in the end, it's just an excuse.

So in the end, the answer to the first question, do we know?

By the looks on their faces, Lerouen, Galarsh, and Lucinil hadn't thought about it.

Antirrhinus did the same.

The Vampire Council doesn't know how to get to the other side.

"Okay, I don't need to know, so what about the next question?"

About a magic coven that would know such a thing.

Once again, the response was lukewarm. No matter how long they live, these immortals are somewhat bored.

So you can't be sensitive to the world's information.

By the way.

"If you mean Cantus Magna, I was once a member of that organization."

Antirrhinus had said that out of the blue.

"Gee, really?!"

"Yes, Lucinil."

It wasn't me who let out a new sound, it was Lucinil.

Apparently, all the other road vampires in the room were just as baffled as I was.

"That was before I became a vampire, too......."

It was the key to Antony's access to the Cantus Magna.

Episode 341.

Antirrhinus was active in the Cantus Magna, not just aware of it.

Lucinil was more flustered than I was, so she jumped out of her seat and asked.

"Is that, is that okay, it's not like you're going to be in a place where you can just drop in and out, right?"

"Of course not, Lucinil."

His body was leaning more and more toward Antony, as if his eyes were about to go beyond the twinkle in them.

"Then how the hell did you get there?"

"They paid with their lives to get out of the association."

Antirrhinus crossed his arms in front of him.

They tried to kill him for trying to get out of the association, and now he's alive.

The attitude was that it was obvious what had happened. Antirrhinus was in the Cantus Magna, he was getting out of it, and there was a fight along the way.

I was that way before I became a vampire. Lucinil's mouth hung open, dumbfounded.

"Antirrhinus, why did you end up in the Cantus Magna in the first place?"

Elyse, who had been observing the situation, suddenly asked him.

"Ugh....... I wanted to be immortalized."

He points to his body.

Load the vampire's body.

"Not this half-assed immortality, but eternal immortality."

Even the body of a vampire who has overcome the sun is only half the story.

From what I've heard from Lucinil, he was torn between being a lich or a vampire and decided that being a vampire would be less uncomfortable, so he became a lich.

The old man's appearance seemed to be due to the fact that when he was really an old man, he couldn't find a way to be fully immortalized and became a vampire.

"It's not really my place to say, but Antirrhinus seems to have a way of saying ugly things that you don't mind hearing."

Lucinil's words made Antirrhinus chuckle.

"Haha, existence is ugly, isn't it, for everyone, but especially for us?"

The other Lord Vampires didn't really argue with him. Lerouen looks at Antrianus with interest.

"So, there's no way to be immortalized?"

"I don't know."

At that, everyone's faces got weird again.

I don't know.

"The Cantus Magna collect alcohol, but they don't collect it to use it. They don't even look at what they have, so generations pass and they forget what magic they have. I took a chance and tried to look at their arcana, but I was caught, and I've been disassociated with the Cantus Magna ever since."

He joined a magical order to become immortal, but was eventually discovered and fled after the battle.

What to say.

It was a little embarrassing to hear him say something that sounded like the epitome of an evil wizard.

I wonder if this is what the road vampires used to be like.

Antirrhinus, who searched for the perfect way to become immortal, failed miserably, and when faced with the choice of becoming a lich or a vampire, chose the vampire.

It's kind of ugly, but I feel like it's not so ugly because it's said so bluntly.

"Then why are you collecting sobriety? If they're not going to use it and forget what they have?"

Rusinil asked.

"Is it true, as the rumors say, that you protect the world by sealing away dangerous magic.......? Is it true?"

Lerouen asked.

What is the purpose of Cantus Magna, the Sobriety Hunter.

I didn't know either, so I wondered what Antirrhinus would say. The Magical Order is neither good nor evil; they have their own agendas.

"No, no. Absolutely, absolutely not, lol. Haha....... They never, ever have good intentions like that."

Antirrhinus burst out laughing at the comment, as if it were too funny, and Lerouen glared at Antirrhinus, ears perked up to see if he was in a bad mood.

"So what's their purpose?"

At Galash's question, Antirrhinus wiped the corners of his mouth to wipe the smile off his face, and Najik said.

"For the completion of Akasha."

"......akasha?"

Even the road vampires looked like they'd never heard of it before.

I think that's Akasha.

Akashic records or something. Although I don't know if it matches the concept exactly as I remember it.

"I don't know if I should call it an artifact or not, but....... Of course, I don't know what it looks like. But an Akasha is an artifact that holds magic. A cantus magna is an artifact that is meant to be filled. Though I don't know how much it needs to be filled."

"So, technically, they're not hunting for booze, they're cramming magic into it to fill it up, and since they've already got it in there, they need to put new magic in there, and that's why they're looking for booze. Of course, they develop new magic themselves, but since booze is inherently complex and esoteric in its recipes and composition, it must have a lot of capacity, right? That's why they have their eyes on booze."

A mysterious artifact named Akasha, apparently some sort of object that can hold magic within it.

The purpose of the cantus magna is its completion. For some reason, it gave me chills just hearing it.

"What happens when Akasha is complete?"

Antony shook his head at my question.

"I don't know. Though the head of Cantus Magna, or one of its leaders, might know."

What happens when Akasha is finished. Is it a threat to the world?

Is it a bit of a leap to say that the completion of Akasha will cause a gate to open? What the hell is going on with the completion of a very powerful artifact whose identity and purpose is unknown?

"So, whether it's possible or not, let's assume it is. If Cantus Magna can access the many spells and spirits that he's gathered in Akasha over the years, it's possible that there's a spell that opens a portal to the Otherworld. It's not a certainty, of course, but what is certain is that it contains most of the magic that exists and has ever existed in the world."

You've been collecting alcohol for a very long time, so if you can open an akasha, you might be able to figure out how to open a portal.

"Of course, it's been a long time since I was in Cantus Magna, and more time has passed, so they've probably stored even more magic in Akasha than they did in my time, or maybe they've already completed it."

The possibilities are endless.

I don't really need magic to open a portal to the otherworld, and if such a thing exists, my purpose is to destroy it.

The Cantus Magna collects not only sobriety, but magic itself. As such, they will study publicly available magic as well as their own.

If there really is such a thing as magic that can open the way to the Otherworld, it's in Akasha.

We don't really need that magic, but if Akasha has it, how does the gate thing work?

But there was a definite sense that I was getting closer, step by step, to the truth of the gate situation, which until now had been a blur.

We don't know what happens when Akasha is finished.

But now you should know.

Akasha's completion may be the link to the Gate debacle.

"I would like to know how to make contact with Cantus Magna."

Antirrhinus.

It seems suspicious and dangerous, but in the end, he was the key.

\* \* \*

"I don't know what Akasha is, but those guys look really dangerous, and I think I'm about to meet some really dangerous people for something that's a do-or-die kind of thing."

Lucinil urged, as if it were a very bad idea, but Antirrhinus shook his head.

"Putting aside whether that's possible or not, if you can have Akasha, it doesn't matter how you get to the other world, because Akasha is a source of power in and of itself."

"Well, I guess....... I guess so......."

In the end, it didn't matter how I got there. I only asked for the Otherworld because I wanted power. In the future, I'll just say I want Akasha because I need power.

"And again, you don't know, do you, Lucinil."

"......what?"

"Isn't it possible that Akasha might contain a way for you to have a soul, just as it is possible that there is a way to true immortality that I haven't found?"

At that, Lucinil stared blankly at Antrian, as if in shock.

Rusinil said he didn't know why, but he wanted to have a soul.

I don't know what magic Akasha holds, but right now it's a jar of possibilities.

Just as I don't know if what I want will be there, I don't know if what Lucinil wants will be in Akasha.

"Antirrhinus, if you knew that, why didn't you tell me until now?"

Antrianus narrowed his eyes at Galarsch's blunt question.

"If it were that easy, I wouldn't have ended up giving up my immortality and becoming a vampire, and even now, if you ask me to go up against Cantus Magna, I'm not sure I want to."

Antirrhinus looks at me.

"Of course, in a situation like this, it's a different story."

If you have to fight, you may not have to fight them directly.

I could pit Cantus Magna and the Black Order against each other, and no matter how that fight ends, I'll be the one to secure Akasha.

"I, I....... I'm....... I'll help you."

Rusinil stood up and said to me, as if possessed by something.

It is Lucinil's desire to have a soul.

"This is why I didn't tell you about Akasha, Galarsh."

At Antrianus' words, Galarsch crossed his arms.

"I can't believe you gave me a clue and then deliberately didn't tell me."

Antirrhinus didn't tell him about Akasha, knowing that Lucinil would hang on to it if he got a clue.

But Antirrhinus deliberately said that Akasha might contain the magic to fulfill his wishes.

It seems clear that Antirrhinus wants Akasha, too.

But I don't want to take the risk, so I'm going to let Lucinil take the risk for me.

If you leave us alone, me, Lucinil, and Elise will risk and sacrifice ourselves to reach Cantus Magna.

I appreciate the information, but he's a sneaky bastard.

"So, you're saying you know where Cantus Magna is?"

"I know, but of course they've moved on by now, because it was a long time ago and they lost me."

The current location of Cantus Magna is unknown to Antony.

"So, unless Cantus Magna has the coveted sake, it's next to impossible to find them."

In the end, Antony's words were no different than what I had told Elise the day before.

It takes sobriety to find sobriety hunters. Better to let them come to us than to find us.

"Okay, we'll think about that later, there's no urgency right now."

Not yet.

Episode 342.

The day after the council.

After the meeting broke up.

Elise and I stood side by side in a deserted hallway, the wind howling outside.

I leaned back in the hallway, Elise staring straight ahead with a determined expression on her face.

"Is this....... correct?"

"Let's hope so."

"Degradation. I've lived a long time, and I've never even heard of an artifact named Akasha, and I'm....... I'm afraid it exists, if it does, and if it doesn't, I'm afraid I don't know what Antrian is up to."

Elise's fears were understandable.

I'm scared, too.

I was nervous that something worse could happen than what happened with Gate.

Wouldn't it be better to do nothing and face a scheduled gate event?

When you start getting involved with a mysterious ancient artifact called Akasha, things can get really out of hand.

The future is unknown.

Of course, I've never been so afraid of anything in my life.

"......I made a mistake."

When I didn't speak, Elise squeezed my hand.

A chill ran down my spine.

"I'm sure you're more afraid of him than anyone else, but I'm afraid of him......."

"......."

I wonder if he's conveyed the fear I'm feeling right now without saying it.

Eleris seemed to be convinced by my demeanor that I wasn't plotting to end the world.

Not everything will work out, but you have to believe in it.

If you're not going to do anything, you shouldn't have started anything.

"Everything will be fine."

I spoke with the power of the spirit, but my voice echoing down the hallway was hollow.

\* \* \*

After the meeting reconvened, I asked Antony a few more questions.

How the first contact with Cantus Magna was made.

In the end, it wasn't so different from my idea. Antirrhinus dabbled in black magic and sobriety to find the secret of immortality.

"The whole point was to call in the sobriety hunters, but if you get immortality in the process, that's not a bad thing."

I'm not aware of anybody who's ever done anything outrageous in the name of immortality.

So it was quite a strange feeling to see Antirrhinus.

For example, it was like watching a villain who dreamed of immortality, which is common in the early and middle episodes, not the later ones, fulfill his dream without being cut down by the hero.

I don't know the extent of the misdeeds committed by the Lord Vampires here, but Antirrhinus was a truly evil warlock.

It's like a few hundred years after Qin Shi Huang's immortalized dream.

That asshole is.......

Is it okay to leave it as it is.......

"So the booze hunters came, and I asked to be one of them, and I could be one of them in exchange for all the booze I had."

"Does Cantus Magna readily accept new members?"

"No, they only took me in because I had so much sobriety, and they'd have to bleed to take it away from me, and they were probably going to purge me sooner or later."

Antirrhinus didn't give Cantus Magna the lame excuse that he had betrayed him because he was going to be purged anyway.

Apparently, Antirrhinus doesn't care about rationalization.

Antirrhinus and Cantus Magna briefly collaborated on each other's needs, and technically Antirrhinus was the loser, as he paid for the wine and never got to see the Akasha.

Of course, this was the price Cantus Magna paid for failing to get rid of Antirrhinus, so they each lost out by exposing their secret agenda to the outside world.

"By the way, I'm telling you that with your own vision and sobriety, contacting Cantus Magna is a surprisingly easy matter."

The Vampire Council is not much different than a secret society. The Black Order knew of the existence of the Lord Vampire, but not necessarily of the five vampire families.

After all, the sobriety or magic that only they possess is not yet available to Cantus Magna.

In other words, if Cantus Magna learns of the Council's existence, or if the Lord Vampires make their presence known, contact itself is easy. In the form of them coming to you.

"That sounds like something I need to think about carefully."

Galarsh said, and I agreed.

"I don't like it."

Lerouen snapped, not wanting to take that level of risk.

Honestly, I agreed with that.

"I don't think it's wise to expose us."

"What would you do then?"

At Antony's question, I crossed my arms.

"Last time I had contact with the Black Order, I killed one of their members."

Everyone but Eleris was stunned by the news.

"It was tangential at best. It wasn't a big deal. The important thing was that I told them I could give them information about Cantus Magna."

It's likely that the Black Order doesn't know about Akasha.

It's not like the Black Order doesn't know how to contact Cantus Magna. However, they're at odds with each other, so they'll want to get to know each other beforehand rather than engage in an all-out war. They just need the information because they want to fight from an optimal vantage point, whether it's a surprise or not.

There's a reason the Black Order didn't take the risk and go head-to-head with Cantus Magna.

Can we use this information to turn the Black Order and Cantus Magna against each other?

And, is it really the right thing to do?

"It's not too late to try and negotiate with the Black Order, see what kind of attitude they come out with, and then make a decision, because it's not worth the risk."

They all nodded at my words.

If the Black Order gets it right, Cantus Magna may be irrelevant, though it's clear that there's a nasty little thing called Akasha.

Still, they succeeded in preparing information about Cantus Magna before the Black Order contacted them.

We've gained the cooperation of the Vampire Council, and we have information about Cantus Magna.

There's nothing left for the council to do until the Black Order case is resolved.

"For now, that's all I need."

We don't need their power yet.

Hopefully it won't come to that.

\* \* \*

I thought it might be quite long, but the Vampire Council only took two days.

I'm curious about Antony's intentions, but it's hard to tell since the important information and mood shift came from his side.

You don't know if it's an enemy or an ally, but it helps for now.

That's what alliances are for. Revolutionary forces will try to ally with us, knowing that they'll be pointing knives at each other later.

The council has concluded and tomorrow we return to the ecliptic.

With nothing better to do, I wandered around Epiax. The snow had stopped falling, and the sharp wind had died down.

Even though it is under the care of humans, Epiax is not frequented by humans.

So the castle would be empty most of the year. I wandered into a room.

Pantheon.

I saw a statue of Eleris here and knew it had something to do with vampires.

As I gazed up at the seven gargoyles, I suddenly felt uncomfortable.

If this was a gargoyle of Gazoo, then it was a gargoyle of Elves and Orcs. So there had to be statues of Galarsh and Leruen.

But none of them had long ears or looked like an orc.

Sure enough, the statues of Lucinian and Antirrhinus were there.

"I've changed it since it's been in the human eye."

I turned at the sound of a voice behind me, and there was Lerouen.

"We've decided not to tell the humans what this place is like, because even if we did, they might say it's unclean if there are any suspicious orc or elf statues."

In reality, the statue in Moyo's location did not have long ears, but it did resemble Lerouen.

Of course, the statue of Friday, where Galarsh was supposed to be, had the appearance of a normal person.

Lerouen stood in the center of the pantheon, facing a certain direction.

"From what I hear, I'm the oldest of all road vampires."

"Listen to ......?"

Sensing my doubt, Lerouen smiled wryly.

"I'm erasing my memory in 200-year increments."

"Ah."

I guess that's one way to endure eternal life.

If so, then Leruen, the oldest being, would have the least memory of the past.

Lerouen had chosen to erase his memory, not die.

"You forgot because I wanted you to, but you did it because you had to......."

Lerouen stands in the center of the Pantheon, arms crossed, looking in any direction.

"I can't help but wonder what the hell I knew before I wiped my memory like this."

There was something wistful in his eyes.

"For what reason did the elves become extinct?"

"What the hell happened to Sunday and Monday. What were they in the first place."

"Surely, I should have known all along."

"Why did I have to erase those memories."

"No, I wonder if I erased that memory."

Lerouen looks at me.

I read more of a desire than a curiosity.

He'd erased his memories, but he couldn't figure out why he'd had to do it, and Lerouen seemed to crave the missing memories.

I was wondering why I had to delete it.

Lerouen stood still, watching Sunday, Monday, and his gargoyle.

Unlike Antony, the Lord Vampires were complex beings, both good and evil.

"Is there such a thing as wind in the Thurday gazoo?"

"You mean like Lucinil?"

Like Lucien, who wanted to have a soul, does Leroy have one?

"Well, technically....... It's about getting your true memories back. All the memories you've forgotten."

Lerouen said, and then shook his head.

"But if I had to find them all, I'd definitely go crazy."

You want your memories back, but you're not sure you can handle them.

"Yeah, well, I don't really have any desires, but I don't want to die, so I'm just going to keep on going, and I'm going to keep on delaying death, and I'm going to keep on living with only the most important memories, like the fact that I'm a lord vampire, and that I have a clan."

Time has been ticking away, with all the memories of magic, power, and lore blotted out, except for the ones that are useless.

"Live......."

As if compressing himself. Lerouen seems to mull over his last words, then shakes his head. I wonder if he thinks the word "living" is inappropriate for the undead.

"I think it's more like dying a very slow death."

Slowly dying, with death postponed indefinitely into the future.

When their immortality becomes unbearable, they choose death.

So you're not living, you're just slowly dying, Lerouen says.

I wonder how that's different from living, after all.

Living and slowly dying.

The end result is the same thing, but the nuances are wickedly different.

"When everything you've planned is done and you've truly rebuilt Darklands, what will you do?"

Lerouen looks at me with that question.

There is a deep sense of emptiness in this ancient being. It is aware that it is living, but that it is doing so for no reason.

And then the next, and the next, and the next.

Is that what you're asking?

Unfortunately, I have no intention of becoming a true demon. So such questions are pointless.

Because I hadn't thought about it.

"I'll do something."

"......?"

"You're right, they're going to do something, they're not going to do nothing."

But if it does, I'm not going to do anything about it, so that's all I can say.

Lerouen chuckled at my comment.

"Haha....... Haha! Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'll do something....... something."

Lerouen's ears perked up as he realized what was so funny about my comment.

"Good, maybe that's a better way to think about it."

I don't know how my cursory answer resonated with Lerouen.

However, Lerouen said it had been a long time since he'd laughed like that, and then quietly walked down the hall and disappeared.

Nothingness does not belong to those who have given up thinking.

You've overthought it and overthought it and overthought it.

As if she would even realize such a thing. Lerouen's steps seemed quite light.

\* \* \*

The next day.

The other road vampires had no use for us right now, but they agreed to cooperate.

While Akasha is a great source of power in her own right, she said she would investigate how to open the portal to the otherworld I mentioned.

"This is something I've never thought about before. I'm intrigued."

Antirrhinus said.

Regardless of whether or not it's possible to collaborate with the otherworld to bring down an empire, the theme of exploring the existence of the otherworld seemed to appeal to me.

Great minds with nothing but time on their hands. Plus, he's a wizard, so I was just intrigued.

"The council will reconvene if the Demon King needs our help."

Lerouen said.

Normally, the council rarely convenes unless something extraordinary happens. However, since the Vampire Council chose to link up with me, it seemed like they were fulfilling their alliance responsibilities.

I don't really have anything to offer, and everyone cooperates with me for their own reasons.

One by one, I watched as they began to teleport out of Epiax.

Eleris has left the ecliptic for now. She is unlikely to return to the ecliptic until she has a new hiding place or camouflage.

So for the time being, I'll be staying on the council as a liaison.

I'm sure we'll always be able to see each other via teleportation, but the distance is just too great.

That's a bit of a bummer.

Still, it was nice to be within easy reach.

In the great hall of Castle Epiax. Eleris inclined her head toward me.

"Take a look, degradation."

"?"

What is this?

"I need a ride. You want me to go alone?"

"Ah."

Eleris shook her head when I said that.

"Looks like Lucinil hasn't told you yet."

I wondered what this was all about, and before I knew it, Lucinil was standing next to me.

"Archdemon, you're coming with me."

"...... Why?"

"I'll be staying here for a while, so if you need magic, Lucinil will help you."

a.

Something like that.

Lucinil has no clan and is alone, so she has more freedom than other Lord Vampires.

Between Radia's care and her duties as the Council's liaison, Eleris has decided to stay for the time being.

So I'm unable to get support from Eleris for the time being.

This meant that from now on, if I needed to go somewhere via teleportation, or if I needed powerful magic, Lucinil would be there to help me.

"Lucinil is much more versatile than I am, so he'll be able to cover the drop-off better than I can."

She wonders what kind of debt she owes that the Lord of Demand would help her like this. Elise seems to trust Lucinil quite a bit, even if the other Lord Vampires don't.

"Boffin, Elise, that makes me feel like I'm beneath him."

"Oh, sorry, Lucinyl. I'll correct that to protection."

"Chit."

"When you say protection, you make it sound like I'm some kind of child who needs a babysitter."

"Wasn't it ......?"

"Chet."

I have to admit.

It's not really a nanny, but it's nice to have an archmage around, and since Eleris is busy with other things for the time being, it's like having another archmage around.

Lucinil is a homunculus vampire who seems like just a goofy kid on the outside, but is really just a kid cosplaying as a homunculus.

"Get ready. We're coming."

Lucinil signals to me when she's done casting.

"Jae-hyung, take care of yourself."

Elise looks at me with concern.

"You be careful, too."

Somehow.

I have this weird, bizarre feeling that I'm being separated from my parents for life!

Soon, Lucinil triggered a mass teleport.

Episode 343.

-Flash!

With the light, Lucinil and I returned to the outer reaches of the ecliptic.

Before she knew it, Lucinil was no longer a vampire, but a girl with silver hair and blue eyes.

I was back to being Reinhardt, not Valerie.

"Hmmm, is this your cover story?"

"Yes."

Lucinil looked me up and down in my Reinhardt form, then crossed her arms.

"He looks just like your temper."

"Well."

"Yes."

There were no humans around.

"It's been a while since the ecliptic."

Lucinil stood still, looking out over the distant landscape of the ecliptic.

"Do you have a place to stay?"

"Hmmm....... He said we should go to a guy named Count Argon Ponteus, he'll do something for us."

He was going to leave Lucinil in Sarkegar's care. I have faith that Sarkeghar will take care of it. He's capable.

Lucinil crosses her arms and stays still in thought.

"You said you were also in contact with the Black Order."

"......Yes."

"I don't know how you've been doing, but you're in real danger from here on out, so stay within my control."

Cantus Magna, and the Black Order.

As I begin to get more involved with the Covenant, I'm bound to find myself in dangerous situations. So Lucinil was going to be a close bodyguard or something.

Right.

Lucinil is right.

"......I have to go to the temple?"

"......template?"

I know this isn't the right time to say this.

I feel like I shouldn't say this after everything we've talked about.

I have to go to school! I know it's winter break, but even the Vampire Council was on a winter break schedule!

I'm a temple first!

Technically, that's the most important thing, in more ways than one!

"Oh, you....... lurking there?"

Lucinil tilted her head, as if she'd heard something from Elise.

Infiltration....... Is that right?

Isn't it?

"Hit him. Isn't this the wrong time for you to do that?"

Lucinil states the obvious, as if to say, why would you go swimming in a typhoon?

I'm not actually a kid, but it's a little dizzying to get beaten up by a guy who looks like one.

"No, I'm supposed to be at the temple, I've got too many things tied up there......."

"......What? Are you serious?"

"Yes."

Lucinil looked at me, tasted me again, and pressed her index finger to my lips.

I could feel him desperately trying to hold back a double entendre.

"No, everything happens for a reason, right?"

Honestly, it's not like I'm going to stay in the temple.

How important it was to cultivate relationships with the powers that be in the Temple in the name of rebuilding the Demon Realm. And since my classmates were the heirs to the Empire, I told them over and over what influence I had over them.

"......Now that I think about it, yes."

Lucinil nodded in agreement when I told him I was infiltrating the Temple to make connections with Imperial powers.

"That's too risky, but....... I'm not going to interfere there."

Lucinil crosses her arms and looks at me.

"I have nothing to lose if you make a fool of yourself. But be careful, Elise will be sad."

Lucinil didn't seem to want to interfere with me any more than necessary.

If you were willing to dig a little deeper, you'd realize that I'm temple living in a different sense.

That could have made things complicated, but thankfully it didn't.

"For now, then, I'll do as Elise says and go find Count Argonpontheus."

If so, they would be in touch through the Rotary Club, and when they needed Lucinil, they could send a messenger to Sarkegar. Or he could ask for Lucinil when Sarkegar came to visit on a regular basis.

I broke up with Lucinil for now.

Another cannabist. Gazoo Lucinil, the master of demand.

Eleris told me that Rusinil was more versatile than she was, but I wasn't sure what that meant yet.

Lucinil entered the ecliptic first, and then I began to enter the ecliptic as well.

Herriot has been researching dimensional magic through the resources of the Imperial Ministry of Magic. However, it is unlikely that he will be able to accomplish much in the next few days.

The achievement is on my end.

That's pretty good for only being away from the ecliptic for a few days.

\* \* \*

"Your Majesty, the investigation indicates that nothing traceable has been found."

"I suppose."

Bertus sat in his office in the Winter Palace, reading through the written reports.

The Imperial and Crusader Knights' investigation into the deaths of Revere Lance has come to an end. The funerals have been organized, but the demons who attacked them are still being investigated.

It's clear that non-humans have attacked.

Most of the bodies were blown up and carbonized, but some were found torn apart.

They appeared to be bodies that had died while fleeing after being defeated.

Bertus flipped through the magically recorded photos of the battle.

While there are no photos, there were also multiple eyewitness accounts of something flying in the night sky in the shape of a demon.

'I wonder why.......'

Bertus stays still and thinks.

There are plenty of reasons for demons to attack the Crusaders.

It is believed that the demons attacking this time are the same ones that attacked the Crusaders last time.

There was once a powerful wizard, a lycanthrope, and a dragon. It was presumably not a real dragon, but we still don't know what it was.

During the last raid, I activated the warp gate and led the demon prisoners away.

However, there were no casualties that time.

This raid made it clear.

It's not that we couldn't deal with paladins in the last raid, we just didn't.

In other words, the demons of that time were not murderous.

But this raid was murderous. All of the paladins were slain, even Leviathan Ranze.

Maybe they didn't fight back then because their priority was to escape prisoners.

Bertus's thoughts seemed to be spiraling out of control.

It's not that there was anything suspicious, there was just too much weirdness.

While it is understandable that large-scale destructive magic was used, there are multiple eyewitness accounts of something in the form of a demon roaming the night sky.

"Why?

Doesn't it look like they've advertised that this is an attack by demons?

It would have been better to disguise it as a human quarrel, but the devil made his presence felt by flying through the night sky.

What did the demons know about the nameless order?

Do they have no idea about the current state of affairs on the continent?

If they knew, the demons should have disguised this as a fight between humans, not a show of force.

Sightings of demons are real, and some have even suggested that the assassination of an unnamed order and its leader, Revere Lance, was carried out by the Imperial or pro-Empire faction under the guise of demons.

Without the demon sightings, this would have been a powerful event that would have sparked a backlash from the Crusader Knights and the Five Lords.

If I knew that, I wouldn't have done the raid the way I did.

If I were in the position of leading a band of demons, I would never do it this way.

'It can't be stupid.'

This is the dumbest thing demons can do.

This can only help the empire.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that the remnants would be that stupid, maybe they were just being emotional, but it just fits the empire in every situation.

"Were you really trying to help the empire? Why on earth?

There's no reason why they should be, and I'm inclined to believe that the demons attacked the nameless order to aid the Empire and intentionally made their presence known.

Why you should.

Why on earth would demons do something that is only good for the empire, and at their own peril.

It's overly optimistic to view this as a mistake by the remnants.

The demons helped the empire.

Despite the situation, Bertus couldn't figure out why it had to be this way, and things were getting out of hand.

I have no idea what their intentions are.

While Bertus narrowed his eyes and worked his way through the thought.

"Your Majesty....... And regarding the matter you commissioned last time......."

The subordinate who was reporting cautiously slipped between the prince's thoughts.

Bertus, still in the midst of his deliberations, narrowed his eyes even further.

"Previously? What are you talking about?"

"That....... about the silver-haired girl......."

"Ah....... that."

It was such a big deal that Bertus had forgotten all about it.

Bertus's face widened slightly as the memory of the time he had spilled tea in his face, a very big rude awakening, resurfaced.

"Hmm, okay. Did you get anything?"

An unidentified silver-haired girl.

It's subtly Reinhardtian, so much so that I wonder if they're childhood estranged siblings.

The other day, he ran into a silver-haired girl who bore a subtle resemblance to his classmate Reinhardt and wondered if they were related.

Bertus had forgotten about it, so it was refreshing.

Technically, this is stalking.

The empire belongs to the emperor, and the first crown prince is one of the potential imperial heirs.

So, when a prince tries to stalk someone overtly, a lot of bad things happen.

"Well, I've been looking into the identity registry of the people of the Zodiac......."

"So?"

1A prince can search the entire zodiac, if not the entire empire, if he so chooses.

"We didn't have any identifying information that fit the criteria he was talking about."

"Since you said silver hair is dyed....... I didn't think there would be."

We don't have a detailed montage, so it's hard to hope that Bertus's recollections of his identity match up.

Silver hair, golden eyes, and a beauty.

It's just sketchy information.

So, even if they were actually Zodiacal subjects, it would have been difficult to find someone who fit the criteria.

"So, first of all, I looked up Reinhardt, who you said was a classmate of mine, because I thought I'd start by looking up his identity registry......."

"Well, that would have been the only possibility."

Reinhardt may be from the streets, but he has an identity.

He'd have to start with where he came from and work his way up. But the subordinate scratched his head in confusion.

"But Reinhardt's first identity was registered early last year, and I couldn't find anything before that."

"......?"

At that, Bertus shook his head.

"That's often the case. People who come from humble origins sometimes don't register their identity at all....... Or, as you said, those who spend their entire lives as street beggars have no identity at all. As you said, Reinhardt came from that, the street beggar background......."

Reinhardt's identity was first registered last year. That means he was living under a false name until then.

This is not unusual.

Clearly, it's not that weird.

At one point, however, Bertus even suspected that Reinhardt might be the heir apparent to a criminal organization.

Reinhard denied it, and Bertus didn't believe him, but he didn't do any digging.

Buha says that Reinhardt had been living under a false identity for so long that it was virtually impossible to trace his birthplace.

Now that some time has passed, Bertus knows that some of the misconceptions he had about Reinhardt are no longer true.

The Rotary Club that Reinhardt belongs to is an organization of beggars.

Reinhardt is just a beggar. Sent to Temple by the Rotary Club.

Identity registration was launched early last year.

I entered the temple too scared to register my identity and was admitted to the royal class.

So, it must have meant that he was issued an identity to enter the temple.

Bertus thinks Reinhardt is an uneducated man, but he has a lot of sense.

For someone who came from the streets, I knew a lot of things, but I also picked up a lot of things from the clubs when I was younger, so I guess you can say I have some knowledge.

However, Bertus was suddenly curious.

Did Reinhardt come from the zodiac?

Where were you born and how did you grow up?

"Well, I'll just ask him."

Where you're from.

Do you have a brother.

You just have to stop by the temple when you have time and ask.

Deciding that Reinhardt's case will have to wait, Bertus turns his attention back to the demonic group.

Still, my head felt like it was going to explode.

\* \* \*

It's been a few days since I returned from the Vampire Council.

Not much had changed. Heriot was doing what he had to do, as was the Magical Research Society.

So I went about my normal routine of training with Olivia, waiting for Ellen to return.

By the way.

"Where are you from?"

My heart sank when Bertus, returning from the palace out of nowhere, asked me about it.

"Uh....... Huangdaoji."

"Where is the ecliptic?"

What is it?

What did we catch?

My heart was pounding like crazy.

But in desperation, I kept up the pretense of nonchalance through self-suggestion.

"Well, I don't know about that, I was abandoned when I was too young. I was sleeping on the street. Do you think he remembers that?"

"...... is it?"

I've been thinking about how I grew up.

But Bertus is on to something, and if he knows my identity, I must leave the ecliptic.

But, so suddenly?

But if you knew the truth, you wouldn't be asking me so casually, would you?

It was just a casual question. Bertus stared at me, arms crossed, and seemed to be thinking about something.

"Why are you asking me that now?"

I finally asked. Bertus seemed to consider for a moment, then sighed heavily.

"...... I hate to say it, but huh. Well, yeah."

Bertus puts his hand on my shoulder and says, "Be still.

"Do you have a brother?"

a.

No way.

That's it!

"Oh, no, not at all. First of all, I don't remember anything....... looks like......."

"I saw a girl who looked a lot like you during the last festival. I thought maybe she was your brother, so I thought I'd look her up, but it's hard to find someone you only know by face."

"Uh, yeah, that's right......."

Dizzy.

I feel like throwing up.

"So I looked up your identity because I can look you up if I know where you're from, but last year was the first time you registered your identity?"

That sent goosebumps all over my body.

My cross-dressing encounter with Bertus was leading to a background check on me.

I'm pretty sure Bertus doesn't know anything yet, and I don't think he's suspicious that I was the first to register an identity last year when I didn't have one.

Dangerous.

It's really dangerous to go any further.

"So....... I hate to tell you this, but your parents abandoned you, and since....... you have a brother, you might not even know you have a brother, so I'm not going to do this if you don't want me to, but if you do, I'm going to do some personal......."

No.

It can also be coarse.

It must be prevented.

You might start out as a goodwill gesture and find out who you are.

This is not a joke, this is a real life threatening situation.

No other options exist.

Almost spinal cord reflexes.

"That's me."

I had no choice but to tell the truth.

"......? What?"

Bertus didn't seem to understand what he was hearing.

"That's me."

I even wondered to myself what I was looking at.

"What......? Huh? What?"

Bertus began to doubt his ears.

I escaped death, but.......

I wanted to die.

Episode 344.

Terrace, where Bertus and I used to chat from time to time.

There, Bertus rides in the car, his hands shaking, and drinks his tea, likewise shaking until it spills over.

I kept my head down, unable to look at Bertus.

I wanted to die.

Bertus will want to kill me.

"What the hell....... Why did you do that?"

Bertus Nazik says.

"...... money, because."

"......money? What does money have to do with cross-dressing?"

"Well, there's this thing called....... so......."

"A cross-dressing contest? A festival?"

"......."

"Things are looking up, aren't they......?"

"It can't hurt to have it......."

"......."

Head down, in a creepy voice, asking why the hell she was cross-dressing.

This.

Isn't this what I deserve?

I think this is the climax, right?

I don't think I've ever been in a worse situation in my life, and now that I've gotten what I deserve, I think I can trust that it will be nothing but happiness from here on out.

-Moon

Bertus barely took a sip of his tea, and I watched him set it down with a floating hand.

"What the hell. No what....... Oh no."

Bertus didn't seem to know what to say.

It's an unmasked Bertus, but not unmasked in the usual sense, but unmasked in a different way.

"Huh. Well. What is this....... Uh. Huh......."

"......."

Bertus had a flashback to the day he'd met her in cross-dressing.

Me playing dagger with the knights.

My hands were shaking.

I had a bullshit alcoholism or something.

All of that.

All those moments.

It was all me.

"......."

"......."

In a shitty mix of self-doubt.

"Holy....... Fuck."

I ended up sitting there, guilty as charged, listening to Bertus take a nasty douche.

"......I'm sorry."

"What's there to be sorry for, asshole! Yeah, because you say you're sorry! I didn't do anything, uh, different. I'm not! I'm not! I'm not! I'm just, uh, you're, uh, a brother! I'm just, uh, in good faith! I'm just, uh, this is crazy!"

"Whoa, who said what?!"

Bertus eventually exploded.

I apologized for nothing, which only earned me more abuse.

\* \* \*

Bertus's gaze shifted toward me.

A madman who will do anything for money.

Fortunately, Bertus didn't seem to have a grudge against me and didn't want to spread rumors.

I staggered into my room with a disembodied look on my face, as if even mentioning or thinking about it was contaminating my mind.

I thought I might somehow be found out about my participation in the cross-dressing contest, but I never thought I would have to confess.

"......."

It was a hellish feeling, but more than that, it was cathartic.

A chance encounter with Bertus led to an odd turn of events that led to a backtrack.

When you start prying about where you came from, where you're from, and the details of your past, no matter what excuse you come up with, there's bound to be a hole.

No matter how much I make sure I'm on top of things, it doesn't change the fact that I'm the same person who came out of nowhere last year. And that's not a hard thing to figure out once you start digging.

Bertus could see me from the wrong direction and realize who I was.

I'm glad I confessed to the cross-dressing contest so that Bertus could psychologically disengage from the crane. Even if he's pissed, Bertus isn't going to dig into this.

Crossdressing Mission.......

As great as the rewards were, they could also come out of the woodwork.

He knew it was dangerous, but he did it anyway.

However, the real danger was coming from the cross-dressing contest.

If Bertus had gone behind my back without asking me directly, I could have been in real danger.

But.

Why would I want to be embarrassed and die when my life was in real danger?

I was stuck in my seat for a while.

\* \* \*

There was an incident where Bertus' mind and mine exploded at the same time, but Bertus was too busy to be seen in the Royal Class dormitory.

A number of events that even I can't quite fathom now were igniting.

Ellen hadn't returned yet. Eventually, I had to do my own routine.

Worry and anxiety don't solve anything.

I've been training with Olivia in swordplay, but my focus lately has been on manipulating magic itself.

-Woof

A smokehouse where you are alone.

[The horsepower reading reaches 20 (A-)].

[Special condition achieved].

[The 'Manipulate Magic' and 'Sensitize Magic' talents evolve].

[Acquired 'Talent - Magic Dominance'].

In the mirrors of the performance hall, I could see my refined mana enveloping my entire body.

In the end, I succeeded in reaching one of Ellen's talents, magic control.

I almost got busted for a cross-dressing contest, and I sold a lot of noodles.

This allowed us to get very close to disenchantment domination.

I honestly had no idea what I was getting myself into when I got the Energy Sense and Manipulation talents. However, it was clear that those two talents helped me quite a bit, as I was able to eventually earn Enchantment.

I was able to use Enchantment without self-suggestion, and now I have the top talent, Enchantment Domination.

The horsepower rank is now A-, which is very high.

-curl!

A torrent of energy surged through his body, making his enchantment feel unlike anything he'd ever felt before.

The maneuvering of horsepower is more sophisticated and detailed, and the power itself is stronger.

It doesn't end there.

As I get used to it, the Magic Control talent will make me stronger.

I'm not going to be on the same starting line as Ellen. She's still going to be better than me, and she's going to get stronger faster than me.

It's just that you can walk a little faster now, thanks to tons of cheats.

You shouldn't be satisfied with this.

The moment I get complacent, I'm done. I still have a long way to go.

Nevertheless, I feel like I've gotten a lot more out of my understanding and utilization of enchantments with just one talent, Mastery of Enchantments.

I'm getting stronger unusually fast.

It's understood that such anomalies can be tolerated in the name of royalty, but how far can this go?

After training on the range, I returned to my dorm, showered, and changed.

-Tweet!

-Talk!

I saw a sparrow tapping its beak on the window of my room.

-Drupal

He opens the window and soon a sparrow flies into the room, too scared to draw the curtains, and the sparrow soon takes human form.

"I see degradation."

"Uh."

Sarkegar was always dressed as a maid when she entered the dormitory.

\* \* \*

I was sitting in a chair, and Sarkegar was standing still in the center of the room with his hands clasped together.

"Demand has arrived."

"I bet you did. What do you think?"

"I was a little confused because I hadn't been handed anything, but after hearing the situation, I'm taking over."

Honestly, considering Lucinil's age, I don't think it's right to say that she's in charge. I think it's also right to say that she's in charge because she looks like a child.

"It hasn't been exposed to the outside world, has it?"

"Yes, I came to you late at night, secretly and alone."

Sarkeghar is also undercover. So Lucinil would be careful not to expose himself to the outside world.

I briefed Sarkegar on what had happened at the Vampire Council.

"That's more than I could have imagined."

"That's right. I honestly didn't see it coming either."

Sarkegaard was pleased that things had worked out much better than he had expected.

"You'll have to be careful, though. I don't know much about road vampires, but from what I've heard, this guy named Antrianus seems dangerous."

"Yes, but you can't grab it by covering your hand."

It's not a time to play favorites, so even if someone is suspicious, you have to work with them.

"And Cantus Magna and Akasha....... I don't think it's too dangerous."

"Yes, but it's very likely that what I want is there, and that's already a very powerful force in itself."

"Clashing the Black Order and Cantus Magna and taking the fish out of the water seems ideal, except we don't know what the hell this Akasha thing is."

Is it right to provoke cantus magna without knowing what akasha is?

Sarkeghar seemed to think that I could covet Akasha enough in terms of wanting power. Whether or not that was possible.

"It's becoming something of a picture, Jaehang."

Sarkegar smiled grimly. The Vampire Council has gained power, and the House of Demand has joined the ecliptic to cooperate.

Sarkhegar was purely pleased that the four demonic factions were now forming something that could be called a force.

By the way.

Please don't smile like that with that sweet face.

I'm getting cognitive dissonance from smiling like that with such a worldly face!

Of course, that wasn't the end of the story.

"What about contact with the revolutionary forces?"

"We don't want to get carried away, so we're looking carefully. We don't know the whole gang, but we have a pretty good list of people who were definitely involved."

Sarkegaard showed me a list of people.

The list goes on and on, including Oscar de Gradias.

Most of them were bureaucrats from commoner backgrounds, and a few were nobles.

"There are a lot of abandoned illegitimate children, especially in aristocratic families."

"I suppose."

Sometimes illegitimate children of noble families are admitted to the Temple with their surnames hidden. They might have been admitted to the Orbis class.

A child of noble blood but abandoned.

It is possible that the anger could turn into a desire for revolution. Most of the names would have been well vetted by Sarkozy, so the participants would be certain.

But in the end, there's no need for nagging.

What I need are the key players. It's my job to contact them and establish a working relationship with the demonic forces.

And in Sarkozy's roster, I soon found a name I recognized, if not familiarity.

I pointed to the name.

"This guy may not be the head of the organization, but I'm pretty sure he's very important."

"I think so."

Owen de Getmora.

The Merchant Guild Master's name was there.

The Merchants' Guild Master has provided the Magical Research Society with a large amount of research funding. He paid me for my ties to the imperial family.

I haven't had any requests or contact from the Merchant Guild since then, but they've been siphoning off money. The Merchant's Guild pays for all of the supplies that go into the Magic Train Shop business, and I've never had a problem with them.

Sarkozy's investigation revealed that such a merchant guild master must have joined the revolutionary forces.

"The guy who funneled money to me because he wanted ties to the imperial family is backing revolutionary forces behind the scenes......."

We don't know if he's just looking for money or if he really wants to revolutionize the world.

If he's the boss, he's important because he's the boss, and if he's not, he's important because he's the path to the boss.

"Okay. You'll contact Owen de Getmora, in Darkland's name if you need to, and I may be able to do so face-to-face, depending on the situation, so keep that in mind."

Sarkegaard looked thoughtful.

"You have to keep in mind that they might be intimidated by the name of a demon and not want to join forces with us, Jae-Hyung."

"Hmm, I don't think so."

I was a little skeptical when Sarkegar said there might be a negative outlook.

"They don't realize that once they're caught, once we turn them in to the Empire, terrible things are going to happen to them. They're going to have to work with us from the moment they're caught, or they're going to die."

The revolutionary forces must choose. If they don't take our hand, they can only know that we can bring them down in other ways. We don't have to do it ourselves.

Once you have your list, you can hand it over to the empire and that's it.

Although you might deny it.

The Empire is on high alert due to our alliance with the Crusaders. Add to that the additional threat of revolutionary forces, and they will do everything in their power to eradicate them.

So they won't be able to turn away from us.

"I admire your wisdom, Jae-hyung."

Contact with the revolutionary forces is left to Sarkegar.

"Get Lucinil's help if you need it, you're probably more likely to need magic than I am."

"Okay, degradation."

Sarkegar is assisted by Lucinil, who is staying with us for the time being.

One day at a time.

As things progress, one by one, in Valerie's name.

I will become increasingly distant from my identity as a Reinhardt.

I watched as Sarkegar flew away as a sparrow.

Episode 345.

On the day he was discovered cross-dressing, he gave important instructions about creating a coalition of anti-Imperial forces.

I wonder what the hell he's doing.

I don't feel like there's too much of a temperature difference between what I do as Reinhardt and what I do as Valerie.

Along the way, he awakened to his higher talent of magic domination.

I also developed a sense of crisis, that the things I'd been doing were a butterfly effect that could catch up with me at any moment.

I felt like I was treading on thin ice when I realized that my participation in a cross-dressing contest had led to Bertus doing a background check on me.

And when will Ellen be back.

That night.

My body was tired from training, but I couldn't fall asleep because I had so many things on my mind.

How long has it been since I tossed and turned for hours, barely falling asleep.

-cook

-Reinhard....... Reinhard.......

"Ugh!"

I was jolted awake by an urgent hand grasping mine.

As I lifted myself out of bed, I saw Charlotte lying on her back, almost face down, clutching my arm.

"Sh....... Charlotte?"

"Rhein....... Reinhard......."

Half of Charlotte's face was shrouded in darkness as she stared at me, sobbing.

More than shocked and amazed, I was scared out of my mind.

I thought it had gone quiet.

We weren't quite done yet.

"Me, how....... I need to know how....... How about......."

"Uh, uh, ah, okay."

Not knowing what to do, I picked up Charlotte, who was squirming and screaming.

"It's okay. It's all good......."

"ugh, ugh......."

Charlotte squirmed in my arms, tears streaming down her face.

I thought I was done, but apparently not.

I'm awake and alert. Eagerly, as if reciting a prayer.

"You'll be fine."

Charlotte's power was not lost.

"Nothing will happen."

Unless this power is destroyed, Charlotte will live in this pain forever.

I patted Charlotte's back again and again, whispering that it would be okay.

Words.

It must have worked, because Charlotte's trembling subsided, and the darkness that seemed to have consumed her gradually subsided.

Is this really responding to the power of words?

That's what Charlotte understands, and that's what Saviolin Tana understands.

But I couldn't tell if it was responding to my power of demonic domination, or to a spirit, or to something else entirely.

However.

"Hmph....... Black....... Ugh......."

It seemed clear that I was the only one who could make Charlotte's condition better.

As the tremors gradually subsided and Charlotte returned to her normal self, I recognized her.

Barefoot in a camisole.

I was soaked in a cold sweat that it was embarrassing to look at.

Charlotte couldn't get out of my arms.

"......."

"......."

You're feeling better, and you can't help but think about what you look like.

I carefully pulled the blanket down and draped it over Charlotte's shoulders.

"Are you feeling better?"

"ugh, ugh......."

In the darkness, Charlotte nodded as she wrapped the quilt I'd given her around her like a cloak. I picked her up from the floor and gently placed her on the bed.

My visit was closed. I checked the lock and it was locked.

How did it get in?

"What happened?"

"......I didn't lose consciousness this time, but it just happened."

They used to be taken from you while you were unconscious or asleep.

But this time, while I was awake, the shadows began to creep in.

"I need to get to you, but if I go out into the hallway....... in case someone sees you......."

Charlotte shuddered, afraid she'd done it.

Once upon a time, when you were completely in the shadows.

It was as if he had traveled straight from his room to mine, using the power of shadows or darkness to move.

"I don't want to do this....... I don't want to do this....... I don't want to be able to do this......."

Charlotte was eventually able to use her powers to come to me unnoticed, but the mere fact that it was possible seemed to terrify the hell out of her.

I felt like my fear was clouding my judgment.

"Stay with me....... Stay with me, Reinhard......."

"Okay, I'll stay with you."

Charlotte clings to my waist, looking up at me in the darkness.

His eyes were wide with fear, tears pooling in his eyes.

I thought it was dangerous.

Charlotte was unstable, and just when she thought she was safe, this happened again, and she was on the verge of falling apart again.

"Together....... Continue with......."

Charlotte's lips were about to part slightly.

"It's okay."

I tugged Charlotte's head toward my chest.

"It's okay, don't be scared."

"......."

I felt like something irreversible was going to happen. I had no choice but to do it.

"Nothing's going to happen, obviously."

Charlotte stayed still in my arms for a very long time.

\* \* \*

As the horror wore off, Charlotte passed out and fell asleep.

I guarded Charlotte's bedside, as I had done in the palace last spring.

How long has it been since Charlotte fell asleep.

-Bang!

A sudden, urgent pounding on the door causes your entire body to stiffen.

-Reinhardt, Nada.

The sound of voices on the other side of the door broke the tension.

Saviolin Tanada.

Cautiously, I rose from my seat and opened the door, and there stood a pale, fed-up-looking Savior Tana.

-delay

"Reinhard, do you happen to know if His Majesty is here....... here."

She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw Charlotte lying on the bed through the doorway.

She straightened up and walked into my room, gently placing her hand on Charlotte's sleeping forehead.

"You suddenly disappeared, so I went to....... just in case."

Saviolin Tana was at the Temple to serve as Charlotte's bodyguard.

Even though you don't share Charlotte's bedroom, you've probably checked in on her periodically to make sure she's sleeping well.

Suddenly, Charlotte disappeared, and I realized that she was looking for me, just in case. Charlotte was fast asleep.

"I don't think I've been knocked unconscious this time, but I think I've had a sudden burst of power, and I've been riding the shadows to my room."

"Is that......."

You're not losing consciousness, but you're losing control of your power.

Savior Tana and I can't help but realize that Charlotte's condition isn't completely healed.

Tana stared down at the sleeping Charlotte with a distressed expression on her face.

"That you could somehow calm His Highness's condition....... I'm afraid."

She seemed to think that my presence was, in and of itself, a great relief to Charlotte.

"But restraining the power of electric charges in this imperfect way will always be....... only a stopgap measure."

It is unclear how long I will be able to stabilize Charlotte's condition.

We need to find a more fundamental solution, Saviolin Tana seemed to think so, and I think so too.

But where is such a thing.

Finding a sealer is a thing of the past.

I couldn't help but think about it eventually.

Akasha.

I don't like to think of it as a one-size-fits-all tool that can fulfill any wish, but that's where my mind went for now.

I wonder if there's a way to seal Charlotte's power in there.

Saviolin Tana says, carefully wiping the cold sweat from Charlotte's forehead with a handkerchief as she sleeps.

"Reinhardt."

"Yes."

"It's clear that the power of ...... is tied to the Devil. You know that."

"It's ......."

I'm the only one who knows that.

"Is it a leap of faith to think that the clue to solving the king's condition might be in the Demon King's Castle?"

Saviolin Tana's melancholy tone was mingled with her own misery at being unable to offer any help to the suffering Empress.

However, Demonstration.

Not a nostalgic place, but a place to start.

I still don't know what's in there.

"......I don't know, didn't we already get everything we could get from Demon Castle?"

"Yes, but Demon Castle is a very important place in the Darklands' history, which is almost as long as humanity's. We probably haven't discovered everything yet."

There are things on the planet that we have yet to discover. So even though we've taken out treasure and other things, there are still things that are hidden, and we're still investigating them.

As I listened to her, I realized that it's one thing to know that Demon Castle has fallen, but it's another thing to know all of it.

All I'm doing is suppressing Charlotte's power with the transcendent power of a spirit. I'm not even sure if it's really a spirit power.

I agree with her that a more fundamental solution is needed.

Is there a clue in the castle?

"Are you trying to go to the Demon Castle?"

"I don't have to go to ......, they already have tons of people searching for it."

You don't have to go there yourself. It's not like she has so few people to call on that she has to do it herself.

"Your Majesty is....... that you should travel to the city of Demon King yourself....... himself. It's obviously dangerous. It's dangerous, and I've always opposed it. Me, too, Your Majesty."

She looks at me with her hand on Charlotte's forehead.

Charlotte knew she wasn't whole, so she traveled to the Demon Castle, thinking it might hold answers.

Tana would have argued against it, of course, because it could be dangerous.

But today, Charlotte's powers have struck again. Savior Tana bows her head in front of Charlotte's sleeping face and speaks in a grim voice.

"Reinhard, may I ask you a difficult favor?"

I didn't have to listen to her to know what she was going to say.

"I'll come with you."

"......."

I knew that if anything happened to Charlotte's powers, I'd be the only one who could handle it, so I knew it would be about going to the Demon Castle with her.

At my answer, given without hearing what I was about to ask, her shoulders shook as she held Charlotte's sleeping hand still.

"Thank you....... Reinhardt."

I think it's the right thing to do.

Was this what the Emperor was talking about, what I needed to do for Charlotte?

\* \* \*

The next day.

Feeling refreshed, Charlotte returned to her room with the help of Saviolin Tana, and rejoined me, properly washed and ready.

"Ma Wangsheng......? You too?"

"Yeah."

Charlotte looked apologetic, as if Tana had already explained everything.

"......might be dangerous."

"How dangerous can a demonized demon castle be?"

I feel absolutely no guilt in saying this.

To me, the devil is just an asshole.

We'll need the Emperor's permission, but we'll be able to go to the Demon City.

I don't know about you, Charlotte, but we once escaped the Demon Castle together, and we're going back together.

It's giving me a weird thrill.

Charlotte looked at me with a complicated expression. She'd lost her cool yesterday, clinging to me and crying, and now she'd offered to accompany me to the Demon King Castle.

The look on Charlotte's face was a complex mix of embarrassment, gratitude, and guilt.

"Thank you. Really."

You say you always receive.

So, I can give you anything I can give you.

Charlotte added with a blush.

\* \* \*

No immediate departure for the city of Demon King. Saviolin Tana had gone to the Emperor for permission, so she would need some time. At least a few days, at least.

I did what I had to do.

I left the Temple and headed to the Rotary Club.

"Is it worth it?"

"Yeah, they're all nice."

Adriana beamed at my question.

Somehow, Loyar had become like Adriana's dog, and the other club members seemed to like him so much that they naturally took care of him.

I wasn't without my concerns, but it's a good thing the rest of the club was looking favorably on Adriana, as Loyar was easily taken down.

Adriana is a diligent worker, and she seemed to be helping out with various chores at the club headquarters.

So it was no mistake that everyone felt a little cleaner than before.

While I was there, Adriana and I walked around the Rotary Club neighborhood.

What's going through Adriana's mind?

I've been hurt by a lot of things, and now I'm in hiding.

"What about you?"

Still, Adriana seemed more concerned about Olivia than herself.

"Well....... His personality has changed a bit, but he seems to be handling it well."

"Yeah....... Good."

I had a future, but I gave it up, and when I came back and tried to get my life back, it was taken away from me.

Adriana will be vague and vain.

You won't know what to do next.

Just as Olivia became disillusioned with religion, she became disillusioned with people.

Is Adriana walking through the steps before that?

"Those who were taught to love terrified me, and those who were taught to hate all their lives saved me."

It must feel like everything she's ever believed in has been denied. Though she keeps quiet here, I'm sure these thoughts are haunting her.

In fact, had she returned to the temple or entered the monastery, she would have been summoned immediately to investigate what had happened.

And it would be fatal if it became known that he had been rescued by demons.

Even now, she is unknowingly protected by demons.

By me and Loyar.

"What am I supposed to live for. I'm not sure anymore."

Adriana looked up at the deep blue winter sky and smiled sadly.

Forced to learn a truth she didn't want to know, Adriana was lost.

\* \* \*

Prince of the Demon Realm and heir to the Darklands, but I do not know what is in the Demon Castle.

But I'm not going to go looking for it just because I don't know.

I don't know, but I'm sure there are guys who do.

After a short walk with Adriana, I called Loyar outside.

"How long have you been off the council, and where else are you going?"

"Uh."

You're talking like you're going to keep running around when your lord's work is done.

"I'm thinking of going back to Mawang Castle."

"Are you talking about....... You mean?"

At the mention of a demonic castle, Loyaar's face fell.

"You know, I've lost my memory, so I don't know what's in the Demon Castle, so I was wondering if there's a secret room in the Demon Castle, somewhere the humans couldn't rob."

At my words, Loyar shook his head.

"......How do I know that?"

"Weren't you at the Demon Castle? You said I harassed you before."

"......."

At my words, Loyar glares at me with a fatalistic look. Does he have PTSD or something?

"Lowly, there's no way I, who am neither a noble nor royalty of the Darklands, could know such a thing. I don't know if there is such a thing."

"......Yes."

Because I've lost my memory, I originally asked Loyar what I needed to know. Of course, Loyar would know nothing of the sort.

"So you don't know Elise or Sarkegar?"

"Wouldn't that be more likely?"

It's the sort of thing only royalty knows about.

You could go there like you're headed to the ground, but there's no reason to.

The royalty of the Darklands, except for me, who has lost his memory.

There is one.

"Does Airi know anything?"

"Wouldn't that be more likely?"

Watch me say the same thing I just said.

You don't want to deal with me?

Despite the inconvenience of traveling to the Edina Archipelago to ask, it was important to have the right information. Better to be safe than sorry.

It's been a while since our first meeting with Airi, so we need to know how she's doing.

However, the warp gate does not reach the Edina Archipelago.

So unless you're traveling with a wizard who can teleport, you'll have to travel by boat, which can take a very long time.

But with Lucinil's help, I won't have to go away for a few days.

Return of the Demon King.

And what might still be left of the Demon Castle.

I wonder if Airi knows about them.

Episode 346.

To get to the Edina Archipelago, you'll need Lucinil.

The situation was not urgent, but there was no reason to delay, so I entrusted the Rotary Club with a letter to Count Argonne Pontheus.

I had to be careful where I went, and even with the Ring of Sarkegar, I wasn't going to show up at Count Argon Ponteus' house in person.

I left the Rotary Club headquarters and headed to the prearranged rendezvous point.

It would be a while before I could reach them, so I waited until the night.

The rendezvous point is in the lower Irine region, just off the ecliptic.

It was very off the beaten path.

If you have time to spare, you can wait, but if you're in a hurry, this isn't the way to go.

I'm staying at Count Argon Ponteius' mansion because I don't have a way to get to him right now, but I know I need to find a way to get to Lucinil more easily.

How I killed time by the river in the dark.

-Snarl

A whitish mist seemed to gather from thin air, and soon took the form of a silver-haired girl.

-Wear

"How are you, Archdemon?"

She lands lightly on the ground and looks up at me.

"Welcome."

"Yeah, here we go."

"But what was that, was that a teleport or something?"

"Huh? Ah....... This?"

Lucinil's entire body briefly blurred and turned to mist, then re-materialized.

"It's a vampire ability. Not teleportation, though I can move fast."

The ability to turn into mist. Eleris had never demonstrated this ability. I wonder if it's an ability only the Clan of Demand can use.

If so, do different clans have different unique abilities?

While I was wondering that to myself, Lucinil put her hand on my waist.

"Anyway, do you need me?"

"Yes, you need to go somewhere with me right now."

"Where?"

"It's called the Edina Archipelago in the southern part of the Empire, do you know it?"

At my words, Rusinil crossed his arms in disbelief.

"I don't know how old I am, but I do know a little bit about geography. Though sometimes the countries I know are gone."

I wondered if that was too condescending a question to ask of a man who never loses after a night out. Lucinil looked at me and shook her head.

"But what's that island nation to the south?"

"I have a meeting with someone."

If I tried to explain it to Lucinil, she wouldn't understand, so I just said it.

But I think Lucinyl's attitude is, whatever I do, I'll do it myself. I don't think she's going to be for or against it.

Lucinil looks around.

"Okay. I don't think there's anyone around to see, so I'll just go ahead and do it, but it's a bit of a distance, so I'll have to cast it a few times in a row."

"Yes, let's go."

Lucinil concentrates and begins to cast Mass Teleport.

Lucinil or Eleris.

They have very different personalities, but they're both reliable.

\* \* \*

The Edina Archipelago, located at the southernmost tip of the Empire, is so far from land that it's out of range of even the largest warp gates, and would normally require a ship to reach.

The archipelago has its own set of warp gates for traveling between islands, but it is not connected to the continent.

-pot!

Lucinil cast teleport several times in a row.

I was able to reach Razak, a port city in the Edina Archipelago, where I had once been when I came to visit the Duke of Granz's villa.

As soon as they reached the outskirts of Razak, Lucinil's eyes lit up.

"Wow, is it snowing here?"

The Edina Archipelago was no tropical paradise, but it was winter, and the snow was falling heavily around them. Lucinil pawed at the snow.

"You've seen it all over ......."

Didn't you say something like "I'm tired of snow" back then?

"Archdemon, is it the same snow that comes from a place where the wind blows like it's going to rip your cheeks off, or is it the same snow that falls quietly in a quiet, cozy-looking port city like this?"

"What's the difference?"

"Wow, it's pretty refreshing to see a guy who's been around a lot longer than me acting like a cranky old man."

First of all, it's bizarre that Lucinil hasn't lost his sensitivity after all these years. Anyway, on the outskirts of Razak, we were looking at a port city covered in snow.

"Anyway, who do I need to meet with?"

"I have a....... who owns a bar. I have a friend, a coworker, something like that."

Honestly, I don't know much about Airi except that she had pink hair. I could have stopped by last time, but I didn't. Lucinil tilted her head as she heard me.

"A tavern? What the hell does your grand dream of rebuilding the Darklands have to do with your buddy running a tavern in the southernmost corner of the continent?"

"I'd like to think of it as the first step toward imperial gold control, but it's kind of complicated and vague and hard to explain."

"...... Yeah, I'll see what I can do about that."

"That's good."

Lucinil stared blankly at the falling snowflakes, assuming that was the case.

He's helping me with this, that, and the other, but he's neglectful. It's like, take it or leave it.

She still wondered what my intentions were.

It's up to you. I'll help you, but if you die, it won't be my fault.

It feels like this.

I'm guessing this isn't what you meant by versatile?

"Anyway, don't call me Archdemon anywhere anymore, I don't want to get any weird looks."

I know there's no way anyone would recognize me after coming all this way, but I'm not Reinhardt anymore, I've changed my face into something completely different.

"Okay, Reinhardt."

"Let's go."

Not Reinhardt, but Reinhardt. It's not exactly a rare name, so I figured I'd go with it.

\* \* \*

I entered Razak and asked for Airi's bar. I didn't even know the name of the place, I just asked if there was a bar with a lot of women in the neighborhood.

The last time I was here, I was already famous enough to cause an entire city to have a family breakdown or something, so I figured I could just bite the bullet and get there.

"......?"

But a passerby saw me asking and frowned.

"When are you talking about?"

"Is that ......?"

"That bar has been closed for a while."

After saying that, the passerby stormed off.

Closed?

I'm sure Elise has been busy with the ecliptic and hasn't been keeping up with Eddie or the archipelago.

What has happened to Airi since then?

"Things are a little weird, aren't they?"

"...... Really?"

Rusinil and I stared at each other, but there was no way the two of us staring at each other was going to answer the question.

I walked a bit further down the street, stopping passersby to ask. Most of the answers were that they knew about the bar, but that it had been closed for a while, so there was no point in trying.

"Oh, that bar? What a shame, I used to go there quite often......."

He was a street drunk who looked like he was going to get really drunk. A drunken man was nibbling on a crisp.

"What about that guy at the bar or....... Are they okay?"

He frowned at my question.

"Are you okay? Are you okay? Heh, heh, heh. Heh, heh, heh......."

He chuckled and brushed past me, as if he'd heard the ridiculousness of my question.

What's going on with Airi and the succubi?

Did you get beaten up or killed for being a succubus?

It seems like there were quite a few instances where the business was actually doing well, but the family broke up.

It became such a problem that citizens were complaining about it, and it became a public outcry......?

The number of such horrible cases was spinning in my head.

I grabbed the next passerby and asked.

This time it was a middle-aged woman.

"There used to be a famous bar in Razak with a lot of extra pay, but it doesn't seem to be open now. Do you know what happened to it?"

"......Why is that?"

The middle-aged woman frowned at me, a stranger getting straight to the point.

"It's not like they were hurt or anything......."

"Are you hurt? I don't think so."

"......Yes?"

"They're bitches that wouldn't take a ghost, what could they possibly hurt, I hope they go to hell, tsk tsk!"

The middle-aged woman snorted and walked away, as if she were an asshole.

What is it?

What the heck is going on?

The answer came from the next person.

"Oh, you mean the girls?"

I didn't notice any signs of regret or that he wasn't interested in drinking.

"I've been out of the liquor business for a while now, and I've been selling debentures."

No.

What the hell is this?

The old man I spoke to pointed in the direction of Razak.

There was a fairly large stone structure that stood out from a distance.

"He doesn't do business with penny-pinchers like us, but mostly with ship owners and nobles leading trading fleets, which is pretty cool, considering he's shut down his original business."

You're not screwed.

In fact, it was going so well that I didn't even need to sell it. As a passerby walked by, Lucinil grabbed my sleeve with a puzzled look.

"Is this that....... imperial gold coin?"

"That....... I think so."

"No, what gives you the idea that you didn't see it coming?"

I was just saying that you should try to get your hands on some imperial gold, but they've already closed the bar and turned it into a payday lender, is that it?

How much money did they make?

Lucinil and I walked toward the building the passerby had pointed out.

\* \* \*

Airi's bar was thriving, so the regulars seemed to be sad to see it turn into a payday lender.

Usury, loansharking, and moneylending.

I think that's what it's called, but the stone building Rusinil and I arrived at was the size of a financial institution.

As usury grows, I wonder if it's any different from financial institutions.

I was expecting to see a busy bar in the middle of the night, but when did they build a building like this?

[Angel capital].

And the entrance to the tall building was embossed with the business name.

"I don't know much about finance, but I think angels and payday lenders are a really bad combination."

"......I think so too."

To Lucinil's mutterings of disbelief.

Even in the middle of the night, it was glowing from within.

And there was a commotion at the entrance.

It was a young woman in a black suit and a middle-aged man with a belly.

It wasn't Airi, but I had a feeling it was one of the succubi I'd rescued.

"Oh, come on, just this once. How many times do I tell you that money is tied up. Huh?"

"Captain, how many times have I told you to make sure you meet your interest payments, because we're tight on money, and we've been known to get screwed if we don't, so I'd like to offer you a lower interest rate in exchange for making sure you meet your payments, and how many times have I told you to be very careful about the penalties for missing payments?"

"Am, I know, I know, I know, of course I know, but did you think it would work out this way? I'll give you just one week, just one week, and I'll double the interest on the money I can't pay. No! I'll triple it. Seriously, I don't know what happened to you, but suddenly you're out of money. This hasn't happened before, has it?"

"Captain Ai, I'd love to be able to do that for you, given our history, but it's not something I can decide on my own ship....... I've been firmly cautioned to only do as I'm told, and this isn't about the amount of interest, and I've had one big project fall through because I arbitrarily extended the deadline and our financing got stuck, so I'm really sorry, Captain."

"Yuria....... Please, please. I'm the captain of a Lenos-class trading vessel. You know I'm not the kind of person to begrudge you a few pennies in interest. I've never beengrudged anything in my life. Please look at my face. Do you think it makes sense for me to go bankrupt for a sum like this? Do me a favor, and I'll make it up to you later."

I felt like I had a headache watching the whole thing unfold.

What the hell is that talking about, that?

At the middle-aged man's insistent pleading, the succubus called Yuria let out an exasperated sigh.

"I can't help it, you and I have a history, but I need you to know that this is the only time I'm going to miss a deadline, and the next time I do, I need you to think of it as my neck going down with it, not yours, okay? As much as you value me."

"Well, when have I ever not kept a promise to you, huh?! Well, except for this one, hehe!"

"Well, I'll give you a week's lead time, but you'll have to be ready next time, and you know I can't do that on my own, right?"

"Sure. In a week's time, I won't be able to pay the principal as well as the interest!"

The middle-aged man walked away with a hearty laugh after being assured that he would be granted an extension on his interest payments.

The Capital employee, a succubus named Yuria, looked at us as we stood dumbfounded at the Capital entrance after the man left.

"Are you a visitor?"

"Well, sort of, but......."

At my words, Yuria scratched her cheeks in a rueful way.

"I'm sorry. Angel Capital only provides financial services to select VIP clients, so we're not accepting new clients. Unless you have a letter of recommendation from an existing member, you're out of luck."

Loan sharking.

But it's not a loan sharking business targeting the common man.

We don't know how he got from the bar to here, but it's clear from the size of it that he's done something big.

I don't look like Valier, and I don't look like Reinhardt, so you won't recognize me.

"Tell the boss that the 'one remaining family' is here, and he'll understand."

"......!"

There are many ways to invoke Airy.

Not blood, but one family member left.

Darklands royalty.

Aside from Airi herself, I'm sure you'll understand that I'm the only other one.

"...... will take you, come here."

And if Yuria was a succubus, of course she would understand.

Episode 347.

Yuria knew who I was just by my words.

It wasn't just a family, it was the one family left.

I was escorted to the Capital building by Rusinil, and soon I could see what was going on inside.

At this point, employees were still talking in various offices, some of them apparently not succubi.

As we entered the area, which is off-limits to all but authorized personnel, we saw things we couldn't see from the outside.

A succubus employee was standing in front of a group of armed men, giving them a list of precautions.

"Try not to get in trouble, and of course we all know what we're doing is legal foreclosure, but let's keep things in perspective."

"Four!"

"Four!"

"Yes!"

The succubus employee who appears to be in charge of them crosses his arms and shakes his head.

"I don't care if a person gets hurt, but if an impound gets hurt, that's a loss, and remember, if you intimidate me like you did last time and break my statue, you'll be liable."

"Yes!"

"Four!"

"Got it!"

"Of course, you know that collections are also a problem if they're not resolved on time......."

No way.

Are debt collectors slaves too?

The venomous words exchanged in a gentle tone made me dizzy.

Airy.

I have no idea how the hell you got to this point, as I was just writing in the corner of the room!

Yuria headed up the stairs, and when she reached the fourth floor, she found a room with a sign that read, "President's Office.

-Bam!

Yuria rang the bell to let her know she had company, and cautiously opened the door.

-Why, I'm busy.

A voice came from beyond the door, unfamiliar but familiar, somehow slightly sharpened.

"Mr. President, we have a very important guest."

-I told you we're not meeting any ship owners or royalty yet. Tell them to go back.

What the hell is this?

"The one remaining family member is....... has arrived."

-Family? What do you mean family....... No?

Before I could finish my sentence, I heard the sound of scurrying shoes and the door burst open.

Now that I don't have to hide it, I use Sarkegar's Ring to restore it to its original form.

In the guise of a ballet.

The long-lost pink-haired succubus queen.

Airi's figure was there.

"Ah."

Airi watched me as I returned to Valerie's form, and then nuzzled the nape of my neck.

-Wrong!

"Bali to......!"

"Uh, uh, uh....... How are you?"

I know what Airi thinks of me, but I'm still not comfortable with her.

To my delight, Airi grabbed me and wouldn't let go for a while.

\* \* \*

A loan shark office that's called Angel Capital but looks more like the devil than an angel to me.

In the president's office, I, Lucinil, and Airi were sitting at the guest table.

The assistant soon brought out the black tea.

"Oh, I don't drink. You don't have to give it to me."

Lucinil shook her head, covering her teacup with her hand as Airi poured tea into her own cup.

"......?"

"This is......."

"If you know about Elise, you know about the Lord Vampire. I am Lucinil, Gazoo of Demand."

"Load Vampire......?"

Airi nodded dumbly at Lucinil's introduction. I wasn't sure what it meant, but Airi seemed quite surprised to have gotten the help of another Lord Vampire.

"......because somehow I got help."

Now that I think about it, I'm not sure where Sarkegar, Loyaar, and Eleris stand in the Demon Army.

It's just that it's infiltrating the ecliptic, acting as an infiltrator.

Come to think of it, I know far too little about the demonic realm, let alone my own people. Airi stared at Lucinil, then bowed slightly.

"I don't think you've made an example of Valerie and the gods, it's called Airi."

Airi lets out a short shout, then looks at me.

"You must have a lot of questions. Bali."

"......Yes. What's going on here?"

I had no idea what I was doing, how I was doing it, at what scale, or in what way.

"You can only do so much business if you want to take over the world."

It goes without saying.

But I don't think it would have been that simple to pursue.

Airi's ambition was to seize control of the empire's gold coinage and cause an economic crisis. Of course, I told her to do it because she needed a purpose in life, but I didn't expect much.

But Airi was serious about it, and it was clear that it had paid off in a big way, far beyond what she had expected.

"I didn't know anything at first, so I asked a lot of customers for advice."

It started with a bar, and bars are where people gather.

In the early days of the business, there was a lot of trouble with impressions, but Airi and the succubi had no trouble subduing the drunken ones.

As word of mouth started to spread and people started coming in and out, Airi created a VIP system.

Hospitality for people who sell ridiculously expensive alcohol.

Airi talked to them and gained a better understanding of capital.

How money is made. How money rolls. And how they made money.

Some were inherited, some were born, and many more started from scratch and succeeded.

"I thought about real estate and investing, but I decided there was nothing else I could do that would allow me to grow my capital quickly in a short period of time, so that's where I started."

"Does ...... make it easy, or is this?"

"More important than money are the relationships you have with the people who hold it."

Airi may have made money running the bar, but more importantly, she made connections. She borrowed when she needed to, invested when she needed to.

It all seems to have been too easy for Airi.

"Of course, I do this for the money, but I do it because I get to use money as a tool to manipulate people."

Airi takes a sip of her black tea.

Airi smiled as she set her teacup down.

"If you bind them to a debt, you can enslave them regardless of their status."

It doesn't matter if your opponent is a noble, royalty, or a colossus.

Money and bonds are power in themselves. If you bind someone with a huge bond, you own them. Everything he is is yours, and he is a slave to your every word.

The hornless succubus queen was up to no good, enslaving her opponents with money instead of charm.

While payday lending itself has a negative connotation, Airi is doing it in a slightly different context.

It's not about making money.

I do loan sharking to trap people.

To make people his slaves.

"......So, what's going on now?"

"I don't sell alcohol anymore, but I run a loan shark business for the VIPs of the day. Razak is a port city, and the port is constantly bustling with ships heading to the continent and back, so the captains and trading fleets load up on the most valuable trade goods to maximize their profits on each trip to the continent, and the same goes for the return trip. The merchants sell those goods and make a fortune on the markup, which can be as little as four or five times or as much as a dozen times."

"......Yes."

"Obviously, you can't do it out of your own pocket, so you're going to have to take on a huge amount of debt to load up on expensive trade goods, or you're going to have to get investment, in exchange for a percentage of future profits."

You get a stake in the trade fleet in exchange for investing in it. Of course, we know about such things.

"People are greedy. Once you've made a huge amount of money on one trade, you don't want to do it again, safely, debt-free, with just the ships you have. Once you've made a profit, you take on more debt or get more investment to build more ships, hire more sailors and captains, and so on, over and over again. Over and over again. No one is spared."

Airi had seen such behavior over and over again. In the words of captains returning from long voyages, she had tasted their insatiable desire.

"According to the captains and shipowners, the usury people lend money to greedy shipowners at exorbitant rates, and then if they can't pay the debt, they seize the ship or the goods, which is good because the interest rates are high in the first place, and if they can't pay, they can seize the ship. It's a way of making money unless the fleet gets caught in a storm and is wiped out."

Airi didn't just see the captains.

I've been approached by various powerful people in the region, and I've been told a lot of things.

Captains sailing their ships on long voyages to trade.

Shipowners who hire those captains to run their trading fleets.

The moneylenders who lend money to those ship owners.

I figured out the structure of the moneymakers on top of the moneymakers by running a bar.

But somehow, in Airi's case, it seemed to have a different meaning than loan sharking.

Enslave.

The words resonated with me.

"So I'm lending them money, and if they don't make their interest payments, I raise the interest rate or charge them an extra fee, or if that doesn't work, I get a share of the fleet or trade goods."

It's clear that Airbnb is making a lot of money.

"But that would take too long, so I'm doing something a little different."

Airi's dream is to control the gold of the empire. She's already incredibly successful, but it's not enough.

"I'm deliberately messing with the finances of captains, shipowners, tops, and traders who borrow money from the Capital. I want them to borrow to the limit, so that when they have to pay back the interest, they have no money left over."

"......what?!"

"In layman's terms, you force them to default, so they're late on payments, late on payments, late on payments. You brand them as unable to pay, you destroy their credit to zero, and then you can foreclose."

I was taken aback by the unthinkable.

You can do that by simply squeezing the flow of money in a market, and then squeezing the flow of money out of a path.

"If you take down three large trading fleets at the same time, you take down the moneylenders, the merchants whose money is tied up in them, and the local fleets in the Edina Archipelago. It's a chain reaction."

If a large trade fleet goes bust and foreclosures begin, the lenders who were supposed to get paid from it, as well as the local fleets that were supposed to transport the incoming trade, are out of luck, and so are the people who were caught up in it.

A subcontractor's downsizing following the bankruptcy of a large company.

"A large fleet has been wiped out, and merchants are unable to buy or sell trade goods."

"Captains lose their ships."

"Sailors lose their jobs."

"Sailors without money can't drink."

"Then the bar will go out of business because it can't sell alcohol."

"And just like that, it falls over like dominoes."

"It paralyzes the economy."

With a nonchalant expression, Airi drank the last drop of black tea in her teacup.

Wasn't that the point of being a slave after all?

Destroying a country's economy? Why?

"You're not going to make money, you're going to cause an economic crisis, why?"

Airi smirked at my stupid question.

"It's about getting rid of the trade fleet cartel in the Edina Archipelago."

"......?"

Again, the words were unexpected.

"If I have a lot of money, how can I control the flow of money in the market? No matter how much money I have, it's not enough."

Airi looks out the window of her office.

"It's all because Edina Royal Bank has my back."

A lender with unlimited creditworthiness.

"It's not that the Edina Archipelago doesn't have a giant warp gate to the continent, it's that they can't build one even if they wanted to. If it's a matter of distance, why not just build one on an uninhabited island at a waypoint along the way and you don't have the same problem?"

"......No way."

"Yeah, we can't because of the organized sabotage by the Trade Fleet Cartel."

Installing a giant warp gate in the Edina Archipelago wasn't impossible.

It hadn't been installed because of opposition from large interests whose livelihoods depended on maritime trade.

They said something about being royalty or something.

Airi had a pact with the royal family of the Edina Islands to that effect.

"If the cascading bankruptcies of large trading fleets lead to an economic crisis, the Edina Archipelago will inevitably need a massive warp gate to improve the overall economic situation. With this logic, we will cooperate with the Empire to build a mega warp gate."

"......Here."

I'm shocked and amazed.

I sent it to a place that didn't have a giant warp gate, and now I find myself trying to build a giant warp gate with my own hands.

What to say.

I was at a loss for words.

"All I get in return is a 9% stake in the operation of the giant warp gate."

Collapse, not mass fleet takeover.

After that, a monopoly on trade between the Edina Archipelago and the continent.

That was the picture Airi was drawing.

\* \* \*

"How the hell am I supposed to take it that you're trying to build bridges when you've sent ...... to places the Empire can't reach?"

Airi grinned bitterly at me.

"You're walking on thin ice on the ecliptic, and I don't want to take any risks from this safe place and trust you to fix everything."

Believing that there was something she could do, Airi tried to do something. She even suggested that they sell themselves as slaves to humans to raise capital.

Airi was not alone after all, she had connections to the royal family of the Edina Archipelago.

Without it, we wouldn't be able to build a business of this scale.

"Anyway, the Edina Archipelago relies too heavily on maritime trade, and a massive warp gate between the continent and the archipelago would reduce the social cost of maintaining a fleet and make the economy much better than it is now, so the royal family has been wanting to build one for a very long time."

"You mean to tell me that it's been blocked by those engaged in maritime trade?"

"Yes."

Maritime traders are an integral part of the Edina Archipelago.

"Whenever there's talk of building a warp gate, the maritime trade cartels have threatened to strike collectively and paralyze a country's economy, and I've heard of a few instances where they've done just that, and the economy has collapsed. It's not like a giant warp gate is going to be built in a short amount of time, so how long can you survive if your maritime trade is disrupted in the meantime?"

The maritime trade cartels have been a constant threat to the people of the Edina Archipelago. Though they have outlived their usefulness, they continue to maintain control of the Edina Archipelago through strikes and intimidation.

"So the crown wants to get rid of the sea trade cartel altogether, and while there will be bloodshed and chaos, I've decided it's better to just build a giant warp gate and collapse the cartel once and for all, and if I fail, the crown will cut off my tail."

If Airi's intentions to disrupt the entire maritime trade cartel are read and targeted, the royal family can simply walk away.

"It's too risky."

"Right."

"Even if everything works out as you say, there's still a good chance that the royal family of the Edina Kingdom will come back and stab you in the back."

If things go wrong, they'll cut off her tail, and if things go her way, the royal family will probably puke all over her.

You're taking too much risk.

"No, Valerie, that's not going to happen."

But Airi seemed confident that she wasn't going to get puked on.

"Why?"

"You know?"

Airi smiles coyly.

"Being loved is too easy for us."

And the ship owners they're trying to bring down.

Or someone in the royal family who is secretly working with you.

They all look like they love themselves and know that they will never be abandoned.

Queen of the succubi.

Despite losing her horns, Airi didn't seem to have lost that confidence.

"There are already people who might think what I'm doing is suspicious, who might think I'm crossing a line, and that's why I don't do business with civilians who don't know me."

To themselves, that they were just playing with people who had already fallen for them.

Airi told me not to worry about that at all.

Episode 348.

Though she doesn't have the mesmerizing powers that characterize succubi, Airi doesn't seem to need them, running a bar and seducing local powerful men.

So that was the important step, and from there it was just a matter of moving forward," says Irie.

It's about tricking and deceiving people who have already won their hearts and taking their liver.

How are they going to deal with the maliciousness of people after all of this is done, and do they already have a plan for that?

Just as I take my own risks, Airi was taking her own risks, even if I didn't want her to.

"Hang in there, Valerie."

Airi smiles at me.

"Because it won't be long before I give you the Edina Archipelago."

It wants to monopolize trade and eventually swallow up the entire Edina Archipelago.

When I first met the succubus captives, I wanted them to live in peace.

When he said something about taking over an empire or something, I thought it would be okay to dream about that as long as I had some sort of purpose in life.

But watching Airi in action made me realize that it would never be possible to achieve that goal.

"My opinion is the same: don't do anything too risky."

"Okay, thanks for your concern."

Originally, the two of us would have been enemies, but after being saved by me, Airi changed her attitude towards me. At first, I didn't think much of her because I didn't know what her past was.

While checking in with Airi to see how she was doing on the Edina Archipelago, I learned some pretty crazy things.

If Airi succeeds in the Edina Archipelago, it will eventually have its own uses. What that use will be is unknown at this time.

"By the way, I'm here because I have a question."

And, finally, I could get to the point.

"What do you mean you're curious?"

"I'm going back to the Demon Castle soon, and I want to know what's there."

"......to the kingdom?"

"Uh."

"There are still Imperial troops there, even if you're disguised as a human......."

"We're going with imperial permission, so there's no problem with that."

"Oh, I see, but what are you trying to ask me....... Oh, that's right, I lost my memory and you were......."

Airi seemed to have a vague idea of what I wanted to find when I got back there.

"There's a quarantine station in Demon King's Castle that only royalty can enter, but I'm sure the humans have been through it all, and there's nothing left that's useful......."

Charlotte and Saviolin Tana decide to go to the Demon King's Castle, vaguely hoping that they might learn something.

But I want to figure out if there's anything left in the Demon Castle, even if it has nothing to do with saving Charlotte.

I'm sure there are still some people who have left the castle for grave robbing or research purposes, so even if I were in Reinhardt's form, it wouldn't be a place I could just walk into at random.

The time is now.

According to Airi, there are forbidden areas that only royalty can enter.

But the place wasn't physically barricaded, and if it's already been robbed, there's nothing to be gained there. Airi narrowed her brow in thought.

"I don't know. But I'm sure there are places in the Demon Castle that only demons are allowed to go, and I'm sure they're sealed off from the rest of us. ....... It's certainly possible that humans haven't found them yet."

Airi said she wasn't sure, but she thought it might be there.

"How do you know such a place exists?"

"...... once upon a time, the Great Demon King would take you to go somewhere in the Demon Kingdom."

Airi must have memories of Bali that I don't have, of what happened at Mawang Castle.

"I don't know where it is, and when I asked my mom, she wouldn't tell me at all, like it was a secret, but she seemed to know something."

"You mean there's a secret room for that kind of thing?"

"Probably. I don't know which place specifically, though."

The place where the Ancestor Demon used to take Valerie.

Airi's mother, a former Four Thousand King, knows something, but she won't tell Airi.

It's possible that humans have already found the place, but it's also possible that they haven't.

A secret area of the Demon Castle, where an old demon king used to take his son.

There should be something there.

I need to know that.

\* \* \*

That was the end of my brief reunion with Airi.

"I can go for a few days."

Airi watched me wistfully as I turned to leave.

"Sorry, I'm out of time."

"......Yes.

Airi cautiously lowered her eyes.

Originally, Valier was an incompetent bastard who ran around like his father, and Airi, the daughter of a succubus queen, was in a position to teach him a lesson.

With the demons gone, we are the last remaining royalty of a fallen kingdom.

Airi walked over to me and held both my hands still.

"I hope you're okay, Valerie."

There was something about meeting that gaze that made me feel uncomfortable.

Maybe it's because the succubus queen race itself is so easy to love.

No.

It's not.

I'm not a volleyball player, but it was a strange feeling to feel like I was responding to a volleyball.

Valerie has been bullied by Airi, but somehow she instinctively knows.

An odd conviction that Valerie would have liked Airi.

It was the uncanny sensation of just looking into Airi's eyes that convinced me.

In the original history, Airi would have been enslaved by the empire, and Bali would have died wandering the wilderness.

Of course, I'm not in Bali.

Nor am I fascinated by a race called succubi.

So.

"Don't push yourself too hard."

"Yes."

I could only offer Airi my best wishes, including a sense of camaraderie.

\* \* \*

Just as quickly as I went to the Edina Archipelago, I was back.

Lucinil offered to keep an eye on me if I wanted to go to Mawang, but I declined.

The area around the Demon Castle is already tightly held by human forces, and she has Saviolin Tana with her. If she and Lucinil crossed paths, strange things could happen.

So Lucinil decided it was better to stay in the ecliptic and help Sarkhegar with his mission.

There is a secret room in the Demon Castle.

But she doesn't know, and I don't know, where that place is.

And if I find it, I have to get in there without being seen, and I don't really have a plan for how to do that yet.

Fortunately, Charlotte's symptoms didn't worsen before we left for Mawang.

In the royal class dormitory, Saviolin Tana called out to me in private.

The time is night. Outside the Royal Class dormitory, Xavier and I are facing each other in the dimly lit space.

"His Majesty has granted permission; departure is in two days."

"Yes."

As I replied nonchalantly, Savior Tana suddenly grabbed my shoulder.

She looks me in the eye with a serious expression.

"Reinhard, I've asked you to come with me out of my own greed, but I don't think you realize the danger of this."

"......Risks?"

"Yes, the Empress is very negative about you going with her."

Charlotte thanked me, but I told her it was dangerous and she didn't have to come.

That's why I've been thinking about it for days.

Are you suggesting that there might be threats to the demon castle that we haven't yet fully grasped?

Charlotte is saying that I took too many risks and she's negative about going with me?

"If you're saying that Demon King is dangerous......."

"No, that's not the problem."

She shook her head, as if I was completely out of context.

"I don't care about politics, and I shouldn't, but I'm in a position where I basically don't have to get involved in it. That's not an ego thing, it's literally true."

The strongest knight on the continent.

If she wants to stay out of politics, she can, because of the influence and authority that alone gives her.

But not me.

I know, I know.

An underdog living in the middle of politics cannot be neutral. They can only be neutral if they eventually gain power or influence.

When I heard that it was politics, not physical danger, I knew what Saviolin Tana was talking about.

"Are you talking about....... about Bertus?"

"Yeah."

Bertus and Charlotte.

I had somewhat forgotten about the problems between them. Charlotte values me, and it's been a while since Bertus has tried to do anything to me.

"There are many people in the Demon City. And it's no secret that the Empress and I are headed there ourselves, so if you come with us, it will be known at some point."

"......."

If you go to the Demon Castle with Charlotte, Bertus will find out about it at some point.

Bertus realizes that I am firmly on Charlotte's side.

"You have already received the imperial crest. His Highness will soon learn that you are the master of Tiamata."

Plus the thing about Tuan's champion.

The fact that Ellen and I have both received imperial crests is not information that Bertus can miss.

It's clear that I'm on Charlotte's side, not to mention that I've been elevated in importance.

That would mean that by going to the demon castle, I would already have Bertus as a certain enemy in the future.

Saviolin Tana doesn't get caught up in politics, she just doesn't know it.

So I think he was trying to warn me because he thought I wasn't aware of the real dangers of doing this.

"For the last time, Reinhardt. It's strange to say this after I asked you to come, but if you think it's too dangerous, you don't have to come. The king would prefer it that way."

I don't think Charlotte wanted to put me in danger anymore.

If I go to the Demon Castle with Charlotte, I will have Bertus as a future enemy.

But what difference does it make if I stay put?

It should be known that I'm a champion of Tuan anyway.

I need to know what is left of the Demon Castle, as well as Charlotte's treatment.

And I know that Savior Tana and Charlotte's worries are unfounded.

The imperial crest given to me.

That in itself says it all.

"I don't think Bertus is stupid enough to lay a hand on Tuan's champion."

"......."

Royal treatment?

No, it's more than that.

I and Ellen are more important to humanity at this point in time than a prince and princess, or even the Emperor himself.

If you try to kill me or harm me for merely being on Charlotte's side, it will backfire on the wrathful Emperor.

You and Ellen are expendable in the fight against the demon, but until you are expendable, you are the most important person on the continent.

Lagan Artorius may not have used political advantage at all, but I won't.

Bertus will not touch me.

Unless it's something that will reveal my identity, you can't touch me.

"So I'm going to go."

But the moment Bertus becomes an enemy, I wonder if my identity won't be revealed.

We don't know that.

"......Yes, I'll pass that along to His Highness."

I know my destiny is coming, and I can't hide my identity forever.

\* \* \*

Champion of Tuan.

It will protect me against all odds and circumstances.

I raised humanity's sense of urgency by exposing the remnants of the demonic world, and I gave myself the political cover to protect myself by claiming to be Tuan's champion.

On its face, it's a pretty nefarious way to position yourself as the savior of a crisis you helped create.

It turns out that Eleris was right when she said that Tiamata would have more political uses.

The day you decide to take off for Mawang.

"It's really okay, I won't be gone long, and I don't need you to be there......."

Charlotte trailed off with a depressed expression. I was grateful, but Charlotte always felt bad that I was always taking from her and never helping her.

It's a big risk to take, no matter how politically correct you are.

So even on the day of departure, there was a hint of wishing I wasn't there.

"Coming from a guy who came to me in his pajamas, crying and hanging on for dear life when the shit hit the fan."

"Mu, what?!"

Charlotte looked dumbfounded at my outburst. Saviolin Tana, who was preparing to start next to me, was also dumbfounded.

"There's no point in yelling at me when the shit hits the fan, so let's just go along for the ride."

"You, what are you talking about?!"

Charlotte's face flushed red and she began to berate me.

"Yeah, I'd rather be angry like this."

"......what?"

I'm more bothered by Charlotte looking like she's about to die of apologies.

"That makes me feel better."

Charlotte stared at me blankly, her lips quivering sweetly, and then she screamed.

"...... Really you. You're a weirdo for thanking people, then not thanking them, then thanking them again!"

Charlotte scowled and led the way, while Savior Tana looked at me and sighed.

"You're the one who doesn't mind talking about being arrested for blasphemy, but I'm the one who's used to your behavior."

Normally, you have to take the initiative by saying that you are safe, but now that I'm doing it, I'm just embarrassed, but I didn't take the initiative.

Saviolin Tana seemed to find it strange that she was getting used to my behavior.

Episode 349.

Somehow, I ended up going to Darklands during my summer vacation and now I'm going to Darklands during my winter vacation.

Of course, the companion goes from Ellen, the next warrior, to the Empress and the Continental First Sword.

And the place Ellen and I were headed to is also an entry point in Darklands.

This time, the castle is located deep in the Darklands. The Allies have been marching in a single-point burst, so they've targeted the castle and succeeded, but they haven't explored the area around it.

While adventurers are continuing to explore the Darklands, they haven't covered much ground.

There were only three of us, myself, Saviolin Tana, and Charlotte, and we didn't need an escort or entourage, and we didn't want to make a big deal out of it.

"We'll have to go through quite a few warp gates, Your Highness."

"Yes."

Supply was a problem for the Allies, so they built warp gates every few miles as they marched to replenish their supply. Naturally, during the war, those warp gates would have been key interception points for the Demon King's forces.

The plan is to reach the Eggsian Forward Base via the massive warp gate, and then follow the Allied advance route directly to the Demon City.

It will take some time to activate the dormant gate, but the warp gate was placed directly in front of the post-war Demon Castle, so the actual travel time shouldn't be too much.

Charlotte looked nervous.

For Charlotte, the castle must have been a hellish place.

You go back to a place you never want to go back to, hoping that there might be some clue to your condition.

So I'm sure Charlotte is feeling a lot of mixed emotions right now, and I'm sure I was too.

\* \* \*

At this point, the city is in the hands of the Empire. They may have taken it, but they're not done scouring and searching the entire castle.

Through the Eggsian Forward Base, my party traveled quickly through the warp gates, arriving in front of the demon star at a speed that made me wonder if it was possible to get there so quickly.

"......."

"......."

Charlotte and I were speechless when we saw the desolate state of the demon castle.

A giant gray castle under an azure winter sky.

The city of Demon King still bore the marks of the fires of war that had swept through it.

The walls bore the marks of numerous magical and siege weapons.

"This is....... Mawang."

Saviolin Tana, who did not participate in the Great Demon War, is seeing the Demon Castle for the first time. I do not know with what emotion she gazes upon the vestiges of the great human victory.

I had no intention of advertising our arrival, not that Bertus would know anyway. Besides, it would be a nuisance to have bigwigs show up at the garrison.

So the three of us donned our robes once we reached the Demon Castle.

"Greetings, Your Majesty. I am Count Alfrid, acting in the capacity of Commander-in-Chief of the garrison of Demon City."

Also, the commander, who must have been briefed in advance of our arrival, was the only one out to greet us.

I could tell that Charlotte and Savior Tana were careful not to cause any unnecessary fuss.

"Ah, I see. Pleased to meet you, Count Alfrid."

I'm sure Bertus has a sense that Charlotte's power is demonic. He's just not using it as a weapon.

That's why she's here, to inspect the garrison. Charlotte explained in a low whisper to me.

While not always active, the garrison seemed to be well supplied with warp gates. There were proper buildings around the castle, not tents, and the troops seemed to be spending more time searching and researching than fighting.

Led by the commander, Count Alfrid, we made our way to the garrison headquarters.

Our visit, while not top secret, was not overt. Our arrival today was known to only a few people in the garrison, including the commander.

Count Alfrid seemed to think of me as a mere attendant.

After a short meal with the commander, he took us to the command center's leadership room.

Charlotte's ostensible purpose is to check on the status of the investigation of Mawang.

On the table in the middle of the map room was an architectural model of the castle, and the walls were covered with drawings of the castle's aim.

"The Demon Castle is huge because it's where the Demon King used to live, so we haven't fully explored it yet."

"...... Is that enough?"

"Yes."

The architectural model even detailed the collapsed castle of Mawang Castle.

In reality, the planet was very large.

Just as the Emperor Emperatos was very large, the Demon King was no different.

Unlike Huangseong, which had one palace each in the east, west, south, and north, Mawangseong had a very large Mawang Palace in the center, with numerous other buildings around it.

"In fact, there are still areas where the traps are active, so we're navigating a bit more cautiously to avoid casualties until we have a better idea of what's going on......."

Charlotte's words sounded like a rebuke, like she hadn't gotten to this yet, and the commander muttered something under his breath.

"It's not a rush job, so I think we should proceed with caution. I didn't mean anything by wood, Commander."

"Thank you, Your Majesty."

The castle is huge, and we're still not done searching for it.

This is because there are still areas where traps are active.

For the exterior, we have a mockup that we can build as we see it, but that doesn't mean there aren't still some unknowns in the targeting diagram.

Still, the commander pointed to the reticle and the three-dimensional model and began to explain.

An adjunct building that rivaled the palace in size was the barracks.

It was quite a strange feeling to have a garrison commander tell me something I didn't know as a demon prince.

"The barracks probably had a standing army stationed there. However, no barracks, no matter how large, could possibly hold the number of demons and monsters of the caliber that fought us during the Demon War, so we assume that they must have summoned resident demons from other regions."

"I suppose so."

The number of troops in the city of Mawang at the time for the Battle of Sucheng far exceeded its capacity.

In peacetime, not wartime, there wouldn't have been that many troops in Mawang Castle, the commander added.

"The first floor of the ground level of the palace has been identified as having facilities for living, including dining and banqueting halls. And do you see the center of the palace, this central courtyard?"

"Yes."

The center of the demon palace was open, and there was a large clearing in the middle of it.

There were destroyed columns and statues.

Everything was detailed, down to the shattered wreckage.

It's a mockup, but it's enough to give you a sense of the enormity of the fight that took place here.

"Do you happen to have....... here."

Charlotte looked at the Commander, who nodded.

"Yes."

A huge clearing in the Demon Palace.

"This is the place where Lagan Artorius and the Devil fought."

The center of the demon castle, where the battle between the warrior and the demon took place.

I didn't see the battle, but Charlotte and I heard a roar that sounded like the world was falling apart.

Charlotte shuddered slightly, and I swallowed hard.

Devil's Trail.

Charlotte vaguely thought that if she touched it, she might learn something or solve her condition.

"I need to go to this place."

So, it was kind of natural for Charlotte to say that.

\* \* \*

The castle is very large, so we traveled on our own horses.

I had learned to ride at the temple, so I was able to get on the horse without too much trouble.

Since the castle was a research area, no one was allowed to live inside unless they had a special mission.

As such, there was one large town, called the Garrison, that surrounded the demon castle.

We don't know if there was ever a village of demons in the vicinity of Demon Castle. If there were, they would not have existed, and if there were, they would have been swept away in the vats of war, leaving no trace of them.

"What areas have been secured so far?"

In response to Charlotte's question, the Commander says.

"For now, the annex buildings are all secured, and the Demon King has confirmed that there are no active traps above ground, but the basement is still dangerous, so please refrain from walking around. As long as you don't head too deep underground, I don't think you'll have any problems roaming freely."

This means that there is nothing to be found on the surface of the planet.

Whatever it is I need to know, I'm going to have to go underground to find out. Charlotte asked again as she rode beside the Commander.

"Are there many soldiers who have been trapped?"

"It's not just soldiers, either. Experienced rangers and knights, as well as mages, are often caught. We're lucky if they're only injured, but those who fall victim to mind-affiliated magic traps can have their minds destroyed, which is why we're more cautious about exploring the underground."

"Hmmm....... Is that it?"

It's not a dungeon in the middle of nowhere, it's a trap in a demon castle.

Charlotte gulped when I told her that if you messed with it, you could be killed, or worse, crippled.

Even with Bertus's problems out of the way, the planet isn't exactly a safe place.

Several times, the commander assured us that we shouldn't go to the underground area because it wasn't known where it was safe.

But me, Charlotte, and Tana would think the same thing. If anything, the clues are underground.

We soon arrived at the entrance to the Palace of the Demons, which is huge and grand in scale.

The girl he thought was a poor hostage in the Demon King's castle was actually an empress, and she was terrified that she was going to die before she could be rescued.

Returning with Dyrus, he obtained the teleportation scroll and rode his horse at full speed to escape the clutches of Duke Salerian's knights.

Without me, Charlotte would have died.

What's Charlotte thinking?

Thinking about the horror, the pain, and the terrible times.

"......."

But the glimpse I got of Charlotte's face was filled with sadness. She didn't seem to be thinking about anger and pain.

It knows what you're thinking without you asking.

You're thinking about Bali.

He saved her life, but then suddenly disappeared, and after corresponding with her for a while by letter, he cut himself off.

Someone who now has to think in agony about what the hell they were.

My name is Reinhardt, and I am now at Charlotte's side.

"Let's go in."

Charlotte, dismounting from her horse, said grimly.

\* \* \*

The path to the main hall of the Demon Palace wasn't too complicated. It's just that it's so huge that you have to pass through long, wide corridors and several halls.

The castle still bore the marks of the battle.

"Of course....... Your Majesty knows best, but....... After the Demon King's death, the demons all surrendered."

"I suppose so."

As they walked, the commander pointed out the signs of battle as they passed through the great halls of the palace.

"So most of the tracks inside the palace belonged to a group of warriors."

"Oh, I see."

The gates of the Demon City would not fall until the Demon King's death.

And since all fighting stopped after the surrender, there was no fighting between the demonic and allied forces inside the palace.

The traces of broken statues and statues, collapsing walls, etc. are the work of the demonic forces and their warriors inside the palace.

The commander walked through the palace, explaining this and that.

There was a certain pride in his tone.

A great victory for humanity.

And the castle is like a museum documenting that victory.

They seemed to think so, and they weren't far off.

Standing in front of a crumbling wall in a huge hall that was probably a dining room, the Commander says. He stood in front of it, suddenly ministering.

A single white flower was placed on the spot where he stood.

"Ragnar Olfy's body was found here."

The location where the body of one of the warriors was found.

After the Demon King's death, all the bodies would have been picked up, so there would have been bodies of the warriors scattered around the Demon King's castle where the battle took place.

As the bodies are recovered, the location of where they were found will also be recorded.

"And over there, the body of Archirion, one of the Four Thousand Kings, was found."

Ragnar Olfy.

The person in your party who held the Ranger position.

I had never set up the Four Thousand Kings, so I had never heard of Archirion.

I set it up so that my party of warriors would die one by one as they defeated the Four Heavenly Kings.

In the end, only Ragan Artorius remained to face the demon.

I did it because it's a cliché to defeat the Four Heavenly Kings one by one and die one by one, but I didn't really think about it.

Perhaps there's a reason why the Four Horsemen took on a party of warriors one by one.

It's impossible to know at this point.

Savior Tana and Charlotte followed their commander's lead and stood still and bowed their heads for a moment of silence, which I did as well.

I wouldn't call it a tour, but the commander led us as if it was his duty.

This time it wasn't a hall, but a huge corridor, and there were white flowers that looked like they hadn't been there long.

It was like having someone bring you flowers every day.

The pillars in the hallway had collapsed, and somewhere among them, the commander held another moment of silence.

"This is where Mullern's body was found."

Wizards in a party of warriors.

"With the body of the succubus queen Reina, one of the Four Heavenly Kings."

Reina, Succubus Queen.

Airi's mother.

It was a name I'd heard before, so it didn't carry the weight of nothing.

The commander stares at the signs of collapse as he speaks.

"The succubus queen, Reina, was a serious problem: on nights when she exerted her influence, tens of thousands of soldiers were unable to fall asleep for fear of being possessed by her, and those who fell asleep without being able to overcome their drowsiness often never woke up."

He emphasized several times that the true fear of the Succubus Queen was that it was monstrous in nature.

While the wick may be extremely powerful or unable to enter the minds of those trained in anti-magic, an unspecified number of soldiers without such resistance have fallen victim to Monma.

"In fact, it was probably the Succubus Queen and her clan that killed the most Allied soldiers, aside from Larken Simonstein."

At the mention of Larken Simonstein, Saviolin Tana flinched slightly.

Is it an illusion?

The commander said, and walked ahead again.

"Given the circumstances, I'm wondering if it wasn't a matter of amplifying my powers beyond their limits to save my companions from the Succubus Queen's powerful mesmerizing spell....... I'm thinking."

The commander, Count Alfrid, has since visited each of the places where the bodies of his men have been found.

The original plan was to see the site of the battle between Lagan Artorius and the demon Valier, but Charlotte wasn't too keen on the idea.

The amount that he feels obligated to make sure they do because they saved his life.

When they passed the spot where the cleric Sheydin had died, and reached the spot where Lagan Artorius and the supposedly last two remaining mages, Seizaria, had died, the commander was silent.

"The bodies of Larken Simonstein, the First Lord of the Four Heavens, and Seizaria, the Demon Swordsman, were found here, and it is believed that the battle between Lagan Artorius and the Demon King took place shortly thereafter."

Larken Simonsteidt.

Airi and I were told that he taught us swordsmanship. I was a jerk and Airi was an honor student.

Of course, I don't know much about him.

"......."

However, Saviolin Tana watched the scene of what must have been an epic battle with a stony expression on her face.

"As for him, I wanted to kill him with my own hands."

Savior Tana's fingertips trembled slightly.

Neither Charlotte nor the Commander said anything. As if they already knew.

I'm pretty sure I'm the only one who doesn't know why Saviolin Tana is saying that.

Sensing my doubt, she looked at me and gave me a rueful smile.

"He was my teacher."

"......Yes!?"

The sound was completely unexpected, and I couldn't help but jump. Both Charlotte and the Commander stared at me in shock.

"No....... You learned to wield a sword from a demon?"

"......?"

"Hmm?"

Saviolin Tana crosses her arms, muttering to herself.

"I guess you didn't know." Well, how could you not know....... It's possible. Larken Simonstein is human."

The first of the Four Heavenly Kings of the Demon Realm was actually a human?

Isn't it kind of a big deal that I don't know this? Luckily, I'm from a small town, so I feel like I can get away with it.

The bones are smoldering.

"A traitor to the Empire who deserves to be chewed up and killed."

Silent fury burned in Savior Tana's eyes.

Speaking of which.

'Yes. The prince and princess learned swordsmanship from Lord Larken Simonsteid, who was the first King of the Four Thousand.'

The title of a sir.

Come to think of it, it's a fitting title for a knight.

Episode 350.

Saviolin Tana gave us a brief introduction to Larken Simonstein.

Larken Simonsteidt was the director of Chanapelle when Saviolin Tana, now quite old, was a rookie.

Like Saviolin Tana now, he held the title of the strongest swordsman on the continent. Larken Simonsteidt taught Saviolin Tana many things to help her become the next Schanapelle.

After grueling training that forced even her prodigy to unlearn everything she had learned at the Temple, she was able to rise to the rank of Knight Captain of Shanapelle's 1st Company.

Larken Simonsteid was already over eighty years old when Saviolin Tana was a rookie. Like Savior Tana, he was well past the age of retirement, though his training and manipulation of magic had slowed his aging.

So once he had trained the next generation and Xavier Tana's skills were well established, he passed the torch to someone else and retired.

It was nothing out of the ordinary, so everyone assumed he would retire and live out the rest of his days quietly.

As the stakes of the Demon War grew higher and higher, the Empire needed strength, and it turned to a retired Grandmaster.

But.

In a completely unexpected turn of events, Larken Simonsteid became King of the Demon Army, carrying the prestigious title of the first King of the Four Thousand.

I had no idea about the Four Heavenly Kings, but one of them is human, and he's even a teacher to Savior Tana.

In the original, even the dead demons are rarely mentioned, so there was no reason to mention the Four Heavenly Kings. Even when I was living here, I would occasionally talk about the devil, but never about the Four Heavenly Kings.

So it was a bizarre situation where I was the only one who didn't know what everyone else knew.

"Why he became the Four Thousand King of the Darklands can be found at......."

"I don't know."

Saviolin Tana shook her head.

"We'll never know."

I had established that she was a character who felt guilty for not being able to participate in the Great Demon War. But there was a backstory I didn't know.

Why did Larken Simonstein betray humanity and side with the Darklands?

I wonder if Sarkhegar, Loyaar, or Eleris would know?

I didn't ask the questions about the Four Heavenly Kings because I wasn't curious about them in the first place, but now that I've heard them, I'm curious about the stories about the Four Heavenly Kings that don't exist in the world.

Still, if he was given the title of First Lord of the Four Heavens and Airi was taught swordsmanship, it seems like he was treated well in the Darklands.

Saviolin Tana had many questions for Larken about his betrayal of the Empire and humanity, but in the end, her duty to the Empire prevented her from traveling to Darklands.

So it was bittersweet to arrive at the Demon King's Castle only now that it was all over.

We walked further, and eventually reached our destination.

The center of the demon castle.

A vacant lot that's been abandoned.

It must have rained and snowed long after the battle was over, but the scars of the battle were not easily erased by the overwhelming force of the fighting.

"This is where humanity won its final victory."

The site of a battle between a demon and a hero.

All the columns and statues were destroyed, and the ground was caved in.

Despite being a very large space, there were signs of heavy fighting everywhere, and the walls of the surrounding demon palace had been blown away or collapsed, as if something had torn them apart.

"......It's an unbelievable sight to see two beings fighting."

Even Saviolin Tana, the world's strongest player at this point, seemed to have had enough.

"Over and over again. Just how powerful the demon was....... I have no idea, and neither does the strength of Artorius against him......."

We walked out into the middle of the clearing.

"I can't believe Ragan Artorius was....... I can't believe it."

Saviolin Tana seemed shocked in a different way.

No matter how great Lagan Artorius was, he was no more than thirty years old.

Even with a strong team, he had killed a retired grandmaster and defeated a demon. Saviolin Tana was beginning to wonder if that was even possible.

"Due to the nature of the fight, the demon's body could not be found, but Artorius was found on the spot with his Alsbringer plugged into the ground, seemingly asleep....... was found."

I didn't see this fight, and I didn't describe it, but I know the truth.

The Four Thousand Kings may not know it, but it wasn't Lagan Artorius' strength that brought down the demon.

It was the power of Alsbringer.

No one knows what Alsbringer is really for except me.

Als, the War God.

Als Bringer.

It is, quite literally, a sword that can summon a war god.

It was Lagan Artorius, the incarnation of Als, who fought the demon in the first place.

The price is life.

Artorius killed the demon in exchange for his own life.

Ludwig becomes master of Alsbringer.

In the original story, Ludwig eventually used the true power of Alsbringer.

So.......

As a tragicomedian, I ended up doing the crazy thing of killing off the main character in this novel that started out as an everyday story.

\* \* \*

Charlotte dismissed the commander, saying that she was done.

He assured her that it was okay to roam the upper floors, but never the basement, and left.

There were soldiers roaming the palace, but not many. If there were any, they were dedicated to searching the underground.

The Commander has told us this and that, but we're not here to tour a turning point in human history, we're here to find a clue that will improve Charlotte's condition.

"Your Highness, do you feel something?"

"......at all."

The place where the demon died.

I got there, but Charlotte didn't seem to feel anything.

After all, it's just a random place. There's no corpse of the demon left, and it's too much to hope that the demon's soul, if there is such a thing, will linger here.

Worst of all, too much time had passed. It was the site of a great battle, but there was nothing left of it except the traces of it.

"We can only hope there's something underground."

"But....... seems to be quite a bit riskier than I expected."

"Whoa, that's right."

There's even a class of enchantments that attack the mind, rather than just traps that trigger if you step on them.

"Let's start at the ground level, just in case there's something up there."

There was nothing to be found at the site of the last fight.

But the palace is large.

You don't have to go underground to explore, Charlotte said.

\* \* \*

My memories of Mawang Castle were not so clear.

The urgency of the situation, and the speed with which time had passed since I'd met Charlotte. There was no time to spare, and I felt like I was running full speed across the ice, knowing that the slightest mistake would kill me.

This was partly due to the fact that I was in a psychologically extreme situation.

"I should have brought Darius."

Saviolin Tana said quietly.

"Hmmm....... I don't think Sir Dyrus had any fond memories of the place, so I didn't think it was necessary to bring him here."

"You're right about that, too."

Just as my memory of Mawangsung is fuzzy, so is Charlotte's. Charlotte would have spent most of her time in the camps.

Unlike me and Dyrus, Charlotte had nothing but horrible memories of the Demon Castle. Not only was it a harrowing experience, but she ended up awakening a strange power and killing everyone in the camp.

Cannibalization shock.

The resulting despair, fear, and disgust.

In the end, Charlotte killed her mother and everyone else in her cell.

Charlotte couldn't tell if she was thinking about the trauma. She was just walking through the halls of the Demon Palace.

It was new to me, too.

You're not being chased by someone and your life is not in danger.

I was able to watch the Demon King at a leisurely, if not relaxed, pace.

The ceilings in the hallways were high and the aisles were wide.

I've seen all kinds of palaces.

The Palace of Spring, the Central Palace Tetra, the White Palace Arnaria, and the Castle Epiax.

But the castle was larger than life, with ceilings and passageways that were more than adequate.

"Wow, that's huge, I wonder if it needs to be this big......."

Apparently, I wasn't the only one who thought so, as Savior Tana muttered.

"It's not like humans are walking around."

It was Charlotte who answered, not me, the demon prince.

"Ah."

"...... Isn't it?"

No.

I feel like such an idiot because Charlotte told me what I needed to know.

I don't know, because I'm not actually a demon prince!

Some demons will be bigger than that, and some will be hulking, so it makes sense to build them big.

Is this enough to get around the ogre?

Of course, not every room was big enough for those behemoths to fit through.

The hallway was littered with the remains of destroyed statues. The destroyed pieces had been removed, but the size of the alcove suggested that a sizable statue had been there.

Charlotte stopped in front of him.

"This is......."

"What's wrong?"

"...... because I remember hearing about it from Darius."

Charlotte looked at the shattered statue.

"Darius and....... that....... ugh, ugh......."

I started to say, "The kid," but Charlotte caught my eye and cut me off.

You said you were going to forget about Bali, and now you're bringing it up again.

I'm not sure why I'm even bothering with it.

"Oops, oops. Anyway. He came into the palace and got the teleportation scroll to rescue me, but when he tried to leave, he said that the knights of the Duke of Salerian had attacked to silence him."

"......such a thing."

It was the first time Charlotte had ever told Savior Tana about what had happened in the Demon Castle.

"Then, I heard that the gargoyles suddenly activated and attacked the knights, so they managed to escape unharmed......."

The memories were more vivid to me because they were mine.

The knights of the Duke of Salerian had tried to kill us, and I had thought that as I watched the gargoyles.

In this situation, you'll usually see a .

That thing was moving.

Something like this.

As if in response to my thoughts, the gargoyles activated and attacked the knights, killing one of them on the spot.

"So they must have destroyed all the statues."

There was a precedent, Charlotte seemed to conclude, and they destroyed all the statues afterward.

"......."

Saviolin Tana was silent, her eyes downcast.

She has pledged to remain politically neutral.

However, the fact that she was nearly killed by Bertus's minions after she was finally rescued from her ordeal in the Demon Castle is bound to stir up some emotions.

Of course, you're not hearing this for the first time, you probably already know this.

But as she returned to the scene and heard those words coming out of her own mouth, she could see her expression threatening to crumple.

She's already not neutral in the first place.

1Trying to save Charlotte's life, even if it's for her own survival, is never neutral.

Once Charlotte's safety is assured, we can take our hands off her problems, but that time hasn't come yet.

Her neutrality was already shaken, and it was clear that it was being further shaken by the overly horrific things Bertus was about to do.

The same goes for the things that happened to me in Mawang Castle, and afterward, I couldn't escape the after-effects and returned to Mawang Castle with terrible memories.

Despite feeling so bad for Charlotte, Savior Tana could tell that her heart was very much with Charlotte.

I could tell Tana was struggling with her belief in staying neutral and her heart leaning toward Charlotte.

"It's all right, Lord Tana."

Charlotte walks ahead again, speaking in a low voice.

"If our situations were reversed, I would have done exactly what Bertus tried to do to me."

"......."

Charlotte said with a straight face.

"That's why I knew what was coming in the first place."

In the end, it's just more of the same.

It's not that Bertus was bad, it's just that it was the right thing to do in that situation.

"So, you don't have to feel so sorry for me."

"......I apologize. Your Highness."

Charlotte said, and walked slowly down the hall.

I'm not defending Bertus, and I'm not putting myself down.

It was just something she said to ease the psychological pressure she was feeling.

Episode 351.

The palace was so large and sprawling that it took quite a while to explore each floor. Most of the rooms were empty or dusty, as everything of value had been taken.

There were spaces that looked like libraries without books, or warehouses that were wide open and empty.

There was also a throne, where a demon might have sat. The realm was larger than any realm I had ever seen.

Once again, this is due to the varying heights of the demons that enter.

After I finished the first floor, I wandered around the upper floors. I passed by the place where I found the magic scroll.

Not surprisingly, it was empty.

And, as I walked down that hallway, I couldn't help but end up there.

Jail cell.

"......."

"This is......."

Charlotte nods.

"Yeah, that's where I was stuck."

A place filled with terrible memories.

"This place looks like....... I don't think it's going to be good."

Charlotte seemed to hesitate, then turned away.

There are no demonic remnants here, only trauma.

-Beatle

"Your Majesty!"

"ah......."

Charlotte stumbled as she walked, and Tana pulled her to her feet.

"Are you okay?"

Charlotte's forehead beaded with sweat as she approached.

I wonder if my body is being affected because I'm reliving traumatic memories.

"It's no big deal....... All of a sudden, my legs gave out and I fell on my face......."

It's not a memory I can easily forget, and it's even harder now that I've returned to the scene. Tana left Charlotte, who was leaning on her, to me.

"I beg your majesty for a moment. Let's find a place to rest."

"Yes."

Charlotte grabbed my arm and leaned against me, while Tana ran down the hall.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

Charlotte was breathing heavily, as if she'd been running a marathon.

"Do you think it's dangerous now?"

"No....... It's not that....... Just......."

It didn't feel like she was having a seizure, but more like she was hyperventilating. Charlotte took a few deep breaths, and her breathing soon stabilized.

"I didn't think it would be that good, but....... This is tough."

She would only tell me that she was the one who had killed everyone in the camp. I let Charlotte lean her back against the wall and offered her my arm.

How long has it been.

"I found a place to rest, let's go there."

Saviolin Tana looked back upstairs and said as she came toward us.

\* \* \*

After a few more hallways and a few more floors, I arrived at what looked like a bedroom.

There were no valuables in sight, but the furniture was still there. After opening the window and dusting off the couch, Saviolin Tana laid Charlotte down on the couch.

Charlotte gave me a vague smile.

"Lord Tana, you are not ill."

"You should get some rest, though. You've been walking quite a bit today."

"......Haha, yeah, I guess so."

Charlotte was lying on the couch, catching her breath.

It was a strange feeling, not knowing whether to worry that she was having a trauma attack or to be grateful that it wasn't a power attack. Saviolin Tana stared around her bedroom.

"Well, it was a quick search, but this is....... Looks like it's the bedroom of someone pretty retarded, even for a demon kingdom."

"......Ah, right."

There were no valuables, but all the large furniture remained. Given the quality of the items, Saviorin Tana's suggestion that this might have been the bedroom of someone with a high level of retardation on Demon City seemed quite plausible.

Somehow.

I felt weird.

"@....... We can't identify whose bedroom it was because we looted it all with reckless abandon, although that's probably not that important......."

Tana seemed to consider the possibility that this might be the demon's bedroom. Indeed, it was a bedroom that could be considered such.

Four Heavenly Kings or Demons.

And.

Another noble someone.

-Drupal

Tana was opening closets and rummaging through drawers to see if there was anything left in the room.

Charlotte suddenly pushed herself off the couch.

Saviolin Tana rummages through a drawer.

Anything that might be worth money would have been taken, so there was nothing left.

But somehow.

A strange anxiety was burning through my body.

-Drupal

As Saviolin Tana opens the drawers one by one.

An intense sense that something is about to be discovered.

The warning from my gut felt like a needle in my heart.

-drag

"......?"

Saviolin Tana opened a drawer in her dresser and shook her head.

"Clearly, there's some stuff left that's not going to pay."

She pulled something out of a drawer.

It was a classy looking wooden case, with the lid open but the contents intact.

It looked like someone went to take it, saw the contents, and left it there.

"You're Biscuit......."

Charlotte stared at the biscuit, wide-eyed.

I gritted my teeth to the point where my molars were chattering to keep from making any kind of expression.

"Can you give me that?"

Charlotte, now frighteningly calm, says, "Yes.

"Your Majesty, it must be spoiled."

"I'm not doing it to eat."

"......Yes, here it is."

Charlotte stares at the biscuit Tana brought, still in its wrapper, in her hand.

Individually wrapped biscuits.

Charlotte stares at it.

Biscuit.

That.

"You must be hungry, eat this.

'You, you....... You?'

"I'm fine, you eat first.

'You, too....... You eat too.'

Biscuit.

The same biscuit, in the same package, found in the bedroom of someone who was supposedly a retarded high demon.

Charlotte unwraps the biscuit and snaps it in half.

"Your Majesty!"

-Wasak!

Charlotte bit into the biscuit, despite Tana's protests.

What I felt.

Charlotte will never be forgotten.

Even if you forget everything, you'll never forget the look and taste of that biscuit.

I don't know if it tasted the same.

However.

Tears rolled down Charlotte's cheeks as she took a bite of her biscuit.

"Ha."

Charlotte was on to something.

"Haha."

"......Sire? What the hell is wrong with you?"

There was something fishy going on, something you didn't want to believe, something you were trying to deny.

There is a limit to how far you can go in denying a truth you don't want to believe.

This biscuit isn't exactly proof either.

But it was too much.

Evidence and suspicion pile up.

Stack, stack, stack.

Biscuits by the dozen in a fancy case.

I wonder if they think these things can't just roll around everywhere.

Charlotte's thoughts must have gone on and on, and she must have come to some conclusion.

"Hmph, hmph....... Hmph. Ha. Hmph."

"Your Majesty, what is it?"

Now, it's an irreversible conviction.

"Hmph, hmph, hmph, hmph!"

Charlotte bent at the waist and laughed like a madwoman.

I think you're right, but still, just in case.

Even the vague notion that it might not work seemed to disappear completely.

What's going through Charlotte's mind?

After all, he might think he's just being used to help the next demon escape.

I couldn't figure it out.

"Hmph! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph!"

Charlotte's laughter, however, turned into a fever.

\* \* \*

"There's a bedroom inside ...... that's a bit bigger than this one, and I'm guessing that's the Devil's bedroom."

Saviolin Tana, who had looked around at all the nearby rooms, said so, not knowing what to say.

Charlotte asked to see if there were any bedrooms nearby that were larger than this one.

There is only one room further back than this bedroom.

Based on the scale, it's thought to be the king's bedroom. I don't know what the architectural philosophy of the palace was, but I can't imagine a second, more luxurious bedroom right next to the king's bedchamber.

Charlotte sat idly by with a box of biscuits in front of her.

This isn't hard evidence either, but it seemed to be the psychological proof that Charlotte needed for the final conviction.

Charlotte had known for a long time that Valier could not be unrelated to the Devil.

However, the Demon King's successor has recently become active.

Charlotte didn't offer any explanation, but Tana seemed to know what Charlotte was thinking.

I was silenced.

I knew that no matter what I said, I couldn't comfort Charlotte now, and even if I could, it wouldn't be my job.

"Your Majesty, why would....... I don't know about you, but it's just a biscuit, after all. This is....... Whatever you may think, Your Highness, it's not enough to convince me of anything......."

Saviolin Tana started to say something, then stopped.

She doesn't know what this biscuit means to Charlotte.

Hearing Tana's words, Charlotte nodded slowly.

"Maybe."

Charlotte says calmly.

"Just....... I've given up."

Charlotte has stopped advocating for Valerie, even in her own mind.

"The kid who saved me must be the son or heir of the devil. I wanted to believe otherwise, but I won't anymore."

This may not be strong evidence, but it's enough to build a wall in Charlotte's mind.

The boy who saved my life is the heir to the demon king, and he's responsible for all the demon attacks on the Yellow Road.

Charlotte is convinced.

"I just kept asking myself, if that's the case, why did you save me....... Why....... Why you bothered to save me when you could have gotten away on your own....... I mean, maybe not, because there's no reason to keep me alive, so maybe not....... I wanted to believe it."

With the teleportation scroll in hand, I was the only one left to flee the demon castle. But I risked it with Dyrus and returned to save Charlotte.

I think that's why Charlotte was willing to trust me until the very end.

If you're the heir to the throne, there's no reason to risk your life to save Charlotte. If you'd rather let her die, let her die.

I, who should hate the Empire as much as Artorius, have no reason to save Charlotte.

That was the last psychological barrier for Charlotte to consider that Valier might not be the Devil's son.

But that's now broken.

"Now....... I think I know why that kid saved my life."

So, now Charlotte is thinking.

Why the Devil's son had to save himself.

A good reason to risk your life.

Charlotte looks at me this time.

"I have the power of a demon, or the soul of a demon, or something like that, because......."

Charlotte mumbles to herself.

I got goosebumps watching Charlotte mutter that.

I could see where Charlotte was going to come to that conclusion.

"You didn't save me....... It wasn't....... wasn't."

Charlotte stares at the biscuits and speaks slowly, her voice thick with betrayal.

"The spirit of me....... the demon's soul....... I saved......."

Once she was certain that Valier was the Devil's son, that was the only reasonable conclusion Charlotte could reach.

We can never arrive at the idea that he did it out of the goodness of his heart, that he wanted to save her. There is no such thing as a good reason for the son of the devil to save the empire's princess.

The war is lost.

The devil is dead.

The devil's son doesn't know that the princess is being held here, and that she possesses the devil's soul.

Not to save the maiden, but to save the demonic spirit within.

One can only conclude that he risked his own life so that the demon could be resurrected in the heart of the empire.

"Hmph, hmph. Bird, come to think of it....... It was obvious....... It was obvious......."

Charlotte chuckled to herself, puzzled that she hadn't come to this conclusion earlier.

To such a Charlotte.

It's not like that, you're misunderstanding.

I just didn't want you to die, and I didn't know who you were at the time, and I had no idea that something like that lay dormant in you.

I wanted to say.

It felt like someone was squeezing my heart.

The misunderstanding grew, and it was too reasonable to deny.

No.

I just wanted to tell you that I've been watching you, and I've been trying to protect you, and I'm still trying.

However, if you reveal your identity, you die.

If I reveal that I'm Bali, the only thing Charlotte will feel is betrayal.

It's a problem with all the lies she's been telling, and it's a problem with the way her thinking is unfolding.

Even if I control Charlotte's symptoms, I may end up thinking that it's for the sake of the demon's full resurrection.

Sure, there would have been a sacrifice if I hadn't stopped Charlotte the day she went on her rampage, but Charlotte would have ended up dead.

The fact that no one saw how desperately I fought that day ultimately helped me hide my identity, but it also created the problem that Charlotte herself had no idea how sincerely I fought for her.

Now that I've begun to suspect Valie, if I reveal that it's Valie, everything I've done with Reinhardt will be to save the demon.

"Ha, ha, ha....... Haha......."

I ended up saying nothing in front of a smiling Charlotte.

Episode 352.

The search for the ground level of Demon Castle only resulted in Charlotte admitting something she didn't want to admit.

Charlotte had come to the conclusion that Valier had been using her from the beginning, and the loose ends of her logic fit snugly together: not to save her life, but to revive the demon.

So, right now, Charlotte wasn't in a position to do anything more.

The feeling of betrayal seemed to sap all my motivation.

I wonder if he regrets warning Elise to run away.

By then, Charlotte was pretty much convinced that I was the heir to the Demon King.

It's just that she's now more confident in Valier's intentions in saving her life.

Now it's clear.

The moment my identity is revealed, Charlotte is bound to hate me if no one else does.

The important thing is that if I can find a way to make Charlotte's condition completely better on Demon Island, and I can execute on it, she'll know that my intentions in trying to protect her were pure, even if my identity is later revealed.

Somehow.

I'm now assuming that there will be a situation where the identity will be revealed.

I can't help it.

If you're going to keep a low profile and stay in the temple, you're not going to be in a situation where you're going to be identified.

But I can't, so I'm going through the motions.

It knows that if it has a long tail, it will get stepped on, so it has no choice but to keep growing it.

It wasn't like I could do much more exploring, and the ground level was already revealed, so there was nothing to see.

I found Valerie's room, which I didn't know about, and Charlotte was convinced of something because of it.

So the natural question was.

The first place I woke up was not in Valerie's room, but in the hallway.

I am Bali, Prince of the Demon Realm.

But I'm also not a Balinese.

Valier, the real-life demon prince, was not a very good prince. He was a fool, lazy, and incapable of anything.

He's a pathetic bastard who believes in the power of the devil.

I don't know anything about Valier other than he's just an asshole and a douchebag, although I've settled for the convenient excuse that he's lost his memory.

But Bali must have had a life before I became Bali.

So.

Even when the demon was about to die, Bali was doing something. That's when I possessed her body.

I saw Balie's room for the first time today.

The first place I woke up was in the hallway.

A hallway, not a room.

It means it was going somewhere.

In Bali before I was possessed, where the hell was I going?

To a demonic battleground where the fight is in full swing?

At the height of my incompetence, in a state of weakness?

A question I'd never had before, but one that came to the forefront of my mind as I arrived at the Demon Castle.

\* \* \*

The Garrison Command Center's guest room.

It looked like a room set aside for a high ranking nobleman or soldier on a tour.

It was like a hotel, with multiple bedrooms inside, and it was a comfortable place to spend a few days.

Instead of getting our own rooms, we decided to share a room because we didn't know what would happen to Charlotte during the night. We had a split bedroom anyway, so it didn't really matter.

"I'm going to check on the status of the underground search."

"Yes, Lord Tana."

"May you rest."

Saviolin Tana left the room for a moment. Charlotte glared at me as she hung the robe she'd been wearing all day on a hanger.

"......Why?"

"I want to wash ......."

Correct.

She was very embarrassed about anyone hearing her wash herself, wasn't she? I could see that Charlotte wanted to say something to me, but she was hesitant because she was sorry.

"...... I'll be out for a while."

Normally, I wouldn't touch Charlotte right now.

"......I'm sorry."

While Charlotte was washing up, I was outside the guest room.

The hallway in front of the Command Center.

From the window, I could see the towering walls of Mawang Castle.

Secret places.

The most likely place is underground, but how do you get in there and how do you get past the traps?

There will be rangers and mages in the garrison who are no strangers to traps in their quest to uncover the secrets of the Demon Castle, and if they're struggling too, that means we're not going to be able to outmaneuver them.

-Dalcock

While I was thinking about this, I heard the door open and Charlotte poked her head out the door.

Water was dripping from her hair and her face was flushed.

"I'm all washed up......."

Something.

That's a weird thing to think about.......

\* \* \*

Charlotte, who had changed into a white dress and slippers, looked in the mirror and ran a hand through her hair to dry it.

That's something you'd expect someone to do for you, but since you're basically on your own in the Temple, I didn't find it particularly awkward to see Bertus and Charlotte doing that.

The majesty or authority of an empress.

He doesn't seem to have any of that, he seems like a normal person his age.

"What are you looking at?"

When I continued to stare, Charlotte asked if I was conscious of my gaze.

"Nah, whatever. Just."

"Hmmm."

At my words, Charlotte looked in the mirror again and dried her hair.

After a while, Charlotte, her hair roughly dried, came and sat next to me.

She wears a white dress and slippers.

Charlotte, sitting next to me, leans her head against me.

I didn't say much, knowing that Charlotte would be very tired today.

"Interesting."

"......what?"

"Something I heard from Detto. It's been on my mind lately."

We're going to get married, that nonsense.

"When I first heard it, I was like, 'What are you talking about?' I mean, I know you're badly mismatched, and I think you're a nice guy, but honestly....... I've never been that interested."

"......So what."

"You're the champion of Tuan."

"......Yes."

"Identity? That doesn't matter anymore."

Champion of Tuan.

Being chosen by God makes you more special than anyone else in the world.

It's something different, something that can't even be compared to royalty.

"Emotions, I don't think it matters anymore."

I have special feelings for you, Charlotte says simply. It's a strange confession that doesn't really resonate because it's so mundane.

"I thought that prophecy was guaranteed to be wrong."

Now I wonder if he thinks it's weird that the prophecy didn't come true. I don't know what to say, so I just shut up.

"I still think it's wrong, but the reasons are so different than they used to be."

"......What do you mean?"

Charlotte leans into me and stares at me.

"I never intended to marry you or anything."

"......, right?"

Charlotte looks at me and smiles.

"But now you're telling me that even if I wanted to marry you, you wouldn't do it."

The words seemed to catch my breath.

It was so direct, I couldn't think of anything to say in response.

"You are of such a nature that even if the king issued a decree to marry you, you would run away."

"What the hell....... What do you want me to do......."

Before I could say anything else, Charlotte suddenly threw her arms around my neck.

The scent of Charlotte's hair, freshly washed, hit me like a ton of bricks.

"You don't have to love me, Reinhard."

"......."

"Promise me one thing, though."

I felt a bite at the nape of my neck.

Charlotte was crying now.

"Don't betray me....... Please don't betray me."

I don't want you to love me, so don't betray me.

What we can say.

I could go on and on.

He's saying, "I've given you this much, you're going to give me this much. Feeling betrayed, Charlotte is very vulnerable right now.

That's why they're asking me.

A promise not to betray.

You can do as much as you want.

"Of course."

But.

The moment you say that.

Already untruthful, I had betrayed Charlotte.

The farther away I got from Bali, the closer Charlotte seemed to get to me. And the moment she went beyond letting go of her resentment of Valerie to the realization that she had been completely used.

Charlotte seemed to have no choice but to cling to me even more.

My relationship with Charlotte only adds to my guilt.

Just as Charlotte is somewhat obsessed with me, I end up being obsessed with her.

A kind of obsession mixed with a sense of obligation, like I want you to be as happy as I am.

So as hard as it was to lie to Charlotte every minute of every day, I couldn't leave her alone.

And.

You're not alone in this room.

So, we have a problem.

-delay

"!"

"!"

"Ugh."

As Charlotte clung to me, Savior Tana returned.

"......."

Charlotte clung to me and froze, never looking back.

She opened the door and turned to stone with one frightening word.

I froze, too, locking eyes with her.

This is an easy situation to misunderstand.

No, it's not a misunderstanding.

Tana seemed to hate herself for opening the door without knocking, and Charlotte seemed to hate herself for jumping to conclusions.

For the first time in a long time, I can read the thought in Tana's expression.

"What did I see?

"Should I leave?

"No, I already saw it, but what if I leave?

"Should I dry it?

"No, what's the point?

"What did I say?

"What do I do?

Eventually, Tana turned and walked away, stiffly, as if nothing had happened, and slammed the door behind her.

-Dalcock

"......."

Charlotte pulled away from me.

After making some sort of confession to me, Charlotte blushed, surprising herself that it hadn't occurred to her that someone might see this.

"I, I. Now, well....... Well......."

"......Yes."

As if her soul had been sucked out of her, Charlotte staggered into her bedroom and quietly slammed the door behind her.

A while later.

-SmartSmart

There was a soft knock on the door.

"...... says there's only one guest room."

Sabiolin Tana sighed, looking like she didn't know what to do with herself.

No.

Did they go beyond avoiding you and try to sleep in another room?

Aren't you supposed to stop this from happening?

"I can't believe this happened....... What the hell am I supposed to do......."

It was clear that she had suffered more mental damage than Charlotte.

Lips quivering, she cautiously opened her mouth.

"That....... birth control is....... should make sure......."

No.

What.

What is this?

-click!

"No, no, no, no!"

The sound was so unexpected that I forgot to speak, and Charlotte, who had opened the door wide, blushed bright red and screamed whale whale.

\* \* \*

Charlotte had retreated to her room, sleeping or pretending to sleep, and wouldn't be stepping out of her room today, while Saviolin Tana sat dazedly on the couch.

"What the hell am I....... What the hell are you talking about......."

It sounds like something a grown-up would say, but it was radical, that's for sure.

Sometimes words just pop out at you without you realizing it, and that's what just happened with Tana.

Blasphemous in some cases, for sure. Charlotte won't take issue with it, and I'm glad no one else did.

At this rate, Tana is going to be out of her mind for the rest of the day.

"It's a misunderstanding. Whatever you think."

"......, right?"

A room with only two people in it.

A man and woman embracing.

Can there be a misunderstanding in that situation?

He looks at me with that look.

No, I mean, I can think of all sorts of things, but that's not it!

"Let's just talk about work."

"Work? Ah....... Oh, yeah. Work."

Saviolin Tana seemed to have forgotten why she was even here. She coughed a few times.

"I heard about the underground search from the commander and....... I thought it was strange."

When I asked to talk about work, his demeanor immediately changed.

She unfolded the map she'd brought with her.

"We've explored five levels underground. There are storage rooms, prisons, armories, and large warrens where demons were bred and held. The facility is so large that the Demon Palace is actually larger underground than it is above ground."

The basement of the Emperor's Palace, which, judging by the map, was quite large.

"Most of the underpasses have already been explored and treasures have been recovered."

"Is there more down there? I thought you said the search wasn't over yet."

"Yeah, they were searching the fifth floor a few months ago and found a secret staircase that led down into the depths."

"There were six floors?"

"Right."

Where Savior Tana had covered up, a new door was drawn, not a circular staircase to the basement, but another circular staircase to the basement beneath it.

However, the bottom part of that circular staircase was not drawn at all.

"The stairs go all the way down here. They say you can go down for hours."

"......Yes?"

"But if you climb back up a few steps, you'll reach the fifth floor."

Saviolin Tana says with a stern look.

"Soon, it's a labyrinth from the sixth floor on."

Labyrinth.

"I don't know if there's a seventh, eighth, or even deeper level. Once we've explored the sixth floor, it doesn't matter if we draw a map, the structure keeps changing with each exploration, and no matter how many traps we dismantle, it seems to rebuild itself."

The commander had oversimplified.

The trap wasn't the problem, it was the labyrinth of not being able to get below the sixth floor in the first place.

"You deliberately oversimplified because you thought you'd be reprimanded by His Majesty. This subterranean labyrinth hasn't even been reported to the imperial court. In fact, it's safe to say that no exploration below the sixth floor is taking place at all."

"......I see."

"It's an understandable situation. The mages don't know what the magic in the Labyrinth is, and there have been too many casualties. The wounded are few and far between, and the dead are many."

It has recently been discovered that there is a labyrinth in the basement of the Demon King's Castle that is so difficult to navigate that you will be forced to give up.

The commander purposely didn't tell her about the labyrinth, claiming that the underground was dangerous. He was afraid that he would be reprimanded for not telling the empress about the labyrinth, or that he would be relieved of his duties. I can't help but think that this is an inspection in the first place. You'd think they'd take a good look around and then go home.

But we're here to explore, not inspect. That's why Saviolin Tana got the Commander to tell the truth, because she needs to know what's down there.

The underground labyrinths of an unidentified demon palace.

The structure of the labyrinth is constantly shifting and traps are regenerating, so there's no point in dismantling and moving forward.

So instead of pointlessly sending people into the maze and increasing casualties, the commander is biding his time, waiting for the order to withdraw. It's a dereliction of duty, but it's a dereliction of duty that the soldiers in the garrison are grateful for.

In the original story, of course, the labyrinth was never excavated. The commander would have tried to cover up the fact that the labyrinth even existed, and the imperial government would have ordered more soldiers to be sent in, which would have resulted in the injury or death of many soldiers.

I agree that human life is precious, but I don't think the Commander's head is going to be spared once Savior Tana finds out.

There is something about the Labyrinth that is certain. And we know it's connected to a secret space.

But that's the thing.

"It's too dangerous for me or you to go there yourself......."

It's too likely that I'll be stopped from going there.

Too many important people going to too many dangerous places.

Episode 353.

To go to the labyrinth or not to go to the labyrinth.

The answer was surprisingly easy.

The next day.

"Let's go."

Charlotte's decision was made lightly when she heard about the Labyrinth.

"......, it's too dangerous."

Naturally, Tana shook her head and looked at Charlotte.

"If they were going to send someone else instead of me, I wouldn't have bothered to come all the way out here. I'm willing to take the risk."

Charlotte has a point.

If you're going to come all this way and have others do your work for you, you can just give orders from the Palace of Spring.

You're here to do it yourself.

"Still, we haven't learned that there are unreported labyrinths, so why not take the time to uncover them and then enter them safely?"

"Lord Tana, I'm not sure how much time I have left."

Tana bit her lip at Charlotte's stern words.

"It could take years to unlock the magic of the Labyrinth, and there's no guarantee I'll be safe in the meantime."

Charlotte looks at me for a moment.

"I'm not even sure how long Reinhardt's words can stabilize my condition, and I can't just sit back and wait for this power to consume me completely."

"Your Grace....... But there's no reason for you to go there yourself, and there's no reason to believe that there's anything in the Labyrinth that will fully resolve your condition. There must be something, but whether it's what you need is anyone's guess."

Saviolin Tana says, almost pleadingly. Charlotte stood still and looked at Saviolin Tana.

"Lord Tana."

"Yes, Your Highness."

"If I can't fully recover from this state, I might as well die."

"......Yes?"

Saviolin Tana muttered in disbelief, as if she had heard something unbelievable.

I'd rather be dead.

I know what Charlotte is thinking, and I clench my fists involuntarily.

"That child-no, the current Demon King-wanted to keep me alive by using the Qi to protect the soul of the ancestral Demon King, but also because if I died, the Demon King's soul would die with me, so if I died, the Demon King's soul would die with me."

So getting trapped and killed in a labyrinth is not a bad thing.

Charlotte says still.

"Your Majesty, what the hell....... what the hell are you talking about!"

"If it's for the good of the empire, it's not so bad if I die......."

"Hey."

I called out to Charlotte, finally unable to hold it in. Charlotte looks up at the sound of my voice.

He looked like he just realized what he was saying and in front of whom.

"If you say so......."

In a fit of rage.

Say.

"What am I?"

I risked my life to save you, and you say you don't care if I die. I might as well be dead.

"......Sorry. I'm sorry, Reinhardt."

At my words, Charlotte dropped her eyes and shook her shoulders.

Having been convinced of Valier's truth, Charlotte is further convinced that it is the Devil's spirit that has possessed her. If it wasn't, she couldn't save herself.

So, Charlotte is too late and comes to the natural conclusion that the demon may be resurrected in full through her body.

Might as well die before that happens, Charlotte thought.

But that was a terrible thing to say in front of me and Savior Tana, who had risked her life to save Charlotte.

Charlotte thought she had said something harsh and apologized to me and Tana over and over again.

"But....... I think I should go there myself."

However, the idea itself is bound to change.

If the demon is trying to resurrect through Charlotte's body, then it's right to die for the Empire.

That you have to take risks on your own.

Charlotte's thoughts come from a place of prioritizing the well-being of the imperial family and empire. You can't blame her for that.

We can't and shouldn't discourage Charlotte's thinking.

Charlotte's words were painful to hear, but I must enter the labyrinth.

Tana watched Charlotte as she did so, and then sighed deeply.

"He said that not everyone gets lost and dies or gets injured; a lot of people get lost for a while and find their way back."

There are injured, dead, and unaccounted for. But they don't seem to be the majority.

"You can go in there for a while and come out if it's dangerous."

In the end, Tana decided she couldn't break Charlotte's stubbornness.

It may become dangerous at some point, but it's not going to happen in the next few days. So you can take your time navigating the labyrinth while being prepared for danger.

\* \* \*

Unsurprisingly, the garrison commander, Count Alfrid, became pensive at the mention of heading into the underground labyrinth.

"No, Your Majesty, you don't realize how dangerous it is to go there......."

"Okay."

But Charlotte cut the commander off mid-sentence with her cold demeanor.

"I think you're worried about what will happen to me if something happens to me in there, and of course you'll be punished if I go in there uninvited."

He can't stop her from going to dangerous places. So if Charlotte were to be in danger, or if she were to die, Count Alfrid, the head of the garrison, would have his head blown off.

So he has no choice but to stop her from heading into the labyrinth.

"But if you don't let me go, I'm going to make you pay for missing a report on the underground labyrinths of Demon Castle."

"!"

He's hiding very important information about the planet, and that alone is reason enough to get his head blown off.

If you don't let her enter the Labyrinth, she will die.

If she enters the labyrinth and dies, she dies.

Charlotte looks at the Commander and speaks briefly.

"So don't do anything stupid and pray that I come back safely."

There was nothing else the commander could do.

He could only stare at us in disbelief as we made our way into the underground labyrinth.

\* \* \*

The morning after arriving at Mawang Castle.

After eating at the garrison, we headed out once again to Mawang Castle.

I could have enlisted the help of a wizard, but Charlotte's reaction was negative.

No one in the garrison knows the princess is here, except for the commander, and the Labyrinth is trying to solve a very important secret of Charlotte's.

There's no harm in having more people know about it, so we decided to keep it to just the three of us.

To reach the entrance to the underground labyrinth, you must descend to the fifth level via a circular staircase.

"It's overwhelming."

Saviolin Tana mumbled to herself.

First of all, the hallways and passageways were much larger than normal, the circular staircase was like a large building, and the underground space was large and spacious.

This is not your average building basement. One floor was so huge that you had to walk down a circular staircase to get to the next floor.

The search for the labyrinth had already stopped, so while there were soldiers underground, it felt more like they were killing time than searching.

It's not quite an underground city, but it's believed that the military forces of Ma Wang Castle actually lived here rather than in the outer barracks.

That's how big it was.

The circular staircase came to an end when I reached the fifth floor of the basement.

"It's going to be work to get this thing back up there."

Charlotte sighed as if she was exhausted just coming down. Me and Tana, of course, didn't mind.

The fifth floor of the basement was lit up and had bars.

"Is this....... prison?"

Charlotte shook her head as she looked at the various cages and the space inside them. Saviolin Tana looked at the map and shook her head.

"I don't think it was a prison, I think it was a stable."

At that, Charlotte nodded in agreement.

"So that's why they're different sizes."

"I think so."

"Then the demons that were here can be found at......."

"It is believed that most of them were mobilized during the siege, and that any that remained were disposed of."

"I see."

It reminded me of the procession of prisoners we saw coming out of Mawang Castle.

A number of demonic captives, including an ogre who broke his chains and rushed to help me escape.

It was not a pleasant memory, as the vast number of demonic prisoners, disoriented by the death of their demons, died, pinning all their hopes on me, the last of the demons.

I, for one, have nothing to do with the wishes of those demons.

I think this is correct, but.

I have betrayed Charlotte, and I will betray Sarkegar in a small way, and Darkland in a big way.

After passing through the beast pens on the fifth floor, Savior Tana studied the map and made her way to a small cage at the edge of the beast pens.

It was a small room that felt more like a prison than a beast kennel.

"This is......."

"Yes, the entrance to the labyrinth."

A relatively recently discovered secret door.

Through the open stone wall, I could see another circular staircase leading down.

Uncharacteristically for a palace of such magnificence, the stairwell leading down was probably just over three meters high, and barely wide enough for four people to pass through.

The circular staircase we had been descending had a railing and was open on all sides, allowing us to see into the underground space. But the circular staircase in front of us was blocked on all sides by stone walls.

It's a staircase you don't know where it's going, and you don't know when it's going to end.

On the walls of the circular staircase, magic lamps illuminated the steps with a pale light.

"Your Majesty, even if I go down there first......."

"You might get lost."

Saviolin Tana seemed to want to check the danger first, but Charlotte wouldn't let her.

"If we get lost, it's less scary to get lost together."

She might as well be dead, but she wasn't without fear, and Charlotte was trembling now.

The three of us took our first steps on the circular staircase to the labyrinth.

If it's just a labyrinth instead of the place you want to be, you've only gotten yourself into trouble.

I wonder how many steps down that was.

Saviolin Tana drooled.

"The entrance is already......."

The circular staircase continues downward, but an opening has already appeared on the right.

We were just on the fifth floor of the basement, so this must be the sixth floor.

The corridor was not very wide. The corridors were not dark, as they were dotted with magic lights at regular intervals.

And at the end of that hallway, there was a door.

However, we were met with a long, straight hallway.

The stairs aren't finished.

You can go further down, or you can enter this hallway and enter the labyrinth in earnest.

You can go down for hours, but when you start to climb, you'll end up back in the little kennel on the fifth floor that you just went down.

I'm not sure if there's something in the next passage, or the door at the end of that hallway.

Once you enter the labyrinth, you may never return.

Even the mages in the garrison don't know what the magic in the Labyrinth is, so bringing in a mage won't make any difference.

"Are you sure you want to go here......."

For Saviolin Tana, the choice was not an easy one. If she went in the wrong direction, she might not come out.

Charlotte gaped at the door at the end of the straight hallway.

"That door, it looks like it's begging me to open it, which is kind of off-putting."

"......I think so too."

The door at the end of the hallway.

I felt like I was walking into a trap, like I was going to walk into a trap. I couldn't help but think that because it was so obvious.

Charlotte ponders.

"I've come this far, but I can't not go."

It seems like an obvious trap to fall into, but it's hard not to.

Charlotte walked in first, followed by me and Saviolin Tana.

\* \* \*

Being inside the labyrinth didn't seem to make much of a difference; I expected the terrain to suddenly change, or the exit to disappear.

"......It's a little more spooky because nothing is happening."

"Sure."

When I looked back, the entrance we'd come in through was still there, and there was no sudden change in terrain or splitting of the group.

"But let's proceed with caution."

Saviolin Tana pulled the scrollbook from her arms.

The reason I didn't call a wizard was because I already had something that could do the job.

"It's a trap detection spell."

-Flash!

The scroll glowed once.

"I don't think there are any magical traps being detected, but....... I'll be careful just in case."

No magical traps are detected, but there may be physical traps.

If detection magic was able to filter out all traps, there would be no mages who were trapped.

Soon, Saviolin Tana's body was covered in blue energy.

"Keep your distance from me and follow me."

"Yes."

With her senses maximized, she moved slowly ahead, keeping her eyes peeled in all directions. If it was some sort of physical trap, she'd be able to react before it was triggered.

Pay attention to your steps, walls and floors, and sounds as much as possible.

The straight corridor wasn't very long, but the time passed slowly as I took each step carefully.

"......I don't know if there are no traps or if I've already been trapped."

We didn't even realize it was a trap until we reached the end of the hallway and came to a door. Behind it was the same entrance we'd come in through. It looked like we could turn around and leave at any time.

Charlotte stares at the wooden side door in front of her, her face set in stone.

"Beyond this door might be the beginning of the real labyrinth."

It was just a door, a door that could be anywhere, with nothing special about it.

I wonder if Charlotte is right that if we open this door, what lies beyond might be the beginning of a real labyrinth.

Charlotte put her hand on the doorknob.

"Your Majesty. I have......."

"Nope. I'll do it."

Charlotte shook her head as Tana opened the door for her, just in case something happened.

Like you have to risk something too.

-delay

Charlotte grabbed the doorknob and opened it.

If you thought this was the beginning of the labyrinth, you were wrong.

"......?"

"Hmm?"

"......What is it?"

When I opened the door, there was a huge cavity.

No matter how you look at it, it's not a maze.

\* \* \*

A labyrinth, if you can call it that.

The ceiling of the great hall was illuminated by a giant magic lamp. We moved into the space, still and wary.

You can't call this open space a labyrinth.

"This is....... What is it?"

Charlotte muttered idly as she looked around. The hollow wasn't empty.

On one side of the very large room was a magic circle that seemed to be drawn on the floor.

There was a weapons rack in the corner with spears, swords, dao maces, and other armor, and a few scarecrows nearby.

"I haven't heard of anyone ever reaching that space."

The cavity wasn't the only thing that was lumpy.

Throughout the circular cavity were passageways that seemed to lead to other places.

When I looked, there was no door, but a clear view of the interior.

I thought I knew what was going on.

We're not in a labyrinth.

It didn't go through the labyrinth, it went straight to the secret room. We don't know how the labyrinth works, but it must have reacted to me or Charlotte.

It's clear that the Labyrinth doesn't have an exit in the first place, and that only an Archdemon can come straight to this place and not the Labyrinth.

Passageways cut into the cavity led to rooms that served different purposes.

We moved slowly, checking out the rooms one by one.

What appears to be a bedroom.

What appears to be a kitchen.

Library.

Arsenal.

A room with tons of unidentified potions.

Plots that appear to be capable of growing plants.

A repository with reagents.

A giant food warehouse.

"What the hell is this....... what is this?"

Charlotte and Saviolin Tana didn't seem to know what this place meant.

But.

I thought I knew what this place was.

This is the bunker.

The question was answered.

In Bali, before I was possessed, it must have been on its way here.

This labyrinth would not have been known to the imperial family in the original story due to the Commander's insistence.

No, it doesn't matter if you're known to the imperial family.

It's not a labyrinth in the first place.

Whether you reacted to Charlotte or me, this place is unreachable unless you come with an Archdemon.

In other words, this bunker is safe.

All the big assumptions you've been making have come crashing down.

In the original, if Valerie came here.

In Demon Kingdoms.

Valerie Jr.

It wouldn't have died.

Episode 354.

In the underground labyrinth of Demon Castle, it was a bunker.

"Your Majesty....... Apparently, we're not in a labyrinth."

"I guess so. I guess....... I don't know if I'd call it an exit, but I'm pretty sure I went straight to a place beyond the labyrinth."

Tana and Charlotte seemed to realize that this was the real destination. That's to be expected, this place isn't exactly a labyrinth.

"Perhaps the reason we ended up here is because....... Labyrinths only lead to the right places for demons in the first place."

"Your Highness......."

Tana looked sadly at Charlotte, knowing what those words meant.

"I'm....... I guess I'm practically a demon right now."

I don't know if she was responding to me or to Charlotte.

However, there is a path in the labyrinth that only the Archdemon can see, and it leads us straight to our destination without getting lost in the maze.

Charlotte places her hand on the wall of the bunker and looks around.

"When you think about it, I'm not even sure if this space is actually the equivalent of the sixth floor of a demon castle."

If the labyrinth is actually six levels underground, you can probably get to it by simply drilling down from the fifth level.

"It's entirely possible that the entrance to the secret passage was simply a passageway, but if it's functioning as a portal, we're not on a demonic planet, but in some other dimension entirely."

It was entirely possible, however, that Tana was right, that this was actually a place far, far away from Demon City.

Teleportation wasn't available on the Demon Castle, but it's possible that it had a limited number of warp gates installed.

We don't know how this will work in practice.

The point is, though, that if any point in the secret passage functioned as a portal, there was a pretty good chance that it would be a way to blow the hard guys into the Labyrinth and send the Archdemons to the right place.

But in the end, principles don't really matter to us right now.

We've arrived at the secret chamber of the Demon Castle.

"Should I say refuge....... I guess."

"It looks like it."

This huge space was used to store large quantities of permanently preserved food in the pantry.

The equipment for training was piled high with magic and weapons, as well as reagents and plants for alchemy.

I was looking around this bunker with an eerie feeling in a different sense than Charlotte and Tana.

It's a place where you can live alone for a very long time. At the same time, it is equipped for training.

The books in the library were mostly spellbooks by the looks of it.

In Bali, they would have tried to get here, and they would have gotten here.

In the original, Valerie would have been alive. In this very bunker.

It had a very ominous ring to it.

Valier Jr. would have been vengeful upon seeing the destruction of Darkland.

Could it be that this was the place where Valier gnashed his teeth and trained to take revenge on the humans?

If yes.

Is the culprit behind the gate neither Cantus Magna nor Akasha, but Bali?

If I'm the one who caused the gate, what's the point of everything I do?

Isn't doing nothing the right thing for the whole world?

But.

Nothing is known.

We know that Valier was alive at the time of the original story, but there's no evidence anywhere that he caused the Valier Gate incident.

If you do nothing, you'll end up with a gate, which is what happened with Cantus Magna and Akasha.

But what if they're irrelevant? What if I'm just touching something wrong and it's causing a gate?

In the original, Valier would have been incompetent. My physical data at the time speaks for itself.

How is it possible for a guy with a vendetta to study for two years and then become a mage powerful enough to cause a gate crisis?

I'm growing at an unrivaled pace, so to think that Valerie could have grown faster than me, that's impossible?

My head felt like it was going to crack.

I've never been more afraid of not knowing the future.

"If only the devil could enter this place, then the current devil could have entered it."

While I was struggling with a completely different problem, Tana was struggling with her own.

"But why didn't you come here....... I don't know."

Ready bunker.

I didn't know this place, so I couldn't come.

"He must have decided that it was more important for the Ancestral Demon to survive than for him to survive."

This has its own reasons.

He saves Charlotte because it's better to resurrect an already powerful demon than to survive and grow stronger himself.

As such, the bunker remains in the Demon Castle, unable to welcome those who should have come. Charlotte looks around the bunker, examining each room.

"Well, it doesn't look like there's a ton of treasure there, maybe because it's a refuge......."

I didn't find anything that looked like a special treasure. Still, there could have been some incredibly powerful weapons or artifacts stored for Valerie.

I do.

If it's a very powerful artifact, you should be thinking about using it to win the war. Stashing a powerful artifact here to save it for later is already an act of defeat.

It's understandable that no powerful artifacts are stored here.

The Demon isn't hiding here, so this bunker is for Valier, after all: a place for Valier Junior, who isn't useful in the fight right now, to get out of harm's way and grow up when the Demon is defeated.

Putting aside the question of how good Bali actually was.

Today, I am both a psychic and a warrior.

If Valerie is the mastermind behind Gate, she probably studied magic here.

If so, the place to check is the library.

If you have a spellbook in your library that involves a portal to the Otherworld.

Burn the spellbook.

Then everything I need to do is easily wrapped up.

A cold sweat broke out all over my body.

If this is the starting point of all your problems, you can end it all by burning a few books.

No more dabbling in dangerous things.

While Charlotte and Tana explored the place separately, I headed to the library, one of the many rooms in the commons.

That's what I was hoping for.

If the books in the library are written in a demonic language, it doesn't make sense for me to read them.

I wanted it to be in a common language so that when I read it, Tana and Charlotte wouldn't suspect me.

If you have a language problem, you'll have to come here on your own later, not now.

"......."

The library was quite large.

Luckily, it was in a common language, so I was able to read it.

The bookshelves were lined with very thick books, starting with primers and introductions.

I don't intend to study magic.

The book I needed to find was an otherworldly one.

And if there is, it would be nice to have something about the spell the Devil cast on Charlotte. We're still not sure if what happened to Charlotte was actually magic.

With so many bookshelves, it would take me a month to go through all the titles, and if the titles didn't hint at otherworldliness, I'd have to go through the content.

I wish I could come back with a guy who has some knowledge of magic.

Herriot is good, Elise is good, Lucinil is good.

This is Darklands.

In other words, it's entirely possible that the demons have their own magic or arcana that humans don't know about.

As I walked past the primers, other texts popped up.

[The Book of Salamandra].

[About Necromancy].

[Introduction to Conjuring].

Engagement.

I couldn't help but stop in front of the book.

It was a very thick book.

Regarding the soul.

A book on how to deal with spirits. I don't know if this is part of the normal magic system or if it's a demonic secret.

But if it was a demonic spirit inhabiting Charlotte's body, it had to have something to do with this marriage ceremony.

I took the book out carefully.

You won't recognize it when you get to the specific formulas, but you can read the introduction.

[Seokhon is the study of how to deal with the soul, and an understanding of the soul must come first if one wishes to master it.......]

There was a lot of talk about what the soul is, but it was written in so much pedantic rhetoric that I couldn't understand what it meant.

However, I soon got to where I wanted to be.

[Those adept at the art are able to do things that would normally be impossible, such as divide spirits that are naturally indivisible, manipulate the spirits of others, mix spirits with spirits, turn the living into ghosts, or take a soul and transplant it into someone else].

[It is important to note, however, that in order to do these things, you must also have a thorough understanding of the branches listed below].

"......."

Divide the soul.

It would mean giving away the soul of a being.

Incorporate a soul.

It would mean being able to mix the souls of different beings.

The Ancestor Demon Valier may have been a master of the art of courtship.

The demon Valier split his soul and put part of it into Charlotte.

It's clear that the magic used on Charlotte was derived from this branch of magic, which is known as enchantment.

I haven't checked to see if there's any otherworldly magic involved, but I did find another grimoire I needed.

One by one, I began to pick off the bookshelves the other offshoots of the Introduction that were listed in the footnotes of the Introduction.

\* \* \*

There were more than half a dozen books on the subject. They were about three times as thick as an encyclopedia.

"This is....... What's all this?"

Tana and Charlotte stare at the books as I pull them out and start stacking them on the table in the communal hall.

"I think this is the magic that was used on you."

"!"

"Me, really!"

Charlotte's eyes widened as she looked at the books that had begun to pile up, the primers among them.

"섭혼......술?"

"Yeah, I don't think we have any artifacts here, but we do have a bunch of magical grimoires."

In order to grow Valier, powerful magic and other magical visions were placed in the library.

There is no treasure here, but the real treasure is the spellbook in the library.

There were other thoughts that flowed from that.

What if the art of betrothal is a magical system that humans don't know about, and what if the things in that library are arcane and forbidden liquors used by demons, including demons.

You might be able to bait them to draw out the Cantus Magna.

Whether that's something you should do or not is something you should think about.

Tana and Charlotte aren't wizards either, but they've started reading the introductory sections of the primers I've seen.

It's clear that they are increasingly feeling what I was feeling.

"A magical system for dealing with spirits......."

Charlotte's fingertips were twitching, and Saviolin Tana seemed to doubt her own eyes.

Soon, Charlotte had gotten to the part about what she could do if she mastered the art of seduction, and she shut up.

"Found this....... This is....... This is it....... It was this......."

That's no small amount.

But if you can get a royal wizard, or anyone, to master this art of seduction.

Charlotte's condition is likely to improve.

If it does.

Even if my identity is later revealed, Charlotte will think I didn't help resurrect the devil.

"Go, go....... Thanks, Reinhard."

Charlotte shivered and gingerly hugged me, and I hugged her back.

Charlotte will get better.

However.

With the new problem of surviving Bali, I was never at ease.

\* \* \*

There was no treasure in the bunker, but there were books lying dormant.

The magic of the Darklands, or the Demon King.

There were some common spells, but there were also some that were forbidden, and there were some that just had the name of the spell on them without any indication of what it was. Of course, that's probably because I'm not very good at magic.

"This is....... My problem is a problem, but it's a great discovery."

Charlotte decided that the real value of the bunker was in the library, and she was right. I, Tana, and Charlotte entered the library and flipped through the spellbooks on the shelves.

"It would be a good idea to bring the royal wizard along at a later date, of course....... It would be a hassle for His Majesty to have to come back himself."

Charlotte can only reach the bunker if she comes in person.

And that would be true. However, Charlotte and I will be able to enter the bunker. If we come back with an expert in magic, we'll have a better idea of the value of the spellbooks here.

"For now, let's just take the books on enchantment, because we don't know what will happen if we release too much dangerous magic into the world."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Rather than recklessly retrieve the spellbooks, Charlotte argued, we should be cautious about releasing the dangerous spellbooks of the Devil's magic into the world.

That's a better choice for me, too.

If the spellbooks in this library were to be transferred to the Empire in their entirety, they would be out of my hands. These spellbooks are important for their magic, but for me they are bait for any future contact with Cantus Magna.

Just as Antirrhinus was able to contact Cantus Magna because he had a large number of spells, I will be able to use these spellbooks as bait to contact Cantus Magna.

So, with the exception of the books on bewitchment, these spellbooks are here to stay.

We don't yet know if Valerie was the cause of the gate or not.

Good or bad.

There were no grimoires for otherworldly magic, at least not ones that could be recognized by their titles.

This makes it a little less likely that Valerie was the cause of the gate.

The look on Charlotte's face as she scanned the bookshelves was haunting.

"If I go back to my original state, I'll never come to this place again, right?"

"I don't know about that, but....... I'm guessing that's probably the case."

If we remove the demon's soul, of course, Charlotte can't go through this labyrinth that only opens up to the demon.

"Then, retrieving these grimoires will have to wait until after the demonic spirit is removed from my body."

That you can get out of a soul-crushing situation.

The look on Charlotte's face when she realized the clue was there was so much happiness that, for a moment, I thought all my worries were gone.

Episode 355.

That time.

Ellen was returning to the ecliptic from a break in her home village of Lizaira.

I was curious about the secrets of my hometown, but my parents told me it wasn't time for me to know yet.

However, unlike her brother, Ellen ended up with two holy relics, just like her brother.

Cloak of the Sun God.

I could have returned sooner, but the delay was to familiarize myself with the use of the sun god's cloak.

Before anyone else, Ellen was eager to show Reinhard the Sun God's cloak. She would have one more new holy object for the fight against the demon.

I haven't figured out how to explain the weirdness of my hometown yet. After all, you're explaining something you don't even know.

Reinhard doesn't talk about his secrets, so why can't I talk about mine?

No.

If anything, they'd rather tell you a little bit about their own secrets, even if it means they feel bad about it.

Ellen harbored some vague expectations.

Honestly.

Anything else is probably good.

I've been gone so long, I can't wait to see Reinhard.

I don't know what he's been doing, but he's not lazy, so he's probably been training and keeping himself busy.

Ellen was so eager to get back from Rizaira that she hung herself.

I would have had to practice swordplay with someone else because I wasn't confident enough.

Ellen could think of a couple of people who might be worthy opponents for Reinhardt.

Saviolin Tana, a first-year head teacher.

Or.

"......."

Olivia Ranze, 5th grade.

Thinking that he might be training in swordsmanship with a senior she didn't like, Ellen wished she could come back sooner rather than later, as he was prone to strange behavior.

Ellen stepped through the warp gate in front of the temple and quickly entered the temple entrance.

Maybe they're accusing me of coming too late.

Still, I haven't been gone that long.

Feeling unnecessarily worried and nervous, Ellen took the tram to her royal class dormitory.

Of course, I wasn't training with Olivia.

"If you're Reinhardt, ....... I haven't seen it since yesterday."

This was Klippmann's answer to the question, "Where's Reinhardt?

\* \* \*

No one outside of the family knew that Charlotte, Saviolin Tana, and Reinhardt had gone to the Demon Castle.

It's vacation time, so Reinhardt might be going somewhere, or he might be gone for a few days.

So where did it go.

Ellen didn't mind waiting in her dorm for Reinhardt to return.

Still, I'm a little tired. I can't wait to show Reinhard his new relic and talk to him.

And again.

You are strong, and you have the confidence to be stronger.

You'll get mad when you hear it, but Reinhardt is still weaker than you.

If you want.

I'm sorry to my parents for giving away the town's treasure.

He would rather die than watch Reinhardt die.

Wouldn't it be better for Reinhardt to have the cloak of the sun god.

That's what Ellen thinks to herself.

I can give it to you if you want.

Ellen couldn't wait to see Reinhardt, if only to see the look on his face when he heard that.

Where did Reinhardt go.

I don't think she told anyone where she was going. I wanted to ask Herriot, but he's out of the dorms, too, and a visit to the Magical Research Society reveals that he's now studying magic at the Imperial Palace.

She didn't know what she was doing traveling all the way to the palace to study magic, but she did know that Herriot and Reinhardt weren't together.

If so, click Next.

-Smart

"What the hell, you."

5th grade dorm.

Olivia Ranze opened the door at Ellen's knock and stared at her with a cold expression.

Olivia stares at Ellen, who seems a little different than before.

Normally, he's always smiling, even when he's being a jerk, but now his face was grim.

For a moment, it's hard not to realize that Olivia Lanchester isn't the same person she used to be.

"Reinhard, do you know where he is?"

Ellen wasn't exactly intimidated by Olivia, so she told her what she needed to do.

"Isn't ...... in the dorm?"

"I heard you were gone since yesterday, and I wondered if you knew."

"Chet, you're hanging out without talking to me again."

Olivia let out a rueful grunt, then smirked at Ellen.

"At least I don't feel like an asshole for not knowing."

"......."

Eventually, they'll try to argue, as usual.

Olivia doesn't know Reinhardt's whereabouts either.

Ellen then had no further use for Olivia.

"I don't need to know."

"Uh, fuck off."

-Bang!

Ellen stares at Olivia's harshly closed door.

"......?"

This person.

Whereas before, it felt like you were openly pretending to have a thorn in your side.

Right now, I feel like a hedgehog.

Ellen couldn't help but notice that Olivia wasn't the same.

Ellen thinks as she walks down the hallway of her fifth grade dorm.

Herriot is studying magic at the Imperial Palace.

Olivia is chilling in her room.

No one in the dorm knows where Reinhardt went.

Then there was only one place to go. Unless he'd left the ecliptic altogether, there was only one place for Reinhardt to go.

Rotary Club.

It doesn't matter if it's not there.

I'm also looking forward to playing with the gray-haired lady for the first time in a while.

Ellen exited the dormitory where she had just arrived.

\* \* \*

Basically, Ellen wasn't that interested in other people.

It's changed a little bit since I've gotten to know Reinhard, and as I've gotten friends, I've tried to pay attention to that side of things.

But basically, Ellen is indifferent and unconcerned with what's going on around her. As a result, her attention span is limited.

So, Ellen doesn't really know what a Rotary Club is. It's an organization with a suspiciously strong gray-haired woman as president. That's about it.

I've wondered what the white-haired lady was doing, but I've never dug deeper than that.

A lady who gets angry when you call her ma'am.

It's just that we recognize it.

Except that Reinhardt's secret has something to do with the Rotary Club.

The Rotary Club is associated with a thieves' guild, so Reinhardt and his secret are involved in something like a criminal organization.

I had a rough idea of what to expect.

The white-haired woman would occasionally visit and give herself a good beating, but she hadn't been around much lately.

Ellen left the temple and went to the Rotary Club's new headquarters.

Reinhardt's disappearance led to a love-hate relationship with the Rotary Club.

I do know that things have gotten a lot better since I started opening shops in the Magic Train.

But what lies beneath the surface is the true story of the Rotary Club.

Ellen believes that Reinhardt's secret is connected to a criminal organization, and that the reason the white-haired woman is so suspiciously strong is because she is the head of a shady crime syndicate.

The misunderstanding led Ellen to do something very suspicious.

It's a bad guy, but he's probably someone important to Reinhardt, so let's not wonder.

So Ellen wasn't crossing that line.

Such as the Rotary Club headquarters.

"Hey, it's Reinhardt's girlfriend."

"......?"

The people at the club headquarters had seen Ellen a few times, so when they saw her, they said so.

Girlfriend.

Ellen couldn't help but shake her head at that, but she inclined her head toward the club member who recognized her.

Girlfriend.

Girlfriend.

Girlfriend.

The words echoed strangely in my head.

Then another club member, who was next to the person who referred to herself as Reinhardt's girlfriend, tapped him on the shoulder.

"Uh-huh, man, what is Reinhardt talking about? Reinhardt didn't say anything."

"Oops, is your girlfriend Adriana after all?"

"If you're good enough to leave it to....... I've said enough, haven't I?"

Adriana.

The mention of the name made Ellen shake her head even more.

Why should people in the Rotary Club know about Adriana, a senior who dropped out of Temple?

-Bang!

"Yuck!"

Suddenly, the door burst open and someone ran out.

It was a gray-haired woman.

He jumped up and down, frightened, as if he were running away from something.

Whatever she was doing, her hair was covered in white foam.

-Won't you get over here?! You're not supposed to wash off all the bubbles!

And then there was an angry shout from inside.

"No! I don't want to wash my hair! Why do I have to wash my hair every day!"

-What the hell is that?! Aah! Stay right there!

"I take care of my hygiene......?"

The white-haired woman cried out in horror and stopped talking. Her eyes locked with Ellen's, who was staring back at her from the front of the headquarters.

"Uh....... You?"

And then someone from headquarters came running out.

Somehow, the black dress she's wearing is soaked through.

"......er....... You?"

It was Adriana, a former Temple senior.

\* \* \*

Adriana washed Loyar's hair once and then dragged him back to her to wash his hair again.

Ellen sat still in her boss's office on the top floor of the Rotary Club's headquarters.

Ellen doesn't know why, but she does know that Adriana dropped out of Temple.

We also know that Reinhardt knows Herriot's parents because the dropout issue led Reinhardt to visit the monastery to which Adriana had returned.

I had just heard from Reinhard on the last night of the festival that Adriana's original monastery was in the Duchy of Saint-Thuan.

And that night.

I also saw Olivia Ranze and Adriana return to the Royal Class dormitory in the middle of the night.

We don't know what happened or what has happened since then.

However.

After that, Adriana doesn't go back to the monastery, but instead seems to be living at the headquarters of the Rotary Club.

It doesn't seem like a problem you should care that much about.

A strange sense of dysphoria swirled in Ellen's mind.

Among other things.

The look on Adriana's face when she saw Ellen.

That look of obvious embarrassment.

It was giving me a hunch that Ellen might have some kind of deep secret.

I don't know how much time passed, but Adriana came up to the top floor of the headquarters, dressed in a clean white dress after changing out of her wet clothes.

Adriana was the only one who knew where Mrs. Whitehead was.

Adriana and Ellen weren't the best of friends. Of course, it wasn't as bad as her relationship with Olivia.

A senior who was close to Reinhardt.

No longer in the temple.

It was nothing more than a paternalistic relationship.

"Ah....... Um....... Ellen, right? It's been a while."

Adriana did the same, so she smiled a little awkwardly and sat down across from Ellen.

"Yeah, it's been a while."

You have no right to interrogate Ellen.

However, Adriana came to see Ellen, who was waiting for her, as if she had to face her.

"I didn't realize you were here."

"Oh, umm....... I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I just happened to......."

Adriana smiles awkwardly.

He's not good at lying, Ellen is sure.

"Reinhardt isn't here, is he?"

Ellen started with the most important reason she was here.

Now I don't know if this is really important or not.

"Yeah, I'm not here. Do you happen to have....... is something wrong?"

At Adriana's worried comment, Ellen shook her head.

"No, I heard you weren't at the temple, so I stopped by to see if you were here. Nothing's going on. Even if you were, ....... I don't know about it."

Not that there was any reason to tell you that.

But Reinhardt was doing things in places she didn't recognize. Adriana's stay at the Rotary Club was most likely Reinhardt's doing.

Even so, Reinhardt is under no obligation to tell him what Adriana's situation is.

But.

Adriana and Olivia returning to the Temple in the middle of the night.

Their frozen expressions.

Reinhardt's reaction, as if he knew something.

What the heck.

What it was.

"May I ask why you're staying here?"

At Ellen's question, Adriana fidgets with her fingertips, squeezing and releasing the hem of her dress.

"That....... had a problem at the monastery where he was staying, and he couldn't stay there. So....... I asked her, Olivia, to help me. So I asked her if she could find a place for Reinhard to stay at....... and she said she could find out where Reinhard was staying....... So I thought I'd post it here....... Yeah. That's how it happened."

Someone who can't stand to lie.

Ellen looked at Adriana and thought about it again.

\* \* \*

There was no Reinhardt in the Rotary Club.

Adriana lied to herself.

Ellen didn't pursue Adriana further, and there was no reason to. Then a gray-haired woman barged in with a towel around her neck and quickly took Adriana away. Something about her needing to play with me.

Ellen returned to her Royal Class dorm.

Reinhardt stepped away for a moment. He's on vacation, which is understandable.

However, Ellen was determined to find out more about this strange occurrence.

Asking Adriana more questions was impossible because of the white-haired woman.

There was one more person to ask.

-Smart

Once again, Ellen came to the fifth grade dorm and knocked on the door.

-Dalcock

"...... Why, what, again. You don't know where Reinhardt is?"

Olivia said, looking nervous as soon as she saw him.

I've been thinking about what to say.

"You were with Adriana the other day."

"......?"

Olivia's already nervous expression hardened at the mention of the name.

"I need to talk to him about something, where is he?"

Olivia stares at Ellen.

"What are you talking about? Let me tell you."

It's more wary than annoyed.

"I just wanted to say it in person."

"......."

Olivia stares at Ellen for a moment, then says, "I don't know.

"I went back to the monastery."

This one's a lie, too.

Ellen confirmed that both Adriana and Olivia were lying to her.

"Really?"

"Yeah. Even if you told me where it was, I'd have a hard time finding it. It's better if you just don't care......."

"The senior. Adriana."

Ellen shakes her head.

"Just now, I'm on my way to meet with the Rotary Club."

"......what?"

At Ellen's point, Olivia's expression hardened even more.

"Senior."

Ellen looks up at Olivia.

Get them to lie to you, get them off the hook.

"Miss Temple contest, why didn't you come?"

Ellen asked the most important question.

Episode 356.

Reasons for not participating in the Miss Temple contest.

Still, Olivia's demeanor had changed, and she looked down at Ellen with a cold stare.

"What are you supposed to do with that?"

"I was wondering."

"So why do I need to tell you that?"

Olivia could barely fit through a needle, and if she asked any more questions, she was going to stab Ellen.

Live.

Ellen was really feeling Olivia come alive now.

"There's no reason to know, and it's not like you and I are that close."

"Didn't you tell Reinhard?"

So Adriana's in a Rotary club that's connected to Reinhardt.

At Ellen's reasonable suspicion, Olivia pulled her into the room.

-click!

Stumbling into Olivia's room, Ellen found herself pressed against the closed door, meeting Olivia's gaze.

"Yes, Reinhardt knows, but why do you need to know?"

"Leviathan is dead."

"......."

Ellen looks at Olivia.

"And that day, your whereabouts are unclear."

"So what. Are you saying I killed him or something?"

"I didn't say that."

Reverie Lance was attacked by demons and killed.

"I just need you to make me think that I'm making a ridiculous suspicion and that it's true."

If it's a lie, it's a plausible lie.

Why you and Adriana were back in the Royal Class dorms so late that night, and why Adriana was staying at the Rotary Club instead of the monastery.

I wonder if it's a coincidence that Leviathan Lance died on the day of your deed.

Why you lied.

Why you have no choice but to lie.

All you have to do is tell a story that ties them together plausibly.

However, it's not something you can make up on the fly.

Olivia pushes Ellen against the wall and looks down at Ellen, who stares at her, still and fearless.

"If I kill you, Reinhard, you'll never see me again."

"......."

Even at the word death, there was no fear in Ellen's expression.

Olivia's fingertips tremble.

You could go to the extreme, but then you'd lose the most valuable thing you have.

Olivia lost everything.

I didn't want to lose the last precious thing I had left.

The bumbling junior tries to grab him by the rear end.

It doesn't seem to have any intention of backing down. I don't know what he's thinking, but he seems to be making some bizarre assumptions.

If he puts his foot in his mouth, he puts himself, Adriana, and even Reinhardt in danger.

What to do.

Looking at Olivia, who seemed to be at a crossroads of confusion and extreme choices, Ellen spoke up.

"I'm no different."

"......."

"I hate you, but Reinhardt will be sad if you get hurt."

Ellen looks at Olivia.

"I wouldn't do anything to hurt you. I'm just curious about what happened that day and why everyone is lying."

They hate each other.

Nevertheless, neither Ellen nor Olivia will do anything to hurt each other because Reinhardt would be sad if they did.

So if I find out anything, it won't hurt you.

Olivia couldn't help but realize that the words were sincere and true.

Because of the strange effect the words had on her, Olivia couldn't quite look Ellen in the eye.

Shaking her head, Olivia says, as if she's about to throw up.

"Ellen."

"It's ......."

For the first time, Olivia called Ellen by name.

"Secret, I promise I'll keep it."

"I'll honor it, whatever it is."

We're not interested in Olivia's secret.

I wanted to know what Reinhardt's secret was behind it.

I didn't know anymore, and it was so hard to think and grieve alone.

"I was there."

"......!"

"Me and Adriana, we were there when the demons attacked."

Unreasonable vague suspicions.

Ellen was stunned to hear the truth of her outrageous suspicions, but the truth that surpassed them all.

\* \* \*

Inside Olivia's room, Olivia sat in a chair and Ellen sat on Olivia's bed.

Olivia told me everything. Starting with why they were where they were at that moment in time, and everything that followed.

"The Five Great Houses....... Independence?"

"Yeah, I think that's what I was thinking. My foster parents were trying to blackmail me for the lottery, and they used Adriana's life as bait to do it, so that's why I was there."

Ellen listened in a daze, unable to believe what she was hearing.

Demon Paladin Attack.

Ellen wondered if Olivia might have had something to do with it, but she hadn't expected them to be there.

The vague similarities between the dead people, Olivia, and Adriana were enough to make him suspicious.

But what followed shocked Ellen even more.

"You got ......?"

"Yeah, I don't know why, but a winged demon saved me and Adriana, and then it left us far away and went off somewhere, and that was that."

"Why on earth would......."

"I'm the one you're most curious about."

Just as Ellen couldn't make sense of the situation, Olivia was still confused by it.

"Why I have to keep this a secret, you see."

"It's ......."

If anyone found out about this story, for whatever reason, they would be terribly misunderstood. He would be accused of being in league with the demons, and he would most likely be killed.

"Reinhard came to see me the next day. He asked what was going on, so I explained the situation, and he said....... He offered to help Adriana."

"...... I see."

Ellen felt uncomfortable with that statement.

Reinhardt seemed to know what was going on with them, or so he thought.

But as the story goes, Reinhardt had no way of knowing at that point.

Is it an illusion.

Just because you think you know someone doesn't mean you really do.

So the feeling he got from Reinhardt that day must have been an illusion.

If so, Reinhardt's absence from the Miss Temple pageant that day had nothing to do with Olivia.

In fact, the suspicion that Reinhardt is the devil is not even in the realm of normal thought.

Reinhardt visited them the next day and talked to them for the first time in a long time, and when he realized what had happened the day before, he left Adriana in the care of the Rotary Club to protect her.

Adriana wasn't completely lying after all.

It's true that you can't go back to the monastery.

A newly discovered problem.

Attack of the Demons.

Olivia and Adriana were there, and the demons had somehow saved them.

Why?

"Why did the demons need to save the two seniors?"

"......I don't know."

Olivia frowned.

"Well, we must have been pitiful."

"Is that ......?"

"So, do you think demons are necessarily bad and evil?"

Olivia was terribly disappointed in humans. That's why she gave a shit about the humanistic mindset.

"It's possible that demons are better than humans, isn't it? There are plenty of humans who are far worse than demons and devils, like my foster father, who is already dead."

Olivia says with deep disgust and contempt.

It's a dangerous line to walk, as someone could be accused of advocating for the devil just by hearing Olivia say it.

Demons are evil.

It is evil and must be destroyed.

It's a big deal among humans, and it's undeniable common sense.

It's natural to hate your enemies and make them unacceptable, and that kind of hatred is infinitely recreated and spread among people even if you don't intentionally encourage it.

Demons are enemies.

Thus, the common belief that demons are evil is bound to arise.

There's a human instinct to categorize enemies as something you can kill or something you must kill.

Olivia and Ellen were also people who could be somewhat free of that common sense, but not completely free.

However.

Olivia was almost the only person in the Demon War who thought that demons might actually be good.

"Do you know why the last demon attack happened, not this one?"

"No."

Olivia was disappointed in the humans.

I don't even know what makes humans better than demons.

Now, I'm starting to think that demons might actually be better than humans.

"You do realize that it was the Crusaders who were attacked then, right?"

"Yes."

Olivia crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes as she stared out the window.

"The Allies distributed the surrendered demon prisoners and tried to auction them off on the black market."

"......Prisoners? Why?"

Ellen had no idea how to distribute the prisoners, or why she should.

"To use them as slaves. There are demons that look like humans. Some of them are....... succubus, incubus, and other ugly demons. I'd cut off their horns and destroy their magic circuits. If they were human, we'd turn them into cripples and then enslave them."

"ah......."

"That's how the Imperials and Empires distribute their prisoners, as well as the Crusaders and the Great Houses. They say it's for research, but that's just an excuse, and I'm sure I don't have to explain how they plan to use them."

When Olivia says she doesn't even want to talk about it, Ellen nods blankly.

"The demon raid wasn't about attacking the Crusaders, it was about the demons rescuing their prisoners, and while they may have been wounded, the demons didn't kill any of the Crusaders."

A raid to rescue demonic prisoners.

Demon captives were distributed among all groups to be used as slaves.

"What was rescued there was only a fraction of the demonic captives, and I'm sure the empires and empires, the royalty and nobility, are using them in dirty ways, paying lip service to the fact that they're enemies, that they need to be killed, when in reality they're stuffing their dirty desires up their backside. Isn't that disgusting, isn't that dirty?"

"......."

Olivia's exasperated tone left Ellen speechless.

"Yeah, well, whether he's resurrected or has an heir, in the end, that demon guy just couldn't stand to see his ruined country's people treated like that, and he did it with less than a handful of demons, and the paladins didn't hurt anyone. I think that's a greater act from a demon."

"Senior. Stop."

As Olivia's words grew more and more radical, even to the point of advocating for the Darklands, Ellen gently took her hand.

There's no reason to do this.

If Olivia's behavior is fine in front of herself, but when she does it in front of others, it's really dangerous.

Olivia looked at Ellen with wide eyes, not expecting Ellen to act as if she were patronizing her.

"I think I know what you mean."

"......Yes."

Olivia took a few deep breaths to calm her emotions.

"That's what the devil said, the one who saved me."

Olivia mumbled to herself, thinking back to that time.

"Man, how wicked are you."

With those words, the flying demon appeared, killed the paladin holding Adriana, and fled the scene, taking Olivia with him.

Suspended in the air, Adriana could see the demons casting mass destruction spells on the wastewater plant.

"Maybe you weren't planning on attacking, maybe you were just going to watch, but you heard it all, you heard the stories that went back and forth, the threats that you'd use my foster daughter to restore my honor, that you'd use the life of a nun who wasn't even a priest yet, that you'd kill the people I cared about until I gave in, over and over and over again."

Olivia would rather believe that the demons who saved her are better than humans.

Seeing a nameless order doing obvious injustice.

Maybe I just couldn't stand all the wickedness, malice, and injustice.

"So I don't think they were trying to raid a nameless order, I think they were spying, saw what was happening, and raided to save me and Adriana, and I'm even thinking about this ridiculous theory."

They may have raided to save Adriana and Olivia.

As a result.

She may have been wrong about some parts of the process, but Olivia's reasoning was very close to the truth.

\* \* \*

Are demons really good or evil?

With the disgusting stories of demon captivity and the truth behind the two previous demon raids, Ellen doesn't know what's what.

I was so overwhelmed by what I heard from Olivia that I had to forget about Reinhardt's problems.

Reinhard tries to help Adriana, which is why she's at the Rotary Club instead of the monastery.

They were rescued by the demons.

From the correlation of the stories, Ellen could not deduce the more frightening truth. The distance between truth and truth was too great, and she couldn't make the connection.

We now know for sure why Olivia didn't participate in the Miss Temple contest.

He wasn't in a position to care about that, even if he thought he was.

Olivia was annoyed that Ellen had told her a secret that not many people should know, even if she did have a clue.

You know that Ellen will keep the secret, but you've just told someone who doesn't like dangerous secrets.

"I have to keep a secret."

"I'm not the kind of person to make this a weakness."

Ellen doesn't like Olivia, but she doesn't end up hating her to the point of wanting to kill her.

Aside from the repercussions of getting the word out, Olivia and Adriana could indeed be accused of being demonic informants and executed.

Reinhardt might be guilty of it, but even if he wasn't, Ellen had no desire to exploit the secret.

Ellen's words made Olivia's brow furrow.

"What? So I'm that person?"

"...... I didn't say that, why, are you stabbed?"

"No! I'm not that person!"

"That sounds about right."

"No?"

Olivia's face flushed red and she scowled at me for yelling at the wrong time.

Exasperated, Olivia crossed her arms and grumbled.

"Anyway, you're lucky I wasn't there so you could have been Miss Temple."

"......."

If Olivia had actually competed in the Miss Temple contest, there's no telling what the outcome would have been. But for Ellen, Miss Temple was probably a good thing.

To be fair, it wasn't a great memory.

In the end, I didn't get to show the people I wanted to show the way I wanted to show them.

"So, do you like it?"

"What is it?"

"Was it good to win Miss Temple?"

Olivia's words make Ellen glare at her.

Now, are you teasing me?

Me asking him what it was like to win the Miss Temple contest without Reinhardt.

"What did Reinhardt say?"

But to Ellen, Olivia's demeanor didn't seem like that of someone who was teasing.

It's a look of envy. It's the kind of jealousy that makes you wonder what Reinhardt would have said to you when he saw you all dolled up and crowned Miss Temple.

Ellen looks at Olivia and realizes.

"He didn't come."

"Huh?"

Olivia doesn't realize that Reinhardt didn't come to the Miss Temple contest.

"Reinhard, he's not here."

"......?"

Olivia couldn't help but panic.

Olivia naturally assumed that Reinhardt had gone to the Miss Temple contest. She told him to wait in his room to do something for her.

He was forced to run away when he received a letter from Leverier Lance.

"No. Why?"

"How do I know that?"

Ellen reacted nervously to Olivia's question. Just as she hadn't been able to attend the Miss Temple pageant, Reinhardt hadn't been able to attend the Miss Temple pageant.

"Why didn't he come?"

"......I don't know."

If you don't know, do you just not know? Do you not want to know?

Olivia thought Ellen's answer sounded strange.

"You didn't ask?"

"It's ......."

It's an obvious question.

It's fair to ask why they didn't come. It's a fair question to ask.

But Ellen didn't ask Reinhardt why he hadn't come. She knew he wouldn't answer, so she forgave him without asking. I'm still not sure if that's a forgiveness or not.

I moved on.

Olivia looks at Ellen with her mouth slightly open.

"Wow you....... Are you a good guy or an asshole......."

"Well."

Reinhardt didn't attend the Miss Temple contest. And Ellen never asked him why he couldn't attend.

Olivia now knows that Reinhardt is involved with a strange organization called the Rotary Club.

Reinhardt has Reinhardt secrets, and sometimes things happen that can't be helped. Perhaps this is an extension of that. Olivia can only vaguely guess.

His frustration, of course, is that Ellen knows more about Reinhardt than he does.

So the idea of a relationship where you can't ask for secrets that you can't tell, but you can't tell them, was offensive to Olivia.

Of course.

Olivia looks at Ellen, whose eyes are downcast as if she's thinking back to the Miss Temple contest.

"I don't know what else......."

Olivia looked at Ellen and gave her a warm smile.

Thinking about Ellen waiting for someone who never showed up, Olivia felt sad, angry, and sorry for her.

I had a lot of mixed emotions.

"You're an asshole."

Of course, at the end of the day, it's a crap shoot.

"Shut up."

"Can I cry? No, weren't you crying in the first place? I would have cried if I were in that situation, because I would have been so sad and frustrated."

"Shut up."

Ellen grits her teeth and glares at Olivia.

Again, I hate this guy.

Episode 357.

Imperial Emperor Emperatos, Ministry of Magic Research Library.

The sheer volume of magical research housed in the Ministry of Magic was such that he wondered if he would ever see it in his lifetime.

Despite the fact that it is limited to one area of dimensional magic.

However, access to the Imperial Ministry of Magic is more than just being able to drop in and out of the library that houses the priceless texts.

I was able to call on expert wizards who had already understood and embodied all of these books to help me make sense of the content, and who could provide concrete research references for abstract questions.

Herriot was studying to be an emperor.

"The imaginary dimension?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

And so, for the first time in a very long time, Herriot realized that he was actually a nobleman, and a very high one at that.

At the Temple, she's berated by a rag-tag bastard, but that's who she is. The research wizards of the Imperial Ministry of Magic, a position of great authority and power, address the Grand Duchess as "Grand Duchess" and "Grand Duchess," and tell her what they know as best they can, fearful of offending her.

Of course, it's a bit of a stretch to say that there aren't any raghead beggars.

For starters, there's a prince and a princess in the class, as well as the prince of Cernstadt in Duchess Youngae.

In some cases, it is forbidden by school rules to take a picture of someone based on their identity, and even if it is, there are other classmates who are more powerful than you.

Goro.

For the first time in a long time, Herriot was studying with a sense of noble pride.

At the mention of this, Herriot shook his head.

Imaginary dimensions.

This was a response to me asking for clarification on something I didn't understand about the warp gate system.

"For example, the shape of a dimension that doesn't actually exist but is assumed to exist."

"Hmmm....... doesn't exist, but you're assuming it does?"

"Yes."

"Why do we even need that concept?"

In response to Herriot's question, the Research Wizard slowly begins to explain.

"Bi-directional one-time dimensions don't need that concept because they're structures that you activate once and then close after a period of time, but the warp gate system is a shared scheme for persistent multi-directional dimensions."

The researcher drew with a pen on a piece of paper on the table, as if to simplify understanding.

[gate - gate].

"With a structure like this, it's easier to make it a one-off - there's no reason to set up the concept of an imaginary dimension. Aside from the complexity of the magic itself, isn't the construction itself simple - there's only one connection between the gates?"

"I suppose so."

"But if there are three gates, how many paths will there be between them in total?"

"Three, right?"

If we have three gates, gates A, B, and C, then there are three connections between each gate: A-B, A-C, and B-C. The order of the gates is irrelevant because the connections are bi-directional.

"What if it becomes four?"

"Six, I think."

In that way.

"The more the number of warp gates, the more the number of paths will grow exponentially, right?"

"I suppose so."

"Not all warp gates are necessarily connected this way, but there are over two hundred thousand pathways between gates by themselves."

"......That's a lot."

Herriot hadn't realized the connections between the warp gates were that strong, so he couldn't help but gape slightly at the researcher's words.

"The warp gate system is the largest magical system in the history of the continent, so we needed a shared spatial awareness of what routes to set up permanent portals and which gates to connect to where, so we created a virtual map of the imaginary dimension."

A virtual map.

If you create a portal for yourself, you don't have to share it with anyone. It's your own magic, and it's a one-off.

The Warp Gate system, however, is a collaborative effort by many wizards.

Having the same map or blueprint in everyone's head means that they can add or modify things to the warp gate system, and that's what we call an imaginary dimension.

An understanding of the hypothetical map or blueprint of the imaginary dimension that researchers have been building.

An imaginary dimension that does not exist but is envisioned to exist.

Understanding it is the first step to accessing the magic of warp gates.

"This is the last updated map of an imaginary dimension."

The researcher laid out a giant floor plan in front of Herriot that could have taken up an entire table.

It's not just a bunch of dots and lines.

The map was filled with complex strings, including the form and nature of each dimension and its connections, as well as their blocking, usefulness, and connection strength.

It's a map of something that doesn't exist, but it changed the course of human history.

Herriot's mind raced.

Otherworldly.

What is this otherworldly thing?

The researcher himself said that the imaginary dimension is a non-existent dimension.

"You're telling me that ...... isn't a dimension that actually exists, right?"

It's really just a fictional concept created to facilitate a common understanding between later wizards and modern researchers.

"Yes, because it's literally an imaginary dimension."

The researcher nodded in agreement with Herriot's statement.

"But then there's the other side of the coin that asks, can we really say that the imaginary dimension doesn't exist?"

"......What do you mean?"

"At the end of the day, a portal is a direct connection between space and space. You can have hundreds of portals, but at the end of the day, the fundamentals don't change."

It was something that Herriot understood.

"But isn't there an in-between space that we skip to connect the portals?"

"Space......?"

"We use a gate, but the gate itself is neither at the entrance nor at the exit, so it's being treated as a phenomenon."

The researcher rests his chin on his arm and looks thoughtful.

"But a gate means that you can only go through it, you can't touch it, you can't reach it. You can control it, you can control it, but the gate means that you don't know if the phenomenon itself is part of an alternate reality or not. It's in between. Warp gates aren't really skipping space, they're just going through some sort of interstitial space, and there are wizards who say that that space is actually a space that exists."

"Hmmm......."

Warp Gate.

While it can shorten space, the gate is an oddity that cannot be touched or reached from either the exit or the entrance.

We can use gate magic, but what is a gate, a substance or a phenomenon?

Are the sidewalks of space that you pass through when you cross the warp gate real or not?

It was clear that this issue was not yet clearly defined.

"It is often argued that the saturation of the system due to the permanent operation of the warp gate has warped the concept of dimensionality and created an imaginary dimension that is actually an imaginary dimension, but this is only speculation."

The researcher stares down at the map of imaginary dimensions.

"The point is, warp gate systems have proliferated far too quickly because they're convenient, and the risks of this large-scale magic have not been properly vetted."

As Herriot hinted at last time.

Warp gate systems are extremely dangerous magic, but their convenience has allowed them to spread very quickly without being properly vetted for risk.

That's why, even after all this time, warp gates are still a subject of debate among wizards.

Even more so in that no one could predict what kind of disaster it would unleash.

Also.

Herriot stared in awe at the vast virtual map in front of him.

"This map of an imaginary dimension....... can't be seen by anyone, right?"

"Sure."

The researcher says still.

"If it weren't for imperial permission, you wouldn't be able to see it, even if the Grand Duchess wanted to."

Though he may have been watching casually, Herriot is now privy to the Empire's most important secrets.

Understanding the imaginary dimension allows us to interfere with the warp gate system.

Soon.

If you want to use it for evil, you can use it for evil. This means that if Heriot understands the map of the imaginary dimension, and fully understands the Warp Gate system, he can tamper with the Warp Gate system as he pleases.

"Is it just me that thinks warp gates are too dangerous magic....... Is it just me......?"

"I think so, too."

The researcher sighed.

"However, the warp gate has already become indispensable to humanity."

Warp gates are handy.

So, it was a reality on the continent right now that even if people knew about the dangers of warp gates, they wouldn't go away.

\* \* \*

After collecting the books on the art of seduction, Tana, Charlotte, and I returned to the ecliptic.

I told the commander that we found nothing in the labyrinth. I simply told him that we had returned safely.

The spellbooks were already in the saddlebags strapped to the horses, so no one saw what we found.

We've decided to keep the underground labyrinths of the Demon Castle a secret.

It was a case of being sure about something I wasn't sure about.

Charlotte's body is inhabited by a demonic spirit.

Charlotte's current state is that of an archdemon.

The Demon separated his soul and fused it with Charlotte's through the art of betrothal.

To see if there is a way to separate them, Charlotte will have her trusted royal wizards analyze the spell and find a way.

"Great work, Reinhard. Thank you."

"......I didn't do anything."

I did nothing to help Charlotte myself. Tana and Charlotte were eager to get back to the palace and begin analyzing their new findings.

There was nothing I needed to do or could do to make it last longer.

Before I unnecessarily attracted anyone's attention, I parted ways with the two of them and went on my way.

I gained more than Charlotte did from this return to Demon Castle.

There was a bunker in the basement of Mawang Castle.

As a result, Bali would not have died.

And through the many grimoires there, you will be able to draw upon the Cantus Magna.

I learned a lot, but I also had a lot of questions.

What was Bali doing in the past? It is entirely possible that Cantus Magna and Bali had nothing to do with each other, that one or the other was involved, or that both were involved.

I wonder if Bali would have tried to contact Cantus Magna the way I do now?

Let's say.

Valier made contact with Cantus Magna, using his many magical powers as bait.

And Cantus Magna used his magic to complete the Akasha, and he did something with it. That's what happened with the Gate.

It's a leap of faith.

But I can't be sure it won't.

And a bit of a bummer.

Engagement.

There was definitely talk of a fusion of souls there.

Charlotte's probably the one who got hit.

Lucinil said he wanted a soul.

Is it possible that the answer to the question of how to give a soulless being a soul may lie in the art of conjugation?

Charlotte was my first thought, but after I calmed down and thought about it, I realized that Betrothal might be just the magic Lucinil needs.

But for now, all the magic around the art of seduction is out of my hands.

If you can figure out how to reverse Charlotte's condition, will you be able to get the spellbooks back?

If I get it back, what will I use as an excuse?

I didn't feel like it was a rash decision, but I wish I could be of some help to Lucinil as much as she's been of help to me.

The underground labyrinths of the Demon Castle.

Bunker.

I'll have to share that with Lucinil and the collaborators and decide what to say about Cantus Magna as well.

With those thoughts in mind, I returned to Temple.

"Uh, hey."

Back at the Royal Class dorm. In the lobby, Ellen was glaring at me.

You're back.

"You're the one who came."

Ellen looks at me with a fat face.

"Where have you been?"

"Uh......."

Another secret.

Ellen gave me a look of resignation, like she was asking a question and not really wanting an answer.

It takes courage to even ask because you know what not to expect from me, but the look on her face is one of acceptance that it won't do any good.

I think it's safe to say that we're done here.

This may be rude to Charlotte, but Ellen already knows that I'm helping her in some way because of the Emperor.

I looked around, made sure no one was listening, and whispered to Ellen.

"Well, I can't really say, because of the Charlotte thing."

"......ah. Yeah."

She didn't expect me to give her an answer, but she seemed very surprised that I did.

"It wasn't dangerous."

"Yeah. Okay."

Ellen looks up at me and says, in a slightly watery voice, "I'm sorry.

"Thanks for telling me....... Thanks for telling me......."

"......."

What the heck.

I felt a surge of emotion as I watched Ellen cry because she was so touched that I had done something for her, even though she hadn't really told me what was going on.

Feeling unnecessarily weird, I squeeze my eyes shut and look at Ellen.

"By the way, did you get home okay?"

"Oh, right."

Ellen seemed to suck in a breath, then grabbed my arm.

"I want to show you something."

"Huh? Now, wait a minute."

"Quick."

Ellen started dragging me along and going somewhere.

\* \* \*

After a while.

I was dragged into Ellen's room and found myself staring blankly at the cloak she was wearing.

"What is this?"

"Lapelt."

Uh.

Well.

That.

Isn't that it?

"Cloak of the Sun God."

"Uh, yeah, that."

I had a brain freeze.

"Why do you have that?"

"I brought it from home."

Well.

That.

I don't think that's the way to say it.

"Why do you have that in your house?"

"I don't know."

Dizzy.

"My mom gave it to me because she said I might fight the devil."

I'm so dizzy!