


ACADEMY'S UNDERCOVER PROFESSOR

NOVEL BY SAYREN



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- 아카데미에 위장취업당했다 -

- VOLUME 1 -

-AUTHOR-

Sayren

[REAPER SCANS]

– STORY –

I wasn't reborn with talent or ability, but at least my knowledge from earth allowed me to stay one step ahead in this other world.

Magic exists here, and new progress was rapidly being made in science while magic stagnated in the name of tradition. Using my earthly knowledge and not bound by the traditional thinking, I was able to do things other wizards couldn't even imagine.

Still, inadvertently becoming an undercover professor for a mysterious secret society at the renowned Sören academy was never in my to-do list!

– GENRE –

Action, Adventure, Mystery, School Life, Shounen

CHAPTER 1

TO THE EMPIRE'S CAPITAL (1)

Most parents recommended high-ranking jobs such as 'doctor' and 'judge' when their children dreamed of their future job.

That was because the jobs that ended with the letter 'sa' were all well-acknowledged.

[T/L Note: Doctors and judges were 'uisa' and 'pansa' in Korean, and most of the high-ranking jobs in Korean ended with 'sa'.]

Or they would at least recommend a civil servant job, which was said to be a quite good job with stable income as well.

No parent wanted their child to go through a tiring and difficult path.

However, it was very different in my case.

"My son, you should be a shaman."

"What?"

That was what my mother said to me when I lost my father early and grew up with my unreliable younger sister.

Although my family was not very lean or poor, I still studied hard to become a doctor in order to earn money... Or perhaps to be a scientist or a developer.

What my mother recommended to me, who had made such meticulous plans towards a scientific route, was not a liberal arts route or even music and physical education, but it was a path of a completely different level.

How should I say it? Was it theology?

"Oh, what did you say?"

“You didn’t hear me right, so I’ll say it again. You have to be a shaman.”

“But I don’t want to.”

My answer was firm.

I wasn’t going to be a shaman. Why all of a sudden?

My mother’s eyebrows shook once at my daring answer, then she spoke in a strong tone.

“You have the qualities of a shaman—all kinds of deities are looking after you. You have no other path than to become a shaman.”

I was dumbfounded to hear that.

The qualities of a shaman, she said. I had such a talent, she said.

Other than the absurdity of it, I just didn’t think of anything.

After that, my mother mainly said things that she should not have said to her son, such as saying I had unique qualities and that I was destined to suffer if I did not become a shaman and experience shaman possession.

What did I say back then?

“Never, I don’t want to.”

“If you don’t, you’ll experience a big disaster someday. I’m saying this out of concern for you.”

“If it’s for me, you should’ve supported me on the path I want to walk on!”

I remembered saying that sternly and shutting myself in my room.

To be frank, I was rightfully resentful and upset. She couldn’t compliment her child, who had been planning his life since his puberty in middle school, yet she told him to give up everything and become a shaman?

Instead, those words prompted me to study harder with a sense of defiance.

My mother kept bothering me and forcing me to do religious things and even taught me strange knowledge such as myths, magic, and sorcery.

But I didn't give up. The more she did so, the more it raised my anger as I gained all kinds of rational knowledge to strengthen my brain.

After more than 10 years, when I had grown to be an adult and became a member of society, I had died.

—It was a car accident.

'It was really ridiculous.'

Was that what my mother meant about experiencing a disaster?

And what was even more surprising was something that happened afterwards...

I was alive. To be exact, I was dead once, but then I was reborn.

I couldn't believe the afterlife existed. I had thought everything my mother said was a lie, but who would have thought that it was all true?

Foolishly, human beings would not realize what they had not experienced in person, and I could feel it bitterly through the experience of death.

And what am I doing now?

"It will be included in the class. Everyone, open your textbook. Continuing on from last time, I'll teach you how to draw a magic circle."

I'm a Professor at the Academy of Magic.

...How did this happen?

* * *

A Magic Engineering locomotive that spurted out white steam arrived at the station.

Click! Choo choo!

The sound of compressed steam spewing resounded out refreshingly as irons were interlocked to each other.

The passengers who were waiting at the station got on the train one by one, and while watching the scene, I took a deep breath before boarding the train.

My body even felt refreshed due to the clear air that permeated my lungs.

The sky was clear without a single trace of clouds, and even a pleasant freshness could be felt in the cold air of the winter season that had just ended.

There was not much time left until the departure of the Magic Engineering locomotive, which was heading to the Exileon Empire.

I raised my hand and brushed my face lightly.

I felt a peculiar foreign sensation through my gloved hands.

‘The face camouflage mask definitely sticks well.’

It was inevitable because I had to hide my identity.

I got on the train with a natural step in order not to arouse suspicion from other people.

“Let me check your ticket,” the conductor spoke to me as I got on the train.

I took the ticket out of the frock coat’s pocket that I wore and handed it over to him.

“Confirmed. Mr. Gerrard. Have a nice trip.”

After receiving a formal greeting from the conductor, I replied with a slight nod.

When I checked the ticket I took back from him, room 403 was written on it.

In other words, it was the third cabin of the fourth compartment. The corridor was narrow enough for only one person to walk around, but it was long, and the doors lined up at a large gap on one side.

The Magic Engineering train I had just boarded wasn’t called a luxury train for no

reason, thus all the seats were divided into each room in the long hallway.

Room 401.

Room 402.

Room 403.

'Here it is.'

I checked the plaque before I opened the door and went inside.

The moment I opened the door, I smelled the strong scent of old trees.

The inside wasn't that fancy, but it had everything that was essential.

—A comfortable-looking seat that was divided from left to right and storage space for luggage, along with a signal bell that was installed to call the clerk if I needed anything.

'This isn't bad.'

I hadn't packed heavy luggage in my bag, so I only moved forward and sat down lightly on my seat.

The seat was soft, maybe because it was a luxurious train.

Looking out of the window, the vast scenery of the northern mountain range was engraved in my sight.

The tops of the sharply towering mountain range were covered with white snow, making them look like giants that were wearing white cone hats.

The train would soon squeeze through the cracks of that mountain range.

'Now that I've come this far, can I be relieved?'

My name is Gerrard.

I was once an ordinary person living in South Korea.

Of course, that was my past life, and I had died in a mysterious car accident.

The place where I woke up after I died like that was the world I am in right now.

—A mysterious world where magic and science coexisted, completely different from Earth.

I was enjoying my new second life here.

‘I’m on the train to the Empire, so I’ll rest until I get there.’

The Exileon Empire...

It was known to be the largest and most powerful nation on the continent.

It was the birthplace of Magic Engineering, where magic and machines coexisted equally, and it was the place where wizards and magic towers existed.

I was heading to that Empire on the train.

‘Is the big city of Leathevelk the transit station in the middle of the trip?’

I checked the contents of the information pamphlet next to my seat after I pulled it out.

The scheduled final destination of the Magic Engineering train, which was just departing, was the capital of the Empire.

However, there was no way that there would be a train heading to the capital of a country directly from the border of another country.

It was the same even for the first-class Magic Engineering train, which only the qualified and rich people could ride.

Naturally, there were two transit stations in the middle of the trip.

Leathevelk was the first one, and it could be seen as a city that was more famous than the capital in some ways.

—Because it was the place where Magic Academy—the dream of all aspiring

wizards—existed.

* * *

‘Is it an Academy? What an amazing world.’

It had been decades since I had started living my second life, but there were still many things that I couldn’t adapt to.

The sense of separation from my past life must have been great.

But the Academy wasn’t a place that had anything to do with me anyway—I didn’t have to worry about it.

Bump.

While I was immersed in such thoughts, the train vibrated slightly once.

‘Are they going to depart slowly?’

Woo wooo woo!!!

As I expected, the train honked to announce its departure.

Within a minute at the earliest, the train would run through the vast northern mountains.

‘Am I going to be alone in this room? It’d be nice since it’s comfortable.’

While I was immersed in such foolish thoughts, the door of room 403 opened with a rattle as if it had been waiting for that moment.

It wasn’t the clerk. A well-dressed man in his mid-20s came inside. He was handsomely tall, and he wore a brown frock coat with a design similar to mine.

There was no way a train clerk would wear such clothes, so it meant he was the guest who would use the same room as me.

Speak of the devil...

I didn't know there was another passenger.

'I was wrong in thinking that I could have a comfortable trip without feeling some sort of constraint.'

When I was sighing inwardly like that, the other person looked at me and greeted me.

"Hello."

"..."

He greeted me first, so I nodded my head slightly and accepted his greeting.

I didn't want to exchange words for a long time, so I responded to him as if I had a silent personality.

He didn't care much about my behavior and sat in the seat across from me.

Woo wooo woo—!!!

The train started to depart with a loud horn.

At first, the Magic Engineering locomotive rattled and shook, but the shaking disappeared as soon as the speed increased.

The tickets weren't pricey for no reason. Just as the high price was beyond an ordinary person's purchasing ability, the level of speed and convenience were different compared to ordinary steam locomotives.

The scenery outside the transparent window quickly flashed past me.

The snow piled high, and the needleleaf trees stood firmly in the snow. The white snow mountain that covered all of it was so beautiful that it naturally drew my attention.

However, after I kept watching it for 10 to 20 minutes, I got tired of it because it was getting boring.

I took out the newspaper that was stuck together next to the pamphlet and opened

it.

There were no laptops or smartphones in this world, so the only things that I could use to kill time were books and newspapers.

[The civil war in the Kingdom of Utah is over]

[The Princess's faction won]

Such an article was showcased prominently on the front page of the newspaper.

Until recently, a civil war had been ongoing, and it was the Kingdom of Utah that had recruited a large number of mercenaries from all over the country.

And it was also the country where the train station from which the Magic Engineering train departed from was located.

A black-and-white photograph was embedded between articles printed in black-letter fonts—it was a picture of the Princess's faction that had announced their victory in the war.

“So the civil war in the Kingdom of Utah is over.”

A voice was heard beyond the newspaper.

I lowered the newspaper that was covering my face slightly and stared at the man across from my seat.

If he asked me directly like that, I couldn't just ignore it, so I opened my mouth.

“Yeah. I was wondering when it would end. I'm glad it ended faster than I thought it would.”

“It wasn't long ago that the Prince's faction gathered a large number of mercenaries and military strength from all over the country, yet they still lost. I'm glad it ended early.”

“But it's not like there wasn't any damage at all.”

“Really? Oh, I'm late to introduce myself. I'm Ludger Chelysie.”

'Ludger Chelysie. Since he has a surname, is he a nobleman ?'

However, he showed no arrogance or rudeness particular to the aristocracy.

"My name is Gerrard. I do not have a surname."

I didn't have a surname.

In other words, I had revealed that I was a commoner.

"Oh. You don't have to be too uncomfortable. I'm from a fallen aristocrat family."

"Oh, I see."

Him being a fallen aristocrat made sense.

They were aristocrats but not actual aristocrats.

"Where are you going, Mr. Gerrard?"

"I'm heading to Lyne de Bruneau, the capital of the Empire. I've got business there."

"Well, if someone as good as you has business there, it would certainly be something great, right?"

I smirked and shook my head at the joke that Mr. Ludger had told me.

"It's not work-related, it's just a visit for some sightseeing."

"Sightseeing, you said. That's good, too. I've only heard it, but the Exileon Empire has developed a lot of magical technology, so there's a lot to see."

"Then where are you going, Mr. Ludger?"

"I'm going to Leathevelk."

"Leathevelk is where the Academy exists. Do you happen to have business there?"

"Yeah. Well, I'm not bragging, but I'm assigned to be a Professor at Sören Academy."

“Whoa.”

I was genuinely impressed.

The Empire’s Largest Academy of Magic <Sören>.

—The place where all kinds of the wonder children that existed on the continent gathered—it was a cultivation ground of the future to carve the jades that would bear the world into jewels.

Of course, the students who gathered there only consisted of children with the best talents, and the professors who taught them were those who had been strictly selected accordingly.

It meant that the man in front of me was one of them.

“You seem to be young, but your skill must be outstanding.”

“No. It’s just that the public thinks highly of me. Actually, I passed the exam by the skin of my teeth at a critical moment.”

“I’ve heard that there are enormous people who failed because they still couldn’t satisfy the Academy with the skin of their teeth. I think you should be proud enough.”

“Thank you for your appraisal of me. Oh, rather than that, about the civil war in the Kingdom of Utah, have you heard of the rumor?”

“What rumor?”

“They said that there was a leading figure in the civil war that led to the victory of the Princess’s faction.”

“Hmm, leading figure, huh.”

“But to my surprise, they said that he was neither a skillful wizard nor a high-ranking knight but a wandering mercenary.”

A wandering mercenary who had made great contributions to the victory of a nation’s civil war...

It hadn't been revealed in the newspaper yet, but was it that word of mouth had spread among the people?

"Mercenary Machiavelli. That's his name."

"I see," I chimed in at his words in a slightly apathetic tone.

"You're not that surprised, are you?"

"Haha. I just think it's a false rumor."

I had said that I didn't know, but it was actually a lie.

I knew the name "Mercenary Machiavelli" very well.

There's no way I couldn't know.

Because Machiavelli was...

The identity I used before Gerrard.

CHAPTER 2

TO THE EMPIRE'S CAPITAL (2)

But why had the man in front of me asked me about Machiavelli's existence?

It was also a fake identity that I had been using until not long before then.

'No way... is he doing it on purpose because he knows?'

'What is his hidden intention?'

For a moment, I suspected that he was a tracer sent by the princess's faction of the Kingdom of Utah, but I didn't think so.

Ludger hadn't taken any other action other than asking me the question.

Rather, his eyes and actions showed something closer to pure curiosity.

'So it's just a mere coincidence?'

'A professor of Sören...'

Sören Academy was so famous that news regarding it had passed by on word of mouth even to faraway countries.

The fact that such a young man was to be Sören's newly appointed professor meant that the person in front of me was a person with great talent.

I surely didn't know it at first, but I could gradually feel that something was odd with that guy.

But instead of raising my guard, I shook my head inwardly.

'Let's just say it's a coincidence for now.'

I couldn't let it show because I'd feel guilty.

I naturally turned to the next page of the newspaper and listened to his words.

“If there was really someone like that, he would have been in the newspapers.”

“Ha ha. Well, there are things that aren’t easily revealed to the public.”

“That’s interesting. Is it okay for you to say that to someone you’ve just met today?”

“Well, there’s no reason why I can’t do it, right? And, Mr. Gerrard, it’s my first time seeing you today, but somehow I feel like we’re on the same page.”

“I’m grateful that Sören’s reputable professor has a good opinion of such an old man.”

Ludger didn’t seem to be able to take his interest off of me, perhaps because he had a good image that was well-liked by others.

He couldn’t let it pass quietly without a word.

Because it had become like that, I decided to respond to him appropriately.

Still, having a companion to talk with made me less lonely, so there was nothing bad about it.

“Mr. Ludger, when you arrive in Sören, will you go to a lesson right away?”

“Not immediately, but I’ll have to wait a while.”

“Teaching first year?”

“No. I’m in charge of the second year.”

“Oh, so you teach the second year. Don’t newly appointed professors usually handle the new students in the first year? Well, you’re more amazing than I thought you’d be.”

It was only a rumor I had heard, but Sören Magic Academy had an image that was close to a university when judged compared to Earth.

It was said that all kinds of buildings were built on a huge expanse of land and that

there were already thousands of units only for the employees who lived and worked there.

Although it was adjacent to a large city, Sören's scale was literally close to a small city, so there were even some comparisons going around that it was like two cities next to each other.

The students of Sören ranged from 1st year to 5th year.

Usually, the higher the year, the smarter the children become, so it would be fundamental to have a competent professor in the senior year and a newly appointed professor in the first year.

But I couldn't believe he was going to teach the second year from the start of his appointment.

I had thought that he might be quite a great man, but he turned out to be more than that.

'He wouldn't be able to become a professor in Sören for no reason.'

The Academy of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

This was a world that had achieved an industrial revolution called iron and steam, but if I should pick a different aspect from the Earth, of course, it was the existence of magic.

'I've only seen it in fantasy novels before.'

The existence of magic was inseparable from this world, and most definitely, magic was always the exclusive possession of the chosen ones.

—Because one couldn't use magic if they couldn't handle it.

But...

Unlike in the past, where only aristocrats of noble blood could use it, these days, there was an exponentially growing number of skill supremacies as common people could also learn magic as long as they had the talent.

Sören was the place where one could get into the top Magic Academy with just that skill.

'I'm curious at this point. What kind of place is it?'

Usually, when it came to a magic academy, I couldn't help but think of a famous literary work from when I lived on Earth.

—Students flying around on brooms and using magic with wooden sticks...

Perhaps children who came across that kind of magic school's movies and books in their childhood had dreams about it.

A magic school.

—There was nothing as dreamy as that.

But there really was such a thing in this world.

—Students who learned magic and enjoyed their youth.

'Youth... huh.'

In my past life, my father had died early, so I couldn't afford to enjoy it.

I had studied like crazy with the obligation to support my family, and I was under pressure to succeed.

My second life wasn't particularly different from my previous life.

No, it was even worse.

There was a reason why I had been walking around hiding my identity.

'I must be wanting something out of nothing if I wished for it now as well.'

It had been about 27 years since I had been born in this world and lived again.

I was no longer on the path of burning youth or whatever you would call it.

The Academy of Magic or whatever was just a story from a different world.

It was still the same regarding the man called Ludger in front of me, who was closely related to the Academy.

I—who lived with a false identity to hide my true identity—and that man—who stood on the shining stage of Sören—were extremely different.

But since he had become a Sören professor at a young age, I decided to congratulate him earnestly.

‘Cause he’s a fallen nobleman.’

There were still classes of society in this world, and the nobles were definitely the pinnacle of such classes in society.

However, those who were in such a place and fell to the abyss existed.

Whether it was because of their rebellion against the state, or they got on the wrong side of those with higher statuses, or they were in huge debts.

Anyway, those nobles had fallen to the abyss for various reasons.

Fallen aristocrat.

Considering that fallen aristocrats were more despised by their fellow aristocrats than by the commoners, the man named Ludger in front of me must have made a really bloody effort until he became a professor at Sören.

While I was immersed in such thoughts, I felt something strange outside.

‘What is it?’

I had no choice but to be filled with strange anxiety as I threw a slight glance out of the window.

The atmosphere was strange.

The air was heavy, to be exact.

It was as if something was going to happen.

“What’s wrong?” Ludger asked, seeming to feel something odd with my response.

I didn’t answer, and I had my five senses on edge.

...Something was coming.

“Is something—”

It was the moment Ludger was about to open his mouth.

————!!!

* * *

A powerful jolt along with a huge explosion shook the Magic Engineering train violently.

The train’s cabin shook, and the train that was running on the railroad swung to the side.

I held the chair’s handle firmly in order to balance my body.

“What is this...? Did the engine burst?”

Ludger muttered so, but I shook my head as I didn’t know.

The engine didn’t seem to have burst.

There was no way the whole train would shake because of one engine going out.

In addition, when it came to safety, there was no way that the engine of an exclusive Magic Engineering locomotive would explode by itself.

There must have been something. A reason why that explosion had been inevitable.

——!

It seemed that my uneasy imagination wasn’t wrong, as something began to run

busily, thumping loudly on the ceiling of the train.

At the same time, a loud noise was heard from the leading compartment.

—The sound of something breaking and of people screaming. I realized exactly what had happened.

“It’s a raid.”

“A raid? On this train?”

“Most of the passengers on this Magic Engineering train are wealthy merchants and aristocrats. The robbers in the northern mountains must have done this while aiming for them.”

Most of the passengers on that expensive Magic Engineering locomotive were rich people. Obviously, there were many people who were after their money and valuables, and raids by the robbers who were targeting those trains occasionally took place.

‘Even so, I can’t believe they’re doing this on the train that’s heading from the border to the Empire.’

Those bastards who attacked right then were pretty much not in their right mind either.

They were so daring that they even became extremely reckless.

‘The explosion that shook the train a little while ago. I don’t think it’s from a normal force.’

I narrowed my eyes because I had something that I had speculated.

‘Is it magic?’

There was a wizard among the raiders.

If a wizard was involved, such a bold move was feasible.

If they quickly robbed and escaped with the help of a wizard, they could hide safely

in the steep northern Arette mountains. It would have been hard to chase them.

If that something was what they were planning, they were definitely not ordinary robbers.

If they had a wizard with such firepower and attacked a train with aristocrats on board, those bold guys could never be ordinary people in the first place.

Since magic existed in this world, there were also some people who did bad things with magic.

“Mr. Ludger, I think you should hide or avoid the attack for now.”

Ludger nodded as he listened to my words.

Ludger picked up his luggage. Did he try to take his bag in that situation? There must have been something important inside it.

I stood up because I also wasn't in a position to worry about others. The first one to take the lead was Ludger.

“I'll stand in front of you just in case.”

“Yes.”

For the moment, my identity was as a commoner in his 40s who had a lot of money.

That guy who became an academy professor in his mid-20s would fight better.

Ludger took out a small wooden wand in his right hand and raised his guard.

The two of us opened the room's door and examined the movement in the corridor of compartment four.

There wasn't anyone in sight yet. The passengers seemed to be waiting quietly in their rooms for the moment.

‘It's the wrong choice.’

It was said that the cabins themselves were protected by magic, but the robbers who

attacked were not ordinary people either. In that situation, sitting still in the cabin was like sticking out your own neck to be slaughtered.

In times like that, the best plan was to stay as far away from those robbers as possible.

‘But there’s no way the robbers who penetrated compartment three haven’t entered here yet.’

I thought that they’d scatter right away and then extort money and valuables from the passengers, but was I wrong?

Or maybe they were after the first compartment, in front of ours.

The first compartment was the first-class seating where the nobles stayed. It was a VIP room that was strictly protected—in other words, it was the golden egg that had the most money.

‘It’s a relief.’

We just needed to step back while they were drawn to the first compartment.

Of course, rescue signals were installed in that kind of Magic Engineering train to prepare for an unexpected attack and in case of an emergency.

The backup force would probably be running in the early hours.

I just had to hang in there until they arrived.

Crash!

At that moment, a man broke into the hallway window.

As he was fluttering the snow from his shoulders, which he had not brushed off yet, he raised his head and stared at us after he sensed our presence.

His eyes were severely bloodshot.

‘His first impression is brutal. Is he high on drugs?’

His appearance, which was suffused with hatred and anger, seemed to be completely different from a robber's.

In that cold weather, I wondered if he was going all out after waiting for the train.

“Aaaargh!”

But before I could reveal that mystery, he yelled at us when he found us first.

At the same time, Ludger revealed his magic.

It was a sorcery in which threadlike strands of magic power were carved in the air in front of the wand.

—The sorcery that seemed to carve a three-dimensional picture in the air soon combined into a single spell.

Zzzt!

A flash of light penetrated the intruder's chest when it seemed that a blue lightning bolt had formed.

“Aaaargh!”

The robber, who was rushing toward our side, fell flat onto the floor stomach-first and shook his body.

“Did you kill him?” I asked while looking at Ludger.

“No, I just incapacitated him,” Ludger replied before slowly approaching the fallen robber with a cautious face.

He continued to aim his wand at the body.

“Wait, Mr. Ludger. It's dangerous.”

“It's all right. I'm just going to interrogate him a little bit about his purpose for attacking the train.”

“No, I mean...”

I tried to say something more, but Ludger moved without listening.

He turned the fallen robber's body upward with his foot.

"Tell me. Why did you attack this train?"

"Uurgh. Ha. Haha."

"Did you just laugh in this situation...?"

"We need to kill all... everyone."

What lay in that stammering voice was a frigid madness that was enough to make anyone's skin shudder.

The robber laughed as his body convulsed and he bled from his nose.

At the same time, his tightly wrapped coat fell open, revealing an object hidden inside.

It was a huge bomb.

"...!"

With his eyes wide open as he saw that, before Ludger could unleash a spell...

The robber pressed the detonator that he had prepared in advance and held in his hand.

Boooooom!

A huge explosion swept through compartment four.

CHAPTER 3

GREAT TRAIN RAID (1)

The foggy dust caused by the explosion subsided.

“Uurgh.”

Shaa.

Crouching down, I woke up while shaking off the broken debris that covered my body.

Fortunately, there were no injuries to my body. Even the broken debris couldn't pierce the coat I had been wearing.

‘It's a good thing I wore a sturdy one just in case.’

The corridor and the wall of the compartment, which had been fine not long before, were completely blown away.

The chilly wind that was running on the snowfield blew through the gap and scratched my face like a blade.

“...I thought it was a normal robbery.”

I couldn't believe he had detonated a bomb that was wrapped around his body in a situation where he was electrocuted by electricity magic.

That was something that would never be seen from a train robber.

It was more severe than a robbery, and they were closer to fanatics, if I may say so.

The mindset of dying together even though he knew he was going to die.

‘Are they the rebel remnants of the Prince's faction who fled the kingdom of Utah? No, they're busy hiding right now. These bastards are different.’

As I was sweeping my face with my hands in frustration, I sighed, feeling my loose skin.

No wonder the cold wind was cutting into my face.

“It’s expensive, though. What a shame.”

Riiipp.

I took off the camouflage mask that I had been wearing on my face.

I didn’t need to keep using it since it was already torn due to the shock of the explosion and the grazing of the debris.

Since I couldn’t keep the face of a man in his 40s with wrinkles and whiskers anymore, I threw the camouflage mask out of the train.

I thought the train was going to be a little safe, but I didn’t expect an unpredictable incident to happen.

‘Come to think of it, where is he?’

Ludger, who had said he was going to be a professor at Sören Academy, could not be seen.

Soon after, I realized something.

When the explosion had happened, he couldn’t react and was likely swept away.

The desolated wall was half blown away and broken. There was no trace of Ludger.

When I slightly stuck my head out and looked down, I saw a steep cliff.

Deep down the cliff, there was a raging blizzard and foggy snow clouds that buried its base.

‘...He must be dead.’

Anyone who thought that he was a mere robber would be bewildered when the robber blew himself up with a bomb.

If he had known beforehand, he could have prepared a spell, but unexpected situations always happened.

What a pity for him.

To think he had died on the day he was appointed as a professor for the famous Sören Academy. I prayed for the repose of Ludger's soul with a small, silent prayer.

'It's not time for me to be relaxed either.'

Since I knew that they were no ordinary robbers, my alert level was several stages higher than before.

If they were all going to blow themselves up when their plans went awry, no matter how strongly that Magic Engineering train was protected by various spells, it might derail.

'That could be their real aim: seeing that kind of extreme act happen.'

'Let's run away.'

After making that decision, I headed to the compartment behind that one.

Sraak.

When the door from compartment four to compartment five opened, a conductor with his face full of tension appeared.

"Oh, sir, are you all right? Wh-what on earth is hap..."

He was slightly bewildered and stuttered at the sight of me standing alone in the corridor and at the bulkhead that had flown away.

"There's a robber attack; they're armed with dangerous explosives. I was almost swept away by it," I replied calmly.

"I... I see."

"I think they're focused on compartment number one, so we'd better step back."

“Oh. I was actually about to evacuate the other passengers to the back.”

“That’s a relief.”

I approached the conductor with a relieved face.

And as soon as I narrowed down the distance so I could reach him by stretching my arm, I grabbed the conductor’s collar and threw him down to the ground.

Baam!

“Argh! Why... why are you doing this?”

“Did you think that kind of petty acting would work in front of me?”

“P-pardon?”

The conductor looked up at me with a confused face.

If it were someone else, they would have erased their doubts by looking at his extremely victimized expression, but I was not convinced.

“I thought something was odd. I refuse to believe that it’s so easy to break through the Magic Engineering train, which is protected by strong defensive magic and magical stones attached to it. And right when it was running fast through the rugged Arette Mountain, raiders appeared as if they had been waiting.”

“Wh-what...”

“It’s practically impossible without someone working from inside the train assisting... Unless someone turned off the magic that should have been operating.”

“...”

At that moment, the conductor’s face changed in an instant.

* * *

He moved his hand and tried to pull something out, but I already knew and had prepared for it.

I thrust a sharp knife under his chin.

“Stay still.”

“Urgh.”

“You’re quick to move. As expected, this is not an ordinary robbery. Tell me, where do you guys come from?”

“...”

“...Or keep your mouth shut. Well, that’s up to you.”

I wasn’t really curious about it anyway. I lifted that man up with a knife around his neck.

If my prediction was correct, something might have happened in the compartment that he had come from, compartment five.

“Move.”

With a knife held in my right hand on his neck, I overpowered him by bending both his arms back with my left hand and then kicked his feet.

Uurgh.

He clenched his teeth and refused to budge, but when I twisted his arm a little more, he immediately moved.

He should have done it from the start.

“How many colleagues do you have here?”

“...”

“So you won’t say it? Then I’ll have to make you talk.”

At that moment...

Something was heard from compartment number five, where he had come from.

It was a small sound that could almost not be heard from compartment number four, where a blast of cold wind blew from outside the train from its missing bulkhead.

My extremely alert ears caught the sound properly.

Click...

It was something I had heard so often that I recognized the familiar sound immediately—metals colliding with each other.

—It was the sound of a rifle hammer being pulled.

Knowing so, I threw the conductor forward and fell flat on my stomach right away.

Ratatatatatatata!

Immediately above my head, a barrage of countless bullets penetrated the door and passed through.

——!

The conductor I had just pushed fell as he was honeycombed with bullet holes without being able to react.

Debris and dust were scattered. I covered my head with my hand and glared at the door.

The bullets showed no signs of stopping soon.

‘Is it a machine gun? They’ve prepared very well.’

—Then they had no choice but to take that action as well.

When I was thinking about it, they stopped shooting, thinking it was enough.

‘He shot his colleague mercilessly even though his colleague was crossing the compartment. They didn’t even let him send any signals.’

It meant that the conductor, who had already become a hole-filled rag, had told them in advance.

—If they don't hear from him for a while, he must have been caught, so shoot him relentlessly.

'The suicide-bomb terrorists were like that as well. I'm sure they're crazy.'

'Why did this happen when I got on this train...?'

I got up from my position while sighing at my unfortunate life.

After shaking off the powder and dust on my body, I glared at the door again.

Soon after, the door was smashed, and three bulky men rushed into the corridor.

"What? There's still someone alive"

"We shot that much, and he didn't die?"

"Who are you to talk about dying or not as you please?" I uttered in an irritated voice while looking at them talking amongst themselves.

They exchanged glances and soon began to approach me in a ferocious manner.

The corridor was narrow enough for only one person, so if I had to go against them, I had to deal with one person at a time.

It was obvious that they looked much rougher and heavier than I was.

I didn't want to fight if I could avoid it. I refused to have a clash in a pointless place.

'But if I surrender now, they won't accept it.'

Looking at the people who approached me with the determination to kill me, no matter what I tried to do to appease them, they wouldn't buy it.

They had not the slightest bit of intention to let me live.

"I want to ask you one thing..."

My unfriendly tone made them raise their eyebrows in offense, but I had no choice. It was just my nature.

“What? Are you going to cry for your life now?”

‘No way.’

“...How dare you attack this train? Aren’t you afraid to die? The rescue team will be here soon, right?”

“Ha! I wondered what it was, so it was just lame intimidation?”

The guy at the forefront snorted at my warning and drew a sword that suited his size.

I had asked him seriously, but he seemed not to think my question was worth answering.

“I’ll cut you in half with a single slash.”

The big man slowly approached me, and I slowly backed away.

However, the partially destroyed train’s cabin had a limit, and naturally, my steps had to stop.

If I tried to step back any further, I would fall outside the broken train.

“Hehe. There’s no place for you to run anymore.”

“I see.”

If I jumped out of the train from there, I would end up like Ludger.

However, my front was blocked by his large body, so I had to pass through them to go forward.

“I’m busy, so I’ll finish you as soon as possible!”

—It was when he was about to spring out at me while spouting such words.

I invoked the spell I had prepared in advance.

Boom!

The sound of an explosion spread through the air as the man who was about to swing his sword at me bounced back like a cannonball.

Thump, bam!

Those who were standing absentmindedly behind him could not react and bounced off each other before rolling on the floor.

“Uuuurgh. Wh-what...”

“A wizard?!”

It was quite powerful magic power, but there was no sign of much distress as they were pretty strong.

No. They were wearing something inside their clothes, to be exact. Was it like a protective suit?

“Then I should just give a stronger blow... ’

I carved a sorcery while releasing the mana I had gathered. The three-dimensional pattern that was drawn in the air soon turned into a spell, and in an instant, it became a big wind and lifted the men who were about to stand up into the air.

They must have been confused because it felt like an invisible giant hand was clutching them.

“Oh, ooh?”

“Let... let go of this! Put me down!”

“I’ll put you down, just as you asked.”

I used the wind to move them by myself.

—To the outside of the wide-open train.

“Sa-save me, please! I beg you!”

They shouted desperately, but I didn’t say yes or that I would spare them. They were

the bastards who attacked that train with the intention of killing everyone. They would stab me in the back if I showed them any mercy.

As I threw them out of the train, their screams echoed and slowly faded into the distance.

“Tsk.”

Having gotten rid of the attacker, I pulled a hair tie out of my pocket while arranging my hair which had become quite messy.

Because I didn't pay much attention to beauty treatments, my hair had become quite long, and if I didn't arrange it in time, it would be quite cumbersome.

I tied my flowing hair together around the back of my neck.

“It's better now.”

While I was thinking of running away again, the door of compartment number three opened and new people appeared.

Once I got rid of one group, others kept appearing.

There seemed to be no end to it.

That was why I wanted to leave quickly.

“What the...”

The men who came from the third compartment saw me standing alone inside the half-destroyed fourth compartment, and my face hardened coldly.

“Kill him!”

Someone who seemed to be their captain was furious as he gave the order.

At the same time, the guys who were waiting pointed their rifles at me.

Looking at it, I desperately held back my sigh.

'Yeah. What can I do? Now that I've come this far, I should see the end of it.'

"Shoot!"

The captain gave the order and his subordinates pulled the trigger.

But the bullets didn't come out.

Clack! Clack!

"Oh, ooh?"

"What are you doing?"

"The... the guns are broken!"

"What?"

While everyone was talking, I prepared the next spell.

If they were together like that, it was easy to get rid of them from where I was standing.

But there was one thing that I had looked over...

—There was also a wizard among them.

Shooo!

The spell that I casted was canceled midair.

The wizard stared at me with a wary eye as he pointed his wand at me.

"I didn't know there was a wizard among the train passengers."

"..."

"Whatever, since it's like this, you should die with them as well."

What was with his words? He had been resolved to kill me from the start.

I figured those guys were terrorists and that whatever I said there wouldn't work.

I took my watch out of my pocket and checked the time.

Ten minutes had yet to pass since they started to attack.

'Is there still... a little bit of time left?'

The scenery passing by outside was still cold and bleak.

When I had seen it through the window, I had thought it was beautiful, but because the bulkhead wall in between disappeared, it had become quite scary.

There was still some time before the train left Arette Mountain.

It would be hard for the supporting troops to come right away.

'I have no choice...'

When I thought about the train's location and the time that had passed, I had at least five minutes left.

'...But to hang in there.'

CHAPTER 4

GREAT TRAIN RAID (2)

“Get out of the way!”

“It’s a disturbance!”

The wizards lined up while pushing the others who were blocking the entrance.

They stared at the man who stood alone in compartment number four with a slightly strained look.

He wore a black frock coat with golden embroidery thread over a neatly fitted suit.

He had long black hair tied tightly around the back of his neck.

He even had sharp eyes that felt colder than the chilly wind raging outside.

Everything from his appearance to the energy that he radiated was unusual.

In fact, their compatriots who had stormed from the rear of the train had been sent to the hereafter by his hands.

‘Who the hell is this guy?’

The terrorist who led the train raid frowned at the man in front of him.

He didn’t think there would be a wizard like that on the train.

Was it too late to find out who he was before they fought?

‘No, I don’t care what happened. We have five wizards here.’

They had recruited high-quality manpower knowledgeable in magic.

Even if there were internal security personnel, they could be swept away with an

overwhelming force.

He didn't expect that there would be a wizard, but there was only one opponent. Even if he was outstanding, he would not be able to counterattack anymore since their side had five wizards.

In addition, Mayhem, who could be called the leader among the wizards there, was a fourth-rank wizard.

'He'll never be able to counter unless he is a well-known wizard with at least five ranks.'

There were only a few wizards on the whole continent who were as capable as that.

In particular, if he had achieved the 5th rank or higher at such a young age, rumors would have already spread.

Then the highest rank he could be was four.

That was precisely equivalent to Mayhem.

Perhaps the man in front of him knew it, so he didn't use magic willingly.

"Hmph, there are five wizards. Of course."

"It's surprisingly quick for you to concede. But it's still too late."

"Then I have no choice but to change my way of fighting a little bit."

The man said so, then soon threw himself out of the wrecked train while the hem of his frock coat fluttered.

"Oh, ooh? Did he just jump?"

"Did he choose suicide because he knows he can't win?"

The terrorists were confused.

One of the wizards stuck his head out over the broken bulkhead just in case, but nothing was seen under the distant cliff.

“I think he fell down and died!”

“I thought he’d do something, but he was just a coward.”

The moment everyone was about to come to such a conclusion.

Whoosh!

A flash pierced through the head of the wizard who was sticking out his head.

The unbalanced body tilted forward and fell outside the train.

“Wh-what!”

“Hanson is dead!”

Dead? Why? More than that, where did that flash come from?

While everyone was confused, Mayhem, the leader of the wizards, frowned and looked up.

“On the roof! He’s on the roof!”

“On the train’s roof? But didn’t he jump outside a while ago?”

“Did he use some flying magic?”

“Is it possible to catch up with the running train and get on its roof with flying magic?”

“Shut up and go after him!”

* * *

‘What a shame. I was going to take down another one after they let their guard down.’

There was a chaotic noise coming from below.

Because they had found out I was alive, they were going to attempt to kill me with all

their might.

I had pretended to jump off the train, hung onto the wall, climbed up, and prepared to catch them off guard.

I couldn't help but be satisfied by taking down one of the five wizards.

“Hurry and go up!”

“Kill him!”

A voice rang in between both compartments, and soon they began to climb up the roof one by one through the ladder.

But it wouldn't be that easy.

I waited and fired a tangible magic power at them as they appeared, and then I turned my back before running toward the rear compartment.

Those who were about to climb up had no choice but to go back down due to the attack that flashed across their heads because a roof without shelter made them the target if they climbed it.

Thump thump thump thump.

As I ran with loud footsteps on purpose, the guys who were standing by in the compartment also heard the sound and chased me.

“To the back! He's heading back into the rear compartment!”

“Chase him!”

It was so easy to get them to follow.

It seemed that getting rid of that one wizard had made a quite big impact.

Did it mean that even if each of them committed suicide and blew themselves up, it wouldn't be acceptable for their colleague to die at the hands of others?

What a contradictory mindset.

'I'm the one who's more thankful if you come out so willingly like this.'

'The more you do that, the easier it is for me to deal with all of you.'

* * *

The terrorists were split in half to catch the wizard who had fled to the rear of the train.

Since their opponent was a wizard, it would be a hindrance if he wasn't fought by fellow wizards.

Except for a few people who would assist the wizards, the rest of them decided to aim for the first class of compartment number one that had yet to be pierced.

The wizard troops were heading to the rear as they were separated into two groups from compartment number four.

"Damn it! Where is he?"

"What about our compatriots up there? Why aren't they saying anything?"

"Anyway, let's go to the back!"

As soon as he led the group and hurriedly opened the door...

Boooooom!

The door exploded, and a bright red flame engulfed the terrorists.

In an instant, the five people turned into black charcoal and collapsed on the ground.

The magical flame was extinguished like a candle after fulfilling its role faithfully.

"You... you wretch!"

"I can't believe he set up a trap in front of the door!"

Mayhem, the wizards' leader, looked at the bodies of his dead compatriots and became silent.

‘In that short time, he installed a spell trap in front of the door?’

The man’s swiftness was astonishing, but what made Mayhem even tenser was the decisive action that he saw.

Usually, the aristocratic wizards he knew were extremely reluctant to move their bodies because they had been weakened due to arrogance since their birth.

Whenever they used magic, they spread out their spells as if they were showing it off and others stood from their seats.

But the man he was chasing wasn’t like that.

‘When his situation seemed to be disadvantageous, he immediately ran away and then lowered the opponent’s guard and made a surprise attack. That can’t be the way a normal wizard fights.’

He was extremely practical and thorough.

Isn’t that kind of move more similar to a mercenary or a hunter than a wizard?

‘What the hell is he...’

At first, Mayhem had thought he was just a wizard who had killed his compatriots.

After all, most people on the train were aristocrats or wealthy merchants.

They were all the ones who sucked the blood and sweat of poor commoners and stood on top of them.

It should’ve been easy enough for them to kill one person.

‘But he’s different.’

‘What the hell is his true identity?’

Mayhem, who was getting concerned, opened his mouth with a heavier expression.

“Everyone, be careful. From now on, we take the lead. We don’t know what kind of traps he might have installed, so move as carefully as you can.”

“Yes!”

Led by Mayhem, the wizards took the lead in checking if there were any traps installed in the corridors or walls.

As a result, they spent a considerable amount of time whenever they crossed the train’s compartments.

“Don’t be impatient. He can’t get away from the rear of the train anyway.”

After all, he was like a rat in a trap.

For the moment, it was obvious that he had fled to the rear compartment.

Mayhem, the wizards’ leader, walked slowly before he suddenly stopped.

He felt an indescribable sense of wariness.

He quickly realized why he suddenly felt so restless.

Clang! Creaaaaak!

There was a loud noise from the rear of the train.

The slow-moving terrorists instinctively realized something was wrong when they heard the sound.

“Damn! The train separated, and he ran away!”

His rising anger had made him too late to realize.

In the first place, his opponent didn’t have to fight them—all he had to do was drag for time and run away.

He had purposely set a trap to raise their alert and buy time.

He was trying to escape safely by moving quickly to the last compartment.

“Chase him! Don’t let him escape!”

They dropped their caution, they had no other intention than to chase and kill the wizard who had installed the traps and run away.

They rushed throughout the train and soon arrived in the last compartment, number 12.

As soon as they opened the door, all they saw was the snowy mountain range and railroad, not the view of compartment number 12, which was supposed to be there.

Mayhem clenched his teeth.

'I made a mistake. I kept reminding myself that he didn't have to fight us.'

'I overlooked an important fact because I was angry.'

Who would have expected that the opponent would run away with such determination?

"Damn it, did we lose him?"

"That brat. I've remembered his appearance. We'll definitely find him and kill him."

When everyone was staring outside with their teeth clenched like that...

Mayhem felt a powerful wave of mana from behind and got goosebumps all over his body.

"What is this..."

He turned his head in a hurry and looked at his back.

And what he saw was definitely the man who should have disappeared along with the separated compartment 12.

"Why is he here..."

But it wasn't the man's existence that mattered the most.

The most important thing for him to pay attention to was the spell that was completed in front of him, almost on the verge of being activated.

It was a very ferocious and dangerous kind of elemental magic.

“Everyone, dodge!” Mayhem shouted as he boosted as much mana as he could.

With insufficient time to dodge, he raised his defenses as much as possible to create the strongest possible barrier of mana.

Whiirrrrr!

Shortly afterwards, a huge spell engulfed the entirety of compartment 11, sweeping the interior like a storm.

It was a dazzlingly white flame.

The flames had the same color as the blizzard that softly swirled outside.

It swept away all the terrorists who had not yet been able to evacuate or respond.

* * *

“Is it over?”

I murmured as I watched the flame spell gradually disappear.

They had been focused on thinking that I had run away with compartment 12.

I’m sure they were. If I dug a trap, stalled for time, and disconnected the compartment in the meantime, anyone would think so.

But it was also a trap.

At first, I had run away, pretending to stall by making a surprise attack.

My escape was also nothing more than a trick to deceive them in the end.

It was also helpful that they were properly angry.

Thanks to that, I was able to control their movements and gather them in one place for an ambush.

'It looks like there are still some bastards left in the lead compartment, but I've dealt with all the wizards, so it doesn't matter.'

I was thinking so, but something rose from the rubble.

"So you've managed to survive."

"You damned..."

It was the wizards' leader who got up. At the last moment, he had saved his life by spreading a barrier and holding on behind it.

But that was all.

His physical condition was horrible enough, so he was only just clinging to life.

He had blocked the attack, but maybe he couldn't completely block all of it, so his face was half-melted, and his whole body was burned. Even one of his arms was missing.

Even just breathing seemed painful to him, so I decided to leave him alone because I thought he wouldn't be able to endure it for long anyway.

"Why on earth did you kill them? Don't you feel sorry for our fellow compatriots who work for the world?"

"What?"

I was wondering what he was talking about, so I thought it was a new kind of bullshit.

When I closed my mouth in confusion, he glared at me with an angry stare.

"Don't you feel sorry for the people who died by your hands?"

"I originally thought you were crazy, but you're even crazier than I thought."

"What did you say?"

"You're the ones who raided the train and killed all the passengers, so what are you

talking about?"

That was why I was dumbfounded.

Those guys had attacked the train and killed any passenger they had seen.

He was treating me like a bad guy because his colleagues were dead, so I was honestly just annoyed.

"They were already cheap, so they deserved to die!"

"Wasn't it you who tried to kill me in the first place? We already decided to kill each other, so why are you talking about what's wrong with me now?"

"That... that's..."

"If they couldn't kill me, they should die."

"You... Who the hell are you?"

He gave up his argument and asked me about my identity.

But I couldn't answer that.

Because beyond him, I saw countless shadows flying toward us from the outside.

Claaaang

A white flash of light sparkled through the widely opened back door and split the wizard in half.

Thud!

A solid line was drawn from the top of his head to his groin, and as soon as the white shadow jumped over the wizard and landed on the ground, his body split apart and collapsed to both sides.

Blood did not flow out of the body because the separated sides were frozen with white ice.

Beyond the fallen body was the image of a female warrior with a waving white cape.

“Are you alright?”

When the woman looked back at me and asked me in a concerned tone, I answered with a nod.

The pattern on her shoulder plate was the shape of a pure white eagle.

It was a sign of the Frontier Knight Guards, who were in charge of protecting the empire.

“I hope you can feel at ease now. The Frontier Guards have arrived.”

CHAPTER 5

COLD STEEL

I had clearly seen it.

The sight of knights in white armor running through the snowfield and jumping onto the train one by one...

It was a movement beyond a human being's capability.

They were strong enough to catch up with running horses using their two legs and could break rocks with their strength.

That's a knight for you.

They were the knights in charge of the steepest parts of the Exileon Empire.

"Aaaaaaah!"

"It's the Frontier Guards of the Empire! Everyone, run away!"

"Help me!"

Terrorist screams rang out everywhere.

If the Frontier Guards, which consisted of elite members, stepped up, the results were obvious without even seeing the conclusion.

It took less than a minute to end after the Frontier Guards stepped up.

That's how the train raid ended.

* * *

'Is it over?'

—Knights of the Cold Steel under the Frontier Guards.

The name alone sounded like nothing, but each individual was a considerably competent knight, as it was made up of people operating in the rugged and cold Arette mountain range.

I went back to cabin number 403, still looking fine.

I plopped down on the seat I had sat on before the raid.

The inside of the train was filled with gashes and soot everywhere as if to prove the fierce fight it had gone through.

It had become like that because a defensive magic circle was engraved on it, but if it had been an ordinary train, it would have already derailed and fallen below that cliff.

“The robbers have all been suppressed, so please feel at ease, everyone. The train will arrive soon, so please wait a little longer.”

The Knights were seen walking around the inside of the train to calm the survivors.

In fact, even if they were survivors, they were all those who were in the first class cabin, protected in the safest place.

It was hard to find survivors in other cabins.

No, it was more accurate to say that everyone else had been annihilated.

It was a pity, even considering the small number of people on the train.

‘But I’m glad we got rid of all the terrorists.’

The Knights had killed all those bastards who had attacked the train.

It was a very futile result after bringing a large number of wizards.

‘Ah, I’m the one who killed the wizards.’

It was not the time for me to worry about it.

The train was arriving at its destination soon.

As we passed through the mountain range full of white snow, fresh plants and trees began to be seen here and there.

The sheer ice mountain range disappeared and it was replaced with a wide plain.

And beyond the horizon, I could see Leathevelk, one of the metropolitan cities in the Exileon Empire.

'It's big.'

Even though it was still far away, the majesty of the city was so magnificent that anyone could see it at a glance.

Tower-like buildings soared high into the sky, factory chimneys spewed out endless white smoke, and big flying boats paddled among the clouds colored by the sunlight.

On the riverside throughout the city, there were many mechanical boats composed of clockwork and brass, and steamboats came and went quickly in between.

It was the result of magical engineering, made possible by combining advanced mechanical engineering with magic.

The civilization had achieved an age of technology akin to what was often called "SteamPunk."

'It's not quite surprising now.'

Still, the strange feeling created by the culture shock caused by the memory of my past life could not be erased, no matter how hard I tried.

I was quite surprised to find that I was born as a baby in this world after dying in an accident in my previous life.

That was already 27 years ago.

The years had seemed to pass by quickly.

This world was a unique world in the age of what was commonly called the Victorian

and Belle Époque eras, with the addition of magic, non-human races, and monsters.

It would be better if I had arrived in the world of one of the games that I had used to play, or one of the novels that I liked... This was a different world that didn't even exist in my memory—it had no connection to anything I knew.

“Are you alright?”

As I was sitting still in my seat and staring at my approaching destination, someone talked to me.

When I turned my head, I noticed the neat black hair at the entrance of the half-destroyed cabin.

Was it the Knight lady who had saved me?

She was looking at me with a worried look.

“You might have been hurt by the terrorists a while ago...”

I shook my head right away.

“No, thanks to the help of the Knights, I'm fine. I just had a little something to think about.”

“Ah, I'm glad to hear that.”

Her look when she smiled as she stroked her chest with relief was reminiscent of blooming roses.

Now that I think of it, she was quite a beauty. She had porcelain skin and white armor without blemishes, and her contrasting black hair further highlighted her strong image.

She was a good person with no harsh personality.

If she wasn't like that, there was no way she would have come and stayed with me just because she was worried about me.

She seemed to have competence, as she had become a member of the Knights of Cold

Steel, and since she looked young, that meant she had the talent.

I was thinking that she lived in a different world than me.

“My name is Veronica DeVille. What about you?”

DeVille...

I'd heard of the name before—it was said that DeVille was a prestigious family that produced many famous Knights in the Empire.

“I...”

Chooo choooo——!!!

The moment I wanted to say my name, the train blew its horn to announce its arrival.

I naturally closed my mouth, and Veronica turned her head as she looked out the window.

“Oh, we've finally arrived at Leathevelk.”

The train slowed down and came to a complete stop at the train station.

The train station over the window was crowded with people.

Apparently, they had come to see the train after hearing that it had been attacked. They looked at the appearance of the partially destroyed train and chatted among themselves.

The police stepped up and built walls to keep people away, and reporters were seen trying to reach the gap and get a scoop somehow.

Just as expected of a big city, Leathevelk was crowded from the beginning.

“There are a lot of people, right? I think the news has already spread.”

“It doesn't matter.”

It was none of my business anyway.

My sadness was only that the train, which was supposed to be heading to the capital, had to stop at Leathevelk due to an unprecedented attack.

However, there was no way to get a refund for the ticket I had already paid for, so I had to get off there for the time being.

Creeaak.

At that moment, the door opened roughly, and police in uniform rushed in.

‘What’s going on all of a sudden?’

“Dear passengers, please wait in your seats and do not leave. We have something to check.”

“What’s going on?” Veronica asked.

“Who are you?” One of the officers asked her.

“My name is Veronica of the Knights of Cold Steel. I’d like to ask you what on earth is happening.”

“Oh, so you were a Knight of Cold Steel. It’s a pleasure meeting you. I’m Officer Remlus from the Leathevelk Metropolitan Police Department.”

“Yes, Officer Remlus. I’m glad to see you. So what’s going on?”

“I heard there was a train raid on the border of the Arette Mountains before the train arrived.”

“Yes, that’s right. We took care of all the raiders.”

“Thanks to the hard work of the Knights of Cold Steel, we received reports that all the bandits who attacked the train had been repelled, but there’s something unclear about it.”

Something unclear?

The words made me nervous. The situation was flowing strangely.

* * *

When I thought of it... there was something that had been bothering me.

“Although there was a wizard among the attackers, a magically protected Magic Engineering train should not have allowed an attack so easily.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

“It’s clear that this attack was done by someone not just from the outside, but by someone from the inside as well.”

“It’s...”

Veronica widened her eyes in surprise.

But then she nodded and agreed to the policeman’s words.

Such an assumption did not have any flaw in the first place.

I’d actually encountered a guy who had disguised himself as a train employee and those who’d removed the magic protections from the inside.

Because of them, the terrorists could easily enter the train, and passengers who were on board died.

“I don’t know if you’re already identifying the corpses. I’m just trying to identify the survivors inside because there might be people who were involved with the terrorists. There is no need to worry. We’ll send back those who’ve been identified soon.”

“Ah, I see.”

Veronica smiled with relief and looked back at me.

Her smile was full of relief, but cold sweat was flowing hard behind my back instead.

“They’re going to check my identity? And in a situation where I’ve taken off my

camouflage mask?’

I touched my face calmly with my fingertips.

‘Yeah, I’m sure it’s not covered with a camouflage mask right now.’

‘I’m in trouble...!’

I had boarded that train as Gerrard, a wealthy merchant in his mid-40s.

Obviously, a person named Gerrard would be on the passenger list.

That was fine, but the problem was with my face.

How could anyone believe that my natural face without whiskers or wrinkles belonged to a man in his mid-40s?

‘...What should I do?’

I hadn’t participated in the attack, and I was just a passenger that had been unjustly caught in the events, but I couldn’t be confident that they’d believe me.

Gerrard was a fake identity to hide who I really was.

A fake identity was a felony in any country.

I would be lucky enough if I was just hanged, but if I was believed to have been involved in a suspected terrorist situation like that, it was likely that I’d be severely tortured.

I wouldn’t be falsifying my identity in the first place if I was a normal person.

‘What should I do? Do I have to run away like this?’

‘There’s no way running away is possible.’

There were Knights of Cold Steel on the train, and there were even soldiers from the Empire outside the train in case of any contingency.

The moment I tried to escape from there, my neck would fly away without even

being able to endure for a minute.

Running away was simply the worst choice. However, if I stayed still, they would be able to find out my real identity.

I tried hard not to show my anxiety.

Meanwhile, the police who brought the passengers' list documents handed over the papers.

They were trying to check the people on the train one by one.

"What room were you in?" He asked me.

"...Room 403. Here's my ticket."

I calmly took the train ticket out of my inner pocket and showed it to the policeman.

He flipped through the papers as soon as he found out that the ticket was not fake.

"Let's see... number 403. Ah. Here it is. Two passengers stayed in this cabin. Ludger Chelysie, a man in his mid-20s, and Gerrard, a man in his 40s."

Then he raised his head and looked at me stealthily.

It seemed like he was about to ask why I was alone when there were supposed to be two of us.

"What happened to the other one?"

"...He was swept away by the explosion that took place during the attack. He fell down the distant cliff in the Arette Mountains."

They wouldn't even be able to find his body since he had fallen down the cliff of that horrifying mountain range.

My words made the police show a more suspicious expression.

I clenched my fist, and I desperately held my poker face.

'I'll get caught. I'll get caught if it keeps on going like this.'

But even so, I couldn't think of a proper way to get out of that situation.

There were a lot of police and soldiers outside. The police blockade was very strong.

'Running away? It's impossible in the first place.'

And the other problem was Veronica, the woman who was flapping her white cape in front of me.

She was the woman who had cut the top of the terrorist's head in half just moments before.

She had no hesitation in killing people.

She was treating me with a smile for the time being, but the moment it turned out that I was shady, she would be the first one to draw her sword.

Considering her ability to join the Knights of Cold Steel at a young age, she must have been even more intimidating than the cops outside the train.

It was when all kinds of thoughts swirled inside my head...

Veronica, who was watching the situation idly, stood by my side.

"Wait a minute. He's not a suspect in the first place."

"Pardon?"

"He was fighting against the terrorists before the Knights of Cold Steel arrived. I saw it with my own eyes."

"He fought them?" The policeman mumbled in disbelief and scrutinized the list again.

Then he nodded as if he was convinced of something and looked back at me with an expression that changed in an instant.

"So Ludger Chelysie is alive, and Gerrard was swept away by the explosion."

...Oh?

'No, wait a minute. What did he just say?'

The officer's expression, who was checking the list in more detail, was colored with astonishment.

"Oh? The newly appointed professor at the Sören Academy?!"

"What? He's a Sören professor? Are you sure?"

Veronica opened her eyes wide at Officer Remlus's shout.

Looking at the reaction of those two as though it was a scene in a comedy show, I realized what was happening.

It was something unbelievable, but... They believed that I was Ludger.

It was sudden, but I made a quick decision.

I immediately regained my composure and nodded.

"Yes, that's right."

As I replied, I picked up the suitcase that Ludger had dropped before he died.

I was glad that I had kept it just in case.

"I'm Ludger Chelysie."

CHAPTER 6

FALSE IDENTITY (1)

Photography had not yet been popularized in this world.

Most photos only existed in black and white, and even then, the quality was not very good, so it was impossible to compare them in detail.

When comparing people, it was inevitable that identification was only based on clothes, age, and overall physique.

It was no wonder they were mistaken.

'I'm sorry, Mr. Ludger.'

I felt sorry for the dead, but that didn't mean I should also die, right?

Living people should live.

And Ludger's identity was very useful in escaping from that situation.

"Oh my God, you're the new professor at Sören Academy. As expected, the magic I saw back then..."

Veronica's tone toward me changed as soon as the name Sören was mentioned.

She muttered something to herself, too.

'I see. Did she see me when I was using magic?'

Maybe that had earned her trust all the more.

Even the officer who had half-suspected me when he was interrogating me immediately bowed to me.

"I'm... I'm sorry for the trouble! Please forgive me for being rude because of the

situation.”

“That’s all right.”

While saying that, I thought to myself that the name Sören was really great indeed.

The only magic academy that existed in the Empire.

Even when considering the whole continent, the best Academy was Sören.

Sören’s name was never to be taken for granted, and it was natural to be surprised to hear that I was a professor who taught the students there.

“I can’t believe he’s a Sören professor.”

“At such a young age, he’s awesome.”

The other guards and police also whispered among themselves.

I decided to be more brazen about it since the situation had turned out like that anyway.

At that moment, I was becoming Ludger Chelysie.

“We... we’ll accompany you on the way out.”

“It’s all right.”

“No, you’re the one who’s going to nurture the future of the Empire, so how can we just let you go? You wasted your time because of us.”

“It’s alright, though?”

“It’s because we feel sorry.”

‘No, it’s uncomfortable for me to move around with all of you!’

I couldn’t shout it out loud, so I agreed with a cold expression.

“Miss Veronica, I’ll be on my way. It was a short meeting, but it was nice to meet you.”

I sent my farewell to Veronica for the last time before I left. We had only met briefly, but I didn't think it was a bad fate.

Maybe she felt the same way, as she smiled and waved at me.

"Yes, Mr. Ludger! Let's meet again if fate brings us together once more!"

"Well then..."

'I'm sorry, but I don't think we'll see each other again.'

I was safely guided by the guards through the swarming crowd to the train station's exit.

The exit was also crowded with people, perhaps because it was a train station where a lot of people came and went.

I opened my mouth when I thought that it was the right time.

"I've come this far, so it's enough. I'll move on my own from here. I'll feel burdened if you do anything more than this."

"Oh, yes. Understood. Please be careful on your way!"

The guard saluted me and disappeared back into the station.

As I sent a farewell to them with a light nod, I let out a sigh using all the strength in my shoulders.

I had almost gotten into trouble.

I was glad that they misunderstood me for a moment, otherwise I would have been caught with a fake identity and accused of being an accomplice in terrorism.

But I was sure that it'd be okay now that I had passed the critical situation.

"Are you Mr. Ludger Chelysie?"

At that moment, I felt my blood freezing at the voice right behind my back.

I had not felt a presence from the voice's owner.

When I turned my head slowly and looked behind, an old gentleman in a rather modest posture was looking at me.

"Yes, that's right. Who are you?" I answered smoothly as I was calming my surprised heart.

"Greetings. My name is Wilford, and I'm an employee of Sören Academy. I'm here to meet Mr. Ludger."

"...To meet me, you said?"

"Yes, I heard that the train was attacked. I came here in a hurry just in case something happened, but I'm glad you look alright."

Wilford said so and opened the door to the wagon he had brought along.

"Now, please get in. I'll accompany you to Sören."

"..."

I rolled my eyes.

'Can I say that he got the wrong person here?'

I didn't know how long that old man named Wilford was there, but since he was convinced that I was Ludger, he must have seen me part ways with the officer.

It was practically impossible to say I was not Ludger and refuse his offer there.

Most of all, when he first appeared, I couldn't feel any presence, he was a keen elderly man who had come out subtly after hiding well.

That man...

He was absolutely not a normal employee.

"...Sure."

I had no other choice but to get into the wagon.

* * *

Veronica, the Vice-Captain of the Knights of Cold Steel, recalled Ludger, who had just left the train.

‘Ludger Chelysie.’

From the first time she saw him, she thought he was an extraordinary person.

Because she had seen it...

His appearance when he had swept away the terrorists with a white flame.

Other Knights might not have been able to see it well because they were far away, but she had certainly seen it with her own eyes, and she had confidence that her eyes were better than her Captain’s.

Even though his opponents were also wizards like him...

Ludger had knocked such men down without a single scratch or wound.

The man’s behavior was natural, as if it was something obvious.

Even when she had brutally killed the terrorist with her own hands, Ludger’s face had showed not the slightest bit of change,

It wasn’t the reaction of a man who was frozen in fear.

Ludger... that man had observed the whole situation with a cool head.

‘He wasn’t an ordinary person.’

A simple-looking yet luxurious black frock coat with a neat suit and golden thread embroidered over it...

He had a silent impression and a serious look in his eyes.

His slightly pulled back long hair, tied in at the back of his neck...

When she had looked at him closely, he was a charming young man with a sharp impression.

What stimulated her concerns the most was the vigor that subtly radiated from Ludger.

‘At first, I thought he was a royal family member who had hidden his identity.’

The grace that had flowed subtly from Ludger was similar to what Veronica felt when she was confronted with someone who had a noble status in the imperial family.

So when she heard that Ludger was a newly appointed professor at Sören Academy, she was convinced that he could do that.

No, rather than that, she even thought that the reputable name of Sören was not enough to be a medal for such a man.

No one is surprised that fish swim well and birds fly across the blue sky—it was the same for Ludger to hold a position in Sören.

It was so obvious that she was convinced of it right away.

Her intense déjà vu became a certainty when she heard the name.

‘Ludger Chelysie. She had heard of him. A young wizard who had recently gained a reputation. He had achieved the fourth rank at the youngest age, submitted 12 theses to the magic tower, and even redefined one of its challenges, the Langester formula.’

In addition, it was said that he had been appointed as an officer in the military, and he had even made a great contribution in a battle by hunting Cryptid.

‘He said he’s going to be appointed as Sören’s professor this time, right?’

If so, she was curious.

It just so happened that her younger sibling attended Sören.

If she had a chance later, she should ask her younger sibling...

'How does he teach his class?'

* * *

My plan to run away as soon as I left the train station was disrupted from the start.

I hadn't expected the Academy to send someone to pick me up.

I thought it was out of line, but it was understandable when it came to Sören Academy.

Any professor who was going to the best academy in the Empire would have special treatment wherever they went.

I'm sure Sören was worried because such a high-level employee was caught up in the terrorist attack.

I understood why they would send a person to serve me in a convenient manner.

'This is a big problem.'

I looked inside the wagon.

There were fluffy red chairs with fancy patterns around them. It was a wagon that I could only think of as luxurious, no matter how I looked at it. Even with how fast it moved, it only shook slightly.

The thing pulling the black wagon was a steamy, horse-shaped golem.

I was so amazed to see the results of the latest magic engineering, made by a mixture of machine and magic.

Most of all, the old gentleman, Wilford, who was driving the wagon, was also quite special.

It was because I didn't feel any sense of presence until he had gotten close to me. Besides, he was dressed in neat attire and had a sturdy body that his clothes couldn't conceal.

'One of the probabilities is that he was once a knight.'

Knights didn't decline just because they got older. On the contrary, an old knight had to be more vigilant.

They had superhuman bodies and years of experience on top of that.

It was crazy to run away thoughtlessly in that kind of situation.

'If I try to leave here with an excuse, he'll obviously be suspicious. I can't sneak away, and even if I succeed in running away, I'd be chased as soon as they received a report.'

Various other problems were also scattered in my mind.

First of all, it was about the identity of Gerrard that I had used previously.

It was necessary to create a new identity because that fake identity was practically killed and done with, and it was obvious that the process would cost a lot of money and time.

What I needed was not a formal route but a criminal underworld. I would also have to gather information in the backstreets of a city I was visiting for the first time and find a place to stay until I created a new identity.

Having lost my once existing identity, I was no better than an illegal immigrant.

Having no identity was no different from having no civil rights. In other words, no one would recognize me even if I was dragged somewhere and died without anyone knowing.

After considering all those possibilities, I decided to give up running away for the moment.

I had to save myself first and foremost.

'Let's not do anything that will make them suspicious for now.'

'First, let's just go to Sören Academy. It wouldn't hurt to think about what to do afterwards from there.'

Clip-clop. Clip-clop.

When the fast-running wagon slowed down, I felt that I had finally arrived at Sören Academy.

As if to prove my assumption, the front window of the wagon swung open to the side, then Wilford spoke to me.

“Mr. Ludger, we’ve arrived.”

Wilford’s words made me stare at the view outside the window.

The first thing I saw was a magnificent and huge gate and beyond that was a vast expanse of land.

The road where the wagon traveled was neatly and nicely paved, and green trees were evenly planted on the left and right, adding sophisticated beauty.

Sören Academy’s buildings, which were standing under the dazzling sunlight, shone brightly.

‘That’s the main building, that’s the villa, that’s the park, and that’s the auditorium, I think?’

Apart from the large scale of each building, I couldn’t even guess exactly how vast the land was.

‘Isn’t this larger than a decently sized city?’

The guard who was guarding the main gate opened the door immediately and gave me a light bow.

As I passed through the main gate, I could see how much magic power existed nearby.

—How many layers of magic circles were stacking up to the point that their original shape couldn’t be seen anymore.

Crazy.

There wouldn’t be a case of a sturdy bastard breaking in through the front door, but if there was, they would become dust and disappear in a second.

Clip-clop. Clip-clop.

The place where the steel horse that was leading the wagon stopped was a building that existed farther inside from the main building.

It was a majestic castle that looked as if it was a tall crown.

“This is the place. Let’s disembark.”

Wilford stopped me when I tried to grab my luggage.

“We’ll be back anyway, so you don’t have to carry your luggage.”

“...Alright.”

After getting out of the carriage, I followed Wilford through the fountain and past the beautiful stone statues into the building.

The interior was spectacular.

The light that was shining from the window spread gently as it was reflected far into the building interior, creating a cozy color and gently warming up the skin.

From somewhere unseen, a fragrant smell stimulated my nose, and I could hear sounds of birds chirping—it felt as if I was dreaming.

The interior was a sophisticated yet neat design that looked like a piece of beautiful architecture from medieval Europe.

If the neighboring city of Leathevelk had a steamy steam-punk atmosphere, the Academy was much more fantasy-oriented.

-Hahaha.

-Kid, don’t do that.

As I walked up the stairs following Wilford, employees and students in academy uniforms passed by me.

Every time that happened, I could hear whispers from behind my back.

'Don't tell me they're gossiping about me because I look like a country bumpkin.'

I felt bothered for some reason, so I occasionally tidied up my clothes or arranged my hair.

Before I knew it, I had arrived in front of a big elevator.

'I'm going to get on this?'

"This way."

I got on the elevator with Wilford. I had thought the building was tall enough when I saw it from the outside, but I was surprised once again to see that it had almost 30 floors.

I finally thought that it was really the scale of an Empire's academy.

When the elevator arrived at its destination, the door opened, and there was a long, red-carpeted corridor with a wooden door at its end.

"The principal is waiting for you. I'll be staying here."

"Thank you for your guidance."

"There's no need to mention it. It's my job."

I crossed the corridor and stood in front of the door of the principal's office.

As soon as I raised my hand and was about to knock on the door, a drowsy and attractive voice could be heard from the inside.

"Come on in."

"..."

I opened the door and went inside.

"Nice to meet you."

The woman who was sitting at the desk with her back to the window greeted me.

She was the principal of Sören Academy.

Considering that she could only sit there if she was at least a 6th rank Lexure among the existing eight ranks, she was unquestionably a first-class wizard.

Looking at her appearance, she looked like she was in her mid-20s.

Maybe she had been organizing some documents, as she loudly put down the fountain pen that she held in her right hand and stared at me.

Her white hair that flowed down like a curtain shone even more brightly with the light from the window behind her back.

She had two-tone hair, the outside of her hair was white, and the inside of her hair was a subtle pink.

‘What is it?’

The moment her golden eyes stared at me, I felt an indescribable feeling.

I felt the beauty of her figure in the depths of my soul.

I tried to ignore the strange sensation and spoke in a firm voice.

“I’m Ludger Chelysie. I’m here because you summoned me.”

‘For now, I’m Ludger Chelysie.’

CHAPTER 7

FALSE IDENTITY (2)

The outside of her hair was white; the inside of her hair was a light pink color that resembled cherry blossoms. She was a beauty with peculiar two-toned hair.

The principal accepted my greeting with a bright smile.

“Yes, it’s nice to meet you, Mr. Ludger. Moreover, are you feeling alright? I heard you were involved in a terrorist incident.”

“It’s nothing much. I was helped by the Knights of Cold Steel at a dangerous moment.”

“Oh my, that’s a relief. I was pretty panicked, too. It’s been a long time since we’ve chosen a new teacher, so I was worried that you got hurt. If that happened, we wouldn’t be able to save our face, right?”

Seeing that she openly talked about saving her face, she certainly didn’t seem to have an ordinary personality.

Well, indeed. Anyone who had climbed up to a high position was bound to be twisted somewhere.

—Even more so when they were a wizard.

My teacher was like that as well. The same went for the woman in front of me.

It didn’t surprise me much.

“You’re not feeling sick anywhere by any chance, are you?”

Looking at the principal staring at me with a subtle smile, I wondered if she had noticed something odd about me.

‘Come to think of it, has the principal met Ludger before? Then wouldn’t she notice

that he changed?’

Her voice dragged me back as anxious thoughts ran through my mind.

“I’ve only seen you through paper; it’s my first time seeing you in person. You’re pretty tall and decent, I see.”

Fortunately, it seemed to be the first actual meeting between Ludger and the principal.

“Thank you for your compliment, even if it’s just empty words,” I replied with an inward sigh of relief.

“No, they’re not empty words. I think the students will show a passionate reaction when the semester starts, right? You are such a handsome man.”

“I’m flattered.”

“Well, take this for now.”

The principal held out a piece of paper to me.

“We already informed you in advance, but it will be better for you to confirm the contract thoroughly. The contract is for two years. The salary is written there. Keep in mind that the accommodation is provided.”

I accepted the contract and looked through the contents carefully.

I didn’t think much of the contract because I was planning to quit quickly and go out as soon as my backup identity came out anyway.

—Until I read what was written inside.

‘Oh, what? Wait a minute.’

What was written in the contract was so surprising that it even made me widen my eyes in surprise.

‘A month’s salary is 30 coins of imperial gold?’

An imperial gold coin is equal to one million denars, the continent's common currency.

In other words, 30 imperial gold coins meant 30 million denars, and it was nearly 300 million won(\$233,814) in terms of the earth's currency where I lived.

It was just a month's salary.

The monthly salary was 300 million won(\$233,814). At that point, I had to wonder if I actually had to sell off my organs, but it was Sören Academy.

It was the best magic academy in the empire.

Even on the earth where I lived, the annual salary of an experienced professor at a Gangnam university was up to 10 billion won(\$7,790,559).

It was quite possible.

'And there's a bonus for each semester and a bonus at the end of every year? What's more, I can even raise my salary based on my performance, you said? If the students' evaluation of their teacher is good, it will be raised, you said?'

I could take a bonus without much trouble, and if so, the annual salary would be more than 500 million denars.

My contract period was two years, so if I added it up, it was more than 1 billion denars.

With that money, I could live quite well off anywhere. I could even do a side job with their permission.

Gulp.

I swallowed without realizing it.

It was amazing that the salary was so much, but the amount of support funds for when the class was starting was huge. There was also the fact that more funds might be disbursed depending on the teacher's evaluation.

In addition, I would have a separate house and eat here, so I didn't have to spend

money unless for some special occasions.

‘If I last here for two years, I’ll get one billion denars. In terms of earth currency, it’s worth 10 billion won, and even that’s just the minimum wage. If I do well, I can raise my salary and extend it after the contract is over.’

It was a condition that could only be considered crazy.

‘This is the best academy in the empire, they said?’

‘What on earth is the life I’ve lived so far...?’

“What do you think? Is it alright?”

“...This is not bad.”

‘It’s not only a ‘not bad’ level. This is amazing. And hella amazing at that.’

I took a deep breath and read the contract again.

As expected, it wasn’t a dream. It was like hitting a whole jackpot unexpectedly.

But there was a fundamental problem...

‘It’s true that Sören is great enough to give this amount of money, but at the same time, I have a lot of burden as a Sören teacher.’

‘Will I be able to endure this position?’

‘Will I be able to work properly as a teacher here, a place where a breadth of all kinds of geniuses exists?’

‘No way. It would be a miracle if my lowly self wasn’t revealed in a day.’

Still, I was confident in babbling and bluffing. I had been growing up in an environment where I could die if I didn’t do that.

I analyzed the situation quickly.

‘It’s alluring, just looking at the annual salary, but it’s also quite burdensome. But

because I'm already here, I can't say no. Ludger was already supposed to become a teacher here, and I became Ludger Chelysie.'

How could I say no in that situation?

My appointment as a teacher had already been confirmed, so I couldn't suddenly say that I wouldn't do it. Then, of course, they'd be suspicious.

In fact, the answer I had to give was already determined.

'Then I have no choice but to do it.'

I was then determined to utilize the identity of Ludger Cheliysie.

I only had to stay there for two years with my eyes closed.

'Yes, in two years, I can end this life. Isn't it better than the army because they pay me a lot of money, and I am free to move?'

It made me feel at ease to think about that.

I handed the contract to the principal and opened my mouth.

Deceiving, bluffing, and finding the right atmosphere.

—That's my specialty.

"I've checked everything in the contract details."

"Good, then let's take good care of each other from now on, Mr. Ludger."

"Yes, I look forward to your kind cooperation, sir."

I shook hands with the principal who smiled at me.

It was a secret that I was sweating hard to keep my poker face because I thought the corners of my mouth would be twisted.

* * *

After meeting with the principal, I followed Mr. Wilford, who was waiting outside, to my assigned accommodation.

Should I say that it was befitting of Sören Academy all the way?

Even the buildings dedicated to teachers on the land looked expensive.

I couldn't believe that my house was a two-story house that was similar to what I had seen in fairy tales.

"We still have three weeks until the semester starts, so you can rest until then."

Mr. Wilford disappeared into his wagon after he said so.

Even when he left, he was a man who did not forget his disciplined attitude, so he could be said to be an example of a gentleman.

'Shall I go?'

I went into the house with a suitcase.

* * *

I could feel it when I saw it from the outside, but it felt very different when I went inside. The furniture was decorated with all sorts of things, and there was not a single speck of dust—as it seemed to have been maintained constantly.

When I checked the bathroom just in case, it was amazing.

The bathroom, which was covered with white tiles, looked like it wouldn't be out of the norm for aristocrats to use. Hot water came out well, and there was even a bathtub where I could take a bubble bath.

It was understandable that this was a world in which the Magical Revolution took place.

Thud.

After checking every corner of the house, I dropped down as I lay on a soft sofa.

'From now on, I'm an academy teacher... right?'

A lot of things happened that day.

I was caught up in terrorism unintentionally, misunderstood as someone else, and even happened to come to Sören academy to work as a teacher.

I was amazed at how things were turning out, but since I'd gone that far, I couldn't even run away.

'If I suddenly disappear now, they're going to ask around about Ludger, and since my real face has been seen, there won't be any place for me in the empire.'

It was potentially fatal that my real face had been sold, not my face in disguise.

In the end, I had no choice but to act as Ludger Chelysie.

At that moment—

“Whew. This is tough.”

—It had already been 27 years since I came to this world.

I was reincarnated in this world with no special abilities and just the memories of my past life.

However, my parents' existence in my life after reincarnating was so dramatic that I had to survive on my own.

At the same time, it was a strange life in which I had overcome death several times by being embroiled in all kinds of incidents.

For me, that situation was just confusing.

I happened to become an academy teacher.

And it was also in Sören Academy, the best in the Empire.

I wonder if I could simply call it as 'it just happened'.

‘This is actually a fake job.’

I didn’t even do it on purpose, but I had gotten a fake job.

But I couldn’t quit either.

It was the so-called ‘riding the tiger’.

The moment I got off, I would be eaten by the tiger. That was the situation I found myself in.

It was a fight between me—who might fall down and be eaten by the tiger—and the tiger—who might get tired of me first.

‘Yes, two years. I just have to endure it for two years. That’s enough.’

I still needed a new identity anyway.

Ludger’s identity in that situation was very alluring.

Ludger Chelysie was a man who traveled to the empire far from his home; he wouldn’t run into anyone who knew him there.

Even so, I decided to find out more about Ludger, just in case.

I went up to the bedroom on the second floor with Ludger’s suitcase. When I entered the room, I shut the curtain by the window and looked inside the room carefully—it was to search for possible external surveillance.

‘There’s nothing in my way.’

I thought everything was fine, so as I was about to open the suitcase...

Clack.

“Hm?”

‘What’s this? The suitcase is locked.’

I checked the leather suitcase in detail. Looking closely, a fine magic circle was

imprinted on the metal lock.

‘This is... a security magic.’

It was not large in size, so I didn’t know that a magic circle with a high level of difficulty, which required detailed magic manipulation, would be engraved in such a place.

‘As expected of a teacher who’s assigned to Sören academy.’

Taking a step away from the suitcase, I wondered what to do with it.

I didn’t give up, but I was figuring out how to open it.

‘It would be convenient if I have reagents, but I’ve already sent away my former luggage in advance, so I’ll have to use another method.’

I picked a moderate towel and wet it immediately. After leaving the wet towel by my side, I took a stick and started a small fire at the tip of it.

—It was 「Pyro」 , a basic spellcasting of elementary magic.

It was only about the size of a lighter flame, but its heat was considerable.

I put the fire on the tip of the stick to the lock of the suitcase.

The hot heat began to heat the brass.

A few minutes later, as soon as the brass heated up and turned red, I pushed a wet towel onto the brass.

Sshhh.

The heated metal cooled quickly with the sound of water evaporating. Soon after, the lock was distorted, and the magic circle engraved on it was also twisted.

Of course, that did not eliminate the effect of the magic circle.

Magic isn’t that easy.

'But it's the moment when I can make a gap in a solid wall.'

Right then...

I didn't miss the short moment and shot my mana sharply through the center of the magic circle.

It was an important part of the magic circle. What I was doing could be called 'hacking'.

Whoosh!

'I did it.'

When I broke it, the effect of the magic circle disappeared.

At the same time, the lock opened with a click.

'It's a piece of cake to open this.'

It was not uncommon for someone to imprint a magic circle or barrier on suitcases.

Most wizards are very sensitive to security, so security magic is close to basic knowledge.

If they couldn't perform it, they'd even ask their acquaintance or company to professionally imprint the magic circle for them.

If you tried to forcibly remove the security magic in such a case, a spell would be invoked to get rid of the contents.

It was the manifestation of an extreme ideology that's a characteristic of wizards that they'd get rid of their items before revealing them to someone else.

However, in order to safely lift the security magic, it's necessary to analyze how the spell was implemented. Of course, the process took a very long time, and I couldn't afford it because I was in a hurry.

So I chose to do that method.

It was a method that was close to a cheating trick that didn't necessarily require me to analyze the spell.

'It's enough to know where the magic is carved and what it's made of.'

Usually, strong metal was the mainstream material where the magic circles are carved. No one can engrave magic circles all over their leather bag.

Leather was very inefficient as a medium for transmitting magic power.

It was the same for clothes and papers. Except for parchment made by peeling the bark of the magic wood, it was impossible to engrave magic circles or barriers on clothes or papers unless you were at least an archmage with 6th rank or higher.

On the contrary, it was metal that has good conductivity of magic power.

The most popular metals for it are iron and brass; the materials that were better than those were silver, gold, and platinum.

The best material was jewelry made from gemstones, but the materials themselves are so expensive that they are not used unless you are from high-ranking nobles.

Obviously, low-priced iron or brass was the most commonly used, and I was fully familiar with the methods of invading the two materials.

It was a method of heating and expanding the metal engraved with the magic circle and then quickly cooling it with cold water to shrink it again.

The magic circle carved on the metal would deviate and twist during the expansion and contraction of the metal.

Even after the deviation, the magic circle would recover automatically as though it wasn't a big problem.

But the gap that existed at that moment was a very fatal flaw.

At that moment, I sharply shot my mana, destroying and canceling the magic circle's core technique.

'I'm glad it worked.'

Well, it's not a commonly known method; it was just a trick made by applying scientific knowledge appropriately.

Most wizards were people who are hung up on history and tradition, so they often looked down on science.

As a result, it was common for them not to prepare for such a method, and that was what I wanted.

'If he was a real nut, he would have carried an iron suitcase covered in magic circles.'

Fortunately, Ludger Chelysie didn't go that far.

I opened the suitcase and checked its contents.

'Hmm, this is...'

CHAPTER 8

FALSE IDENTITY (3)

There was nothing surprising inside Ludger's suitcase.

—Just some clothes and books.

Other than that, there were also some documents and miscellaneous items.

'I thought there would be something greater.'

I put the textbooks, magic books, and theses together as one, then put them aside, and I sorted away the clothes appropriately.

In addition to magic books, there were many other books—such as popular novels and essays by famous scientists.

He really read all sorts of things.

Other items were some letters, identification cards, and personal belongings.

Even though they were his belongings, there was only a small pipe to be used as a portable pocket watch or magic medium and a wallet containing money.

I checked his identification card and documents one by one.

'Ludger Chelysie. A man from a fallen aristocracy of the Northern continent's small kingdom of Queoden. He doesn't have any siblings, and his parents are both dead.'

'It's not bad.'

Although he was a fallen aristocrat, he would not be greatly insulted anywhere because he had a nominally aristocratic title, and there was no one to recognize him because he had no family.

'Let's see... it's an extremely fancy record. He submitted 12 theses to the magic

tower, and he was the youngest wizard who climbed to 4th rank? He even served as a military officer?’

‘As expected of a Sören teacher.’

I didn’t expect that he would have such a record at a young age.

‘Is he teaching magic casting and its following as a specialized subject? So the main subject is mana release and elemental attributes.’

Given that magic casting was a specialized subject, there was a high probability of me teaching actual combat in the subject.

I opened the letter and looked at its contents.

If there were any conversations with his acquaintances, I had to catch his small habits and learn them.

‘There’s not much in the letter.’

Letters that were believed to have been exchanged with his acquaintance only consisted of formal conversations such as his soon-to-be appointment at the academy, book recommendations, or what happened somewhere.

‘I don’t think there was anyone he was close to when he was serving in the military.’

‘Did he have the style of a nerd student?’

Given that there was little personal content, he didn’t seem to be that close to the person he exchanged letters with.

‘What’s left now is... ’

To go over the fundamental contents of the subject to teach to the students after the semester started and the information about how Sören Academy was and how it worked.

For the moment, it was necessary to travel around the land and learn the topography of Sören.

Gurgle gurgle.

As I was about to go outside right away, I had no choice but to pause at the loud sound from my stomach.

'Come to think of it... I haven't eaten anything since I got off the train today.'

'Let's start tomorrow.'

'I'm mentally exhausted because so many things happened today.'

'Let's eat first and rest well today.'

* * *

Two weeks passed after that.

In the meantime, I had been walking around every corner of Sören Academy to understand the geography of the place.

As I expected when I first saw it, the enormous land of Sören Academy was simply beyond my imagination.

'People didn't think highly of Sören for no reason.'

I sat on an outdoor bench in a quiet cafe and enjoyed the peaceful scenery.

I had finished checking the rough picture of it, so I was only thinking about the upcoming classes.

'Is it because it's almost time for the school to start? I see students more often.'

Students in Sören Academy's uniform were seen walking around. The uniform design looked cool for boys and pretty for girls.

It was said to be a uniform made by a prestigious designer in the Empire.

Perhaps because it was an academy that taught magic, some of the students flew on brooms or moved on strange mechanical dolls.

I thought it was a good time to see young people laughing and talking to each other.

Every day had been a fierce war since I came to this world, and such children live their blessed lives thanks to their natural talents and environment.

“Hmm.”

Two female students who passed by peeked at me and began to whisper among themselves.

Well, if I spotted someone I hadn't seen before school started, I'd be suspicious as well.

I took a sip of coffee while being unnecessarily self-conscious of my surroundings.

'I should go back to the accommodation after drinking it all and prepare for the orientation in a week.'

As soon as I was about to get up after drinking all the coffee that was left while thinking about it, a woman walked up to the table next to me and sat down naturally.

The moment I thought she was just a new customer, she spoke to me in a small voice that only I could hear.

“I'm glad you're safe. Why didn't you contact us for two weeks?”

“...?”

My instinctive intuition stopped me as my head was about to turn around unconsciously.

—*Tap.*

I naturally put the empty cup on the table.

“...”

'Is she talking to me?'

I looked around.

If I responded when she didn't even talk to me but to someone else, what could be more embarrassing than that?

But no matter how much I looked around, there were no other people in my surroundings—there was no sense of presence either.

The only people sitting at the outdoor table were the woman sitting next to me and me.

'It means she is talking to me. Or would it be more accurate to say that she talked to me?'

She continued speaking as I remained silent.

"I was worried that you encountered some troubles. The other members are also wondering what happened to Mr. First Order."

"..."

Members...

First Order...

Someone who was worried about me at the first meeting...

I couldn't know the details of the situation by that alone, but I could only be sure of one thing:

'I'm in a lot of trouble now.'

* * *

'What?'

I fiddled with the handle of the coffee cup in my hand.

I had just been drinking coffee while enjoying the atmosphere at the outdoor table of the cafe, but suddenly a strange woman had come up to me and talked to me.

Everything she said to me was unusual.

She spoke to me about members of something in a polite tone that regarded me highly.

A mentally ill person? No. She was being honest.

Then did she find the wrong person? No, she found the right one.

—She was there to see a man named Ludger Chelysie, not me.

As soon as I understood the situation, my mouth moved naturally, as if it was a well-polished gear.

“I had some things to check for a while.”

“Do you mean something in connection with the terrorist incident? It was just an accident. No one knew that the rebel forces would attack the train where Mr. First Order was in.”

“The other things as well. I need to find out the overall information about Sören.”

“Didn’t you receive any information in advance?”

“That’s not enough. There’s a big difference between what I only hear and what I actually see.”

“I... I see.”

The woman nodded her head as she was seemingly convinced.

‘Whatever.’

I let my mouth run its course.

“Then did you take care of your duty well?”

“Yes, of course. I’ve completed all the assassinations of the Academy’s key figures before I came in here—even though most of them were employees.”

‘What, assassinate the Academy’s key figures?’

I almost jerked for a moment, but I managed to hold it in.

“And in the meantime, a traitor was found in the organization, so I took care of it.”

‘What? Traitor? Taken care of?’

I swallowed without realizing it when she told me about a traitor.

“Disposal, huh. How did you do it?” I asked without showing my confusion.

“They pulled out their limbs and crammed them into their mouths. The rest of their torso was fed to wild dogs. I didn’t see it myself, but I heard it from other members. We can say that it’s the appropriate death for a traitor.”

“..”

...They were crazier than I thought.

However, my mind became calmer in that kind of situation.

As the surrounding air sank heavier, I could feel the woman sitting next to me shivering.

“I... I’m sorry. I should have seen it myself and reported it...!”

“Forget it. Why did you suddenly come to find me?”

“Th-that. They said Mr. First Order came here, and we haven’t heard from you in the last 15 days...”

“So you moved on your own at this important moment?”

I was analyzing the situation while I was talking.

She called me First Order, not Ludger.

Given that First was in front of the name, it was highly likely for him to hold a quite high position within the organization.

I trusted that and tried to bluff a little, and I guess that was the right answer.

“Hee, heek! I’m sorry!”

“Be quiet. Do you want the people around us to be suspicious?” I replied in a cold voice to the woman who was about to bow her head to me.

“Hmp. So, sorry...”

“Don’t even say sorry.”

“...”

“Yeah, it’s already time to check it out anyway. How many members are gathered now?”

“Pa-pardon?”

“How many of our members are here?”

“Ah!”

She looked around as much as she could and spoke with a low voice.

“Currently, 31 members of Third-Orders and seven members of Second-Orders have been successful in hiding here, and the other First Order came in first as planned and is already settled down.”

“Hmm, that’s enough.”

While nodding curtly, I sifted through the information I had gathered as much as I could.

‘I have noticed that there is one more person named First Order besides me and that there are almost 40 of them.’

‘Although they are not large in number, their ability must have been extraordinary, as they were able to plant this many people in Sören.’

‘Fortunately, this woman in front of me doesn’t even question my identity.’

Rather, she showed me fear and respect as well as the sight of amazement in the

meantime.

'As expected, Mr. First Order!' It seemed obvious that she was thinking so.

Looking at her like that, at least I could use something in order to gain something else.

"I see. I'm done checking, so I'll get up now."

"Oh! You can come to the designated place for our secret meeting later on."

'A meeting place? There was a place like that too?'

But there's no way I could ask a question like, 'Where is it?' right then.

While I was thinking about what to do with it, a good idea came to me.

"Come? Did someone like you just talk to me about coming or not?"

I deliberately lowered my voice and gave her a cold look, and I could see her face turning pale.

That bluff might have worked properly, as she shook her body like a baby squirrel and desperately made excuses.

"That... that's not it. I... I'm just..."

"I don't want to hear excuses. If you need a secret meeting in the future, I will be the one to decide. The same goes for the place and time. Do you understand?"

"U-understood."

"If there's anything you really need to tell me, I'll only allow it if I was called for by a First Order like me or higher than that."

"If... if it's higher, then is it from the Zero Order?"

'So there's a Zero Order.'

I had said it just in case, but I was right.

“Yeah, don’t bother me with trivial things other than what that person said. Do you understand? This is a warning.”

In other words: I’m telling you to behave well.

I said so and got up from my seat.

I was about to leave without looking back, but she called me from behind.

I stopped in my spot and turned my head slightly to stare at her.

“What?”

“That, that... How are you going to call us...?”

The moment I heard it, I realized something.

‘Come to think of it... I didn’t explain anything to her properly.’

‘But I can’t tell her something that I also don’t know right away.’

“...Do I have to say it myself?”

“Heek! N-no! I made a slip of the tongue.”

“I’ll let it slide this time.”

At the end of my sentence, I walked out of there in quick steps.

* * *

Thump thump thump!

Upon returning home, I hurried up to the bedroom on the second floor and took out the suitcase I had put in the closet.

After scattering the letters in Ludger’s suitcase on the bed one by one, I realized that my anxious imagination eventually became a reality.

“...Hah, damn it.”

The strange sense I felt while reading the letters...

Why did they have to exchange letters in such formal words to an acquaintance who had no family?

Why did a man with such a splendid record withdraw himself from his own private life to the point where it was close to mysophobia?

—All those questions were finally answered.

‘These weren’t normal letters in the first place.’

I scanned special sentences of some specific words that were written inside the letters. The strange sense that I felt instinctively was that there was a certain pattern to those sentences.

Right...

It was a ‘cipher’.

—Their own cipher that they used to keep themselves from getting caught by the others.

Throwing away the letters, I reread his identification papers.

‘He’s a fallen aristocrat? He doesn’t have a family? And—what’s more—he’s from a small foreign country that’s very far from the empire?’

The whole thing was fake.

Even the fancy records of his past were all lies.

The existence of Ludger Chelysie was an identity created by someone who spent a lot of their time on it.

Why didn’t I know? Why didn’t I doubt it?

Why did I naturally accept such an ‘overly ideal’ identity?

‘Then, the Ludger I met on the train...’

He was a member of the secret society that hid in Sören Academy.

He was even an executive who had the title of First Order.

'And now, I'm wearing his mask.'

As I lost the strength of my legs, I flopped onto the bed.

"Crazy."

The identity of Ludger Chelysie that I thought was ideal for starting a new life... was actually a dangerous nuclear bomb more dangerous than any other ones.

'I'm totally screwed.'

CHAPTER 9

UNDERCOVER JOB (1)

I laid absent-mindedly in bed for nearly an hour. I didn't have the energy to do something right away.

At that point, I felt it was unfair.

'No, how can an executive in a secret society get involved in a train attack and die?'

If he was a secret society executive who planted nearly 40 people in Sören Academy, he should have survived in that situation!

"Haa."

Yes, I know. Even if I got angry like that, a dead person wouldn't come back.

I had to admit it...

'I'm now Ludger Chelysie, and I have to hold on for two years while maintaining this damn identity.'

'To be frank, I thought it wouldn't be difficult and that it didn't matter as long as I was not caught by the Academy.'

Still, I thought I could imitate a teacher's behavior pretty well because I had a related experience in my past life.

...Because I could use magic, and I didn't lack theoretical knowledge.

Believing I could spend about two years without difficulty was a conviction that was thoroughly calculated and not reckless bravado.

But that wasn't right.

I couldn't believe he was in a secret society, moreover an executive.

'Besides, according to the conversation I had with her, they're not some ordinary dangerous people. The assassination of some of the Academy's key figures? Dealing with a traitor? Their method is also quite brutal.'

Even the gangsters and mafias in the dark part of the Earth wouldn't go that far. Wasn't it an extreme move that only some bad people would do?

'Isn't it too much to create an inflation in the difficulties by adding a new mission?'

In other words, it went from normal mode to hellish mode.

"Let's think."

'Now I have one more target to be aware of if I want to keep this false identity from being revealed.'

—The academy and an unidentified secret society.

If either of those two communities caught me red-handed that I was not Ludger, I would be dead meat right away.

—Whether it was by the hand of the principal, or the empire's law, or by the purging of the secret society itself...

Death was closer to me than ever.

"I have to think."

Ludger Chelysie was an executive of the secret society.

Ludger was also a made-up identity, so it might be an alias, but anyway, he was in a position that was commonly referred to as the First Order.

Among the members of the secret association that had penetrated the Academy, there were only two First Orders, including me. I didn't need to know what their purpose was at the moment.

The important thing was to find out who the other First Order was.

I couldn't ask it directly, so there was no way to know right away unless they

approached me themselves and held a secret meeting with me.

‘For now, I can ignore the Second and Third Orders.’

I assumed the real Ludger to have been quite an ill-tempered character within the syndicate.

Although I had only lowered my voice and bluffed a little, it was possible to infer from the expression of his subordinate who had become pale.

Since he had a trash personality, she wouldn’t irritate him for the most part as his subordinate. That was well-welcomed by me.

In the end, I only had to pay attention to one executive, another First Order, which was equivalent to Ludger’s status.

The problem was figuring out who the First Order was.

‘I can’t ask about it brazenly. No matter how distant they are, there is no way executives don’t know each other. If I do that, I’ll immediately garner some suspicion.’

I had to deal with the existence of a secret society that was lurking in the Empire and not only the Academy and Empire.

I thought I was riding only one tiger, but I couldn’t believe I was riding two tigers.

I thought I was an amazing guy. Even a circus athlete wouldn’t do that kind of thing.

As soon as either side went awry, I’d be over with.

The moment the balance collapsed, I was to be considered dead.

‘Yeah. Now that it’s like this, I have no choice but to do it.’

I immediately took out the books in the suitcase and opened the letters within them.

‘First of all, I have to gain some information.’

‘This letter must be a secret cipher used by their organization.’

...Then it was necessary for me to interpret it.

There is a fixed pattern in every cipher.

And it was the books in the suitcase that would help me analyze the pattern.

'He's a teacher at a magic academy, so if I discount the magic books... There were some unusual books other than that.'

I looked through the books.

[Watcher in the Rye], [Lingert's Philosophy Book], [Trace of Totalitarianism], and [100 Years of Solitude].

—Novels, autobiographies, and even the bestsellers of non-fiction books.

Among them, there was one book that stood out to me.

[Gentleman's Culture]

* * *

'This is it.'

I remembered Ludger's appearance that I had seen on the train.

—His trivial actions and somewhat unkempt behavior... The way he shook his legs slightly or tapped his fingers.

If he had really seriously considered the Gentleman's Culture and read that book, he would not have acted like that.

'Moreover, this book is the most shabby.'

A part of the book's cover was worn out and deteriorated.

'It means that he read it often, but was there a reason for that?'

'This book was being used as an interpretation of the cipher.'

I opened the [Gentleman's Culture] book and turned the page.

Whirrrrr.

There were marks of wear in between the book's pages.

Some pages had not been read, and some pages had been read to the point where the papers were worn out.

The regularity hidden in the irregularities slowly caught my eye.

When I looked carefully at some particularly worn pages, I saw something between the letters.

I immediately brought the letters and compared them side by side.

'The continent is said to speak a unified language, but each country has a slightly different language.'

The traces of Ludger Chelysie originated in the Kingdom of Queoden, so I could think of the Queoden language.

In particular, the letters explicitly contained traces of some proper nouns or dialects used in the Kingdom of Queoden.

Although it was a small and barren kingdom in the north, Queoden, which had produced a considerable number of great writers, had 20,000 words used in its dialect, of which 8,000 words among them are high-quality vocabulary.

'This must be the point of the cipher.'

Given the connection between the arrangement of the language and that letter, it was not difficult to distinguish between the ciphers.

—Because I know the Queoden language.

'As expected.'

It's what I expected. When I racked my brain and checked the code in Queoden language, I found a connection between the words in the letters.

<Greeting>, <Separation>, <Farewell Party>, <New Meeting>, <Crow>, <Eyes>, <Starlight>, etc.

Next to it was a mixture of some words that symbolized numbers.

The numbers represented the pages of the cipher codebook, and if I interpreted the other words and combined them...

'First Order. Infiltrate into Sören Academy as their teacher and gain their favor. I'll keep track of the situation and deliver the order to you.'

It became like so.

I couldn't get any crucial information, but that much was enough.

I leaned my head back after I closed the [Gentleman's Culture] book.

"Haa."

The remaining two years...

I had to live as a teacher at the academy and an executive at a secret society.

Of course, I couldn't live like that forever. Even if I spent two years as a teacher safely, there was still a barrier of the secret association.

Their presence was very annoying to me.

If things get awry in the middle, I'd most likely be killed.

'But I can't get rid of all the secret society members by myself. I don't know how the organization is structured, but they even planted spies at Sören Academy. I'm sure they're pretty dangerous.'

It'd be impossible to deal with them individually.

However, if I left them be, that secret association would be a shackle that held me back, so I had to get rid of them.

Then how?

'I should use the power of the Academy.'

There is a saying of 'let the barbarians fight it out among themselves'.

Control a barbarian to handle another barbarian.

Sören Academy was not a mere school. It was a place that symbolized the future of the era by fostering the future of the empire.

Although it carried the name of an academy, it was not impossible for the Academy because it had so much power that it could make an impact on a country.

If Sören and the secret society go against each other, no matter how great the secret society was, they'd obviously be pushed back.

How many soldiers and wizards are staying there? There was even a possibility that the Knights Order would also make a move because it is within the scope of the Imperial Decree.

They knew that, so instead of choosing to take the bull by the horns, they had planted spies.

In other words, I had to carefully dig out their information and leak it to the academy in a way that wouldn't let me get caught by the secret society.

'Of course, if I take quite a long time to do that, my tail will get caught.'

The secret association could purge me for betraying them, and the other way around, the academy could suspect me as a spy and rule me out.

In the end, it was important to keep the right line.

The moment I leaned too much on one side, all that'd be waiting for me was absolute destruction.

It's like riding on a single rope while holding a long pole.

I should never be biased against either side.

'For now... Let's think about the first class that's going to be held in a week.'

There was no mention in the command that ordered me to do anything. It was for me to gain their favor, so it meant to positively engrave my image as a teacher.

If so, first of all, performing my duty as a teacher was the priority.

Sören was a place where smart students went, so if I showed any lack of skills for even a bit, I might have been bitten by the students.

Talented children at the age of growing up usually think they are the best and will even look down on their teachers.

I didn't know what the place was like, but I knew from my long experience that the places where people live are all similar to each other.

'...There are so many things to consider.'

I should not look ridiculous to the students

And I shouldn't look suspicious to the academy

And I should not let the secret society find out about me.

I wondered what this was all about, but if I endured all of it, I would get a suitable reward.

Yes, I could bear it enough for that.

After I got out of bed, I entered my private study and opened a magic textbook.

I had to make plans for the future and prepare for how to proceed with the class.

The remaining two years.

I couldn't just play around throughout the years.

* * *

The first day of school had come.

Students who went down to their hometowns during the vacation returned one by

one, and new students of the current year came in along with a new semester.

The students who were previously first-years crossed the school gate in anticipation of what new classes they would take in the future as they advanced to the second year.

Throughout the classroom, the sounds of students meeting their friends again, which they had not seen for months, and the sounds of them greeting each other happily, could be heard loudly.

But...

All of them were learners who took classes at the same academy, but not all of them were the same students.

There were noisy students and quiet students.

Naturally, the atmosphere was divided among students, and of course, it was determined by their status in society.

Inside Sören Academy, students were largely divided into three classes.

—The upper class, led by royalty, aristocrats and high-class clergy.

—The middle class, led by wealthy merchants.

—And finally, the lower class consisted of poor commoners.

Even if they were all students, they could not ignore each status, and accordingly, they built walls without realizing it and divided their classes within the academy.

While the nobles smiled brightly and greeted each other, on the contrary, the commoners often looked around or gathered quietly among themselves.

It was the same with the upcoming classroom of magic casting.

“Hey, did you hear about it?”

“What?”

“There’s the theory of magic casting and the understanding of element class. I heard the new teacher will do it.”

“A new teacher teaches second-years, not first-years? I guess he’s pretty good?”

“They can’t help it. The former teacher is out. I heard that his past records are pretty fancy. I’ve heard that he’s from the military and he has published a lot of theses.”

“Doesn’t that mean he’s an amazing person? He’s extraordinary.”

“But you know what?”

“What?”

“He’s from a fallen aristocrat family.”

At the words of the fallen aristocracy, naturally, sneers emerged from the mouths of the faction that was leading the conversation.

—Those who disgraced the noble name of aristocracy.

It was common for the fallen aristocracy to be treated less honorably than a wealthy merchant among the nobles.

I think they could only be a little bit higher than commoners?

‘Since he was appointed as a teacher of Sören, he might be skilled, but he was bound to be looked down upon by the upper-class students.’

At the same time, aristocratic students had similar thoughts.

If the new teacher was from a fallen aristocrat family, it’d be a piece of cake to get a good grade in his class.

As soon as each student talked about what kind of person he would be, the front door of the classroom opened silently.

Everyone’s eyes turned to the front door.

A man was entering the classroom through the opened door.

CHAPTER 10

UNDERCOVER JOB (2)

The man was like a quiet lake with a rising mist at dawn.

—He was cold, chilly, and calm.

Just like an unshakably calm lake's surface, his every action was restrained, calm, and meaningful.

Even when he closed the classroom door...

Even when his shoes stepped up on the podium...

Even when he put the papers on the desk...

There was not a sound.

The stillness engulfed the entire classroom like a ripple on the surface of water.

“Oh...”

Even the noisy aristocratic students were swept away by the atmosphere and closed their mouths.

The students, who were calm, looked at the main character who was standing on the podium with their eyes shining out of curiosity.

The suit that was suitable for his handsomely tall figure did not have the slightest bit of wrinkles; a black frock coat on top of it fit his body even better.

It was classy attire, but it didn't appear to be too flashy.

When the man took off the silk hat on his head and threw it lightly, it gently flew toward the hanger in the corner of the podium and settled down safely.

With the series of gestures that seemed so natural, his face that had been hidden by his hat was finally revealed.

—He had a sharp jawline and a straight nose bridge along with unwavering eyes.

His strong yet charismatic eyes were sharp enough for him to not seem to be a new teacher.

His hair, which was considered long for a man, was neatly tied at the back of his neck.

Gulp.

Some noble students who had been secretly talking behind his back were weighed down by his vigor and gulped down without realizing it.

“Nice to meet you. My name is Ludger Chelysie, and I’m the new teacher at Sören Academy.”

The moment he opened his mouth and raised his voice...

It was like pouring water on dreamy smudges of waters.

The atmosphere of the classroom, which had been immersed in silence, returned to reality.

* * *

“I won’t start the class right away because it’s the first day of school. However, I will make a prior notice before that.”

I slowly hung the frock coat that I had taken off on the hanger.

It was not difficult to carry on the conversation. I just had to recite the words that came to my mind at the right time.

It was like some sort of play-acting.

‘I’m an actor on stage, and the students are the audience.’

‘All I have to do is follow the flow in harmony and continue the monologue naturally.’

The script was all in my head.

“My class is about magic casting, but I won’t teach you magic casting unsophisticatedly. I’m going to focus on applying magic in real life beyond the principles, a little closer to the actual practice.”

As I skimmed through the audience, I could see several people flinching their shoulders.

That was a good reaction.

Since there were soldiers who had also become teachers in the past, there were no students who thought it was strange for me to maintain that kind of tone and such intense eyes.

“And not only the second years, but the first years can also apply for this class. In other words, it’s a joint class for the first and second years.”

My words began to create a buzz everywhere.

All the students who had gathered were sophomores, so it was no wonder that they were confused.

However, it was not impossible because there was no school rule that classes should be divided by year.

As soon as the noise died down, I opened my mouth at the most appropriate time.

“Stop.”

Silence.

The noise inside the classroom disappeared in an instant.

* * *

Everyone’s eyes were staring at me again.

“As a second-year student, it is natural to complain about having to take classes with a first-year student. But don’t worry. I’m not going to teach the first years the basic

things to learn just because of my consideration that they're beginners.”

The words were welcomed with relieved responses here and there.

Sören Academy's teaching method was more like a university than a high school if compared to Earth's system.

However, it was not completely the same as that of a university, so it can be said that it was vaguely mixed a little bit. The award and penalty points system are typical examples.

The students of Sören choose the lectures they want to take according to their specialties and take credits by completing the subject.

Students there are called prodigies wherever they go.

Even if they are in the first year, there was no significant difference compared to the second year. I decided to focus on that and conduct joint classes for the first and second years.

Why?

Because when the second years get together, it was inevitable that the story about their teacher would spread out.

The curiosity and main topic of the second years, who had already known each other enough for a year, were bound to be me, their newly appointed teacher, instead of their classmates, who were in the same year as them.

But what if freshmen who just entered the school attended the same class?

The concerns of the second years would be focused on their juniors in the first year.

Then the number of people who are talking about me would definitely decrease.

There might be complaints, but they wouldn't fuss any further.

The existence of the first years was a kind of smokescreen and seawall that made me not doubt my qualifications as a teacher.

“Why do you let freshmen take this class as well?”

Someone raised their hand and spoke.

Looking at her, she was a girl with long wavy blonde hair up to her waist.

Her unwavering eyes that were staring at me had a strong sense of righteousness.

People around her recognized her and they were talking to each other afterwards. ‘What? Is she a popular kid?’

Looking closely, she looked familiar.

‘That face... I’ve seen it somewhere.’

‘Someone who makes me uneasy when I think of her...’

Since I was asked a question, I decided to answer it.

“Because I thought they needed an opportunity as well.”

“What do you mean by “opportunity”?”

“I think it’s very unfortunate that only a selected year can take my class. It’s never the right attitude as a teacher. Giving equal instruction to everyone regardless of their year... That’s what I think.”

Well, she would ask me why I didn’t mention the third year and higher afterwards.

Of course they could take my class if they wanted to. However, it would be difficult for third-years to digest the essential subjects that they had already learned right away.

Actually, I could only afford up to the second year.

“Of course, that means that my classes are not year-restricted. I’m confident that it’s definitely different from the existing system.”

Well, it’s not like I was just saying it without thinking.

I'd made sure I was ready for the class.

For a peaceful future, I was referring to a few tips that I had, so there's nothing I couldn't do.

"It's hard to understand unless you explain exactly what class it is."

"If you are curious, just come to my class. It's not fun if I tell you in advance."

—As I spoke while intentionally piquing her curiosities, small wrinkles formed on her forehead beneath her blonde hair.

'I'm sorry, but I don't intend to tell you what I'm about to teach right away.'

'On the contrary, I'm going to make you feel impatient and more curious.'

If there weren't any unknown classes in which no one knew what would be taught, the students in the academy wouldn't feel wary of anything.

"However, let me warn you of one thing: if there's anyone who wants to take my class with such an absurd idea that I'm a new teacher and that they will easily get credit..."

After deliberately catching my breath and taking a break...

I said the last words in a strong tone.

"At that time, I will personally engrave what real education is into your bones."

If they interpreted my last words, then it meant...

"Please don't come to my class."

If they had to take classes with the freshmen, it would quite hurt their pride as sophomores.

I even warned that the class would not be easy, so those with high self-esteem were likely to pass it by saying, "That class. I won't take it!"

I scattered landmines in such a way so that if they stepped on one and exploded, it'd honestly be the fault of the person who stepped on it.

Of course, I would be disqualified as a teacher if I just spouted that out.

I made a deep hole in the process by wrapping it as a reasonable cause.

‘There’s a reason for everything. You’ll know when you take the class.’

It was different than throwing irresponsible, empty promises, but what could I do?

Of course, that was the only way I could do it since I had never lived by standards.

“That’s all. Any questions?” I was directing the question to students who might have prepared to raise their hands and argue with me.

* * *

It was quiet inside the classroom.

When Ludger asked if anyone had any questions, none of the students raised their hands.

Everyone was just rolling their eyes and looking around.

It’s not that there were no questions. Small questions about how to do the assignments, what the exact curriculum of the class is, or what was going to be taught that had all been asked before were also pretty good.

But no one ever brought those questions out of their mouths.

Everyone was overwhelmed by the spirit of Ludger Chelysie.

‘That’s the new teacher?’

‘They said he was a soldier, his atmosphere is no joke.’

‘There’s a rumor that he’s at least a 4th rank. Is it real?’

The incredible pressure from a young man... It was not mere imagination that they feel suffocated just by making eye contact with him.

Even the aristocratic students, who looked down on him for being a fallen aristocrat,

avoided Ludger's eyes and dryly swallowed their saliva.

If the upper classes were like that, how could the other students dare to come forward?

That was what everyone unconsciously felt as they listened to Ludger's speech.

That man never spouted out anything carelessly...

His eyes, way of speaking, and even his confident tone of voice...

He could never show that kind of gesture unless he was truly proud of his class.

What on earth was he going to teach them? If it wasn't based on theory, was it practical? How would he teach the practices?

Such complex thoughts formed and disappeared like bubbles in everyone's heads.

But there was only one thing for sure:

A class taught by the teacher named Ludger Chelysie would never be easy.

"No questions?"

He repeated the question.

He seemed like someone who wanted a question, but the students weren't fooled.

The moment they raised their hands and opened their mouths, they'd get stamped out by Ludger.

Just seeing the look in his eyes that seemed to be glaring at them wanting to get some prey... His willingness to not allow any questions was conveyed well.

The blonde girl, who raised her hand beforehand, sat still as well.

"No questions... then the first day of school has finished."

The first day of school.

—That’s how the breathtaking orientation ended.

* * *

When the orientation was over, the students got up one by one and left the classroom.

I watched the scene carefully from the podium.

I’d said everything I wanted to say, so everyone understood everything, right?

But it was honestly shocking that no one raised their hands when I asked them to ask some questions.

Until the night before, I had prepared to take all kinds of questions and even prepared the answers, but all of them were useless.

‘If it’s an academy like this, aren’t there only children with strong ego here?’

I thought they’d think that I was ridiculous and ask me a lot of questions, but did I think too much?

‘No. Wait a minute.’

It could be the other way around.

‘What if they intentionally chewed on my words?’

I’d heard of it. That is often the case in Korea in the 21st century.

When a new teacher arrived, the students would purposely not give them any attention and look down on them.

Such was often the case with female teachers in particular.

It was mainly the way of the school bullies to take the lead in the class instead of the teacher.

They would quietly throw a mutter like ‘Ah, he’s hella loud’, and if the teacher got mad, they would respond with ‘I didn’t talk about you, though?’—they had that

undeniable technique of bullying.

'Maybe it's a similar case since no one has responded to me.'

'Hmm.'

I had tried to be as serious as I could to look scary, but had it given the opposite effect?

Perhaps my oppressive remarks and actions have disturbed the pride of students who thought they were geniuses.

'Then it's a big problem.'

The way juniors looked down on their seniors in the military, subordinates looked down on their superiors in the workplace, and students looked down on their teachers in school.

—It was often described as being eaten.

It was obvious that if someone lost their leadership in the beginning, they would have setbacks in their future classes.

'Then should I treat them in a more gentle manner?'

'No, if I do it all of a sudden after what happened, they'll think I'm weird. I'm just going to push it to the end since it has already become like this.'

It was rather not my cup of tea to smile and be friendly.

That was my nature, and the identities that I acted out mostly had that kind of personality.

...And it'd been three weeks since I arrived.

Everyone already knew what kind of person Ludger was. It would be ridiculous to change my personality at that point when I was obviously a soldier with a military record.

I put on my hat and walked away with the frock coat that had been on the hanger.

In the meantime, the remaining students in the classroom did not approach me.

It's not that they didn't have any interests because I felt the way they were trying to analyze me.

I thought they'd ask me common questions such as how old I was or if I had a girlfriend, but I didn't know that they wouldn't say a single word.

'It's scary. Kids these days.'

* * *

Step. Step.

I walked slowly down the hallway, leaving the classroom at a leisurely pace.

It was the first day of school anyway, so it was the end of today's work.

Since the course registration correction period had not yet ended, those who wanted to change their course could change it, and those who didn't could settle with it.

The first class would properly start in three days.

'Until then, let's seriously think about how I can take the lead of the class from the students.'

'I should at least avoid being told that I'm not qualified as a teacher.'

Thinking so, I looked at the front, and I saw all the students who were walking in the hallway looking at me and avoiding my path.

When both the boy and girl students spotted me walking, they were surprised and stuck themselves to the wall or window.

'What? Why are they being like that?'

Had the rumor of a new teacher, who already seemed like easy prey, spread throughout the academy?

I had heard that there was a community in that Academy like the university

community called 'Everytime' where you could exchange opinions with each other inside the Academy, was that why?

When I felt like my future class was going to be pretty rough, someone talked to me.

"Hello."

I stopped and stared at the woman who was smiling as she was talking to me.

"You're the new teacher, Ludger Chelysie, right?"

"Yes, that's right."

She was an attractive woman with pink and a slight curl at the tip of her hair with a warm smile that resembled sunshine.

'I don't think she's a student since she's not wearing a uniform.'

'Maybe?'

She spoke with a great fuss before I was able to find out about anything.

"Oh, as expected! Nice to meet you. My name is Selena. You're a new teacher at Sören academy, right? I'm your colleague, Mr. Ludger."

"I see. Nice to meet you."

When I looked at her as if asking what business she had with me, Selena looked around a little embarrassedly and spoke quietly in a low voice.

"Well... Have you eaten yet?"

CHAPTER 11

FIRST LESSON (1)

When I received that first offer to eat together—

‘Is spring finally coming to me?’ was the only thing I could think about.

Since she was a new professor like me, wouldn’t it be natural for her to have a meal with me to bond some friendship? It was only in the midst of a burning youth that the illusion of a pounding heart just because of such a thing was fitting.

In fact, there were three more people besides me when I followed Selena.

—Two men and one woman.

They all looked unique, as if they were each shouting, ‘I’m a wizard’.

“Ho ho ho. Hello.”

The first person to reach out to me and ask for a handshake was a very warm-looking man.

He was plump, and his overall impression was round. I thought he was quite old, and he looked like a friendly man in the neighborhood when he laughed like that.

I shook hands with him lightly.

“I’m Ludger Chelysie. I’m in charge of magic casting.”

“My name is Brino. I’m in charge of the golems in the summoning class.”

The next person who spoke to me was a beautiful woman with a seductive impression and lavender hair that was growing long enough to cover one of her eyes.

“Oh my, you’re so handsome. I’m glad to meet you. I’m Merilda, and I’m in charge of captivation and hallucinations in relation to curses and dispelling.”

“Yes, nice to meet you.”

And the last one had a little bit of a different impression from the previous two.

He was a man with dark blue hair and all-back, rimless glasses on his face, but he looked quite strict from his appearance.

He was frowning all the time and was seemingly not very happy with the fact that he was there with all of us.

When I looked at him, he also stared at me and soon turned his head away. He expressed his willingness not to even introduce himself.

‘Who is this person?’

As I was wondering, Merilda explained in a small voice with a laugh.

“He is Professor Chris Benimore. As you can see, he’s an aristocrat who is different from us commoners.”

‘Oh, so that’s why.’

I had heard of the Benimore family. They’re a Count family in the Empire that has an extensive history.

Chris didn’t want to be close to a commoner, even if they were also professors at the same Academy as him.

In my case, I was a fallen aristocrat, so it was natural for him, who was a noble, to belittle me.

“I hope Mr. Ludger doesn’t look down on us because we’re commoners.”

“It doesn’t matter to me.”

“No way,” Ms. Merilda replied, opening her eyes wide and smiling softly while stepping back.

‘Well, so there are five new professors, including me.’

—One aristocrat, one fallen aristocrat, and three commoners.

But as everyone had become professors at Sören Academy, they were talented people who could go anywhere without feeling inferior in the field of teaching.

“Well, I can’t stay here any longer. I was wondering what kind of new professors there were besides me; turns out they were commoners and a fallen aristocrat.”

Chris’s cold voice was heard before the others even were able to start talking about eating together.

Hearing those words, Brino smiled awkwardly, Selina flinched while being embarrassed, and only Merilda glanced at Chris with an unkind stare.

Me? I just didn’t think about it too much.

It only took a day or two to see the aristocrats immersed in elitism.

I was showing an attitude of saying, ‘If you’re going to go, just go on your own,’ when Chris gave me a sharp look.

“Get over yourself.”

And then he turned around and left.

But why was he doing that to me and not someone else?

Did he know Ludger before? I didn’t think so.

‘I wish I could get along with the other professors, but I don’t think I can get close to him.’

I ignored Chris, who had already disappeared, and looked at the other three.

I could say that they were just fellow professors who were appointed at the same time as me, but I couldn’t relax just because of that.

Maybe there was a spy planted by the secret society among them.

‘Is there a First Order among these three?’

'There are currently nearly 40 secret association members hiding inside Sören Academy.'

Of course, considering the entire population of Sören Academy on that vast land, 40 was nothing, but that didn't mean there wasn't a single chance of bumping into each other on the way.

'Except for the Third Orders, some of the Second Orders may have infiltrated as students.'

In the case of the First Order, in particular, the professors could not escape from being the target of suspicions.

'Because Ludger occupied the professor's seat as a First Order, there's nothing that disallows the other First Order from becoming a professor as well.'

The question was: who is it?

If I had been told that they had just joined that semester like me, I would have definitely been able to narrow my scope of speculation.

The problem was that the phrase 'came in first' that the agent had said could be interpreted in many ways.

Was the period of 'coming in first' long before my arrival, or was it around the same time as me, but a little bit earlier?

Obviously, I had no choice but to suspect those who asked me to eat with them while saying that they arrived in the same semester as me.

'Didn't they invite me to observe me quietly?'

I really couldn't let my guard down for the slightest bit.

I followed my fellow professors to the cafeteria while trying to keep my poker face.

I was thinking that it wasn't so bad since I wasn't alone.

* * *

—Selena, the new professor for Spirit Studies.

Not long ago, she was appointed to Sören Academy and became a professor for the class of summoning spirits.

She had come in proudly, but at the same time, she was quite nervous.

Sören Academy was famous not only in the empire but in other kingdoms as well. The students who enter are geniuses who will be responsible for the future, and they are qualified to be treated warmly anywhere just by the sole fact that they attended Sören.

Teaching such students itself came as a great burden to her.

‘What if I make a mistake? What if I can’t teach them? Besides, there are a lot of noble students here!’

The difference between commoners and aristocrats is huge.

Thanks to the development of magic engineering, the world has gradually changed, and commoners have also become members of the House of Representatives and entered politics, but the wall of status was still high.

She heard that the reason why there were five positions for professors at that time was that the professors in charge of the classes the previous year had retired.

The reason why they quit was unknown, but she still had some assumptions, as she knew how to use her brain.

Before she went to the Academy, her wizard acquaintances had warned her repeatedly about the power of aristocratic students.

“There are students who secretly look down on their professors and try to lord over them, so be careful not to be eaten because you are soft-hearted,” they had said.

Selena was suddenly frightened.

‘I heard that even the royal family goes to this school.’

They had said that the third Princess was in the second year. Selena might not see

her immediately because she taught the first year, but the tension doubled with someone of such a high status attending Sören.

The orientation seemed to have ended smoothly on the first day of the semester, but it is also true that she was still nervous because of her low self-esteem.

Selena thought she couldn't stay like that, so she decided to make friends with other new professors who were appointed.

Still, if she had colleagues who could share difficulties with each other, her life at the academy might be better.

In that way, she became close to Merilda, and after meeting people one by one, she went to the last one.

Ludger Chelysie.

—A man of noble birth who was not a commoner. However, it was not a burdensome status to approach because his family had collapsed.

Until she met him, she had definitely thought so.

'Whoa.'

At first, she wondered what was going on because the crowd in the hallway split from side to side.

'Has the royal family member that I've only heard of appeared?'

It was a man in neat clothes who came slowly toward her, breaking such expectations. He wore a gray suit, a black frock coat, and a silk hat on his head.

'Whoa, Oh my God.'

Selena's thought when she first faced Ludger was extreme admiration.

She had heard that he was a fallen aristocrat.

Looking at him, Selena had no choice but to correct her prejudice.

Walking slowly while spreading dignity around him, he was much more aristocratic than any other aristocrat she had ever seen.

Each of his steps was like a work of art, so she stared at him blankly without realizing it. Selena hurriedly called out to him as she belatedly recalled her purpose for seeing him.

‘S-scary.’

When he stopped and looked at her, her heart felt like it was dropping.

Still, Selena tried hard to smile and told Ludger carefully that she would like to have a meal with him.

She bit her tongue after she said that.

She thought Ludger would look at her with contempt and say, ‘A commoner like you?’.

“Sure.”

But Ludger accepted her offer too easily. When he walked with her along the road, he adjusted with her steps and maintained the proper distance between them.

She felt his consideration for others in his small behaviors.

‘Unlike how he looks, he has a very warm personality.’

When introduced to other colleagues, Ludger did not care whether his talking partner was a noble or a commoner.

Even though Chris Benimore was openly hostile to him, Ludger did not respond much.

Usually, someone may be angry or irritated, but his nobility did not dim for the slightest bit.

It was like he was standing alone in a cloud above the sky.

Later, she heard that he was a great man who was a former military officer and who

had even submitted several academic papers to the magic tower.

‘Professor Ludger is such a great man.’

She wanted to be such a charismatic professor as well.

Even when eating, Ludger just ate quietly without saying a word.

His attitude of handling the forks and knives was also restrained—as if he was the only one living in a different world.

Even the passing students glanced at him, and they already spoke many words.

He acted as if it was natural, and he seemingly didn’t care about the reactions around him.

He was like a living statue, and in the whole process, she could even feel some kind of faith.

Ludger’s attitude was the same when the professors shared their farewells after the meal and scattered to their own private accommodation or professor’s building.

When everyone waved while speaking about seeing each other afterwards, Ludger nodded instead.

He seemed to be in a bad mood, but she thought that he was just like that.

Selena, who was returning to the accommodation with Merilda, recalled the short meeting with Ludger that day.

Selena took a deep breath and deliberately made an expressionless face.

Merilda, who was walking with her, noticed her behavior.

“Selena, what are you doing? You are frowning.”

“Professor Merilda, don’t you think I look strong like this?”

“What?”

Merilda was about to ask again what she meant with that but soon burst into laughter.

“Hahaha! Selena, you’re imitating Professor Ludger, aren’t you?”

“What? No, no that’s not...”

Merilda waved her hand at Selena, who was flustered and spouted some gibberish, telling her it was okay.

“Well, that’s understandable. Professor Ludger is such an incredibly extraordinary person that it was unbelievable to think he was a new professor like us, but when you think about his past, it makes sense.”

“What?”

“Oh, you doesn’t know about this rumor, right? I checked what kind of people entered Sören together with me. He used to be a military officer.”

“Is... is that so?”

“What’s greater than that is, Selena, you and I were both recommended to be the professors here by the support of the magic tower or the Spirit Society, but he’s not like that. He isn’t affiliated to any place and came here on his own ability.”

“Whoa. It’s no wonder... His first impression was different.”

“I’m sure he has a great way of teaching. Still, we have no choice but to teach the students in our own way. Let’s not be swayed by others. You don’t have to pretend to be strong because we’ve become Sören professors as well.”

“Ah, yes!”

The two women, who had just met for the first time that day and quickly became close to each other, chatted happily and headed to a professor-only accommodation.

* * *

Three days had passed since the orientation on the first day of the semester.

Since those three days were the period of class revision, it must have been a busy time for students who had not yet decided which classes to take.

Of course, it didn't affect me.

—It was the long-awaited first lesson. I walked a little excitedly across the hallway.

Three days before, I had issued enough warnings—my class was like a landmine.

Rumors about me must have already spread widely among students.

Would there be any students who would want to take my class after I said that?

Well, I was sure there would be. In the case where there was no room for other classes, they had no choice but to choose my class with a heavy heart and force themselves to complete the credits.

There's a lot of consideration to it. The important thing was that the fewer students I had to teach, the more comfortable I would be.

There were a minimum of 15 to a maximum of 80 students who could take the class.

The class would not be closed just because there were few students, so if such was the case, it would have been enough for me to take the lead well.

Of course, there was no possibility that my students would be the minimum of 15, so I figured it might reach about 30 people.

With that thought, I opened the door and entered the classroom.

'Hm?'

And I saw it...

Students filled the inside of the classroom.

The number was more than the 30 students that I had thought, even beyond 60.

No, it was actually the maximum number of people the classroom could accommodate.

'What?'

'Why are there so many students?'

CHAPTER 12

FIRST LESSON (2)

About three days previously, on the first day of orientation...

The reaction among the students hadn't been great when Ludger had shown his guts by keeping his teaching style a secret.

It wasn't just a few students that were opposed to the fact that the new professor, a man from the fallen aristocracy, showed such behavior at the prestigious academy.

Students from aristocracy in particular were the angriest.

—How dare a new professor from a fallen aristocrat family...

Ironically, however, the students who actually witnessed Ludger's orientation didn't say much.

Only some aristocratic students with high pride appeared to have been huffing and puffing as they seemed to be looked down upon, but nearly 40 of the 50 students in the classroom were rather impressed by Ludger's guts.

Still, since he came as a professor at Sören Academy, wouldn't they have something to believe in about him?

Of course, no detailed information about Ludger was known yet, so students had to be cautious.

It was an obvious fact that if they took a wrong class on the first day of school, they would suffer for a semester.

If any information about Ludger was released, they would trust him only once and take the class, but if not, they could think of him as an experimental rat.

On the second morning, when many students were contemplating...

One article was posted on the community, commonly called the <Akashic Records>, the student-only Magic Exchange Integration Center of Sören Academy.

Title: Did you hear about the Ludger Chelysie's, the new professor's, rumor?

—A title that was deliberately designed to attract people's attention, not knowing if it was good or bad.

Naturally, the students had no choice but to click on it, and the content spread out as if it had been waiting.

This was the summary of the contents that had spread far down:

The article contained an extreme admiration for Ludger Chelysie.

He was the youngest wizard to reach 4th rank. He had been appointed as a military officer. He had contributed himself in Cryptid hunting. As a freelance wizard, he was also listed on the magic tower. His accolades continued.

It contained Ludger's past records.

It was enough for students to be full of anticipation while inwardly asking, 'Is it really true?' as they didn't know that the secret society's desperate attempt to somehow highlight their First Order.

The most enthusiastic person, in particular, was the Third Order member who had contacted Ludger first.

'I can't ruin Mr. First Order's class! I need to get as many students as possible to take it!'

She wrote all day long about how wonderful, great, and incredible he was.

Perhaps because of the persistent posting of appraisals for Ludger in the last two days, more people were interested in Ludger's class than those who protested the excessive praise.

Moreover, the fact that the first years could also take the class stimulated the interest of the freshmen who still don't know anything.

During the revision period, the number of students who wanted to take Ludger's class increased rapidly, and the maximum capacity of 80 students was filled.

And on the long-awaited first day of the class...

The students all sat down and waited for Ludger with anticipation.

—Half out of pure curiosity, half out of triumphant feeling to see how good he actually was.

And when the class was announced to be held at nine in the morning...

The door of the lecture room opened, and Ludger walked in.

* * *

'What the hell is this situation?'

The lecture room didn't have a single empty seat.

The number of people that I thought would be 30 at most had actually achieved the maximum.

As I stood in front of 80 students, I felt a headache.

'Why in the world?'

'I'm sure I secretly warned them that my class was a landmine at the orientation three days ago, though?'

'Don't you think it's a loss to take this professor's class unless you're a fool?'

Above all, those students whose uniform badges were blue...

Those were the first years who had just entered the academy.

More than 60% of the students who gathered in the classroom were first years.

'Why the freshmen?'

‘Why are they taking this class knowing that they’re going to take the same class as the second years? Aren’t they supposed to avoid the class because it’s burdensome to take classes with their seniors?’

I never expected that there would be more first years.

At that point, I wondered if someone intentionally threw malicious information about me somewhere I didn’t know to put me into trouble.

‘Maybe I underestimated the students too much.’

Sören Academy was obviously a place where only selected students could enter after fierce competition in the admission period.

As it was a place where the best children are gathered across the continent beyond the empire, it was problematic to think of them as ordinary students.

I decided to humbly accept my mistake.

My behavior did not raise students’ vigilance but rather set fire to their pride.

Looking at those eyes...

They were wild, hyena-like gazes that would bite me if I made a mistake.

It was my first class today, so I couldn’t believe that kind of pressure existed.

At that rate, I would be eaten by the students in the classroom.

‘Now that this has happened, I have no choice but to do my best to give the lectures.’

I looked at the faces of the students who were gathered in the classroom.

It was full of children with unique hair colors. ‘I guess that’s common in this world.’

Some of them were especially noticeable compared to other students.

—Especially the girl student with the ears of a non-human beast on her head. She was a beastperson who lived in the desert on the southern continent.

Well, in a world where there are magic and wizards, to point out the interesting thing about beastpeople was that in this world, the demi-human species was a very small minority.

—Even more so in Sören academy.

The beastpeople were also a tribe that was colonized and enslaved until 50 years ago, and 50 years later, there were still remnants of discrimination and persecution against them.

It was still like that.

The evidence was present in the other students around her, who looked at the beastperson student with quiet gazes.

‘That kid, I think she’s new to the school; her student life in the future is going to be tough.’

‘Well, I’m not in a position to worry about anyone right now.’

For the moment, the matter of the class was a priority.

“My name is Ludger Chelysie, who will be teaching the overall process of the development of magic casting.”

“If it’s the overall process, does that mean you will teach us all four specialties?”

Someone raised his hand and said so. He was a boy student with a somewhat rude impression.

I immediately issued a warning to him.

“Ask questions only when I say so.”

“...Yes, sir.”

* * *

“It’s the first time, so I’ll let it pass. However, if there is a person who cuts off the flow of my class again, I will give you a penalty point. The same is true for explicitly

challenging the authority of a professor.”

Some students were shocked to hear a penalty point that they had never heard before.

“However, a student who has done their task well will be given an award point. The higher the award points a student has, the better the benefits they will have, so do your best.”

Well, I didn’t know about the third years but it was a well-known fact that first or second years, who are in the middle of their burning youth, don’t really care about penalty points, as they are still far from graduation.

However, there was a big difference between being warned by the professor and not being warned at all.

“To answer the question that was just asked, it’s a ‘yes’. I will teach you, one by one, about “release”, “element property”, “telekinesis”, and “reinforcement”, which are all affiliated with magic casting.”

Most of the students showed a shocked expression at what I had just said.

No matter how far I would conduct the magic casting class, specialization was definitely another field within the same category.

The previously mentioned “release”, “element property”, “telekinesis”, and “reinforcement” are the four specialties of the “magic casting system” that I had mentioned.

They were often called the four major specializations of casting.

Usually, it was enough to teach only two of them, but I had said that I would teach all four specializations to them.

For the students it might’ve sounded like I was bluffing, and it seemed like an incredible lie.

But it was never a lie.

I hadn’t achieved complete mastery of either subject, but I was proud that the overall

spectrum of my knowledge was quite wide, as I'd lived throughout the years.

So...

"We're starting the class."

'I'll show you what I prepared for the class this time.'

* * *

"You know, Cheryl. Isn't that professor really interesting?"

Cheryl tried to hide her uneasiness as she heard a voice calling to her and turned her head to a friend sitting next to her.

The one who spoke to her was a girl with skin so white that it was almost as if she was transparent with long blue hair up to her waist.

She was so beautiful that it seemed like she was a doll made by a craftsman, even the boy students sitting near her kept glancing at her.

"Flora, don't tell me that you're once more..."

"What do you mean 'once more'? That's rude. What did I do to make you say that anyway?"

Cheryl couldn't bring herself to speak to Flora, who had asked back playfully with a subtle tone.

—Flora Lumos.

She was the daughter of the Lumos duke family, one of the most noble families in the Exileon Empire.

She was beautiful, fascinating, and excelled in both literary and martial arts, and she seemed like a living work of art just by staying still. She was famous for having the title of 'genius' in her sophomore year at Sören.

Even students who are called geniuses in the world were common at Sören Academy.

Sören, which gathered only geniuses from all over the city and country, raised the standard of their students too much, and children with less talent were forced to become relatively mediocre.

It was not surprising if a child who had heard that they were a gifted child where they lived became one of those who got left behind at the Academy.

However, Flora was a girl who was called a genius, even in Sören.

It was a title that represented how great her talent for magic was.

She was one of the most famous students in Sören, with a good household, beautiful appearance, and excellent talents, so anyone could only envy her.

Only one thing couldn't be envied...

—The flaws in her character.

Flora Lumos was notorious even among professors inside Sören Academy.

She was a genius and had never been taught properly by someone. On the contrary, she had challenged the authority of the professors and gained victories.

It was common practice for professors to point out the wrong magic techniques in the middle of the class.

On the contrary, she had come up with magic that was much better than the one being taught by the professors and smashed the professors in front of the students.

She has been steadily gaining such notoriety since she was in the first year, and it was the same even then when she was in the second year.

Moreover, because her specialty is in the field of magic casting, the incident was so famous that everyone in the academy knew why the two professors who were in charge of magic casting classes had left the previous year.

Flora became a sophomore, and she had come back to take the magic casting class.

Furthermore, at that time, it was the class of Ludger Chelysie, who was considered unusual from his first appearance.

Flora's friend Cheryl prayed that she wouldn't do it again, but Flora's expression made it seem that her prayer was just a vain hope.

Flora's nickname among professors was "the Little Devil of the Lumos family", because she took out all the energy from the professors' souls in every class that she took.

Considering the people who had been beaten by her were trembling so hard, it was not enough to even name her King of the Devil, let alone Little Devil—that kind of nickname was too cute for her.

Flora chose Ludger as her prey for the semester.

"Cheryl, honestly, isn't it funny? It's just someone who looks like he's only in his 20s, yet he already learned all four of the specialties of magic casting. Well, of course he can learn them, but isn't it an exaggeration for him to teach them all?"

"That's..."

Cheryl had no choice but to agree with that part.

She didn't know if it was his pride as a new professor or if he really had the ability to do that.

If his true qualities hadn't been confirmed yet, she had no choice but to doubt it.

'But did he learn all four specialties so well that he could teach them all?'

There are a total of five affiliations of magic, and the specialties are divided for each affiliation.

The three specialties of Embodiment are Formation of Matter, Transformation, and Alchemy.

The four major specialties of Magic Casting are Release, Element Property, Telekinesis, and Reinforcement.

The four specialties of Summoning are Spirit, Golem, Magic Number, and Necromancy.

The six major specialties of Curses and Dispelling were Astrology, Captivation, Hallucination, Pharmacology, Witchcraft, and Enchantment.

And the last fifth specialization was Uncommon Magic.

In the case of Uncommon Magic, it was ambiguous to say that it's magic in this world, but it clearly means a category that can be expressed by 'magic'.

This Uncommon affiliation belongs to the Vision Magic that descends from generation to generation in a family or to those who have pioneered unique ways themselves.

And of course, no professor taught an Uncommon Magic class.

Just in time, Ludger carved a magic technique on the magic board.

When he transferred his mana on the board with nothing written on it, the magic technique was drawn on its own.

It was Fluttering Flame, one of the third-tier flame element spells.

"It's Fluttering Flame. There are seven elements: heating, combustion, compression, acceleration, expansion, and diffusion, complementing each other and forming the magic technique."

Although it was only a third-tier spell, it was a spell that had to be casted by placing the seven elements that made up the magic technique in the right place.

If there was enough time, students who took the class there could also use it.

"Since it's your first class today, I'll teach you something that will interest you before we proceed into the real lesson. It's a way to cast the spell much faster than the traditional way."

"The much faster way for casting spells?"

Curiosity sprang into the students' heads for the first time.

"Let's see. The speed, yeah. It's more than three times faster than the traditional way."

The sentence made the students' eyes open wide.

CHAPTER 13

FIRST LESSON (3)

“What? He’s going to shorten the time for the magic technique?”

“Is that possible?”

“Isn’t he lying?”

Unlike the first years, who were not familiar with spells, the second years doubted what Ludger said.

Before teaching the basics of magic in his first class, he was going to show them how to cast the spell faster.

They had no choice but to doubt him.

The speed of spell casting was always considered a top priority for wizards.

One second was a lot of time in a battle of life or death.

Moreover, unlike knights who move their bodies in real time and wield swords, the sense of danger was much more acute for wizards—who took time to cast their spells.

Due to the development of science, wizards are less exposed to danger than they used to be, but the danger is not completely gone.

Since they were wizards who always had to think clearly and rationally, they had no choice but to focus themselves more on speed.

“Flora, is what he said true?” Cheryl asked Flora, her best friend.

“Well, I don’t know. Have we ever been taught a proper way to shorten magic techniques?”

There was certainly a way to reduce the time of casting spells.

The representative example was a spell scroll, which was demonstrated by storing existing spells in a medium in advance.

However, in that case, there was a limitation that the spell can be used one time only.

Once you use the spell, the scroll will lose its effect.

Alternatively, you can also use a spell called Memory Reverberation that casts the spell in advance and stores it.

Even in that case, it was impossible to continue using the spell, and the maximum amount of stock that can be accumulated was set according to the wizard's level of proficiency.

"I don't think it's possible unless you change the structure of the spell technique itself."

After all, in order to shorten casting time, the fundamental techniques of the spell must be improved, and even that is impossible.

The spell was a commonly used spell that was the cumulation of thousands of years of history in which wizards had continued to refine, devise, and lead it to that moment.

For some, it might have only been a third-tier flame element spell, but behind the spell was the work of numerous geniuses throughout history.

No matter how genius one was in the current times, they would not be able to improve the existing spell in a better way.

—Because it's already so perfect that there's no more ways to improve it.

It was already a matter of fact that came to a conclusion more than a hundred years ago.

That was admitted by Flora Lumos as well.

'But if he has to change it, he has to lose something in the spell since there must be

something for him to trade off.'

—If the speed of the spell casting technique was increased rapidly, the other areas would inevitably weaken.

Less power, less range, or less accuracy.

However, if he reduced the elements of the spell, could they see it as a well-established spell?

No.

From then on, it would become a completely separate spell.

If wizards who extremely valued legitimacy saw it, they would be foaming at the mouth.

'If that's what you really meant by reducing the casting time...'

Flora's eyes narrowed.

'They'll be very disappointed. Professor.'

No. Flora would rather see Ludger do that.

Only then would it be easier for her to bite him.

'I think our great Princess felt that way, too.'

The third Princess, who had hair that looked like a weave of golden thread, showed off a different beauty than hers.

Unlike Flora, Ludger's remarks would inevitably be annoying for her as well, who liked to be straight and confident.

As if to prove it, the face of the princess was also cold.

As soon as the atmosphere in the classroom started to flow strangely...

Ludger clapped his hands to evoke the atmosphere.

“Stop. That’s all for the chatter.”

All the students were silent, but the atmosphere itself did not change.

Ludger smirked and spoke as though he didn’t realize the atmosphere.

“You seem to have a lot of questions. Good. Before I show you, I’ll take a few simple questions.”

At that moment, the students immediately raised their hands.

Ludger pointed at the student who raised their hand the fastest.

“Speak.”

“My name is Alex Salain, a sophomore. Professor, you said that you would speed up the spell casting time, but what exactly do you mean?”

“Shortening the time of casting the spell, just like how I said it. Be more precise if you want to ask questions. Next.”

“I’m a sophomore, Dahlia. If you shorten the time of the spell casting technique, do you mean you’re changing the spell?”

“It’s not like that. I’m keeping the spell as is, but I’m just going to shorten the casting time.”

Noises were heard from all over the classroom.

“Oh, for real? He’s really going to shorten the spell technique?”

“It can’t be possible. Wasn’t it a challenge that no wizard was ever able to overcome?”

“It doesn’t make sense. There can’t be a method like that.”

Flora thought the same thing. ‘He’s going to shorten the spell casting without changing or upgrading the technique?’

‘Don’t tell me it’s an obvious thing like improving our proficiency by doing it over and over again.’ But looking at the confident look on Ludger’s face, she felt annoyed

somehow.

“That’s impossible.”

Flora could not contain herself and spoke.

Ludger’s cold gaze aimed at her. Flora’s pride was slightly hurt by the look in his eyes that seemed to be asking who the hell she was.

“I’m Flora Lumos.”

Her self-introduction raised the buzz around her.

“It’s Flora. Flora has spoken up.”

“Ha ha. That professor is done too.”

Flora also had fame among the students. It was the same for new students who just entered the academy.

—A sophomore genius. She was already famous among first years, as she maintained her nickname as a genius in Sören.

It was natural for all the students to pay attention to her since she had a different view from Ludger’s method right from the first day of class.

“I don’t remember allowing you to ask me a question, but I’ll let it slide this time. Yeah. What on earth is the impossible that you are talking about?”

“Of course, I’m talking about shortening the spell casting technique’s time. To speed up the spell casting technique without changing it and giving any improvement to the spell... there’s no other way but to do it fast through repeated proficiency.”

“Why do you think there’s no other way?”

“Because no one has ever done it until now. Even the geniuses whose names are remembered in history and the high-ranked archmages aren’t able to do that, but I can’t believe that you are going to do it.”

Even then, countless wizards in the magic tower were racking their brains every day

to continue doing research for new knowledge.

Nevertheless, unlike in the past, there were areas where progress was no longer made, and shortening spell casting times was a representative example.

To say that a new professor could do it, no matter how he became a professor in Sören Academy...

Beyond mere bluffing, it was more likely for it to be an overall insult to the magical academic world.

Chatter chatter.

* * *

Each student nodded in agreement with Flora's words.

There were no students who believed in Ludger or stood by him.

Little by little, the atmosphere of the classroom became hostile to Ludger.

But Ludger didn't even bat an eyelid.

He did not falter, as if no external pressure could even scratch him.

"They aren't able to do that' you said. That's an interesting thing to say. I see it differently. I think they were rather trying not to make any improvements."

"Pardon?"

"Magic values tradition and the lecturers, but it became stagnant at some point. Now that science has advanced, magic is under threat."

"...Are you saying that science is superior to magic?"

"In many ways. I just thought that magic, like science, has room for further development. 'There is no room for improvement' is wrong."

"That's never happened before."

“Because no one was going to try doing it.”

“Everyone who did failed.”

“Then I’ll be the first one to do it.”

“...Are you being serious?”

“There’s no reason for me to lie in front of everyone like this.”

Flora was overwhelmed by his brazen confidence.

‘Does that professor not know what he’s talking about?’

“Well, I don’t think you understand right now, so let’s continue the lesson. You said you’re Flora, right? Do you know how long it takes, on average, to construct the formula for the Fluttering Flame that I wrote on the magic board?”

“...It depends on who constructs it. Ten seconds for a wizard who has just reached the third rank. If you get used to it and the rank goes up, it’ll be shorter than five seconds.”

“Yeah, but I don’t welcome the lame way of increasing the rank to shorten the spell casting. What I’m saying is that it’s adapted to the level of the students who are taking my classes now.”

“Then it’ll be five seconds at the fastest.”

“Are you referring to yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Hoo, that’s a lot of confidence. Then can you show it yourself? Stand here on the podium.”

Flora was not intimidated by the highly provocative words.

“Sure.”

Flora stepped down from her seat and stood on the podium with confident footsteps.

She lifted up her wand and immediately casted Fluttering Flame.

Casting the foundation of it, the property element was flame, then heating, combustion, compression, expansion, diffusion, and acceleration.

Rising into the air was the spell technique of a burning flame.

It was a neat and efficient spell casting technique.

Her speed was like a raging wind, and the students who were watching burst into admiration.

'As expected of Sören's genius. As expected of the daughter of Lumos family.'

Flora looked back at Ludger with an expression that seemingly said, 'How was that?'

Ludger checked the golden pocket watch in his hand.

"It took you 4.78 seconds to cast it. It's a speed that doesn't seem like a sophomore's. The process was perfect as well."

"It was nothing."

"But it's still slow."

It was Ludger's cold voice that chided Flora, who was trying to boast.

"...Pardon?"

"Among third-tier wizards, the fastest time to perform Fluttering Flame is 4.41 seconds. No one is faster than that. It's still slow."

"...I can do it faster once I get used to it."

"I'm saying that even 4.41 seconds is slow."

'Is he being serious?'

Everyone was dumbfounded by Ludger's extremely confident declaration.

Ludger decided to show it himself after saying that.

Standing on the podium, Ludger began to focus on his mana.

“Take a good look, this is how you cast Fluttering Flame.”

Mumbling like that, he lifted a small wand and pointed it into the air.

The mana from the tip of the wand soon began to form a spell.

...But something was weird.

After the base casting spell technique, it was not the stage of heating and combustion that had to be done in order to form the Fluttering Flame.

—It was just a very natural flow of mana with unknown meaning or intention that was made of a straight beam.

Isn't he casting a Fluttering Flame?

It was the moment the students thought so...

That the spell of Fluttering Flame had been completed in the air.

It happened in the blink of an eye.

“...!!!”

The whole classroom was filled with a silent outcry.

There was no one who missed it. Because first of all, Ludger slowly showed how he casted his spell so that everyone could see it.

The beginning wasn't a technique of Fluttering Flame.

His mana operation was completely different from the usual way...

But the results were identical.

The finished spell was Fluttering Flame. The result was perfect enough to look

exactly like what was in the textbook.

‘How on earth?’

Only the beginning and the end of the process existed, yet the middle process seemed to have been cut off and done away with.

It was as if he threw a stone sloppily behind his back, but the accuracy was no different than him intentionally shooting an arrow forward.

Even the speed was incredibly fast.

One second? No. It didn’t even take 0.3 seconds.

It was completely incomprehensible to the students’ common sense.

“Did you see that?”

And Ludger’s voice, who just accomplished such a nonsensical achievement, was neither high nor low.

—As if it was an obvious thing.

He didn’t have the slightest interest at how great the spell casting that he just did was.

“Wh-what was that just now?”

“I’ll show it one more time for those who haven’t seen it.”

Ludger said so as he broke down the existing formula and repeated the process.

—More slowly that time, so that everyone could see it properly.

The students stared at Ludger’s spell casting technique with their eyes wide open in case they missed something.

Mana shot out at the tip of the wand, and it proceeded in a strange method again like the first time.

And right away, the Fluttering Flame was completed.

“Cr-crazy.”

“Is that possible?”

“I don’t know even if I look at it again.”

It wasn’t an artifact, It wasn’t the spell of Memory Reverberation, and its implementation was not that fast either.

The process had to exist, no matter how quick it was.

...But he just skipped the whole process and showed only the result.

One should have pulled their bow’s string, then loosed the arrow, making the arrow fly and hit the target—there was a cause for everything.

The same goes for magic. They should show that kind of flow when they perform a spell...

But Ludger’s method was not like that at all.

He omitted the process of loosing an arrow and sending it flying, but the result was the same.

“No, what on earth did you just...”

Even Flora, who had watched it from the closest place without missing a single thing, didn’t understand the method that Ludger just showed.

No, no one who came there and saw it would understand right away.

Mysterious? New? Innovative? Those words swirled through her mind.

“Finally, everyone’s eyes have changed.”

Gulp.

The sound of someone swallowing saliva echoed throughout the room. The students

were so focused on what Ludger was going to say next.

“The Fluttering Flame that I just casted has a speed of 0.24 seconds. It’s quite different from the old record. But at the same time, you’ll think it’s weird. Because the first spell technique wasn’t Fluttering Flame.”

Yeah, it was that part.

He used a completely different technique, and the result was what he was aiming for.

That didn’t make sense according to common knowledge.

“I definitely used a spell technique. To be exact, I used a spell technique to cast another spell.”

“A spell technique to cast... another spell?”

“What on earth is that?”

The students who were muttering shut their mouths again.

“I call it source code.”

CHAPTER 14

SOURCE CODE (1)

My words made the students swallow their breaths.

Because some students didn't know what on earth source code was.

The other students were shocked by the advent of a new spell.

But what they looked at was the same, and I knew that not all their emotions were hostile.

'Well, it's indeed extremely surprising for the students.'

No matter how advanced the science was, this world was about the 19th century if compared to Earth.

Although it had achieved much more rapid progress than I had originally thought because magic—not science—was predominant.

Still, from the perspective of someone who lived in the 21st century, there were many shortcomings.

—Especially with the absence of a computer-based data processing system.

'Source code is a kind of blueprint that prints out the results as soon as you put in the input value. I made it by combining it with magic.'

Of course, I didn't make it on my own.

To be exact, I came up with the idea, but the actual composition and completion was possible because of the help of my teacher who taught me magic.

Still, I have a share in what I made, so there would be no problem for me to teach it to my students.

Considering my teacher's personality, they are not a person who would say anything about that. Rather, the problem was what I would go through once I came across it.

Let's get back to the point...

The technique of source code was a kind of trick method based on my memories when I lived on Earth.

It was unbelievable for students who knew nothing about computer hardware, software, programs, input and output, and code, even though they knew something about algorithms.

Most of all, the level of wizards became stagnant due to excessive public awareness and confidence, and at the same time, there was a widespread trend of ridiculing science.

There was no way they could easily accept it with the way they valued scientific impressions.

They'd foam at the mouth and shout, "This isn't magic!"

Compared to those guys, I still have a free way of thinking.

'Of course, I wasn't sure if they had the same idea.'

In order to operate the software called source code, a main body called hardware, programs, and data are required.

Hardware referred to the wand that could unfold magic, or the wizard itself.

The program was the spell technique, and the data was the mana that made it happen.

In the end, the source code that I used was through human biological hardware.

It consumed data called mana following a program called spell technique.

—It became a spell that contains the process of expressing the software called magic at once.

With source code, even complex spell techniques could be printed out with completed results by injecting only a little mana.

To put it simply, while others carefully drew strokes of techniques to cast the spell, I just printed it like a stamp.

It's easy, considering the difference in speed between handwriting and printing.

No matter how fast a human being wrote, they could not keep up with the speed of the person who printed with metal printing.

Even when they were impatient, they could make many mistakes.

It could be the case where the spell technique was out of order, the ending process was wrong, the flow of mana was tangled, or the procedure was not right.

Naturally, the spell would lose its mysterious power and become unusable.

Or there were also cases where the mana flowed back and their own lives were in danger.

But the programmed source code didn't have those kinds of mistakes.

Under any circumstances, only a set value was offered.

The speed was something other wizards dared not to follow.

'Of course, spells casted by a wizard in sixth rank or higher will be faster.'

Those superhumans had supercomputers in their heads, so they were an exception in the first place.

This source code must have been a great revolution for the students of Sören Academy, who had not yet fully grown properly.

'It's not that it doesn't have any shortcomings. You can only use it up to third-tier magic. Beyond that, the mana capacity will cause overload, and it's complicated and difficult to make the source code itself.'

Computer programmers go through a lot of testing while diversifying all kinds of

patterns in debugging for a reason.

I also racked my brain to make that one.

However, it was very convenient because it could be used for a very long time after making it once.

Moreover, I didn't have to create the source code for third-tier spells and below them one by one, as it was troublesome.

After all, source code spell was a product of an invention that was made to keep up by those who do not have talent.

It was sad that my circumstances couldn't turn out to be the best even if I did that.

But what could I do?

If I wanted to eat well for two years as a professor at the Academy where only geniuses gather, I had to teach classes with that kind of knowledge.

Well, wouldn't that be enough for me not to be underestimated?

I hoped so.

* * *

With the advent of a groundbreaking spell casting technique called source code, all the students were silent.

The silence that blanketed the classroom even felt passionate.

The first-year students especially seemed like they were about to shoot laser beams from their eyes.

They chose Ludger Chelysie's class because they felt like being half deceived, so they couldn't believe that they were witnessing such a thing.

Some students felt a chill in their backs.

'If I couldn't beat the moment and made a different choice...'

'If I didn't take this class today...'

A spell to cast another spell.

A new method of spell casting beyond common sense.

As it was impossible to see its appearance with naked eyes, their ability to learn it by watching was hindered.

It was such a terrible nightmare that it made them freeze to the marrow of their bones and caused their bodies to ache just by imagining it for those who were trying to walk on the wizard's path.

...Thank heaven.

All the students gathered there had the same thoughts.

And then they were able to see Ludger in a new light.

Obviously, his first impression was as a person who was very serious, in depth, and intense, contrary to what they thought.

Even so, what was important for a magic academy professor is magic skills, after all.

You can't gain a student's respect by just repeating what others have said.

But now...

All the students who saw the new magic had a feeling of awe beyond mere respect for Ludger.

* * *

Moreover, Ludger's behavior was amazing.

His expression shows no sign of excitement, even though he demonstrated in front of everyone a new method that could be called the discovery of the century.

Such natural behavior made the students suddenly immersed in thought.

'For this man, even the groundbreaking spell of source code could be performed in front of everyone naturally.'

Maybe...

'Isn't there another secret weapon besides this groundbreaking magic?'

If you've invented that much and you had that much of an apathetic reaction, there's definitely something else that's much greater.

At that moment...

The passion of the 80 magic academy students in the classroom sparkled.

'If I learn that spell...'

'If I turn his teaching into my own knowledge...'

'I can improve it more!'

Their strong will was revealed through their eyes, and the heated atmosphere was aimed at Ludger.

Ludger reacted with half-opened eyes, but his back inside his dress clothes was damp with cold sweat.

'What's wrong with their eyes?'

For Ludger, who expected the opinion that he was just a moderately great or good teacher, the students' response was beyond his imagination.

Their eyes were hotter than lava coming out through the stratum.

He felt like he was going to be scalded on it, so Ludger flogged his mind, pulled himself together, and maintained a poker face.

He had revealed one secret card there, so it'd be alright for a while.

However, he thought that he could not continue to push the classes only with that until sometime later.

—If he didn't want the academy to find out that he's a fraud, if he didn't want the secret society to find out that he was a fake...

He had to prepare more in the future.

'Let's go all the way to the end.'

—In order to survive.

First of all, he had to do something about the woman from a duke family who stood on the podium.

"Flora Lumos."

Startle.

Flora, who was distracted by Ludger's source code spell that he had just casted, finally came to her senses.

Ludger's cold and sharp eyes had her figure in them.

His eyes felt like they were cutting through her heart.

'Wha, what the hell is this guy...'

She thought of herself as a genius...

And she had the talent to match such a title.

No one doubted her because she showed her skills to those who had doubts.

Even the professors at the academy were intimidated in front of her.

No matter how old they were, no matter how long they had learned magic, no matter how hard they tried...

She was ahead of her professors.

But that man was different.

He didn't boast nor did he show off his talents. Yet still, he was not swayed by the others.

It was like looking at a pillar of steel that was deeply embedded in the ground and standing tall.

—Even throughout the storm, the rain, and the snow, it doesn't get rusty nor worn out.

No matter what kind of flaws she tried to catch, there was not a single scratch.

'What the hell, how come this guy is a new professor? Source code? I've never heard of such a spell.'

Even Flora, who had encountered the royal family several times, had taken a step back to such pressure.

Even the royal Princess had her eyes wide open at Ludger's performance.

"A groundbreaking shortcut to spell casting. Have you finally solved the question you were curious about?"

"...Yes."

Flora replied, pretending to be calm as best as she could.

She kept her posture neat and held her trembling voice. She kept telling herself not to be swayed.

Was her behavior funny?

There was a slight smile around Ludger's mouth.

As if he'd already seen through her desperate, strong act.

"Flora Lumos."

"...Yes, Professor."

"You couldn't overcome your own prejudice, and you asked me questions without my

permission. Do you admit it?"

Flora bit her lips tightly.

It hurt her pride, but she couldn't disagree.

Flora managed to move her lips as she clenched her fist with her cute little hand.

"Yes... I admit it."

It was a painful sense of defeat that she had never felt before.

The envious eyes of the students, which she usually felt, had never been as painful as they were then.

Suddenly, she remembered a childhood memory that she had wanted to forget.

—Her father looking down at her with a cold stare. —Her goal of wanting to be recognized by him.

She held back her tears desperately.

She couldn't crumble there yet.

"I won't say more than that because you have acknowledged it yourself, but your actions are clearly a direct challenge to the professor's authority. As I warned you at first, I'm not going to let this slide."

"...Yes."

"Flora Lumos. I give you 10 penalty points."

Penalty point...

It wasn't that great, but if the target was Flora, the story was different.

Sören's genius who had never made a mistake before...

Even the penalty points, which were only 10 points, were huge because she had no penalty points, and she had seemed unlikely to have any in the future before.

—A slight flaw in a perfect artifact.

Therefore, it turned out to be big and painful more than anything.

“Do you have any complaints?”

“...No, I think that’s fair.”

Flora bit her lips tightly.

“Oh, my Gosh.”

“That Flora...”

Even the other students were surprised that Flora got a penalty.

Moreover, it was not a forced nitpicking but a reasonable punishment that even she had to admit.

Flora came down from the podium with weak steps and returned to her original seat.

At that moment, Ludger’s voice called her up.

“But the Fluttering Flame technique that you showed me was more perfect than anything I’ve ever seen before.”

She stopped and looked back at the podium.

Ludger was staring at her with unwavering and straight eyes.

“I don’t hate students with talents. So, Flora Lumos, you have 10 award points.”

Ten award points...

As a result, the 10 penalty points given to her were practically gone.

The students who were envious of Flora thought that the penalty points were fortunate, and the students who admired Flora thought it was unfortunate.

But Flora, as someone who was directly involved, felt an unprecedented sense of shame.

Even if the penalty points disappeared, there was still the memory that she had gotten the penalty points.

It was unforgettable even after 10 years, or maybe even after a lifetime.

But suddenly, she had an award point.

Flora interpreted the meaning of the award points given by Ludger in this way:

It's the mercy of a winner to a foolish student who dared to come at him. Even that compliment was just deceit.

That, in turn, left an indelible scar on Flora's pride.

"Thank... you."

But...

That was all she could say.

When she returned to her seat, Cheryl, who was watching the whole situation anxiously, spoke in a worried voice.

"Flora, are you okay?"

Cheryl knew how strong Flora's pride was. To be exact, she became like that because of what she had been through as a child.

It was hard to imagine how disgraceful it would be for Flora to be rebuked by the new professor in front of everyone.

"Yeah. I'm fine."

Flora replied with a bright smile. Her relaxed appearance was no different from her usual self, and she did not appear to be wounded at all.

'Oh, so she's fine. Yeah, Flora can get over this soon.'

Cheryl was inwardly relieved.

It seemed foolish of her to think that her friend might go astray in a bad way.

It was still like that. Flora was preparing to listen to the class, staring at the podium with the same face as usual.

But Cheryl couldn't see it. Not only she, no one in the classroom knew it.

—The flame in Flora's eyes, a hot fire that would burn everything down.

* * *

I went back to my position and looked at Flora's condition.

Later, I remembered that the Lumos family was a famous dukedom in the Empire. That means that she was the daughter of a ducal family.

'She's not gonna use her family's power to put pressure on me, right? Maybe she will go home and tell her father?'

Although the place was Sören, such possibilities could not be ignored just because the students were still young.

However, Flora's expression as she sat down was calm. There was nothing strange in her face when she exchanged a conversation naturally with the friend sitting next to her.

'Hmm, sure.'

'Apparently, she's a smart and bright kid, so she won't make too much of it, right?'

The reason why I gave the award point in the first place was because it was a kind of reconciliation attempt to not fight and to get along well in the future.

I was really glad that she seemed to accept it well.

"Then let's proceed to the first class."

CHAPTER 15

SOURCE CODE (2)

“I will select some students who follow my class well and teach them how to do the source code.”

As I said that, I shook the carrot a little, and the students listened to my class without saying much.

Ding Dong. Ding Dong.

When I finished explaining the theory and simple method of releasing the mana, the bell of the clock tower rang to mark the end of the class.

I breathed a sigh of relief inwardly, thinking that I had finished the class safely without any tackles.

The students seemed to not be suspicious of anything because I had explained the contents of the textbook appropriately and mixed them with practical tips.

The first step was easy, so I could just continue with that atmosphere in my next classes.

My lecture period had a total of four hours a week.

Since there were a total of two classes per week divided by two hours, I had a lot of time until the next class.

As I was about to leave the classroom after putting on my outer garment, I could see some students looking at me as if they wanted to approach me but had some doubts about it.

I was wondering why for a moment, but I realized later that I had missed something.

“Ah, for your information, I won’t give you any assignments for the first day. Just go back to your daily activities and review the lesson for today.”

“Yay!”

“Phew. That’s a relief.”

The students smiled brightly and rejoiced at my words.

Even the geniuses who gathered in the Academy were students, after all. Seeing them overjoyed and burdened with the existence of one assignment, I realized that they were still children.

Well, no matter how strict I was in teaching them, I wouldn’t give them any assignments from day one.

Other professors besides me were going to give them assignments anyway.

Usually, professors who gave assignments from the first day of their class were bound to be criticized for the whole semester.

As for the lesson, every mercy that I showed to them was based on some kind of calculation.

The more of their backbiting and complaints about the other professors, the less mention there would be of criticism toward me will be.

I packed the list of students’ names on the podium and left the classroom. Even when I headed out, the students’ eyes still followed me, but I naturally ignored them.

I was immersed in thoughts such as how I should proceed with the next class and how I could find out the basic personal information about the 80 students who were taking my class.

In addition, considering there was information that had not yet been revealed about the secret society, I had to move as quickly as possible.

* * *

‘Whoa. This is for real, right?’

Aidan, a freshman who had entered Sören Academy that year, realized that he had really come to Sören after listening to Ludger Chelysie’s class.

'I vaguely thought it was going to be like this, but it was hella amazing.'

Aidan, who came from the countryside, was a commoner, but he was a young man who had confidence that he was fully passionate about magic more than anyone else.

Thanks to the efforts and some luck that he has built up so far, he had passed Sören's entrance examination, and he took his first class while dreaming of a prosperous future as a freshman.

—Ludger Chelysie's lecture on the overall spell casting technique.

To be honest, he did not have that much of an expectation.

When he first entered the classroom, he secretly listened to the talks of other students because this class that he took was more talkative than he thought.

-There are actually a total of two classes of magic casting, and among those two, this one is taught by a fallen aristocrat.

-Originally, he was a new professor who couldn't pass the entry examination here, but he was lucky to pass because there were five vacancies due to the professors who retired last year.

-All the rumors about him in <Akashic Records> are fake and exaggerated.

It was obviously the talks from the aristocratic students who spoke ill of others and looked down on them.

However, Aidan, who came to Leathevelk from the countryside, did not doubt their words much because he knew that they were seniors and that they were great aristocrats.

'Is the professor named Ludger Chelysie really not that good?'

It was just a class that he chose without much thought, so he regretted it for some reason.

But Aidan realized how wrong his doubts were when Ludger appeared.

The man who overwhelmed the classroom atmosphere with 80 students in it just by

standing on the podium was like a soldier facing a fierce war.

And what happened later made Aidan even more shocked.

After having a conversation with a female senior about the impossibility of shortening the time span of spell casting, he introduced a spell technique.

As soon as he witnessed the spell that Ludger Chelysie called source code, Aidan felt the blood in his body race.

It was a shock that made him feel like there was a blazing explosion in front of them.

It was the light of knowledge that appeared when he clearly watched a mystery that had never been witnessed before and the revolutionary moment that expanded his perspectives toward a wider world.

It seemed like an excessive line, but at least Aidan felt that way.

When he was a little kid who didn't know anything yet, there had been a wandering wizard who showed him magic.

The first spell that the wandering wizard showed was only first-tier magic, and when he reminisced about it, the spell technique was imperfect and crude.

At that time, Aidan thought that the performance was extremely cool.

Since then, he had been taught by the wandering wizard in studying magic and continued on his own, but nothing had beat the thrill that he felt when he witnessed magic for the first time yet.

Still, he remembered that learning magic itself was so much fun.

Thanks to his passion for magic and unexpectedly great talent for magic, Aidan advanced faster as the days went by. Thus, he was able to enter Sören Magic Academy through fierce competition.

He took his first class thinking that this place might satisfy his thirst for magic and open up a new world before him.

He ended up witnessing something that was extremely astonishing.

'Professor Ludger Chelysie is really an incredible person!'

Aidan already thought that he was extraordinary from his first impression of Ludger, but it was real.

—He had showcased a real, new spell that didn't exist in the world yet, not just some false facade.

Aidan was so happy to take the class that he couldn't hide his excitement.

"Hmph."

It was then...

The voice of blatant disdain aimed at him was heard from the next seat.

When he turned his head, a male student who looked like he was from the same year was looking at him with his arms folded.

His face was handsome, but he looked quite greasy, probably because of his parted blond hair that highlighted his forehead.

"This is why we should have no commoners. He's amazed just because he saw something like that."

"Huh? Did you say that to me?"

"Then who else is a commoner besides you here?"

Aidan then looked around at his surroundings. Now that the majority of students have already left the classroom, there are not many people left.

"Ah! So you were talking to me!"

Because of his innocent reaction that contradicted his expectation, the aristocratic male student's face who just triggered the dispute frowned.

"You. Are you making fun of me right now?"

"What? Making fun of you? No way."

Aidan smiled awkwardly and tried to say that he didn't mean to make fun of him at all, but the person in front of him was already so upset with thinking he had been insulted.

“How dare you look down on me, Jevan, the first descendant of Baron Felio?”

Aidan was drenched in a cold sweat. It seemed that it would still be hopeless for him in many ways even if he wanted to let this pass nicely.

‘What do I do?’

As soon as Aidan was contemplating how he should overcome the situation, someone came to help him.

“If you're from Felio Baronage, isn't it the family that lived at the place closest to the border of the Empire?”

“What... what the hell?! Who are you?”

It was a sky-blue-haired boy whose height was shorter than the others who helped Aidan.

Jevan Felio looked at the boy and sneered.

* * *

“Hah. Is this kind of brat able to enter Sören Academy too these days?”

“It's still better than the fact that an idiotic son of a baron passed Sören's test.”

“What?! How dare you insult the Felio family?”

As Jevan clenched his teeth and was about to charge his mana, Leo—the boy with sky blue hair—did not lose his smile.

“You should pay for your words and actions for insulting an aristocrat...”

“Try to do it.”

“What... what?”

“Try to do it. Let’s see what will happen if you cast a spell to attack us here.”

Jevan was dumbfounded by Leo’s confident words.

Jevan thought a commoner would bow their head meekly if he was intimidating enough.

“Do you think it is still your family background that makes you superior to us? Wake up. If you cause even a little commotion here, you can’t even call yourself a nobleman. Didn’t you get that kind of notice before you came here?”

“You, you...!”

“Since I have nothing to say, just shut your mouth if you don’t know what else to do except glare at me like that. And check the situation before you even raise your voice. Can’t you see the surroundings?”

Hearing Leo’s words, Jevan realized that there were still several students left in the classroom. Among them, there were also children of aristocrats from higher status whom he would not dare to look at.

“Hee, heek! Just wait and see!”

Jevan stared at Aidan as if he was about to kill him before leaving the classroom.

Aidan contemplated what he should do with the situation.

However, at that moment, his priority was to thank that fellow for helping him.

“Thank you for helping me. I’m Aidan.”

“I’m Leo. Ah, and you don’t have to thank me. I just stepped up because I was disgusted to see him acting up as an aristocrat.”

“You’re such a nice person, aren’t you?”

“...How did you perceive my words just now?”

Leo stared at Aidan as if he was a strange fellow and shook his head.

“Well, whatever. I’m leaving now.”

“Ah! I’m leaving with you.”

“Where do you think I’m going?”

“Aren’t you going to take the next class? The thing you’re holding in your hand, it’s for the Alchemy class of Embodiment’s specialization, right? It’s also my next class right after this one.”

“...Tsk. Do whatever you want.”

Leo spoke brusquely, but he did not kick Aidan away or reject Aidan’s offer to accompany him. Aidan felt that Leo’s way of speaking was just a little strange and that he was a good person.

Leo suddenly opened his mouth while watching Aidan, who was packing his textbooks for the next class.

“You’d better go around without being too obvious about it.”

“Huh? Obvious about what?”

“Obvious about being a country bumpkin, obvious about being a commoner, obvious that you haven’t studied magic properly. Whatever it is, you’re showing it off too much.”

“Oh, is that so? I’m sorry. I don’t know much about that.”

“Don’t forget, this is Sören Academy. It’s a place full of amazing people.”

“Amazing people? Ah, I think I know it since I just saw Professor Chelysie.”

Leo sighed at Aidan’s stunned response. There seemed to be a lot to explain to this poor fellow.

“Listen up. Since you’re already taking the class, you need to know how this place works. And you also have to be careful about certain students.”

“Certain students?”

“There are students who have an exceptionally overwhelming position inside Sören. Right now, us first years are considered not knowing anything because we just came in, but it won’t work if we proceed to the second year.”

The most representative example was Flora Lumos.

“Flora Lumos, the sophomore. I didn’t expect her to take the same class with us, but you should be careful about her.”

“Why?”

“There are rumors that she has a trashy personality. They said that the sudden resignation of the professor who was in charge of the magic casting class last year was mostly due to her influence. To be honest, I thought it would be like that again this time...”

Leo also recalled Ludger Chelysie’s class. The groundbreaking spell of source code that he showed was certainly amazing.

—That Flora Lumos had even stepped down without even being able to say anything.

However, he didn’t think Flora Lumos will back down just because of that. Instead, there was a possibility that her spark of anger would be released to the others.

“So you’d better avoid her as much as you can.”

“Is there anyone else?”

“Of course there is. Someone who came from the noblest lineages of the Exileon Empire.”

“Ah, I heard that rumor too. They said there’s a royal princess among the sophomores, right?”

“The 3rd Princess, Elendil von Exileon. She’s extremely noble, and the Emperor is fond of her, that’s why she’s able to enter this place. Of course, it’s not good for us as commoners to get involved with her.”

“Ah, that person.”

Aidan recalled a woman with hair that resembled weaves of golden thread.

Blonde hair wasn't that rare, but there was only one person who was able to radiate such nobility through her blonde hair.

"And lastly, Freuden Wolburg."

"If it's Wolburg, do you mean that Wolburg? One of the three ducal families....."

"Do you think there's another Wolburg in the Empire? Freuden, the eldest son of the Duke's family, Wolburg. He is the man who leads the biggest faction in his second year. It's an upper-class faction consisting of only aristocrats, to be exact."

"Upper-class... faction."

"They are people who see commoners like us as no different than bugs on the side of the road, so it's better not to get involved with them. Fortunately, Freuden doesn't take this class. For your information, the idiot who picked a fight with you a while ago seems to belong to that faction."

"It was inevitable. Is there anyone else?"

"...You were just being stamped on, but you are curious about the other people instead? Should I say you're quite bold or quite slow?"

Leo had no idea what kind of person Aidan was, but at least Leo was sure he was not a bad or rotten guy.

"There are indeed a few more."

"Oh really? Who are they?"

"I'll tell them to you later, on the way."

"Okay! Ah, do you also want to eat with me later?"

"What? Why should I?"

Aidan and Leo left the classroom while chattering.

—Without knowing that one of the remaining students in the classroom was watching them.

* * *

‘Hmm. Is this a private professor’s office?’

I felt a little peculiar gut feeling in front of the door of a room that was called a professor’s office.

Perhaps because it was Sören, even the new professors were given a considerably spacious personal space.

The nameplate at the entrance also had the name Ludger Chelysie.

‘Let’s go in first.’

I was curious about what the inside looked like, so I decided to check it out.

I opened the door and went inside the professor’s office.

—And I had no choice but to be surprised to see the guest who had arrived there first.

“Oh my, Mr. Ludger. Come here.”

One of the people whom I had to be the wariest of...

—The principal of Sören Academy.

CHAPTER 16

SUSPICION (1)

‘Why is that person suddenly here?’

I didn’t know why on earth the principal was there.

I walked into my private professor’s office at a leisurely pace and closed the door.

There should never be a situation where I revealed my true feelings, no matter what happened, when I didn’t even know what purpose she came to see me for.

Clack.

As the door closed, a breathtaking silence blanketed the room.

I naturally sat on the seat opposite the guest sofa where the principal sat.

She just smiled brightly at me.

It was the principal who opened her mouth first.

“What do you think? The interior design is quite pretty, right?”

It was a sentence without any context for the start of a conversation.

But I wouldn’t let my guard down. Maybe such action itself was her attempt to pry into me.

“Yes, it is.”

“Sören Academy provides every professor with their own personal space. You can do whatever you want here without being self-conscious of the others, Professor Ludger.”

“I like that.”

The principal's golden eyes turned to me.

I also faced her without avoiding her gaze.

I could see myself inside her eyes akin to a beautifully decorated amber.

Just like when I first met her, I felt somewhat anxious when I faced the principal's eyes.

I immediately changed the subject.

"What brings you here, your honor?"

"Did I come to a place where I shouldn't have come?"

"I'm just curious as to why such a busy person like you comes to a new professor's private office."

"Then it's not like I'm in a place that I can't come to, right?"

"But I feel burdensome."

The principal shut her mouth when I spoke straightforwardly.

Her gentle smile still lingered, but inside her eyes, a peculiar feeling that was hard to understand spread like a drop of ink in the water.

The principal shook her head

"There is no particular reason."

"Is that so?"

"Even though you are a new professor here, you're still a valuable assigned professor at Sören Academy. Of course, as a principal, I can't help but pay attention to you."

"I see."

Listening to my moderate response, she showed a pouty look, somewhat dissatisfied with it.

“You can be a little more surprised, though?”

“I’m sorry, but I’m already surprised enough.”

‘It’s not a lie, it’s the truth.’

I had opened the door excitedly because it was my personal space, and I was very surprised to see the principal.

I was more confident that I wouldn’t be that surprised if I ran into a ghost on the street in the middle of the night.

However, I just didn’t show it because I had no leisure to do it.

In fact, my heart was still beating like crazy, so I was nervous that the president might hear it.

“The other professors were all surprised.”

“Did you stop by the offices besides mine?”

“Yours is the last one.”

‘Why did she come to me last? And is the principal thinking of having a face-to-face talk with the new professors?’

I suddenly remembered the existence of a secret society that permeated Sören.

‘Maybe...’

Did the principal notice something?

No matter how secretive the society was, they could not hide their tail perfectly.

And if it was someone like the principal...

‘She may have noticed that those who made suspicious movements have come into Sören.’

If I didn’t know, I would pass it on, but because I knew there was a secret society

there, I saw the principal's attitude differently.

'Is she being suspicious of me?'

'There is a possibility.'

'It's a bit unfair for me, but frankly, I can't raise any objections.'

'I don't belong to the secret society, but I'm the secret society executive.'

'I don't know what this is all about, but those are actually my current circumstances.'

'Come to think of it, my real identity is not that honorable as well, so I have to work hard not to be caught.'

"So, what question does your honor want to ask me?"

"It's nothing. I'd like to check how your first class was. You were just coming back from your class, right?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever had a hard time with students?"

"Not at all."

Rather, I wondered if it was alright for the students to not ask me questions like what happened then.

Well, I deliberately gave off the vibe of prohibiting them from coming near me, but I just meant for them not to bother me too much. I didn't know anyone wouldn't do anything at all.

Ah. But the daughter from Lumos family did ask me a question.

"Hmm, that's interesting. I looked at the list of students who attended your lectures this time, and there were quite a lot of famous students."

"Is that so?"

“You haven’t seen the list yet?”

“I brought it to see it now.”

I waved the paper in my hand.

“Well, it’s actually up to you, Professor Ludger, but just in case, please be careful not to cause any problems, as the princess is there as well.”

“Yes, I will.”

“The princess?”

‘Did even a royal princess come to take my class as well?’

I just felt confused rather than feeling honored or anything else.

Suddenly, I remember a blonde student who had boldly asked me a question.

‘Come to think of it, I thought she looked familiar, so she was from that lineage... ’

“And I heard that there are also many freshmen in your class. I thought you were only going to teach the sophomores, but I didn’t think you were going to teach it as a joint class with the freshmen as well.”

“Because I didn’t mean to build differences between the first and second years.”

“I’m not blaming you. Rather, I approve of your way that brings a breath of fresh air to this Academy. I can especially see some of the most amazing students among the freshmen.”

“Amazing kids you said?”

“Yes. There are some kids who use Uncommon Magic, some kids who come from great families, and some kids who have worked hard while being raised in the magic tower. Usually, I think there would be a gap if they come from different years, but I don’t think that’s going to happen for the freshmen who came in this time.”

Her brightly smiling face when she was thinking of the students fit her position as an academy principal.

But my skin shivers whenever I see that smile.

First of all, I was not a person who would say such a thing confidently because of my conscience, so I only listened to the principal and responded briefly.

“Well, anyway, Sören has high expectations for Professor Ludger Chelysie”

“I’m unworthy of such an appraisal.”

“I’m glad you didn’t encounter any problems in your first class, and your first impression of the students seems to be okay. You saved me from my concerns.”

The principal stood up at the end of her sentence.

“How about having a cup of tea before leaving?” I asked out of courtesy.

“Yes?”

Was it unexpected that I said that?

She showed a slightly confused look before squinting her eyes like a crescent moon.

“I appreciate the offer, but I have a lot of work to do. I could barely spare the time to come here.”

“I see.”

“And you just arrived here, do you even know where the tea and glasses are in the professor’s office?”

“Somewhere inside the shelf, right?”

“Wrong. Actually, we only prepared coffee. If you want to drink tea, you have to apply for a separate tea room.”

“I see. I didn’t know about that.”

“You can keep it in mind for the future. Then let’s get along well in the future as well.”

The principal, who sent her farewell to me with a playful smile, left after she said

those words.

She was simply like a calm storm.

I sighed softly and rubbed my eyelids with my fingers.

* * *

“How was it?”

The old gentleman, Wilford, asked while following the principal, who walked in the hallway with leisurely steps.

“Have your suspicions of Professor Ludger been resolved?”

“Well, I don’t know.”

The principal recalled the conversation she had with Ludger Chelysie—the restrained attitude that he had shown her, to be exact.

“I’m not so sure.”

“Is that so?”

‘Ludger Chelysie was a unique man.’ The principal thought.

When anyone looked at her, they would be enchanted by her golden eyes.

To be exact, it’s more like they would be possessed by her eyes that were gifted with the reverberation of magic power since she was born.

A captivating vaskania.

It’s her power and the first merit that brought her up to her position.

Of course, it was not intentional for her to use the captivating vaskania on other people. It was kind of a part of her blood since she was born, so if she made eye contact with someone, they’d get captivated without her intention.

It was possible to control her eyes to some extent at least, but in the past, her daily

life was difficult.

But after becoming principal, she honestly admitted that she couldn't have come to that position without the vaskania.

—Because nothing beat her eyes if people who came into Sören had a secret plan and she wanted to find out about it.

'I was going to pry him with the excuse for a personal face-to-face talk, though.'

'The more the mana that the other party has, the more influenced they will be by my vaskania, though.'

Her vaskania could affect even a fourth-rank wizard. Of course, the requirement was that the other person did not currently use any mental defense magic.

Especially since, the greater the magic power the other party had, the easier it was for them to be influenced by her vaskania. The power of her vaskania was proportional to the total amount of magic power the other party had.

But Ludger was not like that.

He must have been a fourth-rank wizard, but his reaction was completely different from other professors.

The first time he met her vaskania was when he had just entered the principal's office.

And that was the second time.

The man faced her vaskania twice and showed no signs of being swayed.

Did he not manage to see it? No, she knew that he obviously faced her vaskania, but he showed no signs of being swayed.

It meant that he had resisted the power of her vaskania with a steel-like strong will.

The principal's eyes shone.

'He really is...'

‘an interesting man.’

The principal had no choice but to think so.

But of course, she couldn’t show her feelings bluntly.

“I sensed suspicious movements, so I’m focusing on the people whom I feel the most suspicious of, but I haven’t had any results.”

Since she had recently found out that a group of bad people was hidden in Sören, she couldn’t even let the little things pass by.

Ludger Chelysie was involved in a train terrorist attack on his way there.

It wasn’t his fault...

But she had some suspicions just in case.

‘What if the train incident was a blindfold, and in the meantime, a man named Ludger Chelysie was replaced?’

That’s why the principal sent Wilford, her most trusted right-hand man and one of the strongest men in Sören’s history...

On the pretext of picking him up.

“What do you think about it, Mr. Wilford?”

“Hmm. I don’t think I can trust him right away, but I didn’t find anything suspicious about him either.”

“Is that so?”

If Wilford said so, it was one among two probabilities:

Either Ludger Chelysie was really innocent...

Or he was someone who was amazing enough to fool them perfectly.

‘I can only hope that it’s not the latter.’

There were so many things to worry about at the moment, so she decided to stop worrying about Ludger.

“Oh, but I can be sure of one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“That Ludger Chelysie, he’s not an ordinary person at all.”

“He’s not ordinary? What made you say that?”

“All I can say is that it’s just from this old man’s gut feelings.”

“What?”

Wilford seemed to favor Ludger Chelysie quite a lot.

She could trust Wilford, who had good eyes on people, if he said so.

Still, it didn’t completely remove her suspicions.

—Because at any given moment, there could be the worst possible outcome.

A wizard was a person who had to give deep consideration to such possibilities.

Most of all, she was the principal of Sören Academy.

She had no choice but to be careful in every case because she held a position that required her to be the perfect person who could not tolerate even an inch of carelessness.

* * *

Being left alone, I was finally able to relax my shoulders and let out a sigh after confirming that her sense of presence outside the door was getting farther away.

I was exhausted.

My brain demanded mana.

'I can't believe the principal suddenly came to see me.'

Well, according to her words it was just a personal face-to-face talk with new professors.

But who would believe such words if a principal suddenly came to see them?

I betted they were all inwardly questioning it.

'That's not what's important.'

I went straight to my personal desk and sat down.

The desk that was made of luxurious wood seemed quite expensive.

There was a clock made of cogwheels on one side of the wall; on the other side of the wall, Sören's map was displayed on a board and was spread out.

Red curtains were spread out on the left and right sides of the window with an antique design, and even the chair I was sitting on was very luxurious.

I was impressed by Sören's totality, which allocated that amount of space to new professors, and again by the fact that it was filled with all sorts of high-end furniture.

I looked at the list of students who were taking my lecture.

'So it's for real.'

There were students who had exceptionally long and cool names on the list of those who took my class.

Elendil von Exileon from the second year...

If someone had the Empire's name Exileon as their surname, you would have known right away that she was of royal descent unless you were a fool.

'She's the student who questioned me daringly during the orientation, right?'

I had thought she looked familiar to me. 'So she was a member of the royal family...'

It was driving me crazy. 'Why does the princess, of all people, have to attend my lecture?'

She must have been taking classes from other professors besides me, but that doesn't mean my burdens went away.

No matter how Sören was said to be the third area where private autonomy was guaranteed within the Empire, if there was a person from the imperial family, the story would be different.

If anything happened to her, I'd be in trouble.

'There's no way anything could happen to her in Sören, but it's just in case.'

I could not rule out small incidents that might occur when she was experimenting with magic chemicals, simulating actual combat, or performing alchemy.

Even if I paid attention to the safety of students as much as I could, there were times when students fight against each other in places that can't be seen by their professors.

In order to eliminate such a situation as much as possible, professors were also obligated to protect students.

...Come to think of it, there was even a secret society hidden in Sören recently.

'It's driving me crazy.'

'Well, there won't be any incidents happening right away, so let's think calmly for now.'

I also looked carefully at the list of other students.

There were also some other first and second years who stood out.

'Flora of the Lumos family as well, and there are even aristocrats from other kingdoms?'

Then my gaze went to a student's name and stopped.

‘Aidan.’

—A commoner who did not grow up in a particularly great family or that was taught by a prominent wizard.

He must have had the talent since he managed to enter, but he was also a child whom I couldn’t find anything special with compared to other students.

‘He looks somewhat familiar.’

There was something that was strangely gripping my nerves.

CHAPTER 17

SUSPICION (2)

‘There’s nothing that comes to my mind right away.’

Even if I was concerned about Aidan, I couldn’t recall anything right away, so I decided to move on.

I put all the personal information of the rest of the students into my brain.

There were a total of 54 freshmen and 26 sophomores.

The ratio between first and second years was roughly 2:1. I had already guessed that the number of freshmen was higher because their color was dominant among the existing name tags, but it was more than I thought.

‘There are also some freshmen whom I should be careful of. Starting from the newcomers who were backed by the magic tower and the alchemy school, to the kid who was publicized as an extraordinary rookie in the magic tower.’

Even students with ordinary grades in Sören were called geniuses when they went outside Sören.

And all those geniuses then strayed to various places.

The place was crowded with such people, so it was certainly far from common sense.

Having checked the list of all the students, I placed the papers on the desk and pressed my fingers against my throbbing forehead.

‘I’m tired. I’m tired in a lot of ways.’

I recalled the meeting and conversation that I had with the principal a while before.

Considering the principal came to me and pried at me, it meant I hadn’t fully earned her trust yet.

Moreover, Sören's trust as well.

It wasn't a complete suspicion, probably fifty-fifty when I thought about it.

There was a high possibility that their views toward me would be divided depending on how I behaved in the future.

'It doesn't matter.'

Since I had already decided to play my role, I had no intention of showing any suspicious behaviors.

The principal was the sixth rank <Lexure>, almost the top of the eight existing hierarchies.

I had heard she had crossed the seventh rank.

A fourth rank wizard could not beat her even if there were 100 of them.

'Not to mention the principal... The biggest problem is the secret society.'

The secret society was still quiet because it was just the beginning of the semester, but if time went by and there was a chance for them to maneuver behind the scenes, they'd move right away.

The problem was: for what purpose did they infiltrate Sören Academy?

What were they trying to do by planting people there while getting rid of some employees?

Were they literally aiming to overthrow Sören, or was there something in Sören?

'Maybe it's a kind of treason against the empire.'

I brought out the newspaper that was stuck between the documents and spread it out.

The article in the newspaper, written in black letters, still covered the last incident of the Magic Engineering locomotive terror attack.

[The terrorist attack on the Magic Engineering locomotive turned out to be conducted by the Revolutionary Army.]

It seemed almost certain that there was a Revolutionary Army behind the train raid.

The Revolutionary Army, or the Liberation Army.

The Revolutionary Army, under the ideal of the fall of imperialism and the uprising of citizens to break down the existing unfair status system...

‘To be honest, it’s no different than a terrorist organization.’

Originally, if it was according to the earth’s history, the politics of this time would have felt like a parliamentary cabinet system was added to the modern constitutional monarchy, but this world, where magic existed, still belonged to the power of kings and nobles.

Still, seeing all kinds of various movements taking place in this world over the past 50 years, the world was also on a similar trend to the flow from the Earth where I lived.

—The stagnant magic and the science that grew rapidly.

At the same time, magic engineering was born by combining science and magic.

It was just amazing that such extreme change was happening in less than a century.

And that’s also the reason why the Revolutionary Army happened.

‘However, it is highly likely that the secret society is not related to the real Revolutionary Army.’

Frankly speaking, the death of the real First Order, Ludger Chelysie, led me to such a conclusion.

If he was in the same organization, why would he be involved in a train terror attack and die?

The reaction he showed then was that of someone who never expected his train to be attacked.

It meant that the terrorist attack itself was completely unexpected by the secret society.

'It would be right to separate the secret society from the Revolutionary Army.'

And there was another thing I could guess:

The First Order known as Ludger Chelysie was not someone who was suitable for combat.

'He was definitely good at magic; his judgment wasn't bad either. He probably received high-level training.'

However, it was not so overwhelming that he was called an executive of a secret society.

What particularly bothered me was the reaction of his secret society's subordinate, who had contacted me secretly.

'His subordinate saw my face and she just thought I was the First Order. I'm sure it's not that she doesn't know the face of the Ludger I saw on the train.'

Why?

She obviously accepted the fact that his appearance had changed.

'If she thinks that it's natural for him to change his appearance, I can figure out the specialization of the dead Ludger Chelysie.'

In other words, the First Order specialized in disguise and infiltration.

It was rather fortunate for me since I had those characteristics as well.

At least I wouldn't gain any suspicions from the other members by my appearance.

I could be at ease.

'For now, I'm just going to do my activities as a professor, and I won't say anything to the secret society. I can just say it's an attempt to clear the Academy's suspicions.'

All I had to do was get the subordinates below me to do all the bothersome things, and in fact, as someone who held a First Order qualification, I just had to be careful about solidifying my position.

Maybe I wouldn't have to worry about it for a while.

However, the problem would genuinely arise when the secret society awakened from its slumber and became active.

From the planting of their executive-level figure as Sören's professor, it was clear that they intended to overthrow Sören in some way.

'It's complicated.'

Sören was not likely to collapse easily, but it was not an iron fortress that was completely impossible to attack either.

No matter how powerful an empire was, it was bound to collapse.

History had proved that.

In particular, the more extreme the transitional form in the generation, the closer the possibility became reality.

Even if it was just in case, I couldn't ignore the slightest possibility that the secret society would overthrow Sören.

'In that case, would it be better to leave Sören and commit myself to the secret society?'

'No, I can't do that.'

'Even if I have to do that to survive, it won't last long.'

For the moment, it wouldn't be a problem if I acted like I was their newly appointed professor under the guise of Ludger Chelysie.

Would the other First Order, who hadn't been actively moving together with me so far, not notice the subtle changes in Ludger?

'I'm sure they'd find out.'

I didn't know what would happen if I got caught being their traitor. It'd be the worst case if the secret society could win against Sören.

Rather, keeping the professor's position while deliberately interfering with their plans was the most likely way for me to survive.

However, if I was also explicitly standing on Sören's side, the society would immediately notice my betrayal.

'It's a moment of extreme tightrope walking.'

Unless I knew what the purpose of the secret society was, I couldn't plan to do anything right away.

I picked up my pen and wrote down a summary of my future plans on an empty paper.

-Be wary of the other First Order from the secret society. Need to quickly identify who they are. After that, refrain from contacting them as much as possible.

-Maintain my position as a professor. Don't let go of my wariness so that I won't be neglectful in my classes.

-I will focus on working as a professor so that the academy won't be suspicious.

After writing it down roughly, there were about three things to do.

I didn't worry about the possibility of anyone reading it.

Since I wrote it in Korean, people in this world would not know what it means even if they were reborn after they died.

'Well, all I can do right now is do my best as a professor.'

Tap tap.

I tapped on the wooden desk with my fingertips.

Well, if the secret society contacted me and pressured me by asking why I didn't make any movement, I could make an excuse that it was an attempt to clear their suspicions.

I immediately took out a new piece of paper to write a letter and picked up a pen.

I originally had an acquaintance whom I was supposed to meet at another place, so I had to tell that person that I couldn't go there.

'There's a lot for me to do.'

In fact, I had to deal with it in advance on the first day, but I forgot because there were so many things to worry about.

Well, since I had nothing to feel sad about, I betted that fellow wouldn't complain much about it.

I wrote the letter with as many pleasantries as possible, instead of direct words, in case someone opened it.

Like the letters that Ludger Chelysie had, I also used ciphers.

At the end of the sentence 'come to Leathevelk' in the letter, I had forgotten an important request that I included at the end of the letter instead.

[Bring my stuff on your way here.]

* * *

The reply to the letter came the very next day.

The appointment that was written in the letter was for me to meet them at Leathevelk's industrial area the next weekend.

As for me, I wanted to meet them a little earlier, but they said they were busy with their work, so I decided to understand them.

Whrrrrr.

After reading the letter, I immediately burned it to avoid the worst case that might

happen.

Immediately leaving out of the professor's office, I dressed casually and headed to my accommodation.

"Excuse me...!"

Someone was in a rush while calling me.

It seemed that he was a Sören employee, but seeing that his outfit was neater than the others, he looked to be an errand man who served as a messenger.

"Are you Professor Ludger Chelysie?"

"Yes, that's right. How can I help you?"

When I asked him so, the messenger looked slightly frightened as he flinched.

As soon as I sensed that even the employees were avoiding me, the messenger gave me a document after calming himself down.

"What's this?"

"It's a patrol duty invitation."

"Patrol duty?"

'Isn't that usually done by an employee or a security guard? Why would a professor have to do that?'

When I looked at the messenger with such a stare, the messenger made an excuse while drenched in a cold sweat.

"There... there was an order from the principal this time. Now that new students have entered the school, Sören's students are at their slackest, so this is an attempt to prevent them from causing any problems."

"To a professor like me?"

"The principal said it would be the most effective if the professors do it instead. And

the article in your contract states that professors should also step up and prevent the problems that might happen within Sören.”

‘Come to think of it... there was such an article.’

However, I had thought they were telling me to do it at my own discretion.

I didn’t expect for them to be that aggressive in giving me the order...

“Hmmm.”

But maybe he took my pondering differently.

The employee hurriedly spurted out additional explanations in a cold sweat.

“You... you don’t have to stay up all night. You just have to do the patrol from after the class ends until before the dorm curfew.”

“And today is my turn?”

“Yes, yes.”

I received the duty invitation without a word from the messenger.

The name Ludger Chelysie was written there on the day’s date.

There were several professors besides me in Sören, so the patrol duty must have been done only once a week.

It would be a little annoying if I needed to do it on the weekend.

“Then... then please excuse me.”

The messenger, who had told everything that he needed to say, ran away from me in such a hurry as though someone was going to catch and eat him alive.

I ignored the messenger and checked the list in the duty invitation.

‘Considering Sören is so wide, does it have a structure where one professor has to do the patrol in each designated area?’

There were three more people on duty that day besides me. Among them, I also saw the name Selena, a professor of Spirit Studies, who was a newly appointed professor just like me.

‘Well, we don’t have to meet each other because the area of our patrol is different, but let’s say hello if we meet.’

‘More than that, if it wasn’t like this before but the rule is suddenly implemented under the direction of the principal, does the principal also suspect that spies are planted among the professors?’

Perhaps that was how professors were being used to weed out their suspicious contacts or movements.

If they were spies, they would not move hastily unless they were a fool, but that did not mean that the principal’s policy was meaningless.

The principal herself gave the instructions because they would be a deterrent to warn the other party not to act recklessly.

It was some kind of warning.

From the principal’s point of view, it was good if the suspicious people got caught there, and even if they didn’t get caught, there was still nothing to lose from that kind of policy.

‘We don’t know what the students who are at the peak of their excitement will do after the semester starts, so there’s no room to argue if the professors have to come forward and prevent possible incidents.’

They were not ordinary students, but geniuses who used magic, and of course, the scale of incidents that could be inflicted by them was different from those of ordinary people.

If the professors had to stop it, they would certainly do it.

The new professors who were just being appointed that year would not be able to refuse the principal’s order because they wouldn’t have any solid arguments in the first place.

The hierarchy existed even inside the Academy. We had no choice but to do what the principal demanded us to do.

The patrol area I was assigned to was the <Magic Training Center>.

“This is really...”

The training center was a place where students often went to show off their magic skills to the fullest, so it was difficult for problems to not occur there.

‘Don’t tell me... she’s not sending me here on purpose because she’s aiming at me, right?’

I headed to the training center while hoping that it was not the case.

* * *

The magic training center was not far from the main building.

They were separated by a short distance that could be reached within a 10-minute walk along a well-paved path.

A large building could be seen through the trees in the moderately cultivated garden.

Its overall design has an appearance that reminds me of a super-large vinyl greenhouse.

‘It’s so big.’

Even on Earth, the size of the stadium was so large that it couldn’t be measured properly, so it’s very impressive.

There are three such buildings inside the Academy.

Each was called the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd training center, and the largest of them, the 3rd training center was also the main stage where Sören Academy’s event—[Magic Festival]—was held every semester.

I looked at the third training center that was located closest to me, but there were no particular incidents, so I passed it.

There were only a few people at the second training center, and most of them went back to the dormitory after they finished their training.

I was just about to check out the last first training center before going back to my accommodation...

Eventually, an incident broke out.

“How dare a lowly commoner like you...!”

I could feel some mana that was fluctuating inside the training center along with a shout that seemed to be torn in octaves.

Sensing that my anxiety had become a reality, I immediately ran inside the training center.

When I ran down the corridor and arrived at the audience’s railing...

One girl student was seen trying to shoot a spell at another girl student.

The magic she used was the second-tier electric spell Burning Thunder.

Even if it was a second-tier spell, it was a spell that could cause fatal injuries if the opponent was defenseless.

‘I shouldn’t be late.’

I immediately casted a spell technique.

The spell technique that was created by that student was almost complete, but with the source code, I could cast spells within third-tier class faster than anyone else.

The spell that I used was a first-tier releasing spell that was made with mana, Shining Stone.

I shot it fast and pierced through the middle of the student’s spell technique just before it was completed and destroyed the spell.

“Who is it?!”

The student whose spell technique was destroyed stared at me with anger, thinking that she had been disturbed.

CHAPTER 18

LYNNE, THE COMMONER GIRL (1)

Sören's training center was an open space for anyone to use.

It's wide and there were three such training centers, so students could freely cast spells anywhere in the spacious space.

The most common users of the training center at the beginning of the semester were especially the freshmen, who were curious about the prestigious Sören's facilities.

As a result, it was inevitable that the freshmen would obviously be involved in small accidents.

The children who entered Sören had already heard that they were geniuses everywhere.

Freshmen who have not experienced proper competition have strong self-esteem because they still think that they are the best.

There wasn't any chance that they would give up to the other party.

At the start, they would spend time nonchalantly with each other, but if they gradually proceeded with the class and become engaged with each other, there would always be a collision that happens.

And it was the first training center where such occurrences happened most often.

Just like at that moment.

"What? Say it again."

"...This is a place that's free to use for everyone. There's no reason for me to leave, though?"

Lynne frowned at the three students who were glaring scornfully at her.

The woman who had gray hair, which was rare in the Empire, was caught in a dispute when she visited the first training center out of curiosity.

The reason was trivial...

It's just that those three people were going to use the place, so they told Lynne to get out of there.

They did not speak in a good manner, and they one-sidedly ordered her to leave because they did not want to use the same space with a commoner.

There were not that many students using the training center and there was enough free space.

Nevertheless, it was a blatant insult for anyone to only rule them out and tell them to leave.

A total of three people were picking a fight with her: one woman and two men.

They were all children of aristocratic families with nobility flowing in their blood.

Among them was Dynema Romley, a first-year student who was the daughter of Count Romley. She was standing at the center of the trio while spitting direct verbal abuse at Lynne.

Her blonde hair, which was flowing down to the waist, was curled up like a roll in the edges.

Just by looking at her fierce impression, Lynne could already assume that her personality was usually rude.

Even so, Lynne didn't expect Dynema to suddenly pick a fight with her like that.

"If you feel so uncomfortable, why don't you guys leave instead?"

"Hah! How dare you talk back to me? How dare such a vulgar and impudent commoner like you to a noble blood like me?"

"...Sören doesn't divide the students' rank by social class and blood. You entered this school yet you don't even know about it?"

“That’s just what you guys want to believe. You have a blind trust in what they said to you just to make you happy. That’s why you guys are so low.”

“That’s right, Miss Dynema. That’s why we shouldn’t have low-class commoners here.”

“This is why people say that you shouldn’t be nice to your underlings.”

The two boy students on both sides were flattering Dynema as they adjusted themselves to her mood.

Lynne bit her lips.

They didn’t even try to listen to whatever she would say in the first place... because she was a commoner.

Even if she continued to argue there, she’d only tire herself out.

Lynne turned her back while thinking that she would just not have them as her company.

The problem was that such behavior offended Dynema’s high self-esteem.

“...How dare a commoner like you ignore me when I was talking?”

Count Romley was a typical aristocrat who fell into elitism and looked down on commoners.

And Dynema, the only daughter of the Count, had also inherited her father’s tendency.

For her, who had only seen and heard such elitist views since she was young, she was bound to have that kind of personality.

Dynema thought she should play a leading role in Sören Academy.

Even if there were many great seniors in the second years, she should be the most dazzling one among the first years.

—That’s what she believed.

When she arrived at Sören, most of the students became her competitors. It was a hard reality for her, who had been receiving the best treatment throughout her life.

‘It can’t be like this!’

It already hurt her pride for commoners to use the same classroom and take classes with her, she wouldn’t want to accept the fact that there were also students who were more talented than her.

An aristocrat must always be aloof and stand on top of everyone...

Because that’s how she was born.

She was the chosen one, and those lowly commoners were nothing but a tool that she used to make herself stand out.

To Dynema, a commoner named Lynne was just an annoying existence.

The first time Dynema noticed her was when they were in the classroom.

Her extremely uncommon ash gray hair had also attracted people’s attention, but most of all, it was Lynne’s beauty that irritated Dynema’s nerves.

She was like a doll made by the goddess of beauty with all her best efforts, her beauty seemed to be out of this world.

Even she, who was also a woman, thought that it was enviable for a moment.

—Her pride was hurt.

Dynema couldn’t forgive it. She couldn’t forgive herself and that despicable commoner who had swayed her.

Dynema needed a target to vent her anger, and the target was obviously Lynne, who had caused such animosities inside her.

So she started a quarrel with the intention of taking her down a notch.

‘What’s up with that arrogant attitude?!’

Lynne's eyes were looking at her as if she was pathetic.

Dynema gritted her teeth and glared at the back of Lynne's head.

'How dare she ignore me and think that she'll be alright afterward?'

Dynema took out her wand. It happened unexpectedly, so even the two followers who were clinging to Dynema could not react.

'No way, Dynema is aiming at Lynne with her wand and going to cast a spell as she was leaving after turning her back?'

The same went for Lynne.

She never imagined that she would do such a thing in Sören.

"How dare a lowly commoner like you!"

A spell technique was formed with mana, and buds of hot lightning sparked around its surroundings.

Feeling something strange, Lynne turned her back, and her blue eyes widened.

'Stupid. It's already too late.'

A cruel smile formed around Dynema's mouth.

It wouldn't kill her, but instead, it was going to burn her beautiful face.

The moment she was about to shoot the prepared spell into the face of that despicable commoner...

A white flash of light pierced through her magic.

Dynema distorted her face into a demon-like appearance when she saw the reverberation of the scattered lightning.

"Who is it?!"

She stared at the place where the spell was casted.

And she saw him...

* * *

A man who was looking down at them from the audience's railings.

"What are you doing?"

'Do the frost pillars that are raging on the frozen ground of the Northern continent feel like this?'

Her skin reacted the moment his voice, which was mixed with subtle anger, touched her ears.

It was such a force and vigor that it would make anyone's teeth bump together on their own.

'He's not a student, not a Sören employee either.' There was no way Dynema didn't know about a man with such an intense impression in the first place.

"Prof... Professor Ludger?"

"While I was on patrol, I suddenly felt a wavelength of mana, so I came here."

His gaze glanced through Lynne, Dynema's gang, and the students who had just watched nearby and hadn't stopped the gang.

"I didn't know they created this kind of problem habitually."

It wasn't even a mere fight between students.

To be exact, it was an incident in which one side unilaterally attempted to ambush the other party.

"Sören must have looked pretty easy to you."

If they had fought in front of each other's faces, he could just pass it with a warning.

However, it was undoubtedly one-sided negligence that caused her to ambush an opponent who had no intention of fighting with her.

The professor had even witnessed it with his own eyes.

“Exactly why and how did it happen?!”

Dynema’s anger had already reached the top of her head and she shouted while protesting against Ludger instead.

“This is to protect my authority as a proper aristocrat...!”

“Authority? Who the hell is that authority for?”

“That’s what this commoner—”

“All students are equal in Sören. Their learning, teaching, and magic are only going to be judged according to their talents and passion. I don’t care how noble your blood is.”

Ludger’s words were for them to stop bluffing while acting as an aristocrat.

Dynema bit her lips.

Ludger shook his head at her behavior which had not shown any remorse.

He was convinced that the first years would cause trouble.

Rather, it was possible because they were first-year students who were still ignorant of the world.

Freshmen who didn’t know the way Sören was run naturally made their judgments based on their environment so far.

The petty and prejudiced way of thinking that the world they lived in was everything there was obviously caused the problems.

—Just like Dynema Romley had been thinking.

But her ignorance wouldn’t absolve her.

If her prejudiced way of thinking was the cause of the problems, it was Sören’s policy to impose stronger disciplinary actions to bring people back to their senses

rather than to forgive them.

“It hasn’t been long since school started, and you’ve already caused such a big problem, so please don’t believe that you can avoid disciplinary action.”

“You come with me right now.”

Ludger said so and turned his back immediately.

‘She’s understood by now.’

He thought his warning would moderately soothe the incident.

Of course, it was not only a verbal warning, he really intended to put disciplinary action on her.

It wasn’t a mere fight, she was trying to cowardly do an ambush on her classmate.

“A mere fallen aristocrat like you...”

But with that one sentence from Dynema Romley...

The training center, which was already quiet, became dead silent.

“M-Miss Dynema?”

The two students, who were Dynema’s followers, were drenched in a cold sweat.

No matter how badly they acted, they thought her words were not a good choice.

Even Ludger Chelysie, who was about to leave, stopped walking.

It was a big problem.

The students who were watching the situation turned pale.

Dynema belatedly realized what she had just said.

But she couldn’t take back what she had already said.

“What did you just say?”

Ludger’s more subsided voice was aimed at Dynema.

It didn’t stop there, his body also floated in the air lightly.

Ludger, who slowly came down from the audience’s railings while walking in the air, landed on the ground and walked toward Dynema.

Thump. Thump.

With every step that Ludger took, Dynema felt the illusion that her world was falling apart.

She didn’t realize it when he was far away, but when she faced him closely, the pressure that Ludger emitted was beyond her imagination.

He looked exactly like a giant.

He had a huge appearance like a mountain which made it seem like he could press her with just one finger.

“Ah, aah.”

She accidentally said a harsh thing.

It was something she shouldn’t have said, but she had crossed the line.

It’s no wonder that Ludger was angry.

“Did you just call me a fallen aristocrat?”

“Ah, uh, aah...”

Dynema couldn’t even move her mouth properly as Ludger looked down at her while casting a shadow on her face.

Ludger’s atmosphere was so brutal that it seemed it would be no wonder if anyone died afterwards.

When the students were thinking if they should stop him while glancing at each other...

“Professor Ludger!”

Selena, the new professor of Spirit Studies, rushed over while calling Ludger from the outside.

She had just arrived after hearing the news a little while before.

But as soon as she got there, she saw Ludger, who was glaring at a trembling girl as if he was about to eat her.

No way... Just in case... Maybe...

An uneasy thought entered her mind.

The moment Selena was about to stop Ludger...

Ludger opened his mouth.

“That’s not exactly wrong.”

What everyone heard was a completely unexpected word.

“What?”

“What did Professor say just...”

They thought he’d get angry.

Or they thought he’d punish give her a physical punishment on the spot.

“I am definitely a fallen aristocrat, but this is Sören and I am Sören’s professor. Dynema. What you said were clearly the words of a student who’s challenging the authority of the professor.”

But Ludger did not do it.

He just spoke in an infinitely calm and admonished voice.

“But you are still a young child before you are an aristocrat and a student. It’s your first time, so you might not know.”

“Ah...”

“So I’ll pass it as a warning this time for your slip of the tongue, but just know that there’s no second opportunity.”

It was a totally unexpected and yet so mature treatment.

The students had no choice but to stare blankly at Ludger.

“Of course, you will have disciplinary action accordingly for what you did to your classmate. I hope you are aware of it.”

Dynema felt the illusion that the world was collapsing at the mention of disciplinary action, but even so, she could not protest.

What Ludger said was too much of an argument.

...To the point where they thought he was too lenient on her instead.

Ludger’s eyes turned to Lynne, the gray-haired girl, as Dynema showed no words of consent.

“And you there. Lynne.”

“Yes, yes!”

Lynne’s shoulder shook when she heard Ludger call her name.

“Did you get hurt anywhere?”

“Pardon?”

“I asked if you got hurt anywhere.”

“Ah, aaaah no! No! I’m alright! Be-because Professor helped me.....”

“Then it’s a relief.”

Ludger turned his head right away and looked at Selena.

“Professor Selena, I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“Ah, yes!”

Ludger left the training center after saying that to Selena.

No one dared to move until he disappeared beyond the darkness of the corridor.

Just blankly...

They could only stare at Ludger’s back.

CHAPTER 19

LYNNE, THE COMMONER GIRL (2)

Away from the training center, I headed straight to a secluded place.

I couldn't see any students, perhaps because it was way past school time.

After looking around and checking that there were no people, I took a pill out of my pocket with my trembling hands.

'I thought I was going to die from holding it in.'

I put the pill in my mouth and chewed it.

With a bitter and pure sense that touched the tip of my tongue, intense mana spread through my mouth.

'Phew, I survived.'

As the energy from the drug spread and mana was being supplied to my brain, my slowly deteriorating body condition returned to its original state.

The ringing inside my ear, which I could hear faintly, also disappeared immediately as if I was turning off a radio.

I took a breath while sitting on a quiet bench.

The first signal had come when I stopped by the second training center.

My fingertips were shaking, and my head felt numb with a headache.

It was some kind of chronic disease that I had after I came to this world.

'I'd be in big trouble if I didn't have the pills.'

Still, I had thought it was bearable, so I was going to take the medicine right after

checking up on the first training center.

I didn't expect a fight between freshmen to break out there.

No, should I call it a fight? One side's unilateral attempt to make an ambush can't be counted as a fight.

—School violence.

It was a situation where the victim and the perpetrator were clearly divided.

I intervened in between and managed to prevent things from getting bigger.

Afterwards, I had been talking about disciplinary action and such, but I felt the soaring wave building up inside of me.

Feeling my body's signal to put the pill in my mouth quickly, I had tried to take care of the situation fast and leave.

But there was a problem...

Who would have thought that she would insolently tell me that I was a fallen aristocrat?

For a moment, I didn't even know what she had just said to me and was contemplating hard on it for about three seconds.

I wondered if she really meant it, and all kinds of complicated and long lines were being prepared inside my head, but my communication skills were poor, so those might have been my last words.

However, the problem was that after I heard such an impudent speech, I couldn't just go away as a professor.

'Why did she have to say that at that kind of timing?'

If she had just said it to herself without anyone else listening, I would have pretended not to hear it, but there were too many witnesses around her.

In the end, I had to say something to protect my authority as a professor, but I

couldn't say anything plausible because my brain wasn't working well.

-Originally, what you did was an evident challenge to the professors' authority.

-You may be referred to the disciplinary committee in accordance with school regulations.

-You might get a penalty or be reported to the principal.

Well, I should have said these kinds of principled things, but they didn't come to my mind.

'So I just said whatever came to my mind.'

I was in such a hurry that I said whatever came to my mind in the best way possible so that my image didn't get ruined.

—Even while I had said that, I was having a hard time keeping together my crumbling expression.

Maybe my face was a little distorted, and my eyes were a bit bloodshot.

'It won't be a big problem, right?'

Anyway, since professor Selena belatedly came, I left the rest of it to her and hurriedly left my spot successfully.

I got up from the bench while gulping down the pills that still lingered in my mouth.

I was glad it was just an early symptom.

If it got worse there, other people might have noticed my peculiarity.

'The pill, is this the last one?'

I sighed when I found out that the medicine bottle was empty.

I put the extra medicine in a bag that I had sent away; I didn't know that this would happen since things went awry in the middle.

'I'm meeting him next weekend... It honestly seems like it will be hard for me to hold out until then, so I'll have to write a letter again and tell him to come earlier.'

Otherwise, I'd have to rent a private pharmacy and make it my own space, but if I did that, I would be in trouble because it would be recorded.

'Seeing this kind of situation, I'm not sure if I can last even five days.'

If I consumed mana, the period of five days would be shortened.

'I hope everything will go by safely until then.'

I went on patrol again, taking a light breath into my mind as it gradually became clearer.

* * *

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Thank you for your concern."

"Don't mention it; this is my job."

Lynne bowed to Selena, who took her to the infirmary even though she adamantly refused her offer and told her that she was fine.

Selena gave a warm smile and waved her hand, but Lynne meant her gratitude.

"That... Professor Selena."

"Hm?"

"What will happen to her?"

"You mean Dynema, right? Hmm. I'm not sure what will happen to her either. I just got in here as well."

"Oh, that's right..."

"But according to the pre-announced school rules, it's not a mere fight but a one-

sided quarrel, so I think she'll have a disciplinary action even though she won't be dismissed from school."

It would be nice if the Academy took strong disciplinary action against someone who had great pride and high self-esteem like Dynema.

Even so, both of them were vaguely aware that they would not take such an action.

The weak punishment would play its part because she was a freshman who didn't know anything yet, but most of all, there was a Count's family on her back, so they would let it slide.

"Why? Are you worried?"

"No, it's just... I'm curious."

To be honest, she didn't feel sorry for Dynema after she had explicitly aimed at her and launched an attack from her end.

She would get what she deserved. It was rather surprising that she did not get expelled from school even though she did that much.

She was just asking because she felt upset.

"Are you concerned?"

"Pardon?"

"Your expression shows everything."

"Ah..."

Lynne nodded quietly. Her bobbed, gray hair swayed in tune with her movement.

"It's just... when I came here, it was more intense than I thought. I thought Sören was a place full of dreams and idealism."

"..."

"But after I talked to the aristocratic students then, it didn't seem like that at all.

Although the person will be punished, there is no guarantee that something similar won't happen again."

"...I suppose so."

Selena agreed with Lynne's opinion.

Even though Sören said that both royalty and commoners were equal, such a promise had rarely been properly protected.

Even if the professors also became mediators among students in the most neutral way possible, they had nothing to say about the problems that arose when the students were mingling with each other.

Some professors from the aristocracy even showed some discrimination against commoners and secretly favored aristocratic students.

As a result, some people, who had a strong pride as aristocrats, looked down on the professors just because they were a commoner or from a fallen aristocratic family.

Dynema's verbal abuse against Ludger just was a result of it.

"Yeah, I honestly think her words were too much for Professor Ludger."

Selena puffed up her cheeks with her hands on her waistline as if to prove she was angry.

Selena smiled softly while looking at Lynne, who opened her eyes wide as if she didn't know that the professor would say that.

"But Professor Ludger has passed it as a mere warning. We can't say anything anymore."

"Aren't you angry?"

"Of course, I'm angry, too. I'm just trying hard to hold it in, but I'm sure it was Professor Ludger whose mind was more messed up than anyone else."

"Ah."

Lynne recalled the expression that Ludger had shown at that time.

She couldn't see it properly because there was a shadow casting on his face, but it must have been very scary.

Even Dynema's face turned ghostly pale after looking at those eyes.

He was originally a scary professor when he set the mood of the classroom, so she couldn't imagine how scary he would be if he was genuinely angry.

Nevertheless, Professor Ludger said that he would forgive Dynema's mistake only that time.

He must have been angrier than anyone else.

...Yet he endured it and let it slide.

He didn't let it slide just because he succumbed to the other party's family either.

On the contrary, it was more like a form of mercy to guide a student who was really lacking in many aspects.

And that was because Ludger stared at her coldly all the time instead of being intimidated by Dynema.

A person who showed such an expression would not step down just because of the other party's family influence.

To be frank, when he spoke to Dynema while saying that he was indeed a fallen aristocrat...

Lynne thought that his behavior was completely unexpected as she witnessed it.

—And also that he looked really cool.

“So I'm going to believe it for once. I'm sure what they did is wrong, but they're still young students, right? Just think that there's still a chance for them to change.”

“Ah.”

Selena scratched her head.

“Hehehe. Sorry. I really sounded like an old lady, right?”

“No. Professor Selena is still quite young. Honestly, if we met outside Sören, I would have called you as though you’re my older sister.”

“Oh my~ Thank you for the compliment. You’re a good girl, Lynne.”

‘No, it’s true, though?’

Selena herself may have thought that she was old, but according to Lynne, she was so young that she would look like her senior if she wore a school uniform.

Selena, who was beautiful and always smiled, had already been the target of some male students’ love. It was just that she was not aware of it, actually.

She wondered if people in their mid-20s thought they were that old in the first place.

“Hmm. Older sister, you said~ It sounds good. I wish I had a younger sister like Lynne as well.”

“I also wish I had an older sister like Professor Selena.”

“Really? Oh my, you’re such a nice girl~”

“Heheh. Then can you give me some more points during the Spirit Studies class?”

“After I saw you working hard~”

Selena laughed while replying to Lynne’s joke.

“Time’s already passed by so fast. I’ll go look around the rest of my patrol area. If there’s something wrong with your body, you have to tell me, okay?”

“Yes, I will.”

Selena left the infirmary while waving her hand.

Lynne, who was left alone, stared at her physical condition and got out of bed,

thinking that she was fine.

‘Come to think of it, Professor Ludger actually called my name.’

When she used the training center, she wore comfortable clothes in case her uniform got dirty.

Obviously, she didn’t have a name tag then, so no one knew Lynne’s name.

But Ludger Chelysie naturally called her name.

“Lynne,” he had said.

‘Did he remember me from when I took his class?’

For Ludger Chelysie, she was just one of his 80 students, a commoner who didn’t even need to be noticed.

Still, Ludger remembered her name.

Suddenly, she remembered what he had said to Dynema.

‘All students are equal in Sören.’

Just like a stone that was thrown into the calm water, the words caused a ripple in Lynne’s mind.

If he had only spoken empty words, she would not have believed it and would have been rather disappointed.

But Ludger was not like that.

—His actions, his unwavering principle, his voice...

He instilled hope in Lynne for Sören.

‘His first impression was obviously that of a scary professor.’

Even as he was a new professor, she hadn’t expected much when she took his first class.

However, she was surprised at once by the innovation of the source code shown by Ludger and realized that he was not appointed as a professor in Sören just by his words.

Even so, recalling the inconsiderate and audacious attitude that he pointed out to Flora...

She thought he was a tiresome professor in many ways.

‘But he wasn’t like that.’

When he was mediating the situation, he ended up only warning the student, even though he had been insulted.

He had even asked her if she had been hurt anywhere as he saved her.

He suddenly appeared at the moment of crisis and saved her. It was just a passing moment, but it seemed like she saw a prince riding a white horse in the fairy tales.

It made her heart throb.

‘No, Professor Ludger wouldn’t have thought much of me.’

Yeah, there was nothing more shameful than being all flustered by herself for no reason.

She was there to learn magic, not to look for that kind of dramatic encounter.

* * *

I was able to return to my accommodation comfortably because nothing unusual was found on my patrol after the incident at the first training center.

When I got back to the accommodation, I immediately mailed a letter to him.

The content of the letter was for him to come earlier because it was hard for me to wait until the next weekend.

And the next day...

The reply came early in the morning.

What was written inside the letter was simple:

The work he was dealing with ended earlier than he thought, so he would depart right away.

We will meet the next day on the weekend.

The place of our appointment was the industrial zone beyond the eastern business zone of Leathevelk.

I burned the letter, thinking it was a suitable place that was away from people's sight.

'Today is Friday. It's Saturday tomorrow, so I'll be able to go through the day.'

Students must have been at the peak of their excitement because it was the first weekend since the start of the semester, but would the same type of incident happen, similar to the previous day?

While thinking so, I heard a strange story from Professor Selena, who was having lunch with me.

"Did you just say werewolf?"

"Yes, werewolf."

Rumors about werewolves began to circulate in Sören.

CHAPTER 20

ABRAHAM VAN HELSING (1)

Professor Selena, who was smiling brightly again that day, nodded at my question.

“Yes. Rumors have already spread all over amongst the students. A werewolf who exists only as a city’s ghost story. Funny, right?”

“..”

“No matter how many geniuses are gathered here, I think they’re still students after all. I can’t believe they are genuinely concerned about that kind of ghost story.”

Professor Selena laughed, saying that the students’ imaginations were so cute, but I couldn’t laugh.

It was said that the first source of the rumor was from the students who went out to the nearby city of Leathevelk the previous day.

It was a dark night in Leathevelk when the sun had set.

The first sighting of a werewolf was when they saw a black shadow wandering through the roofs of the buildings in between the night fog that was gently subsiding.

I shook my head.

“They’re still children, aren’t they?”

“Yes. Of course, but it was a little fascinating to hear that the werewolf they saw outside the city was also seen in Sören.”

“Inside Sören too, you said?”

Were the students inside the school seeing things because those who saw a werewolf in the city spread rumors about it?

“Sören must be so wide, and since it is a place where all kinds of magics are prevalent, strange phenomena occur due to the magic power. There are seven ghost stories in real life, right?”

“Seven ghost stories, you said?”

“Yes, you didn’t know?”

“Professor Selena knows a lot about ghost stories, I see.”

“Wh-what?!”

It was just a compliment, but Professor Selena somehow overreacted to it.

She opened her eyes wide, and her cheeks blushed in a pinkish ; her hair also stood on the edges a little.

When I gave a curious look as to why she was reacting like that, she spoke in a hurry as an excuse.

“I... I didn’t look meticulously for Sören’s school ghost stories in particular! It’s just... I was thinking about what topics to talk about when we’re having a conversation about the students, so that’s not the case, really!”

“I get it, so calm down.”

Seeing that both of her arms that lost direction were shaking here and there, they seemed to nearly bump into the plates and spill the food as if she was being careless.

“Noo. It’s really not the case.”

But Selena continued to make more desperate excuses as if she sensed some temper in my attitude.

When I thought that lunchtime was unlikely to proceed like that, Professor Merilda intervened.

“Oh, come to think of it, Professor Ludger, I heard you’ve done your job quite splendidly since your first class. Is that true?”

“What are you talking about?”

“You know, you showed them a groundbreaking magic that shortened the time spent for casting spells. What’s the name again?”

“Source code!”

Selena also forgot that she was embarrassed and shouted such words with fire in her eyes.

Her shout was so loud that there was a momentary silence in the professor-only cafeteria.

Professor Selena lowered her head when she realized her slip of the tongue. Her earlobes that were exposed through her pink hair turned bright red.

I let out a small sigh and nodded.

“Yes, that’s right.”

As I nodded and confirmed it, the gazes from every direction of the cafeteria stuck to me.

They were the gazes of the professors who were eating at the other table.

As I was wondering why they were staring at me like that, Professor Merilda moved her upper body toward me and explained it in a way that I could hear well.

“It’s because everyone is interested in Professor Ludger’s spell.”

“My spell, you said?”

“Oh my. Are you pretending not to know? The spell that Professor Ludger showed in your first class has spread throughout Sören, though?”

“Hm.”

I put a piece of meat in my mouth and figured out how things were going.

‘Are they interested?’

From the first day of class, I vaguely guessed that it would be like that.

From the perspective of the people of this world, the source code that was borrowed from a 21st-century computer programming method was simply innovative.

I had already expected enough that the ripple effect itself would reach the other professors.

“I heard that it dramatically reduced the time span of the spell technique’s casting. Can you really showcase it here?”

“That’s right. You’ll be able to earn a lot of money by patenting such a spell in a magic tower.”

Professor Selena also responded.

Well, it’s not wrong to say it, to be exact. The source code spell would be the wind of change in the stagnant magical society.

In fact, if I offered that magic to the magic tower where the magic patent system exists, I could literally sit on a money cushion.

Of course, that’s ostensibly common sense.

“I don’t care about that.”

I pretended to be humble, but I knew better than anyone else why I should not apply for a patent.

For those who didn’t know anything yet, they might think it was great to offer the newly developed magic to the magic tower, but the reality was quite different.

There was definitely a magic patent system at the magic tower.

Wizards who lacked money wanted to earn income through such a patent system, but such an ostentatious offer was only superficial.

Spells could only be patented if they were properly recognized by the magic tower...

The problem was that most of the magic that was usually submitted as a patent was

nitpicked while the magic tower made all kinds of excuses.

‘It might be better if it’s just an excuse, but there are people who also abuse it.’

Other new professors may have still had a positive perception of the magic tower, but I have already experienced how dirty and cheap they are, so my perspective toward the tower was different.

Even if the old judges of the magic tower found a new magic that had no room to be nitpicked, the problem still existed.

‘If you don’t have any supporter who will become a reliable support to you or a backing from a noble family, your magic patent will literally get snatched away.’

Or, if the developer was dissatisfied with it and did not want to apply for a patent, they could be dragged to places like a back alley or something and forced to cast their developed spell.

There was a time when such a thing happened.

In other words, the nominal patent system that was being promoted by the magic tower was nothing but an ostentatious fraud.

Knowing that, I didn’t offer my spell to the magic tower in order to earn money.

It was an obvious reality to get kicked out because one didn’t have a backing, let alone money.

‘I’m better off as Ludger now.’

Although he was a fallen aristocrat, he was currently working as a professor in Sören, so it was not bad in terms of his recognition.

However, even with Ludger’s identity, the magic tower might make me catch a sleeping weasel if I barely lowered my guard.

—A place where stagnant old men’s greed was as rampant as sticky mud.

Even I loathed such a place.

And the source code that I intentionally showed in Sören was an act that was done with some calculation.

First of all, the students would spread talk that the groundbreaking spell of Source Code was created by Ludger Chelysie, and the story would circulate.

The rumors would keep spreading among students and reach the professors, and even among the professors, the rumors would keep spreading outside of Sören.

—That's how it'd reach the ears of the magic tower.

If I lowered my head first and applied for a patent, it'd be like offering my neck to be cut.

However, if they approached me because they were getting impatient with the advent of new magic, then the position of the former and the latter would change.

—And Ludger's status would be even higher.

Rather than being viewed as Sören's new professor who had nothing, he would become a Sören's professor with considerable talent.

If I carried around such a name card, people around me wouldn't easily look down on me.

It would take a little time, but there was nothing better than that to solidify my position.

'However, the problem is that the other professors are after me with their eyes on fire.'

It was like that even then.

Professor Selena and Merilda were good-natured so they just passed it, but the other professors had been sending me explicit jealousy.

Especially the eyes of Chris Benimore, one of the professors who was newly appointed with me at the same time, seemed to be like an infested magma.

He could kill people with his eyes like that.

“But it’s still a shame...”

“I don’t have to think that it’s a shame to show it to my students first.”

I got up from my seat after properly wrapping up my sentence.

It was because I thought I would get indigestion from the other professors’ gazes if I stayed there.

“I’ll be on my way now. I have another class to teach.”

“Oh, yes! Good luck with your work!”

“Good bye~”

I nodded my head lightly to the two professors who sent their farewells to me and walked away quickly from the professor-only cafeteria.

* * *

Merilda narrowed her eyes as she watched Ludger go away.

She had thought he was a great guy from the first time she saw him, but she realized it even more while talking with him.

Ludger Chelysie... That man had really shown the spell of source code, which even the other professors had eyes on, to the students first.

‘Otherwise, he wouldn’t have kept it secret until he showed it to the students in his first class, let alone revealing it to the magic tower.’

From Merilda’s point of view, Ludger’s behavior had not been something akin to wizards in those days.

It’s a little strange to say a term like ‘wizards those days’, but wizards had always been like that since the old days.

Because they were too cool-headed, they lacked a lot of empathy, and that made them selfish and lacking in consideration for others.

But over time, such tendencies had become much worse.

It was the magic world of that time that even a teacher who had to teach someone never showed his vision bluntly because they did not trust their student.

She was feeling it earnestly because she also had experienced a similar situation.

But what about Ludger?

Even when he had that great spell, he didn't show off his skills to his surroundings.

And what was more surprising was that he used the spell in front of his students.

'No matter how young the students are, if he shows them how to use a spell like that, some sensible students might get the ropes of the technique.'

'Doesn't he even worry about his spell being snatched away?'

There are only two reasons for him to do so:

One was that the spell was something that's hard to understand just by looking at it.

'Or...'

He'd resolved that it was okay for the spell to be snatched away by someone.

'Eyy, no way.'

But if it wasn't that, the confident attitude that he showed her when they were eating a while ago...

That couldn't be explained.

'I can't believe such a person is a new professor like me.'

The more she thought about it, the more shabby she felt about herself.

Merilda sighed and turned her head to the side.

Selena, her colleague and close friend, stared vacantly at Ludger's seat.

She was pretty much into it, too.

Merilda shook her head, thinking that she couldn't help it, then she immediately smiled mischievously before touching Selena's neck with her fingertips.

"Heeyaaa!"

"Selena, what are you thinking about? Why? Are you feeling upset that Professor Ludger left first?"

"Pr-Professor Merilda? What on earth are you talking about!"

It was indeed fun to tease Selena.

Merilda thought so and teased Selena for a while.

Of course, she would have to appease Selena afterward, who became sulky along the way.

* * *

—Saturday after the theory class ended.

From noon, when the sun was shining the brightest, I had already been in Leathevelk, a nearby city from Sören.

At first, it seemed like I was having a simple walk to look around nearby cities, but in reality, I did that because I had a previous engagement.

The appointment was at night, so there was still a lot of time left.

I arrived early to look around and see what kind of place Leathevelk was.

'The city itself looks pretty splendid.'

Leathevelk, a city with advanced magic engineering, was a huge city where the Ramsey River, which stretched for more than 500km, flowed into the center of the city.

The flowing rivers and countless railroads on its ground were the blood vessels that

instilled the vitality of the city, and the people living in them were full of vigor.

Leathevelk, which was the center of all kinds of business, magic, and engineering, had won the reputation of being the most developed city since it was side by side with Sören Academy.

I walked through 'Centerford', the main street of Leathevelk.

Unlike other districts, there were gentlemen and ladies dressed in suits quietly enjoying their leisure time.

Centerford, a place that symbolized the revival of Leathevelk...

A residential complex inhabited by rich people, the roadside trees were beautifully carved, and steam cars and golem wagons roamed on every road.

I drank coffee while sitting on the terrace of a quiet cafe.

The subtle fragrance of coffee beans and the aroma of coffee I drank were mixed in a cafe that was quiet, even on weekends, inflicting a strange atmosphere.

'It's cool.'

It was a beautiful place, and I wanted to live in a place like that at least once.

It would be natural to have such a vague idea in my mind.

'The price of the housing here must be expensive.'

After I got up from my seat and calculated the price of the coffee I drank, I headed to the next area.

It was 'Grand Chapel,' a high street with the most population in Leathevelk.

It was the place where a huge white cathedral in Gothic Revival style stood tall.

It was a busy street for some reason, so many things that I had never seen before in the other places were all packed on that street.

—Machines emitted white steam from an external combustion engine made of brass

and the technicians working with those machines.

—Children playing with little mechanical toys.

—People who were busking on the streets while playing accordions, cellos, and violins, and the citizens who danced while listening to the music.

“...”

As I walked around the city while taking a look at various places, the sun was sinking, and the sunset began to burn the sky's.

Ding. Dong. Ding.

A huge clock tower that was rising throughout the city rang a bell, signaling that it was already six o'clock.

Since it was early spring, where there were still traces of winter, the sun set early, and the air that touched my skin quickly became cold.

I headed for the appointment while closing the front of my black coat.

So far, I had only seen the beautiful appearance of Leathevelk, but the place I was headed to was the opposite.

—A clear shadow that's cast under the intense light.

The place was called the hideous bare face of the city.

I walked through the water vapor that was rising from the surface of the Ramsey River while pressing the wide-brimmed hat that I wore on my head.

When the clouds, which were the of burning scarlet flames, drifted over to the west and the deep blue sky covered the entire city of Leathevelk...

I stood in front of an alleyway in a foggy industrial area.

There were no people.

The street vagrants gave up begging and went back to the deep side of the alley, and

the children who worked hard to earn a daily wage while coughing severely also went home.

I was the only one there.

The scarlet light of the street lamps touched the fog and hazily scattered.

In that empty silence, I waited for the person I was supposed to meet while leaning against a brick wall covered with dirt.

'He said he'd come early, but he's late.'

As soon as I thought so, I heard a sound from the inside of the alley that I was leaning my back against.

Grrrrrrr.

It was a sound that could never be made by a human being.

I pulled my back from the wall and stared inside the alley.

A pair of red eyes rose from inside a strange space that was half-mixed with gray fog and pitch black darkness.

'This is really...'

I remembered what Selena had said at the cafeteria the day before.

The rumor that students saw werewolves.

She'd gone on by saying that it's just a ghost story, but I wasn't sure.

Looking at it then, I wondered what she would think of it.

At that moment...

He moved in the darkness.

His movement was heading towards me in an instant.

I didn't miss it and stared at the werewolf intensely.

I immediately raised my fist and hit him on the head.

Baam!

“Aaargh!”

A loud scream resounded briefly amidst the fog.

I looked down at the guy who sat down in front of me without hiding his pathetic face.

“I wondered why you were late, so you were planning to play this kind of prank.”

“Darn it. Still, it's been a while. Can't you act surprised somehow?”

The person who said that and touched his head with his hand was the acquaintance that I was supposed to meet, who could also be called my subordinate.

“Long time no see, Hans.”

“Long time no see.”

He was the cause of the werewolf rumor among the students.

CHAPTER 21

ABRAHAM VAN HELSING (2)

“Mm, more than that...”

Ludger interrupted Hans when he was about to say his real name.

“Now my name is Ludger. Call me Ludger Chelysie.”

“Ludger Chelysie, you said? Ah. Come to think of it, you also used that name when you sent me the letter. What on earth happened? Why didn’t you meet me in the capital city where we were supposed to meet?”

“It’s a long explanation. More than that...”

Ludger shook his head as he glanced at Hans.

“You’re still causing accidents no matter how much time has passed, huh. What kind of appearance is that this time?”

“Damn it. Who do you think would want to be like this?”

Hans’s current appearance resembled a werewolf that could make anyone who was walking on the street scream and run away.

However, that was because the surroundings were dark, but if people had seen this appearance in bright daylight, they would have felt rather odd instead of running away.

Hans’s appearance had no ferocity peculiar to a werewolf at all.

To be exact, he even had a cuteness that did not match his size.

“What did you get bitten by this time?”

“I don’t know. It was some kind of a furry brown puppy. Who would have thought

that he would bite me after suddenly jumping down from an old lady's arms?"

"I can tell roughly what kind of dog breed it is from that appearance."

Hans, who had the shape of a half-human and half-beast, had brown fur on him.

However, the brown fur was not a dark and dull color of a wolf that had been traveling throughout the wild, but rather it was more of a noticeable brighter brown.

Above all, the shape of his face was very different from that of a wolf. He had a shorter muzzle than a wolf's long head and bigger eyes.

Right.

He looked just like a Pomeranian that was famous for its cuteness as a pet.

The furry puppy that Hans said had bit him was a Pomeranian.

"I've been feeling this way for a long time, but you have a very interesting body type."

"Damn it. Don't make fun of someone else's hardship. I wonder if I've actually been cursed."

Hans was a human being who was born with a rather unusual body type.

When an animal bit him, that animal's genes were expressed into his body, and he was mutated into their shape.

The legendary werewolf whose human skin was suddenly torn and their wildness exploded when they saw the full moon...

That was Hans.

'However, should I say that it's a flaw that he is different from ordinary werewolves?'

"Werewolf" meant transforming only into a wolf, just like the name suggested, and it only reacted when the full moon rose, but Hans was not like that.

Hans was still intact even when he saw the full moon, but only when he was bitten by an animal did he forcibly mutate.

And he would transform into the animal that bit him.

If he got bitten by a wolf, then he would be a werewolf.

If he got bitten by a tiger, then he would be a weretiger.

If he got bitten by a bear, then he would be a werebear.

Hans, who could mutate through that way, had quite enormous power.

The problem was that he was born in the wrong generation.

'Where are the wolves, tigers, and bears in the cities in this current age where civilization and science have developed?'

They were the men who had to go somewhere in the deep and perilous mountains to discover those animals.

And the precondition that they could only change when they got bitten was ridiculous.

If they got bitten by a wild predator beast, they would die with one bite, let alone being able to transform, so how come they could only transform when they're bitten?

If they didn't want to die, it was better to give up the idea of mutating to something wilder.

As a result, Hans could only mutate himself into animals in the city that could easily be encountered, whether they were wandering street cats, wild dogs, or pets raised by noble ladies.

It seemed that his unusual body type might have had some kind of effect, as the problems when the animals were rushing to Hans overlapped with each other.

It didn't matter if something like an animal's fur only touched his skin.

As soon as the animals bit him because they were being attracted, that cursed ability was awakened.

There was no such thing as letting him mutate by his own will.

There was also no proper way for him to control the ability.

If Hans lowered his guard for even a little bit, he would be bitten by a small animal and forced into mutating into the form of a half-human and half-beast.

—Just like his appearance in front of Ludger at that moment.

—A strange power that's different from magic.

What Hans had was actually more of a superpower.

“Take this.”

Ludger took an ampoule jab containing a green chemical from his pocket and threw it to Hans.

Hans hurriedly grabbed the ampoule with both hands and injected it right into his forearm with a happy face.

Shoot!

Then a change occurred immediately.

The fur that had grown thick on his body thinned, and his big size gradually decreased.

The bright, cute Pomeranian face had also changed to a slightly mean-looking man.

Returned to his original state, Hans touched his body here and there and breathed a sigh of relief.

“Phew. If it weren't for you, I'd have been going through a lot of suffering for a few more days.”

“It's right now that I think about it.”

It was quite a long time ago that Ludger had met Hans.

At that time, Hans was being chased here and there, being called a monster because he couldn't control his own body.

Still, if he had the power to turn into a beast, he could pretend to be a king in the back alley, but he was a man who couldn't fight, so he just wandered from place to place to avoid persecution.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime fortune for Hans to meet Ludger at that time.

"I almost died when I first met you."

"You did. I thought you were a Cryptid that was roaming around the city."

A Cryptid was a mysterious creature that appeared implicitly throughout the city now that the monsters had disappeared.

They were some kind of monster remnants.

Compared to monsters in reality, they were a little more like a supernatural phenomenon.

Magical beasts, spirit beasts, and the other strange beasts... Or also beings who reacted to negative emotions and magic power then embodied them.

That was a Cryptid.

Ludger had also met Hans because he was asked to eradicate Cryptids.

But when he had first met Hans, Ludger was quite taken aback when he realized that he was not the werewolf he had imagined.

That was because Hans at that time was a half-human and half-beast that had a similar shape to a Chihuahua.

He was a so-called werechihuahua.

"I was quite surprised to find out later that you were a human being with a decent ability to talk."

"Was that a surprise? I was rather surprised by your ability to develop the cure to it

in such a short time.”

“It is not a cure. It’s more like a neutralizer.”

“Well, that’s that.”

* * *

Hans snorted.

“If it weren’t for this medicine that you made for me in the first place, I might have been hunted as a monster somewhere in the back alley.”

Ludger nodded as he didn’t deny such a statement.

“But this time, you said your alias was Ludger Chelysie. And a Professor at Sören Academy? When the hell did you create that identity called Ludger Chelysie? It sounds a little chaotic. How surprised I was to hear that you suddenly became Sören’s professor in the letter.”

“It’s a little long to explain the situation.”

Ludger explained how he became a teacher of Sören, starting with the terrorist attacks on the magic engineering train.

When Hans heard his last sentences, he couldn’t help but burst into laughter.

“Kekek. Hahahaha! You’re really amazing, too. How could you say that you’re Ludger right there?”

“I had to do it if I wanted to live.”

“If it were me, I would have stuttered and acted extremely suspicious. Even worse, Ludger was originally a member of an unidentified secret society?”

“He’s also an executive called the First Order.”

“Hmm, First order... First Order, huh.”

“Do you know anything about it?”

Hans was immersed in contemplation as he stroked his chin.

It was his habit when he tried to think of something.

“Well, I think I’ve heard of it. No, it’s surely within my memory. Have you heard of the recent turmoil in the Empire’s underworld?”

“No. Not yet.”

“Well, it’s quite recent, so you might not know. They say there are a lot of new guys out there, but they’re all pretty strong and crazy. Oh well, those guys call each other as members or whatever and classify each of them with what-what-Order.”

“I think it’s certainly them. What’s the name of the society?”

“They’re called the Black Dawn Group. Some people call them the Black Dawn Society.”

The Black Dawn Group, or the Black Dawn Society.

Ludger mused on the name.

The guys involved with him were definitely not normal, nor were they average.

They had planted many of their members in Sören, assassinated the employees, hid their identity, and even did an infiltration.

They must have been extremely vigilant people.

“Do you have any more information about them?”

“It’s very recent, so I don’t know the details. What I know is just the name of the organization and its rank, but did you just become their First Order recently?”

“It’s not that I became the First Order. It’s a situation where I have to wear the mask of the original First Order.”

“Right now, you’re lucky that they passed it with that face, but if you make a mistake, won’t you get caught?”

“Yeah.”

And if he got caught, he'd be tortured in a way that went beyond imagination.

Ludger clicked his tongue and rummaged through his pockets.

“So I have to prepare.”

Ludger took out the pillbox and tried to take the pills inside, but he realized that he had eaten all the pills the other day and stretched his hand to Hans.

“My suitcase.”

“Oh, I brought it here.”

Hans brought a black suitcase hidden in the dark of the alley and handed it over to Ludger's hand.

Ludger confirmed that his suitcase was intact.

“So you didn't open it.”

“You think I'm crazy enough to open your bag? I couldn't open it even if I wanted to.”

Hans was fed up and denied Ludger's half-joking sentence.

“I know. More than that, did you meet Sheridan?”

“The little kid? Well, of course I met him beforehand. He was the one who was waiting for you in the Empire at first.”

“I'm sorry about that.”

“You don't have to be sorry. Did you or us know this was gonna happen?”

Ludger opened his suitcase and examined all of his personal items inside.

It was still the same as when he organized and put the luggage in the suitcase before sending it.

Ludger took out two pills from the pillbox and poured them into his mouth.

Hans looked at Ludger with a slightly pitiful eye.

“You’re suffering a lot, too.”

“Well, you’re not the only one.”

“Well, I suffer too, indeed, but come to think of it, you and I are both living while heavily dependent on drugs.”

“But unlike narcotics, it’s fortunate that our drugs have no side effects.”

“So what are you going to do with your future plan? Do you have an appropriate method? Ludger is an unintentional identity, so there must be a lot of restrictions on him.”

“I’ll have to think about it later.”

Originally, he had intended to use Sören’s power to control them or disrupt their plans, but that alone seemed to not be enough.

It was too optimistic to expect Sören alone to take care of the Black Dawn Society.

He also needed to move more actively and uproot them.

“Hmm.”

Ludger, who was trying to lock the suitcase again, suddenly remembered something, so he asked Hans a question all of a sudden.

“Hans. If you arrived here two days ago, why didn’t you ask me to meet you on that day? Why did you ask me to wait two more days?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why do you even ask? Rumors spread all over Leathevelk that a werewolf appeared at night two days ago. There was someone who even saw you in Sören.”

“Eh? What do you mean? I just arrived in Leathevelk today. “

“What?”

Ludger asked back without realizing it.

It was the same with Hans.

“More than that, there were rumors of werewolves in Leathevelk? Even before I came?”

“Yeah. I thought it was you.”

“No, I just came here today. And you know my personality. If I had come the day before yesterday, I would have asked you to meet me right away. What reason would I have to stand by here for two days?”

The two men were speechless for a moment.

So who had caused the werewolf rumor to spread?

Owoooooo!

At that moment, a cry was heard from beyond the foggy darkness.

In a civilized society, they were supposed to no longer face the dangers of wild animals.

There was no way the two men in the present could not identify the cry of such an iconic beast.

“Hey.”

“Yeah.”

Ludger leaned his back against the wall and was on guard, watching his surroundings.

The sound of something moving fast with rough breaths in the wind echoed in his ears.

“It’s really a werewolf.”

“So it wasn’t a rumor. It was real?”

“Maybe.”

At that moment, Ludger and Hans looked up at the same time.

In between the factories that were built with bricks...

On the high rooftop, they could see a black shadow crossing quickly.

A black-furry beast shed a bloody red glow in its eyes through the air.

The distinctive disgusting smell of a beast could be smelled on the tips of their noses.

His instincts sensed that it was not fake.

“Crazy, it was real... Shall we leave this place now? I don’t think he can recognize us right away.” Hans asked as he swept the goosebumps rising above his skin with his hands.

“It’s only a matter of time.”

The werewolf was moving around fast.

But it didn’t go far away. It was currently wandering around the factories in the industrial area.

It was currently looking for prey.

‘It seems like there was something on the werewolf’s neck.’

When the werewolf had shown its appearance in that brief flash...

Ludger’s eyes had penetrated the thick fog and clearly scanned the werewolf.

What caught his eyes was something similar to an identification tag that was hanging on its neck.

‘Is it the belonging of someone that it ate? No. It was more like a leash.’

Maybe he was mistaken.

It was such an instant moment that he might have been mistaken about it.

But the fact that the werewolf appeared in Leathevelk and its rumors also spread in Sören disturbed him to no end.

“Hans, I think I’ll have to check it.”

“Check it, you said? Don’t tell me you’re going to catch that werewolf?”

“Something is fishy about that werewolf. Maybe someone artificially made him and released outside.”

“What? Who the hell...”

“I’ll have to check it out now.”

Ludger said so and picked up his items one by one from his suitcase.

He wrapped a leather belt around his waist. The multifunctional belt was full of empty holsters.

Ludger put all sorts of things into the empty slots of the belt one by one.

—Thrown weapons, close combat weapons, drug bottles with chemicals.

—Lastly, two black revolvers.

Clack.

Ludger checked the firearms quickly and stuck them on his back.

Click.

Ludger even finished putting on gauntlets with mechanical devices on both of his arms.

Looking at Ludger putting on his equipment one by one, Hans recalled the first time he had met him in the past.

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen you use them.”

Despite the addition of all kinds of equipment, Ludger’s appearance had not changed.

As such, the tools that he used were very secretive and seemingly unobtrusive objects.

“Was it when you were a Cryptid hunter? Didn’t you use an alias then, too?”

“You are right.”

“What was your name at that time? You have used so many aliases. I don’t really remember it. Va... Van what?”

“Van Helsing.”

With all the equipment on, Ludger got up from his seat while closing his suitcase.

His face was shaded by his hat.

“Abraham Van Helsing.”

It was the name that Ludger had once used when he was a hunter.

CHAPTER 22

A HUNTER IN A MECHANICAL SPRING CITY (1)

Five years before...

The Kingdom of Durman, one of the small countries in the southern part of the continent, was plagued by a sudden infestation of Cryptids.

Wolves roamed in the middle of the city, mysterious beasts ate people every night, and the nightmare of an endless blood scent continued for more than a month.

Even the officers were helpless.

Even though soldiers and knights were deployed, the Cryptids evaded their siege by messing with the knights.

The situation had been sluggish and unsolved.

Among them, there was one of the most notorious Cryptids.

It was a monster that had invaded Jévaudan, one of the largest cities in the Kingdom of Durman.

It was a rare monster that ate three knights who held the title of elite soldiers.

—The worst Cryptid ever to dominate the horrors of the kingdom and a nightmare for Jévaudan.

The monster of Jévaudan.

The King of Durman thought that things wouldn't work out like that, so he had issued an official paper saying that he would give a huge reward to those who defeated Cryptids.

After hearing the rumors, all kinds of freelance wizards, wandering knights, and famous mercenaries from the continent gathered in the Kingdom of Durman and

began a massive operation to suppress the Cryptids.

Countless Cryptids had died, and a considerable amount of human beings had also died.

People called the hunt 'Bloody Night' because the blood shed at that time colored the ground red.

The Bloody Night was enough to instill fame in many people.

At that time, there was one person who had made the greatest achievement.

—A person who single-handedly defeated the most notorious monster in Jévaudan and recorded the most achievements in shooting down and slaughtering Cryptids.

He was not a famous wizard, a high-ranking chivalrous knight, or an elite special mercenary.

He was only a hunter.

The hunter was adept at handling all kinds of tools and weapons, and during the year after the Bloody Night, he traveled all over Durman, setting up a record of defeating Cryptids with a kill count of more than three digits.

The name of the hunter, who was also famous as a mystic because he didn't actually reveal his identity...

Was 'Abraham Van Helsing'.

* * *

Fully equipped, Ludger slowly walked out to the boulevard.

The damp night fog blanketed his coat.

The blurry scarlet light spreads dimly around the street lamp as if it had consumed the water from the fog.

The smell of the beast, which gently exuded among the reek of soggy mud, brushed against the tip of his nose.

'What a memory.'

Dum!

Ludger immediately kicked a drum that was lying around in the street.

Ka-boom boom!

As the drum collapsed, a strong noise echoed through the air. The werewolf, who was searching for prey, turned his head when he heard the sound.

His ferocious eyes found Ludger standing alone in the center of the boulevard.

Grrrrr.

The werewolf jumped from the roof of the building and landed in front of Ludger.

'It's big.'

Ludger was able to get a closer look at the werewolf.

He was over 2.5 meters tall, had bloodshot eyes, and his body was full of black fur.

His sharp nails were pointed on both hands, and his energy was so creepy that Ludger could feel it in his skin.

If he got caught by that thing, even steel would be ripped like paper.

But most of all, what caught his eyes was the metal leash that was stuck in the werewolf's neck.

'I knew it. I wasn't mistaken.'

There's no way that was just hanging around the werewolf's neck without a cause.

There was no way that a wild beast who lost his rationality would think by himself and wear that around his neck.

There was only one possibility:

‘Someone deliberately raised or made that werewolf.’

He thought that it wasn’t completely impossible.

It was a world where magic existed where and science had developed in a strange direction, and Hans, whom he knew, had the body type that made him turn into a beast whenever he got bitten by a beast.

Well, it wouldn’t be strange if some secret organization made a werewolf as their experiment.

‘The question is: why does it have to happen in this kind of timing?’

The incident happened not long after the start of Sören academy’s semester. when things had been quiet without much news until then.

Also, in the year when he was appointed as the professor?

He couldn’t help but be suspicious about the situation that was so blatant.

‘Well, I’ll find out once I catch and beat him up.’

Ludger immediately got into his position.

The werewolf distorted his face as he seemed to feel uncomfortable when the human in front of him raised his will to fight rather than run away.

Owooooo!!!

The roaring werewolf that was stretching his chest and raising his head to the sky rushed immediately toward Ludger.

The werewolf, who ran fast on the ground with his four legs, was faster than a car.

Ludger stepped back while watching his movement. The werewolf’s claws passed through the air where Ludger was.

Grrrrr!

The werewolf waved his arms nonstop; Ludger continued to take back steps and

focused on avoiding the werewolf.

Thud.

The moment the tip of Ludger's brown shoes touched the ground, a strange wavelength spread around him.

Booom!

Every time the werewolf's attack missed, Ludger continued to tap the ground with his toes and spread the wavelength of mana.

In an extreme situation where he might be torn to the bone just by brushing against the claws, Ludger never allowed the werewolf to attack him.

Gaaaaah!

The angry werewolf roared and spread his arms wide. He was going to attack Ludger in that state and grasp him so that he wouldn't be able to avoid his attack.

'So he used his brain.'

Ludger's mouth, which was covered by the shade of his hat, smiled.

Hiiiiiiiiiiing!

The werewolf, who was about to jump at Ludger, suddenly distorted his face and fell flat on the ground.

Badump.

The werewolf slipped over the mud that covered the ground.

"Oh, ooh?"

Hans, who was watching nervously from afar, suddenly opened his eyes wide, confused at the sight of the fallen werewolf.

Did he eat something wrong?

“Your head will ring a lot.”

Ludger gently stepped on the back of the werewolf, who was struggling in pain.

The werewolf was more of a beast than a human.

And since it was a canid, it was particularly sensitive to high frequencies that ordinary people couldn't hear.

Ludger's stomping while avoiding the werewolf attacks was a preliminary preparation to cast such a spell.

That spell—which moderately mixed sound waves and vibration magic—may have been nothing to humans, but it was different to werewolves, who heard sounds beyond a certain frequency range.

Even then, the ultrasonic waves that rang the werewolf's ears in real-time and shook its brains continued to shake the surrounding area.

“I don't have to use expensive silver.”

There was no more suitable way than that because the purpose was to suppress the werewolf, not to kill it in the first place.

‘Now, let's check where the hell they made this guy.’

It was when Ludger took out a syringe and tried to collect his blood...

Hiiiiiiiiing!

“Here it is! I heard a sound from here!”

“Everyone, move quickly!”

* * *

With a whistle, uniformed policemen rushed towards them from beyond the fog.

Police officers, who had been patrolling for two days due to rumors of werewolves, must have flocked as soon as they heard the disturbance here.

'Why does it have to be right now.'

When Ludger looked away for a moment, the werewolf, who had stayed still meekly, jumped up.

Ludger hastily stepped back and avoided an incoming mishap.

Ludger was immediately wary of the werewolf's counterattack, but the werewolf had no interest in Ludger in the first place.

The werewolf shook his head a few times and soon turned his back and ran away.

'Darn.'

'I didn't expect the werewolf to run away in this situation.'

Ludger sighed and released the high-frequency spell that was spread around him.

When the police officers who were carrying mana appeared one by one, Ludger decided to slowly step back from his spot.

"There! There's someone there!"

"Arrest all suspicious people!"

Before he knew it, the werewolf was climbing up the wall of the factory and climbing to the rooftop.

Ludger ran after the werewolf.

He was running through alleys avoiding spells and the sound of whistles.

Ludger, who was running through the dark alley, stretched his arm in the air as he felt that the werewolf was going farther away.

Whoosh!

The machine spring, which was hanging under the wrist of his gauntlet, quickly turned around, and soon a wire-mounted hook was shot toward the roof.

Click!

As soon as the hook was fixed to the roof railing, the cogwheel rotated and wound the wire at high speed.

—A tightening pulling force.

Ludger used the rebound to fly up to the roof.

It was Ludger's favorite item when he was active as a hunter, commonly called a Wire Launcher.

Ludger landed splendidly on the rooftop.

Whiiiiirrrrr!

Ludger, who pulled the wire and withdrew the hook, witnessed the back of the werewolf that was fleeing far away.

'I won't let it go.'

Ludger put mana on his legs.

Wizards that were in that world had methods of strengthening their bodies with mana which had spread widely in case of unexpected situations.

Ludger stormed out the roof and chased after the werewolf with his strengthened legs.

Whooooosh.

The night scene in the industrial zone quickly passed by. He could see the werewolf that was running away gradually getting closer.

The werewolf looked back as he felt a strange sense of presence as he ran; he found out that Ludger was chasing him, then accelerated his speed to escape.

The werewolf, who was constantly jumping over between the roofs of the factory, jumped onto the huge railroad down there.

Just in time, a cargo train loaded with magic stones was passing underneath.

Boom!

The werewolf landed roughly on the cargo train.

Ludger jumped down and landed on the cargo train as well, scared to miss the werewolf.

He minimized the shock of his landing by flowing the mana that was loaded on his legs to the soles of his feet.

Ludger gazed at the werewolf with a flick of his hand over his shoulder.

Perhaps the werewolf realized that he could no longer escape. He looked back at Ludger while raising his bent body.

Clackety-clack.

On top of the train, Ludger and the werewolf faced each other about three cabins apart.

As the train ran, the strong wind blew Ludger's coat hem.

The scarlet streetlights stretched along the streets and scattered around as it was reflecting the light.

"I was just going to control you moderately at first."

Grrrrrrrrrr.

"But I can't do that."

Judging from his situation and the police officers around who were after him after hearing some commotion, he couldn't afford to do it.

The night breeze that was passing by the edge of his cheeks and the steam emitted from the head of the train blurred the view for a moment.

Hap!

Using that moment, the werewolf rushed toward Ludger.

It was a pretty sharp move to pierce through his opponent's weak point using the moment when his opponent's view was covered.

But Ludger had already calculated a couple of steps ahead of the werewolf's movement.

Ziiiiing!

The werewolf, who was rushing toward Ludger, stopped running at the strange noise that rang in his ears—it was some kind of instinctive intuition as a beast.

His judgment was indeed correct.

Something sharp passed quickly on both sides of the werewolf's neck.

"Your intuition is good."

As they cut through the skin of the werewolf's neck, they spun around and went back to Ludger.

—They were boomerangs with sharp blades that were spread out like a fan.

If he was a little too late to stop, the sharp circular saw would have cut the werewolf's throat.

The werewolf quickly regenerated the wound running through his neck. He was angry at the fact that there were wounds in his body, and veins popped out throughout his body.

"I was just going to finish you with that in one blow."

Ludger left his regret behind and took out a wand hanging from his waistline, and grabbed it.

That time it was Ludger's turn to charge.

He held a wand in his right hand and collected mana in his left hand to create a spell called Shining Stone.

It was shot like a bullet and aimed at one eye of the werewolf.

Whoosh!

The werewolf bowed his head and dodged the Shining Stone. At that moment, Ludger flicked his left index finger.

Then, the Shining Stone that passed by the werewolf made a turn in the air and hit the back of the werewolf's head.

Baam!

While the werewolf was dumbfounded by the intense pain that he felt in the back of his head, Ludger rushed at the werewolf and swung his wand to the werewolf's face with all of his might.

As soon as the werewolf tried to block it with his arms, a saw blade boomerang flew and pierced through the werewolf's hands.

Ludger had already expected it and threw the boomerang ahead of time.

Aaaaargh!

The bewildered werewolf opened his mouth wide and bit Ludger's wand because his arms were not able to move.

Craack!

His powerful teeth gripped and bit the wand.

The werewolf's eyes bent like a crescent moon.

Since he had already bit the cane, there would be nothing that his opponent could do.

As soon as the wound on his arm regenerated, he was going to tear the arrogant human in front of him into pieces.

But as if he was mocking such werewolf's thoughts, Ludger immediately took the next move.

Whrrr.

The handle and the grip of the wand were separated, and a white sword blade was pulled out of it.

At such an unexpected sight, the werewolf could not even think of putting the empty shell of the wand in his mouth.

—Wand blade.

Often referred to as a sword-stick, it was more like an assassin weapon that pierced through the opponent's weak point rather than a weapon used head-on.

And there was only one moment when he picked this in a fight that was aiming for each other's lives.

—It was only when he was confident that he could kill the other person.

Ludger's body spun around once in his spot.

Whoosh!

A solid white line was drawn in the air.

An extremely thin but vivid light gently split the werewolf's neck.

CHAPTER 23

A HUNTER IN A MECHANICAL SPRING CITY (2)

'Hmp, phew. I almost got cornered and caught as a suspicious person.'

Hans, carrying Ludger's suitcase, walked slowly through the dark alley while avoiding the eyes of the police who had suddenly come to the scene.

It was just that day that Hans had arrived there, but he didn't get lost because he had already memorized a map of Leathevelk city in his head.

'More than that, he went to catch a werewolf. When the hell is he coming back?'

As he thought so, something fell in front of Hans from the air.

—It was a giant wolf's head that rolled to his feet.

Heek!

Hans shrugged his shoulders and desperately held back the scream that was about to leak out of his lips.

"Surprised?"

Ludger walked slowly out of the darkness of the opposite alley.

—Shoes and leather trousers with a white dress shirt and a brown leather vest over it and a long dark coat on the outside and a hat on his head.

It seemed like Hans might have plopped down on the spot if he didn't know who he was due to the intense pressure that was being emitted by his appearance.

"Damn it! When you want to show up, say something before that! I almost dropped your suitcase!" Hans shouted with quivering lips.

"You didn't, so it's fine."

“Ah shit. Is this the werewolf? Well, I’m not looking down on your skills, but I wonder how you managed to catch this horrible guy in that situation.”

Hans, who checked the head of a werewolf who had died with his tongue stuck out, shivered and handed Ludger the black suitcase.

Accepting the suitcase, Ludger turned his back and walked ahead.

Hans followed in Ludger’s back.

“Can you leave the head just like that?”

“Yes, I don’t need it anymore.”

“Why did you bring it then?”

“To surprise you.”

“...So you still remember me trying to tease you in the alley?”

When Ludger was silent, Hans sighed and raised his hands.

“I get it. I lost. I lost, so let’s not do that again.”

“Seeing you do it...”

The two people who left the alley came out to the street where there was human presence with pedestrians here and there.

“So what was the identity of the werewolf? Is it really Cryptid?”

“No. It was an artificial experiment made by someone.”

“Experiment? They’re crazy. I’ll have to watch myself while I’m in this town. It means that the people who made that are here.”

“I have something to tell you about that.”

“Something to tell me? I’m suddenly very nervous. Can I not listen to it?”

“...”

“I... I get it! Tell me what it is.”

“I should move up the work I originally planned.”

“The work you originally planned? Don’t tell me...”

“I think it’s better here than in the capital.”

Ludger threw two bags at Hans.

Hans took them and checked the contents. One was full of gold coins, and the other contained his beast neutralizer.

“This is...?”

“Shouldn’t we slowly settle down?”

“But in Leathevellk? In a place that’s in contact with Sören, and where there might be the secret society, the Black Dawn Society? There’s even a gang in the back alley since it’s a big city, though?”

“Yeah.”

“You’ve gone crazy.”

“There’s plenty of funds for it, so do your best.”

“What about you?”

“I can’t move hastily because I’m an academy professor for now. The principal is still suspicious of me.”

“So I have to do this all by myself?”

Ludger shook his head.

“I’m not asking you to do everything. I’m asking you to gather important information first. Who’s the gang in this city, who’s the mafia, how the underworld goes here, and

how we can get a spot there. You can figure them out and tell me.”

‘I’ll step up, then.’

Hans, who understood what Ludger was about to say, gulped down his saliva and soon smiled and nodded.

“Yes, that’s my specialty.”

* * *

Returning to the dormitory of the academy, I unpacked all my luggage in the accommodation.

I had left it to Hans to collect information by himself for the moment, but it will be fine.

He didn’t seem trustworthy, but his ability to gather information was unrivaled.

I didn’t take him around often for no reason.

‘I should build up my own force to prepare for unknown situations.’

I couldn’t move right away for the moment, so I decided to just prepare in advance.

The principal was still suspicious of me, and I still didn’t know exactly what the secret society of the Black Dawn Society was going to do.

It was rather poisonous for me to move rashly.

Having finished organizing my luggage briefly, I sat on a fluffy sofa and recalled what happened that day.

‘That werewolf... It was an experiment deliberately made by someone rather than pure Cryptid.’

The existence of werewolves was not surprising.

Monsters exist in this world, and by then, they’d been driven out beyond the shadow barrier, which was the outside of the continent, but there were still traces of them.

Cryptids were a prime example of the remnants.

The subspecies of monsters were more like urban legends or ghost stories caused by the abnormal occurrence of mana rather than the beings called as monsters.

The werewolf I caught that time was also some kind of Cryptid, but it was just a fake one, to be exact.

'Because experiments and spells that create werewolves have existed for a long time.'

There was a curse potion made by putting various medicinal herbs in the water with wolf's footprints in it and mixing them with wolf's fur.

It was a transformation potion that could make even ordinary people turn into a beast if they drank it.

It was certainly black magic.

Black magic was prohibited nationally, so they would be punished with an unconditional death penalty no matter what reason they had if they got caught.

It also rarely circulated in the underworld.

'But how could they make a werewolf like that? Seeing that he even has a lab marker as the sign that he's an experiment, I don't think there's a lot of power involved in his creation.'

'Seeing that it has a leash, are they mixing human genes after capturing wild wolves alive?'

There were signs of restraints and other traces of experiments engraved on the werewolf's body.

It was certainly the result of science.

A potion that corrupted humans and transformed them into beasts was the exclusive property of black wizards who had almost gone extinct.

Science had intervened in that thing.

‘Someone deliberately urged them to do it.’

Then who was that someone?

Normal space was not enough to make that much of an experiment secretly.

A fairly large laboratory was needed, and it should have been kept hidden from people.

Space, confidentiality, and possible failure in the experiments...

Considering all that, it meant that there was a big investor in the case who could provide a huge source of funding.

—An aristocrat or a millionaire.

‘There must be a suspicious rich man in the empire.’

I shook my head.

I didn’t know who was suspicious enough, and since I’d eliminated the werewolf and finished collecting his serum, I wouldn’t have to worry about it anymore.

It was the weekend after a long time, so I didn’t want to be involved in any more troublesome work, and the next day was Sunday, so I wanted to rest well.

‘Moreover, I have to prepare for what I should do for the next class.’

There were so many things that I had to deal with in many ways that I had a headache.

* * *

Monday morning marked the beginning of a new week after a peaceful Sunday.

I had breakfast with simple toast and coffee and then went to work at my private professor’s office in the main building.

The class was the next day, but I had to show myself going to work for the moment because I was a new teacher.

That's social life.

After sitting at the desk in the office, I opened the day's newspaper that I brought from the accommodation.

It was to simply check what happened in Leathevelk or Sören.

But...

'...What the hell is this?'

The front page of the warm newspaper that came out just that morning was inscribed with a single prominent title in the coverage.

[An unidentified murderer in Leathevelk. Still in search!]

-Last Sunday, five more people died in Leathevelk. As a result, the total number of deaths exceeded 10. The culprit has yet to be identified, but witnesses say it is a dreadful beast with black fur. Although the cops say that it's just a lunatic murderer and announced that they'd arrest it soon, citizens are still anxious.

'What is this?'

I read the article on the front page of the newspaper again and again.

No matter how I looked at it, it was the werewolf that I had killed the previous Saturday.

But the newspaper said that the death toll happened on Sunday.

There were as many as five people.

'I definitely ended his life then, and yet there's a new victim. Does that mean there wasn't only one werewolf?'

It was the moment when I felt that the situation was going weird...

Beep! Beep!

The translucent crystal ball on the work table began to flash with a strange sound.

I knew what that was.

‘The principal is calling me.’

It was some kind of signal artifact to bring the professors together.

That meant that there was a meeting to be held.

‘I have to go.’

I stood up and put on my coat on the hanger.

* * *

Suddenly, I remembered what professor Selena had said during the meal on Friday.

Some students had said they witnessed werewolves inside the academy.

‘Victims in Leathevelk, including sightings at the Academy.’

Even if I excluded the one that I hunted, there might have been at least two more werewolves.

...Maybe more than that.

Trying to move on from such anxious thoughts, I headed to the meeting room where the professors had gathered.

Chatter chatter.

The conference hall on the higher floor of the main building was full of professors.

—Those who were clearly competent in their own teaching fields.

When I went inside, people’s eyes were looking at me.

Most of the feeling that was emitted in their eyes was curiosity, but I knew it was directed at the source code that I had invented, not curiosity toward me.

‘Professor Ludger! Here!’

A familiar pink-haired woman was seen swaying her hand in the corner.

When I found out that professor Selena was waving at me, I walked toward her.

‘Is that person Ludger Chelysie?’

‘I heard he invented some pretty great spell. Is that true?’

‘I heard he’s from a fallen aristocrat family. He’s acting so high with that look.’

Among some professors, there were not a few people who looked at me with hostility who were descendants of the aristocracy.

Their hostile and jealous stares were quite stinging, but I just shrugged it off.

Professor Selena greeted me as I sat in an empty seat next to her.

“Did you have a good weekend?”

“I had a good rest. Did you have a good rest, too, Professor Selena?”

“Yes, it’s been a while since I had a good rest. More than that, have you heard the rumor?”

“Did you mean the reason why we gathered this time?”

“Two first-year students were severely injured last night after they were attacked by an unidentified assailant.”

Selena explained that the situation was like that.

‘Last night...’

It was said that two first-year students who were returning to the dormitory after going outside the academy were attacked inside Sören.

The injuries were not life-threatening, but it was quite serious, and it was a big shock that such an incident happened inside Sören.

And one of the students who just woke up that morning had said...

—That a horrifying beast had attacked them.

“I guess the werewolf rumor that has been going around since last week was true. There were also victims in the nearby city of Leathevelk.”

“I see.”

It was difficult to simply dismiss them as seeing some hallucination, and the wounds carved on the victims’ bodies were said to have been scratched by a beast.

That’s why the professors were all gathered that time.

First of all, it was mentioned in the contract that Sören’s professors had to work with all their might in case of an emergency.

That meant it was hard to calm things down with internal guards or employees alone.

‘If the opponent is a werewolf, it would be much better to send elite professors than to put in unnecessary manpower.’

Sören’s professors didn’t only teach students normally.

In other words, the professors’ skills had been guaranteed to some extent at the time when they taught the prestigious Sören students.

“The principal is coming.”

When a woman in her mid-50s with wrinkles on her face said that, all the professors who were talking to each other became quiet.

I was wondering who she was, and Selena explained it to me.

“She’s Professor Mary Ross. She’s been teaching in Sören for more than 20 years. Her field of teaching is pharmacology.”

“I see.”

She’d been teaching for more than 20 years in Sören? It meant that she had great ability.

She came forward and settled down the situation, and all the other professors were silent.

“The principal is coming.”

Then the door opened, and the principal came in.

She was always beautiful. Along with her fascinating golden eyes, her two-tone hair with white and light pink s naturally caught peoples' eyes.

“Good morning, everyone. The reason I called you in so urgently today is that I have something to announce to you.”

The principal got straight to the point without dragging more time.

All the professors in the conference hall pricked up their ears.

“Recently, an unidentified assailant appeared inside Sören. In fact, last night, two new students who entered the school this year were attacked and seriously injured.”

“Who’s the culprit?”

“It hasn’t been revealed yet, but according to what the witnesses say, it was a werewolf, which means that it was done by a Cryptid.”

The mention of the werewolf that was just rumor caused a stir among the professors.

“That can’t be true, your honor. Aren’t they mistaken? How come there’s a Cryptid in Sören?”

It was an avaricious middle-aged man who appeared to be in his mid-50s who stood up while speaking so blatantly.

He parted his greasy hair neatly 2/8 and had grown his mustache, which made his face look full of grumpiness.

It was like seeing an old boss that every school seemed to have...

However, after he stood up, the atmosphere of the conference hall strangely changed.

“Anything you want to say? Professor Hugo Bourtag?”

“This is Sören. This place is protected by the Exileon Empire. For such a werewolf to appear in Sören, I wonder if the students have been mistaken after believing the ghost stories that are currently circulating.”

“Professor Hugo. You don’t seem to know anything. Didn’t I just say there were already two victims?”

“I know. Even the victims were children of noble families. That’s why I don’t think it was done by a werewolf.”

Hugo Bourtag glanced at the crowd once.

“I think the criminal is a fellow Sören student. A commoner at that.”

“What?”

“Otherwise, there’s no way that only the aristocratic children would be among the many students who got hurt. A werewolf attack in Sören? Rather than saying that, it is much more credible if some students deliberately pretended to be werewolves and committed crimes.”

The words certainly had a plausible persuasion, but I couldn’t help myself but feel some instinctive displeasure at Hugo’s words.

Yes, he is not purely questioning the situation.

He was just trying to nitpick at the principal’s words and pass the blame on to certain students.

Looking through the atmosphere, I nodded inwardly.

‘Oh, I get it roughly.’

As long as Sören was also an organization, it was inevitable that factions existed within it.

Students were divided into commoners and aristocrats, but the professors were not that different.

The reality was that professors also had a subtle, strange atmosphere between commoner professors and aristocratic professors.

The new teacher, Chris Benimore, who had just joined Sören, had also refused to eat together while commenting about me being a fallen aristocrat.

‘I thought the Black Dawn Society would go against that, but I don’t think so either.’

Maybe Hugo was the only one who acted rashly like that, but he would have known that there were quite a few people who secretly agreed with him.

Some aristocratic professors united and formed a faction.

And that faction didn’t seem to get along well with the principal’s faction.

It’s not enough for them to work together, but what kind of situation was an internal conflict like that?

When I thought, ‘Is this what Sören’s reality is like?’ a small bug climbed up the wall and crawled onto my shoulder.

The moment I was about to bounce it off with my hand because I thought it disturbed me, I had no choice but to pause.

It wasn’t a bug. It was a small thin piece of paper in the shape of a bug.

Fortunately, others had not noticed it yet.

I grabbed it naturally and checked the contents in a way that others wouldn’t notice.

It was fortunate that most professors’ attention was focused on the war of nerves between the principal and Hugo.

“...”

After checking the contents, I pressed my finger against my slightly throbbing forehead.

「Three of the experimental subjects escaped. Immediate capture is required. Eliminate them if not possible.」

I could immediately see who sent the message and who was the mastermind behind the werewolves.

But the most important thing was the last sentence.

「If the experiment's whereabouts is revealed, there is a risk that your identity will be revealed.」

‘Oh, my God.’

‘Why do You give me such a hard time?’

CHAPTER 24

BLACK DAWN SOCIETY (1)

I crumpled up the note and put it in my inside pocket, and then I was immersed in contemplation.

First of all, I knew that the Black Dawn Society was related to the werewolf crisis.

However, considering that it was urgent to capture the werewolves and get rid of them if it was not possible, it meant that the werewolves escape was probably unexpected by them as well.

‘The problem is, if the werewolves get caught, the Black Dawn Society will suffer greatly.’

If they suffered greatly, it was no different than a boon to me.

Even if I pretended to feel nothing on the outside, I welcomed such a situation with open arms inwardly.

But if there was a problem, it was written in the last sentence.

-There’s a possibility that your identity will get caught.

In other words, it means that the identity of Ludger Chelysie was somewhat related to the creation of the werewolves experiment.

I had to catch at least three werewolves. No, it was two.

In other words, I had to find and catch the werewolves before Sören did and then kill them.

‘Come to think of it... there was a mark on the werewolf.’

Maybe the mark itself was related to the people who did the experiment.

The problem was that Ludger Chelysie was somehow involved in it.

Honestly, if it wasn't related to me, I would have just left it up to Sören to take care of it.

But because I was getting involved there, the story was different.

If I got caught, I'd die.

"Professor Ludger? Are you sick?"

"It's nothing."

I racked my brain while responding that I was okay to professor Selena's question when she anxiously asked me about my well-being.

For the moment, it had been confirmed that there were as many as three werewolves.

I had caught one, so only two of them were left.

—One in Sören and one in Leathevelk.

'I must hunt them down.'

Meanwhile, the war of nerves between the principal and Hugo gradually headed toward the end.

"Well, it's up to Professor Hugo to be so narrow-minded, but I just want to make sure that you get the job done."

"So, do I need to intensify the patrol?"

"That's not all. I'm going to increase the number of people who do the patrol a little bit, and most importantly, we can't stay still until all the students return to the dorm late at night."

Hugo looked blatantly annoyed at the remark.

Rather than worrying about the student, he didn't seem to like the fact that someone

like him had to go on a patrol that only employees should have done that in the first place.

However, the incident had already taken place, and other professors were also aware of the seriousness of the situation.

Even Hugo was in a position in which he could not directly oppose the order.

“Well, of course.”

“Good. And other professors should also warn students not to go out late at night. If they violate the warning, you can give them a penalty point. It’s the directions that I, the principal, ordered myself. Understood?”

“Tsk. Understood.”

After the meeting, the professors rose from their seats and scattered one by one.

I was also about to get up and go back to my office, but some people blocked my way in advance.

“Are you Professor Ludger Chelysie? I’m glad to meet you. My name is Daniel Masrak, and I’m in charge of astrology.”

“Professor Ludger, this is the one who’s in charge of the reinforcement class...”

It was obvious why they approached me.

—They want to ask me about the source code spell.

The greed emitted in their eyes already told me that.

“I’m sorry, but I have to go because I’m busy.”

I immediately shook off their interest in me and left the conference hall.

* * *

Instead of heading straight to my office, I moved to a secluded warehouse.

I stopped at my spot because I thought it would be enough.

“Come out.”

The person who messaged me at the meeting must have been waiting for me to come out.

There must have been something they wanted to say because they couldn't convey all their intentions within a few lines of messages.

As soon as I spoke, I could feel a presence of someone who was hesitating over the pillar and sticking out their head.

“Uh...”

“Speak.”

Her first impression was a girl who looked like a squirrel.

Well, I thought I'd seen her somewhere, but she was one of the subordinates of the Black Dawn Society who tried to approach me 15 days after I entered Sören.

“What's the matter?”

“S-so...”

She was visibly flustered, as she didn't expect to see me again.

Then she showed herself completely from behind the pillar, and I was a little surprised to see her in Sören's uniform.

I didn't expect her to be a student there.

The reason why most members of the Black Dawn Society were hiding as employees there was because the students' status could not be simply manipulated.

In order to get in there, I was sure that they needed to have the talent or the ability to pass the entrance exam.

I didn't know that the person who seemed to be a low-rank member of the society

was a student there and that she was also a freshman who had just entered the school.

At our first meeting, I didn't know because she wasn't wearing a uniform either.

"Let's move from here first. Follow me."

"Ah, yes."

I took the lead, and she followed.

I suddenly remembered something, so I looked at my back and asked.

"Do you like coffee?"

"Pardon?"

* * *

I sat face to face with the Third Order student at a quiet cafe.

She had been at a loss for some time and shrank her shoulders.

I glanced at her.

—White skin and elaborate facial features, voluminous brown short hair with a slender build.

I couldn't see her ears and her bangs were so long that they almost covered her eyes.

It was literally like seeing a little squirrel.

I guessed I wasn't mistaken when I saw that she was shaking at my intimidation then.

I took a sip of the hot coffee in front of me and put it on the table with a loud sound.

Tap.

"Heek!"

The sound of the coffee cup and table touching each other made the girl curl her shoulders.

“Name.”

“Pardon?”

“I won’t ask you again. Name.”

“I... I’m Sedina Rochen.”

“Is it a real name?”

“Yes, yes.”

“It’s not an alias?”

“This is unexpected.”

Having a surname in this world meant that they were from a higher class rather than a commoner one.

—An aristocrat, a clergywoman, or a great rich merchant.

Why did a woman who grew up in such a perfect environment go into a secret society? And she also had the talent to enter the Academy but could only become the lowest Third Order?

‘No. It’s possible that the more prestigious the family she came from, the less favorable treatment she would gain.’

The strangest part was that she was only a Third Order with that level of talent.

Well, I’d ask her that later.

I flicked my fingers lightly.

“Tell me exactly what happened... Without missing a single thing.”

“Oh, that... our surroundings...”

“I casted a voice-blocking spell. Even if we scream here, the conversation won’t leak out.”

“Voice blocking spell? As... as expected from Mr. First Order.”

It was weird for her to keep saying that I was the First Order.

No, it was uncomfortable, to be honest.

“We’ll have to improve that nickname first. Don’t call me Mr. First Order from now on.”

“Pardon?!”

At my remark, Sedina opened her eyes wide as though she had just heard news that seemed like a bolt out of the blue.

I didn’t think I would make that face even if people said that the country was destroyed without any exaggeration.

“Do you want people to be suspicious? I’m a professor at Sören now, and you are the student.”

“Yes, yes. That’s right.”

“From now on, call me Professor Ludger.”

“Ho, how can I be so profane...”

“It’s an order.”

“O... order.”

She nodded while saying, “Understood,” when I spoke in a strong tone that it was an order.

However, contrary to the obligation that was ordered to her, her lips were constantly rising because she was happy to be able to call my name.

“So, what’s the situation?”

“Ah, yes. I’ll explain everything. The recent werewolves incident that occurred at our Black Dawn Society, or, to be precise, at an affiliated organization that joined hands with us.”

I was confused for a moment at the sudden change in her tone of speech, but I nodded naturally.

“Keep talking. Without missing a detail.”

“Just like what First, no, Professor Ludger already knows, there are factions within the Black Dawn Society. Especially with Victor Dreadful, the other First Order, who pushed this project the most enthusiastically.”

“Yes, of course.”

Actually, I didn’t know anything.

But I pretended to know everything when responding to her words.

‘Victor Dreadful... I’ll have to remember that name.’

“The Shamsus school, which was created by gathering the scientists who were kicked out of the association due to habitually using black magic and unethical experiments in the back alley, went into Cryptid experiments as usual.”

“What kind of experiment did they focus on exactly?”

“Only a few of us know that, so I don’t know that much... Oh, come to think of it, you lent your name when Mr. Victor asked for help.”

“I just lent him my name. I didn’t expect him to come this far.”

Looking at her response, Ludger seems to have been somewhat close to the person called Victor.

It’s just that their closeness would be poisonous for me at that moment.

The Shamsus school must have conducted an experiment on Cryptids, and their lab rats eventually escaped, and things turned out to be like that.

“It was their fault, so they should have taken care of it by themselves, but one of the escaped lab rats hid in Sören through the sewer.”

“That’s why there were victims the day before.”

“Yes. This was something that even we, the Black Dawn Society, didn’t expect at all.”

“...”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’m too talkative... I often make these mistakes when I get too thrilled. As... as expected, someone like me...”

Sedina Rochen’s attitude had changed into a noticeably passive one, perhaps because she took my staring in a different way.

I shook my head right away.

“No. Unlike your stuttering at our first meeting, your explanation was surprisingly good, so I was just impressed.”

“I... I’m just feeling sorry.”

“You speak better than I expected. You may explain further. It was nice to hear your explanation.”

“Is... is that true?! Yes! Understood!”

After throwing a few compliments, Sedina immediately became happy and continued her explanation.

I inwardly breathed a sigh of relief.

If she stopped explaining, I couldn’t find out any more information.

I had to pull all the information out as long as I was being respected by Sedina because I was covered in the shell of the First Order.

‘It’s surprisingly easy to utilize her.’

For the moment, Sedina Rochen was a Third Order member at the bottom of the

Black Dawn Society, but her own abilities were quite outstanding.

Starting from collecting information to continuing her explanations, our conversation itself was quite long and smooth.

Sneaking the note that was sent to me was also part of her magic.

However, why did she only become a Third Order with that level of skill?

‘She seems out of place.’

The fact that Sedina had a surname meant that her family was a pretty well-off aristocratic one.

‘Her reaction showed reluctance when she said her surname in her introduction. In other words, she doesn’t like her family. Reluctance? Sense of defiance? Something much bigger than that.’

The problem was that she may have entered the Black Dawn Society by her own will, but it did not look like that at all from the perspective of other members.

They thought that maybe she was a spy, and she herself had a loose screw personality, so she couldn’t get along with the other members properly.

‘To send me magic in secret, to be literate about a lot of information, to be admitted to Sören as a student... Her position is rather low compared to the outstanding ability that she has. It looks like, inside the organization, she is only considered as a pawn that’s being used roughly before being thrown away.’

Just by looking at her, who seemed like she was dedicated to me, in the identity of someone who was known to have a trash personality, I could get a rough estimation.

Sedina herself might be so passionate that she vowed allegiance to the Black Dawn Society, but the society itself was not happy with her presence.

She tried to work harder as she seemingly realized that fact, but the situation did not improve favorably towards her, and she fell into a deep pit.

‘From the standpoint of the Black Dawn Society, they’re keeping her for now, but she’s like something that they hesitated to use since they have so little interest

toward her, but they still can't give up on her.'

No, there was no way a First Order executive cared about her in the first place.

They were probably trying to use her as a sacrifice to do a mission that required her to risk her own life.

I could picture her future without looking at it.

'Is someone from the Second Order going to get rid of her?'

It was a while ago that I saw a crack carved inside Sören at the meeting.

And right then at that moment...

I could also see the cracks carved inside the Black Dawn Society.

There was no perfect organization in this world.

After all, the places where people live are all the same.

'This is maybe... '

It felt like I could see a way out when I found out that both parties had considerable disputes within each other, in a situation where Sören and the Black Dawn Society had been caught in layered problems just like a sandwich.

If I did well, maybe I could gain something from Sedina?

"Once you catch the lab rats, it's better not to leave any evidence. The priority is to capture them alive, but we have no choice but to get rid of them as soon as possible since the people are getting noisy about it. There are three of them, so we'll try our best to..."

"No. There are two of them."

"Pardon?"

I took out the werewolf leash that I had put in my inner pocket and showed it to Sedina.

“Th-this can’t be...”

“I’ve already caught one of them.”

“Wh-when on earth did you.....”

“Two days ago, in Leathevelk.”

Her face was blank since she didn’t know that I had caught one of the three werewolves already.

“As... as expected from Mr. First Order.”

Her expression was one of extreme respect.

Her trust level toward me had always been maxed out, but it felt like it advanced more.

“Anyway, are there two of them left?”

“Yes, yes.”

“You said that the werewolf hid here through the sewer, so I’ll expand the search around the sewer first. Sören still doesn’t know this information, right?”

“Yes, you’re right, but I don’t know how many more days it will last...”

“Then I’ll have to move right away.”

I said so and got up from my seat.

Sedina looked up at me as if asking if the conversation was already over and immediately bowed her head as she thought her behavior was rude.

I released the sound barrier that I had surrounded us with.

“Sedina Rochen, I’ve heard your story well. I’ll see you next time if I have a chance.”

“Yes, yes! Uh... Professor Ludger.”

Sedina blushed shyly after saying so.

If I looked at her like that, she looked like a fresh young girl of her age.

How did such a child end up in a hideous organization called the Black Dawn Society?

Well, she must have had her own circumstances.

“Well, then...”

I left the cafe after drinking up all the coffee.

* * *

Flora Lumos was going to go to the library and study leisurely because she had no class that day.

She was usually just going to slack around, but recently she couldn't sit still because of a professor who had ignited her desire to learn more about magic.

Thinking so, she was walking in an outdoor corridor with long arched pillars.

‘Oh?’

Beyond the second-floor window of a cafe not far away from her, she could see a familiar face.

How was it possible for her to forget such a face?

That was the man who taught the class that she took just then.

Ludger Chelysie.

But there was something fishy about his attitude.

‘Who's the girl on the other side?’

Ludger, who seemed somewhat softer than usual, was having a face-to-face conversation with a female student.

CHAPTER 25

BLACK DAWN SOCIETY (2)

‘What? What are those two talking about?’

Ludger was having an in-depth conversation with a girl student.

At least, that’s what it looked like to her.

However, no matter how much she wanted to listen to them with her ears, she couldn’t hear the conversation between the two that was too far away.

If it were just an in-depth conversation, Flora would have thought that Ludger was just giving career counseling or something related to his lectures to the student.

But she saw it with her own eyes...

A strange mana field was spread around Ludger and the girl.

‘What’s that? Magic? Judging from the color, is it a spell to block sounds?’

Flora Lumos had a secret she hadn’t told anyone.

—The reason why she was able to maintain the title of genius even in Sören.

—The reason why she could see through the weaknesses of spells that she had never seen or learned beforehand.

That’s because Flora Lumos had a unique body type that was called <Mana Synesthesia>.

She could feel the ‘color’ and ‘smell’ of mana.

Most people perceived mana or magic itself as only visual.

It was because the magic technique used by others could only be seen through sight

among the total of five senses of human beings.

But Flora also felt color in addition to that.

She saw a well-organized magic technique as though she was looking at a painting and smelling the scent of delicious food.

Born in a noble family, she was so sensitive to those things that she found it easier than anyone to sense that odd feeling if a technique was slightly off.

Moreover, if one color splashed out of harmony with the other colors, or if there was a nasty smell mixed in between ordinary smells.

—Flora had always discovered ‘wrong’ magic in that case.

Obviously, she perceived the right magic with a completely different sense from others.

...Just like the colors that were floating around Ludger.

As a professor whom she couldn’t hold in check, the magic tricks around Ludger were also perfect without any flaws to be pointed out.

She could not smell it because it was far away, but the colors of mana were so clear beyond the windows of the terrace.

‘I can’t believe he’s having a conversation while using magic. What the hell are they talking about?’

She was curious.

If it was just some ordinary professor, she would have ignored them and passed by, but she couldn’t stand her curiosity because the other party was Ludger.

‘Shall I go and just pretend that it’s a coincidence?’

After thinking that far, Flora shook her head. Wasn’t that too obvious?

And it would certainly seem like she had an interest in him.

'I would never do that!'

Ludger was a wall that she had to climb.

On the first day, she had felt such a great insult in front of everyone.

Of course, there was no room for disagreement in her defeat.

It was unacceptable to her pride if she spoke ill of the other party after losing a fair duel.

The source code spell presented by Ludger was so powerful that she was bound to lose because of it.

She had never heard of such a spell in the first place.

So he beat her purely by magic, just like she had always done against other people.

'Still... he was somewhat wonderful.'

When Ludger performed the source code spell, Flora felt a sensation she had never experienced in her whole life...

—An indescribable visual pleasure and sweet scent.

In particular, Ludger's source code spell was like looking at an elegant painting in which myriad metals of silver and gray colors were meticulously and solidly woven.

Flora Lumos felt exceedingly proud of her magic because of her unique body type and talent, but she even felt bored because of it.

But the source code shown by Ludger rekindled the spark in her boredom.

She thought that she wanted to see more if there was anything else in his sleeves.

However, there was an image that she had been building so far, so Flora was in a situation where she could not move hastily.

'I'll sneak a peek just once...'

The moment Flora was about to move...

“Flora? What are you doing here?”

“Kyaaa?!”

Flora could not help but be surprised by the voice coming from behind her back all of a sudden.

Looking back, Cheryl, her best friend, was looking at her with a confused gaze.

“Ch-Cheryl. What are you doing here?”

“What do you mean? It was you who asked me to study with you in the library.”

“Oh, oh right. Of course, I did.”

“...Are you sure you’re okay?”

Cheryl showed a subtle look of concern.

It was already well known that Flora had received a hard blow instead on the first day of Ludger’s spellcasting class.

Because of that, some students who usually felt envious of Flora laughed at her.

Cheryl was extremely worried about it.

“Hmm? Just~ it’s nothing.”

“What’s in there? You seemed like you were watching something.”

“No, no. It’s nothing like that. Let’s just go study.”

“Hmm.”

Flora pushed Cheryl’s back toward the library.

Even so, she couldn’t avert her gaze from the second floor of the cafe that was getting farther away.

Having been informed by Sedina Roehen, I told her to see me next time and immediately returned to my private office.

I hung my coat on the hanger and sat on a fluffy sofa while resting my chin on my hands.

‘Let’s get this straight for now.’

There was a place called the Shamsus School, where black magicians and crazy scientists joined hands. It was that place that created the werewolves as their experiment.

Although it was a separate group from the Black Dawn Society, it was an alliance that held hands with the Black Dawn Society, or maybe they were just holding the same intention for a short time.

The one who joined hands with the Shamsus school was one of the executives of the Black Dawn Society, Victor Dreadful.

Sedina’s explanation suggested that the Black Dawn Society was responsible for the invention or research.

‘The problem is that this occurred in Shamsus school.’

Three werewolf experiments that the Shamsus school was secretly experimenting with had escaped.

I didn’t know exactly where the lab was, but the rampage that happened in Leathevelk meant that the lab was around there.

The werewolf should have been captured as soon as possible in the early days of the incident, but the rumors had already spread in the city. It was impossible to simply keep it as a secret that had never happened since there were already people who died.

One of the werewolves even had hidden in Sören and hospitalized two students.

It was fortunate that there were no deaths in Sören, but the problem was that the

situation had become more serious and out of control.

'It's right to ask them to take care of it by themselves because it's their fault, but the problem is that the Black Dawn Society also gave some support to this Shamsus school's experiment.'

And in addition to that, the former owner of my identity, Ludger Chelysie, had also gotten involved in it.

I would greatly welcome it if another member was being caught and tracked down, but it was different if I also got involved there.

In other words, if I wanted to live, I had to catch the werewolves before others.

'First of all, my priority is to get rid of the werewolf who hid inside the academy.'

Just in time, security patrols have also stepped up.

In addition to the existence of werewolves, the professors will also patrol until late at night because it is clear that there is an unidentified assailant wandering around inside Sören.

No one would find it strange if I got rid of the werewolf there.

'I thought I had quit hunting quite a while ago.'

Five years before, I had ended my blood hunt and practically retired, albeit temporarily.

The reason was not something fancy. Rather, it was because I became so famous.

Of course, I had used the alias of Abraham Van Helsing so that my real identity wouldn't get found out.

However, the source of trouble was that, after hunting the monsters in Jévaudan, many people tried to approach me because I had become so famous.

So I retired while getting rid of the said identity and changed to a new identity.

'How many times have I changed my identity?'

The last identity that I had used was 'Gerrard', a rich middle-aged man with a lot of money, and after that, I had become Ludger Chelysie.

It was a fake life, not a real one, but I didn't feel particularly dissatisfied or suffocated.

Was it because I was born again in this world after I had died once?

My perception of life and death had changed to be a little different.

'Even so, I don't want to die again.'

I'd already died once, so I hated dying even more instead.

I wanted to live longer and more comfortably. However, there were things to do for me to achieve that.

It was originally just a part of my journey to the capital of the empire.

That train attack had turned my life into a complete mess.

'First, let's focus on catching werewolves.'

I had to deal with the werewolves first before anyone else found them.

I racked my brain while contemplating on how to catch the werewolves.

* * *

The werewolf rumor among Sören's students was like a hot potato.

Even the students, who had just dismissed the werewolf stories as mere rumors, finally accepted the existence of werewolves when the news that there were two students injured that time broke out.

Those rumors were especially exaggerated because they were students.

Obviously, the professors had to suppress the curiosity and vigor of the students as much as possible.

“You should study, study! Why do you believe such a false rumor? I’ll surely give you a test today, so you should be focused! Those who fill wrong answers afterwards, you will be on your own.”

“Everyone, there’s a patrol this week, so you should go back to your dormitory as soon as the sun sets. If you get caught walking around, there will be a penalty point.”

“Don’t bring yourself to get some penalty points. You should take care of yourselves.”

Some timid students thought they should go back to the dormitory immediately after class due to the professors’ warnings, but the number of students who didn’t go back to the dormitory immediately was not small either.

The more prideful a student was, the more they’d want to do it if they were being prohibited.

“Hey, there’s a werewolf. Honestly, aren’t you curious?”

“So what?”

“Let’s catch it.”

“What? Didn’t you hear that we will get penalty points if we get caught once we make a wrong move?”

“Hey. Think about it. They’re telling us that because they’re worried about us, but if we catch the werewolf instead, wouldn’t the school give us an award for doing well?”

“What if the professors catch us before we find a werewolf?”

“Then we just need to try not to get caught!”

There was even an official letter in the newspaper that said if someone caught a werewolf in Leathevelk city, they would receive a reward.

The first-year students in particular, who had not yet tasted the bitterness of the reality that they were not that great in Sören, dreamed of becoming heroes by hunting the werewolves.

It was when they were in the vigorous youth of their life when they wanted to be

praised for being great and to show a good image to their peers.

“Aidan. What do you think?”

Leo asked him while looking apathetically at the students who were already excited about what to do with the reward they would receive after catching the werewolf.

Just in time, Aidan, who finished taking notes of the formula written on the magic board, asked back to the voice that called him.

“Huh?”

“What? You weren’t listening?”

“Why? What did you ask me?”

“What do you think of the werewolf case?”

“Ah, that?”

Aidan laughed awkwardly.

“Well, the professors told us to be careful, so I think I should just buy it. If we get caught, there will be a penalty point.”

“Tsk. Right. I knew you’d say that.”

“What about you, Leo?”

“I’m not the type that likes to take action as well. If there’s a victim, then it’s what professors need to do in the first place.”

A female student approached the two boys who were having that conversation.

She had red hair that was tied in pigtails. She was a very attractive beauty with her coy eyes.

She stood in front of Aidan’s desk and slapped the table with her palm.

Leo responded with, “She’s here again,” but Aidan was different. He greeted the girl,

who stared at him with a bright smile.

“Hello. Tessie. Good morning.”

“Good morning, you said?”

Tessie Friad, the girl who received the greeting, wriggled her eyebrows while staring at Aidan instead.

Leo sighed at her reaction.

“Hey. If you lost in sparring, isn’t it time for you to stop already?”

“Lost? It was a draw. You haven’t settled the quarrel with Aidan yet. And this is about me and Aidan. Can you not intervene?”

“Sigh.”

Leo shook his head.

It hadn’t been long since Tessie Friad had approached Aidan like that.

It happened during the battle of magic to be exact.

Aidan, who didn’t know anything yet, had a battle with Tessie, and that’s where the relationship between the two began.

The situation was advantageous for Tessie, but the problem was Aidan’s unusual magic.

“Get yourself back together this time. We should use all of our power while not hiding each other’s strength.”

“Oh, oh? I... I don’t know.”

The battle then ended in a fairly vague result of a draw, but Tessie couldn’t accept it.

Tessie had always tried her best to study magic in order to revive her nearly fallen aristocratic family, the Viscount Friad.

Coming into Sören, she had the idea that she should do the best in her first year. In fact, she was so outstanding that her entrance grades were in the top five.

However, it disturbed her pride that she failed to win a proper victory in the rankings of the magic battle class and that she lost to a loose-minded commoner at that.

Her pride was hurt.

And the spell that Aidan was about to show then...

It was certainly not a kind of spell that was normally seen. If the professor hadn't told them to end the battle, she could've seen what kind of spell it was!

"Anyway, stick with me today in the evening after class."

"I'm sorry, Tessie, but I don't think I can do it today."

"Then, tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow is a little..."

"Why?!"

"What do you mean, "why"? There's a werewolf wandering around out there, so we can't do any activities at night. If we get caught by the professors, we'll get a penalty point."

"Hngg."

Listening to Aidan's excuse, Tessie folded her arms and then sneered.

"You're trying to run away from me with that excuse, right? I know everything. So you are scared?"

It was a blatant provocation.

Tessie expected Aidan to get triggered and shout, "What? No way!", but Aidan's reaction was different.

“Huh? Yeah. Then just think of it like that.”

Aidan had decided to concede in his position because he didn't want to have a fight with his friend—although Tessie herself would strongly disapprove that she was his friend.

He never expected that the mature response would give a scratch on Tessie's pride instead.

Raising her eyebrows, Tessie shouted in front of Aidan's face.

“It's a match! Aidan!”

“Huh? What kind of match?”

“If you can't fight with me, we can just do something else.”

“Well, so what's...”

“Werewolf.”

When the topic came up, Aidan and Leo stared at each other before staring back at Tessie again.

They were already anxious about what kind of ridiculous offer she would bring up.

“The person who catches the werewolf first wins the bet. What do you think? You won't run away because you're scared, right?”

“No...”

“Okay. We'll do it.”

“Leo?!”

Aidan was about to reject it because it was dangerous, but he was shocked by Leo's action that cuts in his words instead.

“Okay! The loser will grant the winner's wish!”

“You are the one who shouldn’t be so meek to us.”

Listening to Leo’s provocative tone, Tessie left after saying, “Of course!”.

“Leo. Why did you suddenly accept such a ridiculous offer?”

“You’re stupid. If you said that you won’t do it right here, then it’s obvious that she’ll bother us again. That’s why I gave her a moderate agreement to pass it like that. Look. She went right away. Peace has finally come.”

“Still... Lying is bad. I wouldn’t care about the werewolf in the first place.”

“Idiot. Is that the problem now? The professors will take care of the werewolves anyway. We just need to stay still. Whether it’s a match or whatever, it won’t be able to be decided in the first place.”

“But Tessie seemed sincere about it. What if Tessie runs into a werewolf when she wants to hunt it before the professors do?”

“Hey. She wouldn’t do such a reckless thing on her own unless she was a fool.”

“Oh, hm. That’s true, but honestly, I thought that if it was Tessie, she would do it, though.”

“...No way.”

Aidan and Leo looked at the back door of the classroom where Tessie had disappeared at the same time.

“ .. ”

“ .. ”

No way she would do such a reckless thing...

But...

Could they answer “no” with confidence to such a statement?

“...Is she for real?”

“I told you so.”

Tessie, whom they’d met for the past few days by then, had the personality which she would definitely do what she said she would do.

She had a strong character in which she would grit her teeth and still do it even if it was dangerous.

That was Tessie Friad.

The two of them looked right out of the window.

There, they could see a familiar girl with red hair huffing and puffing while heading somewhere.

—The direction was the opposite of the women’s dormitory.

She was heading to a dangerous forest where the professors had warned never to go at the beginning of the semester.

“We’re in trouble.”

They had to stop her.

CHAPTER 26

WEREWOLF (1)

Sedina Rochen recalled her dreamy encounter with Ludger with a blank face.

Mr. First Order had recognized her.

She always made a lot of mistakes, and even within the Black Dawn Society, she was considered as an outsider, yet Ludger Chelysie had recognized her.

‘I wasn’t wrong.’

—Rochen, the leading big merchant family in the Empire. Sedina was born as a child there.

It may have seemed like a good family to others, but for Sedina, the Rochen family was a place worse than hell.

Her last name, Rochen, always followed her just like a curse, and it was the same when she left her family.

Rochen.

In order to escape from that hateful family, Sedina had entered the Black Dawn Society.

—To get rid of Rochen and to find her real self in the Black Dawn Society.

Even after knowing that the society was antisocial and immoral, she still chose that path.

She could be different there.

She could live by herself, not as the Rochen family’s insignificant daughter.

But the reality hadn’t gone that way.

As the Black Dawn Society was a place of resistance to the world, most of its people were low-class people or criminals who operated at the bottom of society.

In such a place, Sedina, who had Rochen as her surname, was so different from their kind.

-What? You have a surname? Is it for real?

-Rochen? Why in the world would someone from such a great family be here.

-Be careful. She could be a spy who sneaked in here.

-Those damned upper classes.

Unlike them, who came up from the muddy water, there was no way they could see Sedina, who came down from the top, as someone on the same board with them.

That's why she was called a Third Order even though she was talented in magic and had entered Sören.

The surname Rochen eventually made her feel out of place even at the Black Dawn Society.

'Even though I just wanted to be recognized.'

She wanted to get rid of her hateful family, so she had entered the Black Dawn Society. Eating well and living well wasn't her goal.

She believed that if she tried hard, the gazes of caution and contempt toward her would gradually change.

She wanted to believe that.

However, the vigilance of the members of the Black Dawn Society toward Sedina became even worse, and she became an object of envy and jealousy because she even had the ability to enter Sören.

Originally, Sedina was a talented person who could occupy a position above the Second Order.

Without even being able to receive the attention of the First Order, she continued to stay at the low rank of the Third Order due to being kept in check by the other members.

—A good pawn to be used before being thrown away.

—Just a little, useful human being.

They could utilize the name of the Roehen family that she had.

Their intention was so clearly conveyed that it brutally ripped through Sedina's tender heart.

'But I met him.'

When she was tired and thought it would be fine for her to meet any kind of ending...

Orders were issued to her in the organization.

It was an order from a Second Order a little higher than her.

First Order.

Code name, <John Doe>.

Unlike other First Orders, he was an unknown existence whose real appearance and identity had not been revealed.

She was asked to contact him and check the progress of his mission.

The man, who was being called Ludger Chelysie, was a master of disguise and an executive who specialized in infiltration and assassination and who never revealed his true identity.

But there was a flaw: his personality was very trashy.

He was a psychopath who beat people up in their seats when he was annoyed or even killed them in the worst case, even though those people were fellow secret society members.

Even Zero Order, the leader of the Black Dawn Society, turned a blind eye to such behavior.

Unless the other party was the same First Order executive, Ludger was bound to be a symbol of fear within the Black Dawn Society.

Having been tasked with asking him why he didn't contact them was practically no different than sending her to die at his hands.

Sedina Rothen shed tears of resentment.

She was resentful to the Black Dawn Society's colleagues who had told her to go and die, and she was also resentful to her cowardly self who couldn't deny such an order properly.

What she hated even more was the idea of giving it all up and living as the Rothen family's daughter again.

'I don't want that.'

She hated her family so terribly that she might as well die instead.

So she approached Ludger.

—With the mindset of having been determined to die, it didn't matter if he killed her.

But when she got closer to him, the man's charisma was beyond her imagination, and Sedina shuddered without realizing it.

She made a slip of the tongue, and her voice trembled. She had done pretty much everything she shouldn't do in front of him.

'I may die.'

That was what she thought.

But to her surprise...

Ludger did not kill her.

He didn't even show a murderous intent.

Just as the rumor went, she felt that his personality was trashy and ill-tempered during their conversation, but that was all.

Ludger let her go without saying a word.

And just then...

Ludger even praised her for her good explanation instead.

She wouldn't have been that happy if it was just a lip service.

But in Ludger's flattery, she could feel his honest behavior.

From correcting his title that he was professor Ludger, not First Order, he listened to her more cautiously than anyone else, even though it might be just a pretense.

She was extremely happy because of it.

—Because she thought that she might be helpful to someone.

She felt like tears were coming out of her eyes.

'Mr. First Order. No, Professor Ludger Chelysie is really great.'

She felt her heart beating when she saw him starting from their first meeting.

She thought it was because of tension and fear at that time, but the meeting she had just had made her realize for sure.

It was a sense of awe.

It was an endless adoration for the man she truly wanted to serve.

She didn't think she was treated like that because she was special.

It was nothing more than a small, small reward for the misfortune and effort that she had experienced until then.

Ludger Chelysie may have done some good deeds for his subordinates as an executive of the organization.

It was still too early for her to be elated because of that already.

Still...

Even so...

It was the first time someone praised her for doing well.

* * *

When it was time to leave school, and the sun was setting, Ludger packed his outer clothes and examined all his equipment.

In order to properly hunt the werewolves, speed was essential, and of course, all the tools needed for hunting had to be prepared.

They were highly secretive items that were not very visible on the outside, so people who encountered him while passing by wouldn't be suspicious of him.

Ludger, who left the professor's office while thinking so, met Hugo, who was visiting him just in time.

"Oh! Professor Ludger!"

"...Professor Hugo Bourtag."

Hugo Bourtag.

His family was Marquis Bourtag, a famous magical great family with a long history in the Exileon Empire.

However, due to their excessive magical and authoritarian tendencies, the family was gradually on the decline due to their inability to accept modern science properly.

A representative man who was at odds with the principal at the meeting in the morning visited Ludger.

“Do you have a business with me?”

“Hoo. You punk. Do I need to have some business in order to come and see you?”

—Hugo’s exceedingly friendly attitude.

That’s what he said, but Hugo went there to make an offer to Ludger.

“You. You haven’t seen the other professors properly yet, right? It seems like you’re only close to the other new professors.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

Hugo wriggled his eyebrows at Ludger’s rigid attitude, which did not even bend, let alone be intimidated by him.

However, it was him that would be at a loss, so Hugo decided to endure such an attitude and move on.

“Ahem. I’d like to introduce you to the professors I’m close to, though.”

“..”

Listening to Hugo’s subtle offer, Ludger immediately noticed what purpose he had in visiting him.

—Faction recruitment.

Hugo intended to bring Ludger to a faction that consisted only of aristocratic professors.

Even in a situation where students were anxious because of werewolves, was it a fight to divide the professors into groups for the sake of power?

Ludger shook his head in laughter at Hugo’s attitude.

“I’m sorry, but I’m already comfortable right now.”

“What?”

Hugo's face turned red at Ludger's direct refusal.

He had already spoken very nicely, but not only did such a fallen aristocrat not thank him, he even rejected Hugo's offer?

"Do you know how many years I've been a professor here?"

"Do I need to know?"

"It's been 15 years. It means I'm the next highest professor except for that old lady, Mary Ross. It means I'm a senior and superior far above you!"

"Superior, you said?"

"Yes!"

"That's strange. My only superior is the principal."

Principal.

Hugo gritted his teeth at that word.

For Hugo, the name "principal" was not welcomed at all. It was more of a disgust that awakened his inferiority complex and anger instead.

Hugo, who immediately managed his facial expression, opened his mouth.

"Professor Ludger, I heard you were in the military before you came here."

"It was just a short stay."

"Didn't you say that you achieved brilliant military service as you hunted the Cryptids?"

'Did he already obtain that much information?'

Well, it was a specification that was intentionally spilled by the Black Dawn Society anyway, so it was not strange for a person like Hugo to know about it.

Ludger nodded his head.

“I’m saying this because I admire your ability. Don’t you want to bring back your fallen family? With the support of our aristocratic faction, it’s possible.”

Hugo chose to make the most persuasive argument that could make Ludger give in.

He was anxious.

The principal’s faction was getting stronger day by day. Even Hugo could not be off guard against such a woman, especially because she was a sixth-rank Lexure wizard and had natural political ability even though she was young.

‘If it weren’t for her, I’d be the next principal!’

Hugo was dissatisfied with it.

Moreover, the president was not only being nice to aristocratic students but also taking care of the commoners more instead.

There were as many as five new professors, three of whom were commoners and one of which was a fallen aristocrat.

There was only one pure-blooded aristocrat.

‘It hurts my pride, but Ludger Chelysie... I must bring this man to our faction.’

It was already known that he comes from a fallen aristocrat family.

Normally, he wouldn’t have given a look at him, but he couldn’t help it because the situation was urgent.

In addition, Ludger Chelysie was a fourth-rank wizard at a young age and a fairly capable man.

That was also the case when he posted a military achievement on Cryptid Hunting.

There was no more coveted and talented person except him, with the exclusion of his birthplace.

That’s why Hugo visited him directly.

“I can help you. So what do you think about holding hands with us?”

“What exactly does it mean for me to hold hands with you?”

That time, instead of answering with no, he asked back.

Hugo continued, thinking that Ludger was finally interested in his offer:

“There’s nothing fancy about it. All you have to do is build a friendship with us and receive patrons from other nobles and take better care of their children.”

“In other words, do I have to accommodate the aristocratic students?”

“Oho. You just need to show them a little bit of flexibility.”

Hugo thought Ludger was almost giving in.

This man who served as a soldier in the first place was probably trying to rebuild his family by somehow building some achievements.

Hugo judged Ludger’s track record as such.

“Then I can’t do it.”

“Wh-what?”

Hugo asked back foolishly as he did not know that he would get a rejection there.

“I appreciate the offer, but I reject it.”

“A-are you serious with that?”

“Yes. You are telling me to treat the students differently and discriminate against them. I’ll pretend I didn’t hear it.”

“It’s not discrimination! I’m just telling you to be flexible!”

“Then I’ll ask you. If the principal gave a particular commoner student a better benefit and wrapped it up as flexibility, would you be willing to follow it?”

“What? Is a commoner the same as a noble? You have to say something that makes sense!”

“That’s exactly what I mean.”

“What?”

Hugo showed a blank face. “That’s exactly what I mean”, he said. What does he mean anyway?’

“Flexibility should eventually be applied to both sides, not to either side. But if flexibility only applies to the aristocracy, it’s no longer mere flexibility. It’s a privilege.”

“No, I mean, the aristocrat...”

“There are no commoners, nor aristocrats, nor royalty inside Sören—they’re all just students who receive magic lessons. I have no intention of bending this idea.”

“You...!”

Hugo clenched his teeth at Ludger’s remark.

Hugo raised one side of his lip to calm his anger and mocked Ludger.

“Alright. I wasn’t thinking straight. By the time you got here, I was overlooking the fact that the principal might have used her authority in your appointment.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Ludger meant it.

He had no intention of getting involved with a man like Hugo in the first place.

Helping him to raise his fallen family back up?

Then they’d find out that his family was fake. From Hugo’s point of view, it was meant to help him, but for Ludger, he was nothing more than a meddling man that would expose his identity.

He didn't even want to revive his so-called fallen family in the first place. His only purpose was to stay there for two years without getting caught.

Moreover, it would also bring troubles to him if he joined hands with Hugo and confronted the principal.

No matter how he saw it, Hugo and the principal were not equal.

Hugo himself may not think so, but in Ludger's view, the principal was much more overwhelming.

'If I do something weird and get caught in the eyes of the principal, I will get worn out.'

There was a tiger in the mountain, so he must have no brain if he was also holding hands with a fox.

It would be ideal to walk a tightrope without belonging to either side, so Ludger was bound to make a choice as the other party was clinging to him so blatantly.

If he had to choose between the two, of course, he'll choose the principal.

It was more convenient for him to choose the principal who treats everyone equally rather than the authoritarian nature of the aristocracy.

"I have to go on patrol now, so I'll be on my way. Professor Hugo, you might be in danger, so please go in first."

"You'll regret it."

"I'll bear it in mind."

Ludger's provocative words turned Hugo's face red like a boiled octopus.

His thick cheeks quivered, but Hugo could not say anything to Ludger's back, which had already left him.

To be honest, it was because he was scared by the appearance of Ludger, who was staring at him.

He was a lot more senior and a lot more prestigious than Ludger, so why was he even scared?!

Hugo didn't want to admit that fact.

“Argh!”

Hugo stomped on the innocent ground, then he huffed and puffed while leaving that place.

If there was a student that he caught red-handed wandering around that night, he thought about giving them a penalty point.

* * *

Ludger, who separated ways with Hugo, patrolled outside.

Before he realized it, the magical lights were turned on inside Sören after the sunset and the lights were spread around in his surroundings.

The night, which was supposed to be silent without any sense of presence, finally emerged, but strangely, darkness was still alive.

Ludger sighed inwardly and headed to a nearby bush.

“So you didn't listen to the order that told you to go straight back to the dorm.”

As he broke through the bush that was protected with magic, the students who were hiding inside it swallowed their breaths.

Ludger spoke coldly while staring at the three students, who were looking up at him dumbfoundedly.

“Or you listened to the order, but you're acting boldly.”

“Uh, Professor. It... it's not that, but...”

“All of you have five penalty points.”

CHAPTER 27

WEREWOLF (2)

Then I went on patrol and captured nearly 20 students, gave them penalty points, and forced them back into the dormitory.

I mean, why did those guys keep wandering around at night?

The first years were immature because they were new students, but I had a headache seeing that the second years were also caught in my patrol.

‘That’s how much everyone’s interested in this werewolf case.’

The sun was already setting, and darkness blanketed the surroundings.

There were still quite a lot of students hiding inside Sören’s land, although security guards were walking around and other professors were patrolling.

‘Even though they are just students, they are kids who can use magic, so ordinary employees can’t find the kids who are hiding.’

The werewolf case must have fueled their spirit of adventure.

To be honest, I was just going to ignore them and pass by, but I couldn’t let them be because each one of them stuck out too much and it bothered me.

If I just ignored them, it was obvious that they would go even wilder when they became proud that they were not caught by the professors.

I couldn’t stand that.

‘There are a lot of them.’

Most of the students were obsessed with the idea that they would capture the werewolves.

I wondered why they were like that even when they would get penalty points if they got caught inside the school. It turned out that it was because of an official letter that came from Leathevelk.

If they killed the werewolves or captured the werewolves alive, the city itself would pay them a reward.

It was no wonder that it made the students' jaws drop.

'With the desire to be a hero, there's no one whose jaw wouldn't drop when they would get paid, and their reputation would go up if they caught the werewolves.'

Even ordinary people who were short of money would be fascinated by the prize money that they would get from knocking down the werewolves.

In the case of commoners, there was a system that supported scholarships and self-funding within Sören, but it did not provide all the magic textbooks and various other supplies.

There were so many things that the wizards had to pay for.

The same went for students.

If they became a hero in that case, they might have sponsors who noticed their abilities, so it was no wonder that everyone coveted it.

Some boy students seem to have done it because they couldn't beat their youthful passion of getting attention from the opposite sex.

'But since I've sent most of them back to the dormitory, I'll have to start tracking the werewolf again.'

It took a lot of time.

Besides, I realized that the situation was worse than I thought.

I didn't know there would be so many students.

Other professors must have also felt that something was strange and done the patrol more diligently.

If someone other than me found the werewolf first...

And if they noticed that it was not a normal Cryptid but something manufactured from a laboratory...

The situation would spread like a forest fire that was even more out of control.

‘So before that happens, I should deal with it.’

I headed to the sewage treatment plant, the most likely route that the werewolf went through in order to sneak into Sören Academy.

Since Sören had a vast land, there was quite a lot of water used in Sören, so there was a huge sewage treatment facility outside the land.

—A place where a huge amount of water was drawn from the Ramsey River, and at the same time, a large amount of water was discharged through a huge earthen pipe.

Considering the size of the werewolf that I encountered at that time, it was highly likely that it went back and forth through the earthen pipe.

‘Fortunately, no one has come here yet.’

Most professors went on patrol and sent students back to the dormitory or prepared for an unknown situation.

There was no one who thought about where the werewolf came from or how it moved or chased its prey like me.

Well, it was because that was not the way a wizard did it.

It was a hunter’s method.

Walking around the darkened sewage treatment plant, I finally found a trace.

‘Footprints.’

The footprints that had clearly stamped on the bushes seemed to have been engraved there for days.

Other people would have been naturally passing it by, but I didn't miss it.

After I approached the footprint and swept it with my hands, I was sure.

'Comparing the size by its footprints, it's a little smaller than the one I encountered then. It must be pretty intimidating.'

However, there was one problem...

There were two kinds of footprints.

Even the werewolf with a relatively larger size appeared to have made some footprints recently.

'Don't tell me, are both of them in Sören already?'

'I thought there was only one, but the footprints show that the guy who ate people in Leathevelk also came all the way here.'

I moved slowly and chased after the tracks.

The two steps initially moved in the same direction but then split on both sides.

—The small one to the right, the big one to the left.

I didn't expect those guys to split up there.

Originally, the wolf had a lonely image, but in reality, it was a beast that flocked groups. Of course, the same went for werewolves, who had inherited such strong tendencies.

Normally, they should've stuck together.

I didn't know why, but those guys were moving separately from that point.

I had to make a choice.

* * *

'I'm in trouble. I'm too late.'

Lynne, who had ash gray hair color, which was rare even in Sören, was running on through Sören with magic textbooks in her arms.

It was a while ago that she forgot to go back to the dormitory and fell asleep while studying in the library.

Looking out the window with her hair clinging to her cheek, she rushed out of the library in a hurry when she saw the sun setting.

While running toward the dormitory, Lynne had no choice but to blame herself.

‘Stupid! Idiot! Why did I have to doze off there?’

In recent days, her fatigue had accumulated, perhaps because she had concentrated on homework and studying more and had reduced her sleeping time.

Sören was uneasy, so the professors threatened students to go back to the dorm right away without doing anything else after school.

The source of trouble was that she opened some books in the library with a complacent thought that she would study a little more, then fell asleep.

It was also a student’s duty to control their body condition.

Just because she dozed off due to her forgetfulness didn’t mean it wasn’t her fault.

If she was caught by the professor, there was no excuse for her to avoid a penalty point.

‘Aah. Still, getting a penalty point is a bit painful.’

As she was tight on money, she was in a position that required her to survive on a scholarship in Sören. However, Sören’s scholarship support amount decreased if the student had a penalty point.

When the student’s penalty points were serious, their scholarship application itself was sometimes rejected.

She wouldn’t be penalized so badly for one point, but the fact that she might get a penalty point itself came as a burden to her.

‘Still, can’t I just go back to the dorm before I get caught?’

She also had to avoid the eyes of the dormitory supervisor, but she was confident that she would not be caught by the supervisor—not the professors—somehow.

Lynne continued to move anxiously and walked fast on a road that was being illuminated by streetlights.

When she thought that she would certainly get the penalty point, she had some hopes that there was a possibility of her not getting caught, but she didn’t want to move while hiding in the dark.

‘Even so, it’s too much. How come no one woke me up?’

After thinking so, Lynne sighed deeply.

Originally, it was the basic principle of students attending the academy to make friends and get close to each other, but it was largely due to the controversy caused by disputes with nobles from the beginning of the semester that she couldn’t do so.

Due to Dynema Romley’s disciplinary action, Lynne was considered an arrogant commoner who insulted the aristocracy, according to the aristocratic students.

Other commoner students were intimidated by the aristocrats and decided they should not go near her.

Still, there were some boy students who asked her if she was okay the next day after the incident.

Her appearance was the only reasonable excuse why those students were approaching her.

Lynne didn’t feel like wanting to get close to those people.

* * *

‘The librarian is gone, too. They didn’t even want to wake me up in the first place.’

Perhaps the employee who worked as a librarian in the library was also on the side of the aristocracy.

'I'm already being disliked.'

Lynne bit her lips as she felt sad about her situation.

It was the moment when she decided to go back to the dormitory, wash up, and organize what she had learned in the day's class...

—*Rustle.*

"Who... who is that?"

Lynne stopped her footsteps unconsciously and shuddered.

She must not have been mistaken when she saw that the grass shook greatly beyond the darkness where the trees were planted.

"Hu-hurry up and come out. If you don't, I'll call other people."

Lynne had also heard the rumor that was circulating recently of a werewolf.

There were actually two people who had been hurt, so she couldn't dismiss them as false rumors.

To think that maybe there really was a werewolf that had been rumored...

A chill of fear flowed down her spine.

'No way, is it really a werewolf?'

Lynne stepped back, moving her shaky feet.

At that moment, the rustling sound in the dark approached her quickly.

...And something popped out from inside the bush.

Lynne shouted while closing her eyes tightly.

"Aaaaaah! Help me! I'm not delicious at all! If you eat something like me, you'll only get a stomachache!"

However, the expected shout of the wolf was not heard.

There was also... no pain.

Lynne cracked open her closed eyes slightly.

The first thing she saw was blond hair that shone brightly in the dark under the light of a street lamp.

Leaves were stuck here and there on her body, but her nobility had not faded the slightest bit.

Looking at her with her hands on her waist, she was Lynne's senior, one year above her.

She was the princess of the country.

"Really. What do you mean I'm going to eat you? Isn't it rude to say that in our first meeting?"

"Oh, oh?"

Lynne immediately noticed who the person in front of her was.

No, how could she not recognize that iconic person in the first place?

"Y-Your Highness?"

The 3rd Princess: Elendil von Exileon.

Lynne had also seen her in Ludger's class before, so she bowed her head immediately.

When she saw the princess, she was so shocked and shouted, 'Don't eat me,' so it was not strange to hear her say something about profanity.

However, when Lynne was about to bow her head, Princess Elendil stopped her.

"No, it's fine, it's fine. You don't have to do that."

“B-but.....”

“It’s my fault that I surprised you in the first place. And this is Sören. Did you forget? Everyone is equal in Sören. You and I are the same.”

Listening to Elendil’s dignified words, Lynne opened her mouth with an ‘eh’ without realizing it.

She didn’t expect to hear Sören’s ideology from the mouth of the princess herself.

Regardless, Elendil was only focused on shaking off the leaves on her body.

“Oh, but why is Your Highness in this place.....?”

“I told you not to call me Your Highness. You’re a freshman, right? Then just comfortably call me Elendil in a casual way.”

“M-me?”

“Because it’s more comfortable for me. I don’t have any intention of acting impudently with my status in Sören in the first place. Did you say your name was Lynne?”

“Oh? Do you know me?”

“We’re taking the spell casting class together. I have a good memory.”

“You’re amazing.”

“Well, that class is really unique. I remember most of the students in that class because it was so intensely craved in my memory. And you’re pretty noticeable, too.”

Oh. was she talking about her hair color? Lynne smiled bashfully.

She never thought she’d get attention from the princess because of the color of her hair.

“So why are you wandering around here late at night? Didn’t the teachers warn you?”

“Well... well, that’s.....”

Despite her shyness, Lynne honestly explained why she was moving alone that late at night.

After listening to her whole story, Elendil opened her eyes wide.

“Whaat? No one woke you up? Isn’t that too much?”

“No. It’s still my fault that I dozed off.”

“No! I can’t just let it be. How could they do such a dishonorable thing? I will say something to the librarian as soon as pos—”

“M-more than that! What were you doing here?”

Lynne hurriedly changed the subject because she thought that it had become complicated on her part.

“Oh, you mean me? I’m still in charge of finding and sending back students who haven’t returned to the dorm. Everyone must have been so loud right now.”

“Uh... Aren’t you a student, too?”

“You don’t have to worry. I’m moving with permission.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Anyway, hurry and go back to the dorm. Oh, if you keep going through this path, there’s another professor, so if you go back to the dormitory through this path, they won’t see you.”

“Oh, yes! Thank you!”

It was the moment when Lynne was about to leave while bowing her head...

Grrrr.

A strange sound came to Lynne and Elendil’s ears.

If they hadn’t heard it wrong, it was definitely the sound of a beast.

“...Lynne. Stay back.”

Elendil glared at the darkness and pulled out her wand.

There were a pair of red eyes floating in the dark. It came slowly towards the two of them.

The streetlight showed a werewolf beneath it.

“...I didn't think the werewolf was real.”

“The rumor wasn't fake?”

“Why are you so surprised? You were surprised the first time you saw me as well.”

“Well, that's because anyone would be surprised if you suddenly come out from the dark like that!”

“Anyway, this is a big problem.”

The werewolf in front of them did not look weak at all.

The eyes that were glaring at them obviously consisted of murderous intent.

Lynne and Elendil were pretending to be tough, but they were actually very scared.

Still, as students of Sören, if they couldn't do anything...

“—Get out of the way.”

At that moment, there was a strong flame in the air.

The high-temperature flame engulfed the werewolf and burned its whole skin.

Fwoooosh!

The werewolf rolled on the ground, screaming.

Perhaps because of the beast's instinct to avoid fire, it did not die from a direct hit, but its flesh and fur melted down since it could not avoid the blow.

Its wounds were also recovering quickly, but it was enough to buy some time.

Both women's eyes turned to the place where the magic was casted from.

There stood a man.

Lynne shouted his name without realizing it.

“Professor Ludger!”

Ludger Chelysie.

He was wearing a black suit and a black frock coat, still neat and stylish.

Ludger's icy gaze moved away from the werewolf and turned to Lynne and Elendil.

Ludger opened his mouth to the two people who were overwhelmed by such spirit.

“Lynne... And Elendil von Exileon.”

“Yes!”

“Yes, Professor.”

The two waited for Ludger's next words, feeling fortunate that he had come to rescue them.

“Five penalty points for both of you.”

CHAPTER 28

WEREWOLF (3)

“Pardon?! W-wait! Aren’t you supposed to ask if we’re okay at times like this?”

Elendil thought she had misheard Ludger’s words.

The professor who saved them from the werewolf said he would give them penalty points as soon as he saw them.

It was indeed breaking the atmosphere, but from Elendil’s point of view, it was quite unfair.

“Elendil. What are you yelling about?”

“I got permission from another professor...!”

“Shut up. Even if you get permission, it’s something you can only do if there’s no danger. Don’t you know what you were about to end up like?”

“Th-that’s.”

“Your mouth is still able to move even though you can’t even manage your body properly, I see.”

“Urk.”

Ludger was ruthless even though his opponent was a princess.

Elendil could not refute what Ludger said.

She was able to walk around like that in the middle of the night because of her status as a princess.

It was easy for her to send the students who were at the peak of their excitement back to their dormitory with their heads bowed down just because of her status as a

princess.

Because Elendil herself, as a princess, had a sense of responsibility to keep the students from being in danger and was preoccupied with that role.

Although in the end, she had to be in danger first before she realized that she had her priorities wrong.

Realizing that, Elendil bit her lips and clenched her fist.

There was nothing wrong with what Ludger said.

“Then... at least remove the penalty points for her.”

“What?”

Ludger’s eyes turned to Lynne.

As Ludger recognized Lynne, whose shoulders all tensed up, he soon stared at the textbook that she was holding in her arms.

“Lynne.”

“Yes, yes. Professor Ludger.”

“What are you doing, not going back to your dorm?”

“Th-that’s...”

“I acknowledge your enthusiasm for studying, but don’t you know that if you do that in this situation, you’ll be a nuisance to others?”

“...I’m sorry.”

Ludger shook his head.

Whatever he said there would just exhaust him emotionally, and it wasn’t a fundamental solution either.

“Elendil.”

“Yes.”

“You should take responsibility for Lynne and send her back to the dormitory. If you do that, the penalty points that I just gave you will be dismissed.”

“Pardon? Is that for real?”

“Should I say that again?”

“...No. I understand.”

Elendil replied that she would do that, but she couldn't get rid of her sudden curiosity.

‘Wait. Why is there such a big difference between him talking to me and him talking to Lynne?’

He had been giving her criticism and telling her to get her senses together and such, but he was actually asking a question to Lynne in a more concerned manner.

While she was thinking about whether to argue about it or not, the werewolf who, was burned by the flames jumped up.

“Pr-professor! There!”

“I know.”

Ludger stared at the werewolf while standing in a position to protect Lynne and Elendil.

Most of its wounds that were inflicted by magic had been healed, but it was still dazed because of the pain.

The werewolf, who was staring at them with boundless hostility, suddenly moved.

Not to rush them but to run away.

“Ah! It's running away!”

At the same time as Lynne shouted, Ludger chased the werewolf.

He never had the slightest intention of losing the werewolf that he had found.

Lynne and Elendil hadn't noticed yet, but the werewolf's neck was also tied with a leash.

It was fortunate that the leash was covered with its fur and could not be seen properly.

However, if someone else found it afterwards, it would be difficult for him to destroy the evidence.

Ludger stormed out from his spot with mana in his legs.

As he chased the werewolf through the dark grass and crossed the garden, he could see the werewolf crawling up the roof on the outer wall of the nearby research building.

—Its sharp nails easily dug into the outer walls of the building, and its huge body soon reached the rooftop full of spires.

'I won't lose it.'

Ludger immediately used his wire launcher to soar vertically into the air and settled on the rooftop.

Elendil and Lynne, who were still watching the scene from afar, were amazed, with their mouths wide open.

"Was that a floating magic?"

"May... be?"

—Floating magic that could be implemented by the release of mana casting.

They couldn't believe Ludger's ability to operate his mana, which he could use naturally while he was running.

The two of them, who couldn't see the wire launcher because it was dark in the night, saw Ludger's entire movement as a part of his magic.

The two silhouettes on the roof faced each other.

Although it was not clearly visible because it was far away, it was not difficult to distinguish Ludger among the two by the size and approximate appearance.

“Ah. The full moon.”

The clouds in the sky were cleared, and soon a cold and tender silver lining poured down onto them like a curtain’s hem.

It was a full moon night.

Ludger moved first as he was balancing himself on the rooftop of the spire-filled building.

The werewolf also rushed toward Ludger.

The two of them crossed each other, and a tight fight broke out.

“Whoa.”

“Oh my Gosh.”

Lynne and Elendil watched Ludger’s battle, forgetting that they had to leave.

There was something about Ludger’s fighting style that made it hard for them to take their eyes off of him.

Under the moonlight, Ludger moved like a dancer and avoided the werewolf’s attacks.

The attacks made their skin shudder even though they were far away from the battle.

Yet none of them touched Ludger’s body.

And his brilliant spells that were casted amidst the gap of the werewolf’s attacks...

Fire, ice, wind. The elements of the spells were being shot like an arrow.

The spells were second-tier magic, but they exactly hit the vital parts of the

werewolf.

‘They said he was in the army before he came here.’

Elendil recalled what she knew about Ludger Chelysie.

She wasn’t particularly interested, but the maid who was taking care of her brought her his data to read just in case, so she had read everything to kill some time.

At that time, she remembered that Ludger Chelysie had been in the army and had a military achievement while hunting for Cryptids.

The phrases that were written in his personal history...

They were actually unfolding before her eyes.

Elendil saw a wizard who fought for the first time.

No, could she see that as a wizard fight?

It was more controlled, neat, and meticulous.

Rather than a wizard, his fighting style was more like that of a soldier, or perhaps more like a hunter who aimed for his goal accurately.

Gaaah!

The werewolf rolled on the roof while producing a violent sound and slipped on the slope.

Ludger did not miss the chance.

He was a predator who never missed the gap that was created by the wounded prey.

His appearance when using magic to attack the werewolf seemed to be more similar to the wolf itself.

Whoosh!

The icy fangs that Ludger shot pierced the werewolf’s chest.

Three fist-sized ice spears penetrated the werewolf's body in a row and impaled it on the rooftop.

No matter how resilient the werewolf was, it was bound to die immediately from such a wound.

The fight was over.

'Phew, I'm tired.'

Ludger realized that he had consumed a considerable amount of mana to deal with the werewolf.

'It's not good to use a lot of mana, though.'

He was glad to have been able to meet Hans and carry his medicine again. He would have been in big trouble if he hadn't done it.

Originally, he wouldn't have to use magic in order to deal with that werewolf.

There were many more certain ways than consuming mana uselessly.

His deteriorating body condition also played a role in his mana consumption.

If he had to point out a problem, it was that the place was Sören.

There were some eyes watching him from time to time.

'A magic professor is bound to use magic in front of his students.'

First of all, he was a so-called Sören professor, so if he used the tools or methods that he often used in the days when he was a hunter and not magic there, they would be suspicious of him.

'I'll have to finish it quickly before it gets more bothersome.'

There was still another werewolf hiding in Sören.

He was going to finish his duty to get rid of the werewolves that night.

Gaaah!

As Ludger slowly approached the werewolf, the stumbling werewolf suddenly raised its arm.

There was still a long way for him to go to reach the werewolf, so even if it swung its arms, it wouldn't be able to reach him. What was that werewolf going to do?

Ludger's question disappeared the moment he saw the debris of the building that was thrown by the werewolf.

'What?'

It was fortunate that he was on guard just in case.

Ludger built barricades around his body by releasing his mana right away.

The debris that flew like an arrow hit it and bounced off, but the problem was that the werewolf dragged some time for its next move.

It immediately raised its hands and hit the rooftop floor hard.

Crack!

Due to the strong muscle strength of the werewolf, a part of the rooftop collapsed, and its body fell down from there.

Debris was spread, and a foggy cloud of dust soared around it.

Ludger squinted at that sight.

'The werewolf is using its surroundings as a tool?'

No matter how artificial that non-Cryptid creature was, since it was based on a wolf, its instinct as an animal naturally preceded its action.

Even if it was able to use its brain, it was mostly about distinguishing whether it could touch its opponent or not.

But from the previous werewolf to that one in front of him...

It is somehow doubtful to call them werewolves.

Ludger also didn't expect the werewolf to run away as soon as it felt an emergency situation, but he never expected it to throw away the wreckage of the broken building in particular.

'Did I lose it?'

Ludger, who entered the building through the gaping hole, clicked his tongue when he realized that the werewolf itself had disappeared.

However, he did not entirely lose it.

There was still its subtle scent in the air that stimulated his nose.

'It's a good thing that I buried my scent in the middle of the fight, just in case.'

Ludger followed the scent left by the werewolf.

His intention to finish all of it by the end of the day remained unchanged.

—Because he wanted to live.

* * *

"Tessie! Tessie! Where are you?"

"Aidan. We couldn't find her no matter how much we walked around. Wouldn't it be better to just give up?"

Aidan and Leo were searching hard for Tessie in places where people didn't visit.

Last time, they had heard that Tessie had gone to the woods in the east, then the two continued to look for Tessie even after the sunset.

But there was no sign of Tessie's presence.

Leo spoke first as he was slowly starting to get irritated.

"I'm sure Tessie must have backed off when she realized that she couldn't do it by

herself. Don't you think that's the case if we can't find her, even in a place like this?"

"But you never know. Even though it was Tessie who made the bet, it's our fault for not rejecting it properly."

Leo looked sullen as he listened to Aidan's argument.

He was obviously the one who thought that Tessie was bothersome as she kept clinging to them and had lied to her in order to kick her out.

He felt a little bit guilty.

That was also why they were walking around looking for Tessie.

"But we're also in danger if we get caught by the professors. Others will say it's only a penalty point, but it's also a big penalty for us since we also have to pay attention to our ranking."

"But we can't let her be."

"Do you really believe that Tessie is still looking for a werewolf?"

"I don't usually believe that, but it's Tessie we're talking about."

In fact, Aidan didn't know why he was so sure after saying it.

But the look in Tessie's eyes when she asked him to fight with her again and when she was just chattering on a usual occasion...

The look in her eyes always seemed extremely desperate and obsessive, just like a person who wanted to achieve something.

The thought that she might really be wandering around with her body messed up in order to catch a werewolf came to his mind.

"Phew. I get it. Let's check for just 30 more minutes, but if we don't find her by then, let's go back to the dormitory."

Leo sighed as he looked at the boy beside him, who had a strong sense of justice.

Even so, Leo couldn't stop him.

He knew that his good-natured fellow, who approached him to be his friend at first, was someone who was so stubborn at crucial moments and not willing to make any compromises.

It was the moment when the two people who had taken a little rest were about to move again...

Kyaaaa!

There was a distant cry that belonged to a girl.

The strangely familiar voice was obviously the voice of Tessie Friad, whom the two had been desperately searching for.

"Leo!"

"Yeah. I heard it. That way!"

The two ran through the grass and branches to the place where the scream came from.

At that moment, the grass on the opposite side shook, and someone popped out.

And Aidan, who was running in the lead, collided with that someone.

Aidan fell backwards as he was pinned underneath by something.

"Oh my. What's this all of a sudden?"

"Hngg."

Aidan raised his head as he felt something crushing his body when he fell backwards.

The first thing he saw was a woman with red hair who had a strong presence, even with subtle moonlight shining upon her.

"...Tessie?"

“...Aidan?”

Tessie raised her body immediately as she realized who the person she had underneath her in a cuddly position was.

“You... you! Why are you here?!”

“That’s because I heard your scream...”

“What?! Wh-what do you mean a scream?! I’ve never done that.”

Looking at Tessie, who blushed and shouted at Aidan, Leo sighed while saying, “I was worried for no reason.”

Then they heard a shout of a beast.

Grrrrr.

“Oh! Aidan. Did you hear that?”

“Yeah. Is it really the werewolf of the rumor?”

The two men’s wary gazes turned over to the bushes. Aidan and Leo both took out their wands.

Then Tessie stood in front of the two.

“Both of you. Hold on a second.”

“Tessie. What are you doing?”

As Aidan asked her such a question, Tessie hesitated, unlike her usual self. She put her finger on her lips and motioned them to follow her.

Aidan and Leo looked at each other because they wondered what was going on and eventually decided to follow Tessie’s footsteps.

The three of them, who moved quietly, soon reached the front of the basin where the ground was blown out.

“Look at that.”

As they looked in the direction that Tessie pointed in a quiet voice, they saw something wriggling in the center of the basin that was full of fallen leaves.

“That’s...”

Aidan, a country boy with good night vision, immediately discovered what it was.

“Werewolf?”

It was obviously a werewolf. It was full of wounds everywhere and was gasping for air all the time, but it certainly was a werewolf.

And...

“It’s a pup, though?”

The little werewolf was a pup that was not all grown up yet.

CHAPTER 29

THE PERSON WHO SEES, THE PERSON WHO SOLVES (1)

Aidan and Leo only looked at each other.

Werewolf...

The one who turned Sören into a crucible of chaos was right in front of them.

But no matter how many times they looked at it, it was a pup; even its grumbling voice made it clear that it was hurt somewhere.

“I came across it a little while ago.”

The reason why Tessie screamed... It was because she had suddenly found a werewolf while walking around without much thought.

Tessie, who blushed because she was ashamed of the fact, soon acted arrogantly.

“So? I won the bet, right?”

“You’ve only found it. Wasn’t the bet for the one who captured it?”

Tessie immediately raged at Leo’s remark.

“Is that so? Then I’ll soon...!”

“Tessie, wait a second.”

Aidan pulled Tessie’s nape as she was about to go down into the basin.

“Urgh! What the hell are you doing?!”

“Ah, sorry. I didn’t realize it.”

“Aren’t you being rude to a lady?”

“That’s not what’s important right now.”

“If it’s not, then what?!”

Tessie immediately sneered as she realized something.

“Hoho. Aidan, are you being impatient because I found that werewolf? You pretended that you didn’t, but you actually cared about losing to me.”

“Tessie. Didn’t you feel anything strange?”

When a serious question was heard after her provocation, Tessie pouted her lips as if she had been disappointed.

“What?”

“That’s a werewolf’s pup over there. Aside from whether it’s possible for a werewolf to have a pup, the pup over there doesn’t look well at all. I don’t think it can move properly.”

“Yeah. So why?”

“But look... It’s surrounded by fallen leaves. Besides these surroundings, it’s a location that’s far away from the public eye. I’ve never heard of a place like this in the forest, no matter how wide Sören is.”

“Well, so what’s wrong with that?”

“Do you think that little werewolf settled here and collected the fallen leaves by itself?”

Tessie realized something and shut her mouth when he said that.

In other words, Aiden was saying that the injured werewolf pup could not have gone all the way there alone.

It meant there was something else that had helped the pup.

“Who in the world?”

“I don’t know who it is. Maybe... There’s probably another werewolf.”

Aidan kept his eyes on the werewolf while saying so.

—Just in case it noticed their presence and suddenly rushed at them.

Although it was a pup, it was bigger than a fairly large dog.

The probability of danger could not be excluded.

‘Oh?’

Aidan, who was carefully examining the werewolf, found something strange.

Near the neck of a werewolf that was covered in fallen leaves and only just visible, he seemed to see something shining under the moonlight.

When he looked at it while focusing his eyes, it turned out that he wasn’t mistaken.

‘Isn’t that something like a leash...?’

At that moment, Aidan judged that the werewolf did not just occur naturally.

“Aidan? What are you doing?”

It was the moment when Leo called him, as he felt that the look on Aidan’s face was quite serious.

Aidan glided down the basin, determined to do something.

“Aidan! Hey, hey!”

Leo was confused, and so was Tessie.

The two rushed after Aidan. Aidan, who had come down to the center of the basin that was more than five meters away from his original spot, slowly approached the werewolf pup.

“Aidan! What are you doing?! It’s dangerous!”

“There’s something strange about it.”

Aidan wanted to confirm it with his own eyes.

At that moment, the werewolf’s pup, who was closing its eyes, stared at Aidan.

Aidan paused as he tried to approach it cautiously.

Their eyes were tangled in each other’s gaze, and a breathtaking tension was lingering in the surroundings.

Gulp.

Aidan slowly held out his hand while swallowing his dry saliva.

“It’s okay. I won’t hurt you.”

He said so because he had seen the werewolf’s eyes.

—There was no hostility or murderous intent.

The transparent and clear eyes that were staring at him were full of innocence that seemed to belong to a country dog.

A werewolf with such eyes attacked two people and sent them to a hospital room?

Aidan didn’t think so.

Leo and Tessie couldn’t think of stopping Aidan any longer.

The pup, who was staring at him, immediately turned its head and closed its eyes again.

Aidan breathed a sigh of relief inwardly and drew closer to the pup.

As expected, it was docile.

It even made a purring sound as though it was in a good mood when Aidan swept its

fur with his hand.

“You hurt a lot, I see.”

Aidan said so and examined its wounds that were exposed outside of the fallen leaves.

‘Didn’t it get bitten by an animal?’

The traces on its body were not caused by an attack from other animals. Rather, it was more like a cut from something.

When he looked at its neck while sweeping its hair with his hand, he could feel a hard and cold metal.

As expected, he was not mistaken.

‘I thought it was just a mere werewolf, but there’s more to it.’

It was when Aidan thought that far...

From the darkness, the sound of something approaching them quickly could be heard.

Leo, who first noticed the strangeness of that sound, shouted.

“Aidan! Run!”

As soon as Aidan heard the sound, he rushed in the opposite direction from which the sound was heard.

Soon after, a huge shock hit his body.

“Argh!”

Aidan, who bounced more than three meters and rolled on the ground, shook away his dizziness and looked at the mysterious creature that had knocked him away.

‘Werewolf!’

The thing that had hit him with its shoulder while running fast was an adult werewolf that was 1.5 times bigger than the werewolf pup.

It glared at Aidan as if wanting to kill him while standing there protecting its pup.

“It... it’s really a werewolf.”

Tessie trembled at such a sight and eventually raised her wand while charging mana with a determined look.

The werewolf also stared at Tessie while thinking that she was about to do something.

“Hey, hey! What are you doing?!”

Leo tried to stop her, but Tessie didn’t listen to him.

There was a werewolf in front of her... The root of what had driven Sören into chaos.

If only they didn’t exist, and she got rid of them...

She could revive her family.

—A fallen family. Her mother, who forced a smile at her while saying that ‘It’s okay.’

—The trashy people who used to cling around her but turned their backs right away after her family had collapsed.

She had to do it.

Only she could raise the Friad family back up.

The werewolf in front of her was a certain steppingstone for it.

Just because she hunted a werewolf did not mean it would revive her fallen family.

Tessie was fully aware of it, but even a little recognition was fine.

She could get an award point, collect a reward from the city of Leathevelk, or make her name known.

She learned magic to do that, and she had gone to Sören to aim for success.

'!...!'

The werewolf rushed at Tessie.

It was fast.

Tessie tried to cast a spell, but she made a mistake without realizing it due to the pressure of the werewolf that was rushing toward her.

'The spell!'

Her impatience had ruined her spell casting; the barely drawn mana was meaninglessly scattered.

Beyond the appearance of the spell that disappeared like a ripped, wet paper, she could see a werewolf approaching her while showing its fangs.

'Ah. Is this the end?'

As she thought so, Tessie felt someone suddenly push her to the side.

The sharp claws that were wielded by the werewolf passed right in front of her through the air.

Whirrrr.

Tessie, who rolled on the ground with someone, was stunned.

"Oh, oh?"

"Tessie! Are you okay?"

"Ai... dan?"

It was Aidan who had saved her from the crisis—the boy whom she kept bothering and asked for a match.

If he was the slightest bit late in pushing her, Tessie would have lost her head.

“I’m glad you’re safe.”

“You, you. Why did you...”

“I can’t just watch my friend who’s in danger.”

“Friend.”

The word left Tessie speechless.

* * *

Aidan looked at the werewolf, not caring about Tessie’s reaction.

“There’s something wrong with its movement. I think it’s seriously hurt somewhere. Maybe that’s why we were able to avoid its attack.”

As expected, there were three large holes that had yet to be healed in the werewolf’s chest that was slightly exposed in the dark.

Aidan gulped and opened his mouth.

“Sorry. It wasn’t on purpose. We don’t intend to do any harm to your pup.”

“Aidan? What are you doing?! There’s no way a werewolf can communicate!”

Tessie shouted from behind, saying, “What kind of stupid thing are you doing?” but Aidan was serious.

Aidan continued, staring at the werewolf in front of him with an unshakable gaze.

“You. Can you understand us?”

“What’s...”

Leo and Tessie looked puzzled.

But the werewolf’s reaction was strange.

The werewolf, who was staring at them like it was going to kill them, calmed down

and went back to its pup.

Leo, who was watching such a scene, couldn't close his mouth.

"...Does it really understand you?"

"It just overreacted because it was afraid that its pup might be in danger."

"But... Aidan, it already attacked two students. It's calm now because of its baby, but we don't know when it'll suddenly show its true colors."

Leo's point was valid, but Aidan felt something indescribable.

It was possible for Aidan to know because it was him who had faced the werewolf's pup the most closely.

As soon as he had seen the pup's eyes, Aidan had clearly heard something.

—"Please help me."

"Leo, Tessie, I know what I'm saying is far-fetched, but believe me, just once."

Aidan said so and slowly approached the werewolf.

Grrrrrrr.

The supposed mother threatened Aidan by showing her gums, but Aidan raised both of his hands and made a gesture that he was not dangerous.

"It's okay. I won't hurt you."

As he narrowed the distance little by little with such determination, the werewolf glaring at Aidan also stopped showing its hostility.

That was because the pup was in the worst condition.

"Use this."

Aidan took a small medicine bottle out of his pocket that he usually carried around.

It was a very basic recovery medicine that he had made when taking pharmacology classes in curses and dispelling.

Since his skill was still insufficient, the potion's poor performance wouldn't show any great significance in healing, but at least it would help improve the condition of the pup, who was gasping for air.

It was the moment when he tried to approach the werewolf with that thought...

A white ray of light from somewhere penetrated the mother's body.

"Oh, oh?"

Aidan, who was approaching the werewolf slowly, along with Leo and Tessie, who were watching the scene while holding their breaths from behind, were surprised and confused by the ray of light.

It was a silver, shiny metal that penetrated the body of the werewolf mother.

At first, he thought it was a sharp spear, but eventually, its shape collapsed and turned into a net that bound the mother werewolf's body.

'Is that a metal magic that uses Alchemy?'

'Who the hell does this?'

As soon as everyone was dumbfounded, a black shadow fell from the sky.

"You guys. What are you doing here?"

It was a man who they saw as a black shadow.

And the man was someone whom they knew very well.

"Professor... Ludger?"

Ludger, who overpowered the werewolf with a surprise attack, squinted his eyes, as he didn't know there would be three students there.

"You all look familiar. Aidan, Leo, and Tessie Friad. What are the students who took

my class doing here at this late hour?”

The three people whose names were called shuddered.

They were doomed.

They didn't expect to get caught by a professor in that situation! Their opponent was even Ludger Chelysie, who was famous for having no blood or tears.

“I'll hold the three of you responsible for this later. Back off for now.”

Tessie and Leo followed his order.

But Aidan was different.

He intervened between Ludger and the werewolf, blocking Ludger's way.

“Wait!”

“...Aidan. What the hell are you doing?”

Hearing Ludger's cold voice, Aidan trembled but did not back down.

“Professor Ludger! Pl-please wait a minute!”

“You told me to wait?”

“There's something strange with that werewolf! No, I mean, to be exact... it seemed to understand people's words! Please reconsider killing that werewolf for a moment!”

Aidan spouted out what he had found out.

Otherwise, Ludger would take the breath of that mother werewolf right away.

“It understands people, you said? What nonsense are you talking about?”

“It's not nonsense. Maybe that werewolf...”

“I told you to step back.”

Despite Ludger's threat, Aidan didn't step back.

While staring at Aidan, Ludger found a baby werewolf licking its mother's face with its tongue over Aidan's shoulder.

No ferocity at all; it just showed pure concern for its own family.

The pup stood with its feet. It was the moment when the fallen leaves that covered its entire body were pushed out, and the rest of its body that was covered by the fallen leaves was shown.

It saw Ludger.

His eyebrows wriggled slightly.

"Oh?"

Aidan, who was staring at Ludger intensely, immediately noticed the subtle changes in him.

'What's wrong with Professor?'

Aidan was about to look back unconsciously.

Whoosh!

At that moment, his body flew through the air as if it had been pulled strongly by something.

Aidan's body gently landed on the ground without any injury.

—It was a buffer effect that used wind magic.

It was all done by Ludger.

"Prof... Professor?"

What he saw was Ludger's back, wearing a black frock coat.

He couldn't see the werewolves that were hidden by Ludger's back.

When Aidan was about to say something...

Ludger casted his spell.

Whrrrrrrrr!

There was a flash of hot fire all of a sudden.

It swallowed the two werewolves in a flash, scattering light everywhere.

He could feel the heat even from a distance. It was obviously an attack spell that would kill the opponent.

There were no screams from the werewolves that were swallowed by the fire.

There was no time for them to scream, and they couldn't even feel the pain, as they had already disappeared into ashes.

When the magic fire completely subsided...

There was no trace left of the werewolves.

There were only black ashes.

“Go back to the dormitory.”

Ludger said so without looking back.

“I will hold you responsible for your deviant behavior tomorrow.”

There was no emotion in his voice.

CHAPTER 30

THE PERSON WHO SEES, THE PERSON WHO SOLVES (2)

Ludger stood still and stared at the place where the werewolves had been.

His hands had burned them all down without a trace.

—Along with all the evidence that they were a lab test and not just werewolves.

It was okay for him to be relieved.

—Since it was over now.

But Ludger's mind was not the slightest bit at ease.

Until the other professors, who lit up a fire with their magic from a distance, arrived one by one...

Ludger stood still, stuck on his spot.

* * *

The werewolf case—which had caused a stir at Sören Academy—ended with the removal of werewolves by the new professor, Ludger Chelysie.

Many students wondered if the incident was simply an inflated false rumor, but there were many witnesses who had actually witnessed the werewolves, so such an opinion was ruled out.

Rumors had already spread among students that Ludger had a bloody fight with a werewolf on the roof of a building under the full moon.

The students had already talked about the case on the <Akashic Records>.

-Is it true that it was a real werewolf?

-I saw it in person. On the roof of the research building, the new professor fought with the werewolf, and it was so cool.

-It's not a lie?

-Actually, a part of the roof of the 3rd research building was broken, and there were signs of a fight.

-Whoa. So the new professor really caught the werewolf?

-I heard the new professor is a former soldier. Then it's possible.

-He's awesome.

So there were also questions about what the werewolves were and where they had appeared from.

Some even argued that the werewolves might actually have been a secret experiment from somewhere.

However, in the absence of clues, such an opinion was nothing more than gossip that did not even circulate properly.

—Because that wasn't the important thing.

-Ah, I got five penalty points because I got caught.

-Me too. This is a bit risky for my warning in this Academy.

-Yeah. I don't care about my five penalty points~ I already got award points.

-Where do you live?

That time, most of the students who decided to catch werewolves were found and faced penalties.

Out of the entire school, there were 130 students who had been caught.

Even the third-year students were included among them, so it was understandable.

They went out to become heroes, but instead of solving the case, they only got penalty points, so most students tore their hair out of regret about their wrongdoings.

It was the same for Aidan, Leo, and Tessie.

“Aargh! We’re doomed! We’re really doomed! Why does it have to be Professor Ludger who caught us out of all people?!”

The three of them had been called to the counseling room for a meeting with the principal.

Aidan was still immersed in his thoughts, but Tessie was different.

She was restless.

She should never have allowed a loophole in order to revive her family, but in the werewolf incident, let alone being compensated, she was being properly punished by Ludger.

Tessie glared at Aidan with resentment and soon bit her lower lips and shook her head roughly.

She couldn’t blame Aidan.

She wouldn’t be alive without Aidan.

Aidan was the one who saved her from the werewolf attack, after all.

‘Yeah. I’m just... I couldn’t do anything at the time... ’

She felt so stupid that she grabbed the hem of her uniform with her trembling hands.

It’d been about 10 minutes.

The door to the counseling room opened.

The three musketeers: Aidan, Leo, and Tessie, who were sitting in their seats, stood

up on their feet.

Principal... She was coming into the counseling room with a beaming smile. She had white color on the outside part of her hair but a pinkish color on the inside part of her hair.

Following the principal's footsteps was a man with a cold-hearted image.

It was Ludger Chelysie, the man who blew down the werewolves the night before.

Ludger looked the same as usual.

His outfit was a red long coat, not his usual black frock coat, but his firm neatness still remained.

"Now, now. All three of you, sit comfortably."

Hearing the principal's words, the three people, including Aidan, sat down again while studying the principal's face.

The principal also sat in her empty upper seat.

"Please sit down as well, Professor Ludger."

"I'll stand here."

"Well then, if that's convenient for you. Now, let's get down to business. Do you know why I called the three of you here?"

No one answered that question right away.

But there was no one who didn't know.

There was only one reason why the three of them were gathered there: Because they had witnessed the werewolves from the closest distance and gotten caught by Ludger.

Tessie, who didn't expect to face the principal, thought Ludger had really been determined to punish her.

‘What does he mean by not just giving penalty points but also telling the principal about it?’

Wasn’t it a declaration that it would never be finished with ordinary disciplinary action?

‘I’m doomed!’

She held back her tears for dear life.

It was some kind of a bad feeling.

After that day, she never forgot that she had promised herself never to cry again.

Most of all, she was triggered by Aidan and Leo, who were sitting casually.

“What will happen to us?”

Aidan opened his mouth first, but as Aidan spoke, his gaze did not avert from Ludger.

“Why do you think I called all of you?”

“...I don’t think you wanted to give us a mere penalty point.”

“You’re right.”

It was then that Ludger opened his mouth.

“The three of you ignored Sören’s warning and went all the way into the forest and posed a danger to yourselves, and you almost got hurt. If things had gone even a little wrong, one of you could have died.”

The three people who felt as if they were stabbed by his remark shut their mouths.

“Even though there wasn’t an accident in which anyone died in the end, I thought you should know for sure how serious your complacent behavior was—that’s why I offered the principal a suggestion.”

They realized it was serious.

All three of them knew that those words didn't have good intentions behind them.

As the heavy atmosphere lingered in the counseling room, the principal clapped her hands.

"Now, now. Don't make faces like the world is collapsing. Think positively. And Professor Ludger. Your words that frightened the students were a bit harsh."

"Your honor, this is not something that should be overlooked."

"Of course, thanks to Professor Ludger's hard work, it ended without anyone getting hurt, and you are right that the students were complacent. But it ended well, didn't it?"

"...I don't understand."

"Because they're still kids. And even with the intimidating remarks, Professor Ludger gave quite a detailed explanation, right? Aidan?"

"Yes, yes!"

When he was suddenly called, Aidan answered in a hurry.

"I heard the story. I heard you jumped to save Tessie from danger?"

"N-no. It's... just."

"Competition among students is important, but it's better to help each other instead. And neither of you ran away from the location so that you could protect Aidan."

At the words of appraisal coming out of the principal's mouth one by one, confusion lingered on the faces of Aidan, Leo, and Tessie.

'Why is the principal like that?'

"You're absolutely wrong in your behavior; that's why I decided to take Professor Ludger's advice and give each of you 10 penalty points."

Ten penalty points!

If it was 10 and not 5 points, it meant that it was twice as bad compared to other students.

It was obvious that it was disadvantageous towards them.

“But...”

At that moment, the principal’s clear voice awakened the three people from their thoughts.

* * *

“Your actions in the moment of crisis are certainly worthy of praise, so I’ll give all three of you 10 award points.”

“Pardon?”

“Is... is that true?”

Ten penalty points. However, in addition to that, the penalty points had practically disappeared due to 10 award points.

The principal’s words did not end there.

“Aidan. You showed your courage in thinking of your colleagues before your own body in a time of crisis; I’ll give you 10 extra award points.”

“Oh!”

“Leo. You didn’t forget to be cool-headed in a moment of urgency, and you deliberately left a trail on the path as you passed so that others could follow you.”

“How, how come...”

“I’ll give you 10 extra award points. And... Tessie Friad.”

“Yes, yes!”

“You had the courage to face the werewolf and fight without running away. Some might say it’s reckless bravado, but you’ve understood it well. I hope you will keep

that unshakable heart forever.”

“Yes, yes! Understood!”

“Because of that, I’ll give you 10 award points.”

As a result, the three of them had received 10 additional award points rather than penalty points.

The principal, who had been smiling at the three people who still couldn’t accept that this was real, looked back at Ludger while sitting down.

“You don’t have any complaints, right, Professor Ludger?”

“...If that’s what your honor wants.”

Ludger stepped back and drew the line that there was no disagreement.

The principal clapped her hands.

“Congratulations, kids. Keep up the good work in the future.”

“Oh, yes! Thank you! Your honor!”

“But still, don’t overdo it. Now... we have already taken too much time. Everyone, hurry up and go back to the dormitory.”

The three students left the counseling room while thinking that they were still dreaming.

Aidan, who was leaving last, stopped and looked back at Ludger, who didn’t even glance at him.

What was the reaction that Professor Ludger had shown just then?

Aidan left the counseling room with unresolved questions.

The door closed, and only Ludger and the principal were left in the counseling room.

“Phew, Professor Ludger. Are you satisfied now?”

The principal said so after the students were completely out of their sight.

“I was surprised. Even though it was you who asked me to take good care of those children.”

The principal, who was shaking both of her legs with her head leaned back, glanced at Ludger with half-opened eyes.

“On top of that, you’re asking me to act as if I was the one who did all of it.”

“Because it wouldn’t carve a very good image of you if you did what I was doing there.”

“I know. You want us to play a good cop and a bad cop, right? I can’t believe you call yourself a villain. Aren’t you feeling sad about it?”

“I just chose the most efficient method.”

“Oh, is that so? Well, since you said you’re fine with that, I won’t bother longer about that because, in the end, it was a good thing for the students.”

The president, standing up from her seat, approached the window that showed Sören’s scenery and swept the transparent window with her slender fingertips.

“Professor Ludger, you said you took care of the werewolves yourself, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“What did you see there?”

“What do you mean?”

“Wasn’t there something peculiar about the werewolves?”

Even with the principal’s sharp words, Ludger’s expression did not change.

“I didn’t think there was anything.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. I just chased the werewolves, and I got rid of them because I was afraid that they would pose a threat to the students. Just like what I did in the military.”

“Hmm. Well, then it can’t be helped.”

The principal also did not question him any further because Ludger’s fight with the werewolves while protecting students was already so famous that it had spread throughout the school.

“Anyway, I’d like to thank you once again. Thanks to you, nobody died.”

“I just did my job.”

“I like that confident attitude. I’ll look forward to your good performance in the future.”

Ludger bowed his head without a word.

After his conversation with the principal, Ludger returned to his professor’s office.

Ludger, who was sitting while leaning on the back of his chair, recalled what had happened the night before.

What had surprised him...

—The body of the werewolf pup that had been hidden by the fallen leaves that no one else had ever discovered.

It had certainly belonged to a human child on which fur had not yet grown.

Right...

He wasn’t mistaken.

It was obviously a human body that had not yet turned into a wolf.

‘The Shamsus school did not use wolves as experiments to create werewolves.’

Rather, it was the opposite.

They... created a werewolf using human beings as an experiment.

Instead of substituting human genes into wolves, they had captured human beings and forcibly mixed beast factors into them.

The strange behavior of the werewolf who had thrown the wreckage with her hands when she was in an emergency was finally understandable.

He had wondered why their brains worked so well, they were not like beasts—who should have no reasoning.

The werewolf pup must have been a human child.

It must have been the mother who blocked his way to protect her child.

‘Was it... her family?’

The three werewolves who had made a mess in Leathevelk and Sören...

Was it a human family that’d been used as an experiment?

—A child and two parents.

—Ordinary people who were just being swept away by unfortunate incidents.

Ludger had killed the three of them with his own hands.

Silently...

Ludger tightened his fist.

‘I have no regrets in my actions.’

Even if he went back to that time, Ludger would have made the same judgment.

Otherwise, it would have been him who was in danger.

All of the experiments had to be eliminated, and the connection he was involved in had to be broken as well. There was no other way.

And there was already a death toll from the werewolves.

Even though they had no choice but to do that in order to live, they had still killed and eaten someone's family.

That was why he had killed them.

Yes...

He's sure that was enough.

'The eyes...'

—The baby's clear eyes as it looked back at him at the end after licking its mother.

While Ludger was casting his spell to kill them, the look in the pup's eyes did not contain any rebuke or anger toward Ludger.

There was only one emotion...

The pup had been thankful to him for ending their terrible lives.

"..."

Ludger got up from his seat.

CHAPTER 31

THE PERSON WHO SEES, THE PERSON WHO SOLVES (3)

Aidan, Leo, and Tessie, who were sitting on a bench in a quiet garden, had yet to come back to reality as if what happened a while ago was a dream.

It was Tessie who came to her senses first.

“So we really didn’t get punished. It still feels like a dream.”

“I know, right?”

“Who would have thought that the principal would take action and side with us.”

“I know, right?”

Leo, who usually had sharp conversations with Tessie, agreed with her completely at that time.

The two people’s eyes soon turned to Aidan.

They stared at him as if asking if he had anything to say.

“Hey, Aidan. Aidan?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah.”

“What are you thinking about?”

Unlike the two who were happy to receive the award points, Aidan showed a serious face the whole time.

“Aidan, do you have any concerns?”

“Well, should I say it’s a concern? Well... I know that it’s kind of weird to say this now...”

“So what is it? Don’t hesitate, and say it so your heart will feel more at ease!”

When Tessie strongly whined at him, Aidan hesitated for a while before confessing his concerns to his two friends.

“It’s just that something is weird.”

“Weird? What’s weird?”

“The werewolf yesterday. You may not have seen it, but the werewolf’s neck was tied with a strange silver leash.”

“What?!”

“Shh!”

As Tessie raised her voice, Leo immediately gestured to her to be silent.

“Be quiet. What if someone hears you?”

The three looked around and checked if there were any other listeners, and then they put their heads together and spoke in quiet voices.

“Keep talking. Is that true?”

“Yeah. I’m sure. That’s also why I tried to stop Professor Ludger.”

“A leash, you said. Are you saying that the werewolf is not an ordinary werewolf?”

“I think it’s really someone’s intentional experiment.”

If his story was true, it was bound to be a serious problem.

Leo also opened his mouth with a heavy expression as if he was thinking about something.

“Me too; I heard a rumor recently...”

“What is it?”

“That there are suspicious people hiding in Sören.”

“Suspicious people? What’s that? You’re talking about a secret organization, right? Isn’t it just a secret club or false rumor that the students created by themselves?”

There was nothing unusual about having a secret meeting between students in Sören.

Leo shook his head at Tessie’s question.

If it was just that, he wouldn’t even say that the rumor was suspicious.

“I’m not sure either, but I think it’s clear that a secretive organization that has not been revealed has permeated Sören. I realized it, especially after I saw this werewolf case.”

“W-wait. Then you are saying that there are dangerous people in Sören.”

“It’s just still in a level of doubt, but I’ll say so. Aidan. Do you think so, too?”

“Yeah. Honestly, it’s not a good thing to suspect someone, but I’m sure something is off. And I think that, in particular...”

Aidan shook his head and shut his mouth as he tried to say something.

“No, never mind.”

“What is it?”

“Is it because of Professor Ludger?”

At Tessie’s straightforward words, Aidan wasn’t able to lie and nodded his head.

The reason why Aidan’s heart has been weighed heavily since a while ago was because of the violent behavior that Ludger had shown the previous day.

“I don’t want to be suspicious of Professor Ludger, but the way he looked last night was somewhat strange.”

“Strange, you said?”

“You may not have been able to see it properly because you were covered by Professor Ludger’s back, but I was facing him from the front. At that time, Professor Ludger saw something.”

The reaction that Ludger showed at the time was obvious, even though it was just a brief moment.

Aidan hadn’t missed it.

But before he could ask about it, Ludger had forced him to get away and burned down the werewolf.

Leo held his chin after hearing Aidan’s words.

“Do you mean Professor Ludger tried to destroy the evidence?”

“What? Professor Ludger? Is that possible?”

Tessie asked back as if saying that he was such a fool to say so.

No matter how likely it was, she couldn’t believe that Ludger Chelysie, who had helped them and fought fiercely with the werewolves, had something rather secret beyond his action.

“I’m not sure. However, I keep thinking that Professor Ludger might know something. The professor at that time seemed to be in a hurry to hide something.”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

‘Maybe it’s a misunderstanding.’

‘There’s no way a Sören professor would do such a dangerous thing.’

‘But what if it’s real? What if Ludger Chelysie is a part of a secret organization that’s too dangerous to talk about?’

‘What if he killed the werewolves to destroy evidence?’

“Are you idiots? No matter how likely it is, you still went too far.”

Tessie put her hand on her waist and shook her head while rebuking the two.

“Professor Ludger must have thought of something. And when we were talking face to face with the principal earlier, didn’t you think something was weird?”

“Oh? What?”

“I didn’t think so.”

“Phew. Idiots. Don’t you remember what the principal said when she complimented us? She pinpointed each of us for what we did well and our deeds.”

“Oh, right. She did. I couldn’t think of it because I was so focused on something else.”

“Think about it. How would the principal, who wasn’t even there, know about it?”

“Oh, that’s...”

“Of course, someone told the principal everything. And who could tell the principal about what we did?”

Ludger Chelysie.

It was just him.

“Professor Ludger was pretending not to, but he actually witnessed everything that we did. If he wanted to scold us, he wouldn’t have told the principal our good deeds.”

“Ah.”

Listening to Tessie, it certainly seemed so.

Only the principal and Ludger came into the counseling room, and when the principal said she would give them award points, Ludger took a step back and yielded.

“Everything is Professor Ludger’s plan? But why on earth?”

“I don’t know it either. Still, Professor Ludger cared for us and only told the principal good things about us. Isn’t it too much for you to suspect Professor Ludger?”

Aidan and Leo had nothing to justify their previous remark.

To be honest, it was indeed true.

* * *

If Ludger was a suspicious person, would he have taught them the groundbreaking spell of source code in his first class?

It doesn’t make sense for a person who had to hide his identity to reveal it instead.

“Is that so?”

Aidan scratched his head, but he couldn’t get rid of his subtle doubts about Ludger.

He was sure that Ludger was a respectable professor, but he also couldn’t deny that there was indeed something strange about him.

“Yes. Tessie, I think you’re right. It’s meaningless to think about it right now anyway.”

“Yeah. As long as you know that.”

“More than that, I’m hungry. Did you guys eat?”

“No. Not yet.”

“How about Tessie?”

“Why me?”

“If you haven’t eaten yet, why don’t we go eat together?”

“What... what?”

Tessie wondered if she was mistaken when listening to Aidan’s words.

'What? Eat?'

'With me?'

"Are you for real?"

"Why?"

"That, that's because... eating is... uh..."

As she was embarrassed, Tessie twisted her hair with her fingertips and murmured softly with a blushed face.

"For... fellow friends..."

"We're already friends, right?"

"...!"

Looking at Aidan, who stared at her while smiling brightly, Tessie's ears turned red.

Leo, who was watching the scene from the side, sighed and shook his head.

Seeing that childish girl who couldn't be honest and his friend who had no sensitivity whatsoever...

He thought that his daily life in Sören would be eventful.

* * *

"Oh! Professor Ludger!"

It was after I was headed back from work.

On my way back to the accommodation, I met professor Selena.

She, who found me first and ran toward me like a puppy while making a fuss, looked more like a student in the Academy than a professor.

'Isn't she lying about her age?'

“Are you off from work?”

“Yes.”

“I heard the news. Yesterday, I heard that you caught the werewolves.”

“Yes, I got rid of them.”

“Whoaaa. Really?”

Professor Selena was looking at me with a burdensome gaze.

Still, we were fellow new professors, but I thought that she was looking up at me too much.

“All they’ve been talking about lately is only Professor Ludger. More than that, how on earth did you catch the werewolf? Was there any method to do it?”

“Wait.”

“Pardon?”

“I’m a little busy today, so I’ll talk to you next time.”

Listening to my firm words, Professor Selena nodded with a slightly sullen look like a child scolded by an adult.

“That... I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have called you when you were busy.”

“No. It’s not that I couldn’t answer your call. Have a good rest, professor Selena.”

“Yes. Please take care on your way, Professor Ludger.”

I greeted Selena and separated ways with her.

Unlike other professors, she was a good person who was interested purely in my achievement.

However, I couldn’t get close to anyone because I was in a tight position.

It was still possible to eat together as a group, but that was all.

And first of all, I had one thing to do immediately.

When I returned to my private accommodation, there was a package at the door.

Taking the package, I went inside the accommodation and checked its contents.

It was data that Hans had sent me.

—Areas where missing people and some particular people had gathered recently in Leathevelk.

Whirrr.

After checking the contents briefly, I headed to my private study.

On one side of the wall in the study, photos were pinned everywhere, along with a map of Leathevelk city.

I cut out some of the contents of the document and pinned them to one corner of the map.

—An area full of abandoned factories in Leathevelk.

—An abandoned slum.

There was a laboratory around there.

After I finished pinning the locations, I immediately took out a portable crystal ball.

As mana flowed in, a voice came from beyond the crystal ball.

[Did you check all the data that I sent?]

“Yes.”

[As you told me yesterday, I checked the surrounding area. In one abandoned factory, about ten strong men rushed in and out. I think I’m sure about that.]

“I see.”

[And I personally checked what you told me to. Some laborers have recently gone missing outside the city.]

“Was there a family of three among them?”

[There was. It’s the only case where a whole family disappeared. The police didn’t do much investigation and hushed it, but their neighbors must have been very nervous. The data came out easily after investigating a little bit.]

“...I got it. I will go there soon.”

I left that message and cut off the communication.

After staring intensely at the map fixed to the wall for a while, I left the accommodation while wearing a dull brown coat that was unlike my usual one.

* * *

One dark night...

In Leathevelk’s factory area, where starlight and moonlight disappeared due to the thick clouds in the sky...

The chimney of the factory, which stood tall without emitting any smoke, became a tombstone in honor of those who died in the shadow of the city.

Considering that there were actual people who died due to a difficult environment, the word “tombstone” was not particularly wrong.

The slum area, usually called an abandoned area, had a strong sense of desolation because there were no street lights that were sometimes seen from time to time.

All he could see was a gutter rat passing by the ground quickly.

Ludger arrived at that place where even vagrants gave up begging and gave a wide berth.

“You came?”

Hans, who had arrived first and was waiting, welcomed Ludger.

Hans looked at Ludger's face, then he shook his head and clicked his tongue.

On the surface, he looked nothing like a danger, but Ludger was already heavily armed.

Hans could feel that Ludger was thoroughly prepared for the fight ahead, judging from the bitter energy emanating from him.

"Will you go alone?"

"Will you help me if I ask you to?"

"Well, I thought I might be able to deal with one or two of them."

"Never mind. It's enough for me alone. What kind of guys are on the inside?"

"There are nearly forty people, but it seems like they know that they're in a rush—they're slowly leaving this place. It'd be in vain if you were here three days later."

"What's their power?"

"You'd better assume that each of them and even some of the nobodies have guns. Well, guns won't work against you, who's a wizard, but there are about three of them who are wearing strengthened armor."

"What about their elites' power?"

"There are two black wizards."

"I see."

The entrance was a large pipe tube that was drilled for wastewater disposal.

Ludger, who was about to head to the laboratory, stopped and asked Hans a question.

"Hans. The family that I asked you about beforehand..."

“Yes.”

“How old was the kid?”

“Their kid, you said?”

With his back against the wall, Hans looked up as if he was thinking of something.

The sky was full of gloomy clouds.

“He was seven years old. He was still such a little boy.”

“...Seven years old, huh?”

Ludger moved his legs again.

“I see.”

CHAPTER 32

A STEP TOWARD THE TRUTH (1)

Ludger headed to the entrance of a secret laboratory that was decorated with a large wastewater pipe.

The wastewater pipe, which was rusting everywhere and full of odors, seemed real, but when he went a little deeper, the scenery changed right away.

The inner wall of the wastewater pipe neatly changed, and even the odor that used to reek disappeared.

Ziiing.

From beyond that place, a sound was heard with subtle scarlet light.

Ludger immediately advanced with caution while trying to show as little sense of presence as possible.

“Hah. I’m so bored. How much longer do we have to stay?”

“I don’t know. We still have more than two days to spare, so shouldn’t we wait a little longer?”

“Why did those damn experiments escape anyway?”

“We’re not going to get caught yet, so it might be okay. We are cleaning this place up and going to leave to prepare for the worst possibilities.”

“But I’d rather be guarding like this. It’s a mess inside currently, as they are organizing the equipment.”

“It’s time to switch shifts soon anyway.”

“Argh. If only those sh*tty experiments hadn’t escaped.”

Ludger leaned his back against the wall and listened to their conversation.

The two, who were bored due to having to stand on guard for a long time at the entrance, did not stop chatting.

“I was outside at the time. How did that happen? Did the management make a mistake?”

“There must have been a mistake. I heard that the kid who was kidnapped didn’t take medicine often, so he didn’t turn more Cryptid-like. Maybe it’s because he’s still young.”

“So?”

“Why do you even ask? So when I tried to pull him out to inject more drugs into his body, he resisted.”

“I heard it’s really painful to be injected with the drugs. Is it true?”

“I’m sure it’s painful because they scream loudly. But the problem is that his parents made a ruckus there.”

“What? His parents? They had already become werewolves, yet they were still trying to protect their kid?”

“Yes. The scientists didn’t know that they still had some reasoning. They were angrier than we expected, and the inside the laboratory was a mess.”

“Damn it. So that’s why they escaped? Isn’t it a bit dangerous then?”

“Hahah! Dangerous, my ass. Don’t worry. I heard that we asked a reliable person to take care of the werewolves. Anyway, I’d have stepped on the werewolf pup until he died if I were there. He made us suffer like this.”

‘I see.’

Ludger felt that he no longer needed to eavesdrop on their conversation.

—Because he had already found out about everything and how things were turning out.

Splash.

As Ludger stepped on the water that was puddled on the ground, the two people who were chattering immediately closed their mouths and stared at him.

“What? Who’s that?”

“Isn’t it just a rat?”

Magical lights were shining around the entrance, but the place where Ludger stood was relatively dark, so he couldn’t be seen.

The two men pulled guns from their waistlines.

But before that, two beams of light flew out of the darkness and penetrated the middle of their forehead faster.

Bam! Bam!

Without even being able to scream, the two men who were guarding the entrance collapsed right on the spot.

It happened in the blink of an eye.

Ludger walked slowly out of the darkness.

He was wearing shin-length leather boots, black pants, a gray vest full of pockets, and a shabby brown coat over it.

His face was covered with a black hood that was drooping down to his nose, and he wore a hood that covered up to his forehead.

Ludger walked past the corpses and went into the secret laboratory with ghostly silent steps.

And not long after he entered...

A scream rang out from the inside.

* * *

“Aaaaaaah! Help me!”

The man who was patrolling near the entrance appeared from the dark and ran away desperately from a monster that had killed all of his colleagues.

He didn't know from where the monster had suddenly appeared.

Like a mirage, the monster had suddenly appeared and killed his patrolling colleagues in a flash.

‘What did the guys who guarded the entrance do?’

At the moment he thought so, his sight turned upside down.

“Oh?”

His body swayed, then he fell forward. He couldn't move his legs below the shins...

“Why... why on earth?”

He looked down at his legs and finally realized why.

—His legs were cut off under his shin.

The moment he recognized it, the pain came belatedly.

“Urk!”

He gritted his teeth and glared at the darkness behind his back.

Beyond the wide passage was a darkness where all the lights had gone out.

He heard footsteps from there.

His spine became cold, and every hair on his body stood on end.

It was a guy.

The intruder who had suddenly appeared and killed all his colleagues...

He is already coming after him.

Step.

The intruder slowly emerged from the darkness.

He covered his whole face as he appeared from the darkness, so he could not be identified.

However, based on his sturdy build, it was clear that he was a man.

He warned the man in a trembling voice.

“You, you. You thought you’d be able to get away after messing with us? I don’t think you know who’s in there, but you’re already done.”

The man didn’t respond.

Rather, the man’s eyes that were seen beyond the shadow of his hood became sharper.

His lips and throat became dry.

As soon as he wondered if he should rather beg for help, a large number of people flocked from beyond the passage.

“Here! There was a noise here!”

In the distance, he saw mercenaries approaching the place where with magical lights.

All of them were packed with guns; one of them especially stood out, as he was heavily armed.

The man shouted as he discovered his colleagues had come to his rescue.

“Here! This way! Here! Hahaha! You are dead now! You will turn into a honeycomb in this narrow passage... Urk!”

Ludger thrust a dagger into the mouth of that noisy man. When the dagger was

pulled out, blood splattered, and his body fell sideways.

It was then that the troops who arrived just in time discovered Ludger.

“There! Shoot him!”

They aimed their guns right away without asking who Ludger was, perhaps because they were well-trained soldiers,

Meanwhile, Ludger stood still as if he were stuck on his spot.

“Shoot!”

They pulled the trigger right away, but there was no gunfire.

“Oh?”

“Wh-what?”

Clack. Clack.

No matter how strongly they pulled their triggers, the bullets didn't emerge. Their guns were not broken, but the gunpowder was frozen.

A stream of cold sweat flowed down their leader's cheek, who had instructed them to shoot Ludger.

In this case, he understood from his own experience.

“Silence of Fire! He's a wizard!”

It had been a long time since weapons based on gunpowder emerged as the world had evolved.

Nevertheless, wizards and knights still kept their positions of being those who held the most power in the world.

There was only one reason for that:

It was because guns were not threatening at all to knights and wizards.

Knights with superhuman physical abilities could easily avoid or cut down ordinary bullets.

On the contrary, wizards didn't have to do that.

The Silence of Fire spell that they used made it possible to prevent the incoming gunshot.

Silence of Fire...

It was literally a spell that suppressed the performance of gunpowders that was targetted at the wizard within a certain range.

The spell made it possible to neutralize even machine guns if used by a third-rank wizard.

If a 5th-rank wizard used the spell, they could even neutralize a cannon.

If a 6th-rank Lexure wizard used it, the flow of the war would change from then on.

That's why wizards and knights could maintain their powerful spots even when the era of guns and gunpowder had already come.

But the spell that Ludger used ended in the third tier.

So Ludger realized that he couldn't go beyond that and made up for his lack of power by strengthening the casted spell.

When a common third-rank wizard used Silence of Fire, their effective range was within a radius of 20 meters.

And the effective range of the Silence of Fire that Ludger used...

—Was within a radius of 200 meters.

"Darn it! Everyone, pull out your weapons!"

The people affiliated with the Shamsus school were quick to make a move.

They threw away their meaningless guns and immediately took out their swords and

clubs.

Zzzzt.

An electric current flowed all over the clubs.

Ludger raised his hands at such a sight.

Each of his hands held a revolver.

“Idiot! When you’re using Silence of Fire, even your guns are useless...!”

Shoo!

The man who was laughing at Ludger fell backward as his forehead sprayed blood.

Everyone watched the scene with a pale complexion.

‘What just happened?’

“Wh-what?”

“How the hell...?”

Ludger had obviously shot his gun, but it wasn’t a bullet that he fired...

Magic.

It was actually mana which had the shape of a bullet.

* * *

Therefore, there was no sound when he shot, and the Silence of Fire spell itself wouldn’t be affected.

“You... you...!”

“Did you want to fight in an equal battle?”

Ludger laughed at the soldiers and shot bullets of his mana randomly.

Ratatata!

However, even though he seemed to shoot randomly, the bullets hit their foreheads precisely.

In an instant, blood and screams were rampant.

“These idiots! Everyone, get out of my way!”

A big man dressed in massive armor stepped forward. His reinforced armor, made of black synthetic metal, easily deflected the mana bullets that Ludger fired.

It was an armor suit that had been reinforced and made with recent engineering development.

Its movement was slow but very sturdy, and it required tremendous strength—it was used exclusively for great knights.

‘That will be a bit of a bother.’

“Die!”

The big man in reinforced armor rushed toward Ludger with his arms wide open.

His stomping steps gave off a sense of intimidation as if he was a rushing tank.

Ludger was not panicking or frightened at all.

After withdrawing his revolvers, he took out two Karambit daggers—which had the form of crescent moons—from his waist and held them tightly.

“You’re going to have a close-up battle as a wizard?”

As soon as he reached out his arm to grab Ludger by the collar, Ludger’s figure distorted and disappeared.

‘What? Where did he disappear to?’

The moment the man in the reinforced armor was dumbfounded by his disappearance, a terrible pain punctured his forearm.

Blood gushed from the gap in between his armor.

“Aaaaaargh! Wh-what?!”

A dagger pierced in between the joints of his armor.

“How the hell? No, more than that, he’s so fast that I can’t even see...”

As soon as he tried to move his left arm, there wasn’t any strength left in his left arm.

It was because something cold and sharp had pierced down his armpit.

“Wh-what...?”

Next was both of his ankles.

Before he could come to his senses, the tendons of his legs were cut off, and he knelt down on the spot.

And lastly...

He felt a cold touch on his neck.

“H-help...”

Slash!

Ludger cut his throat with a Karambit dagger without listening.

“Damn it! Gabe was defeated!”

“Get out of the way! I’m gonna fight him!”

That time, it was someone with a slightly different type of reinforced armor who stood in the front.

He was wearing brass armor, which was not black but yellowish, and white steam spewed out from behind his shoulders.

—It was a reinforced exoskeleton made with steam engines.

Both of his hands held onto a huge gun barrel, and the end of the gun barrel was connected to a large Tesla coil hanging from his back.

“Die!”

Zzzzzzzt!

A purple current engulfed the passage. The high-voltage current of the Tesla gun, which wouldn't be affected by the Silence of Fire, spread in all directions and splashed sparks of electricity.

“Bwahahahaha! What could you do?”

But he had no choice but to stop laughing.

The high-voltage current that he fired was not moving forward; it was as if it had been blocked right in front of Ludger.

“Wh-what?”

No, to be exact, the electric current was seeping into a metal that had popped up in front of him and was permeating it.

‘Is that a metal magic based on alchemy?’

No way, he was a guy who specialized in metal among the elemental properties?

He was doomed. A Tesla gun that shot high-voltage current did not work against wizards who used metal elemental magic as their attribute.

He realized it, but it was too late.

Ludger pulled out his revolver again and fired his mana.

It hit exactly at the Tesla's gun port and made it explode.

Zzzzzt!

The electricity spread all over the place, and all the people nearby burned into ashes.

The only one who managed to survive leaned his back against the wall and stared at Ludger, who was slowly approaching him.

Half of his body was already charred, and he was barely breathing.

“Gasp. Gasp. Cr-crazy bastard. Why the hell are you doing this to us?”

He felt it was unfair for some reason, but Ludger didn't even reply and just walked past him.

He didn't kill him.

He couldn't survive in that state anyway, so Ludger was going to leave him in pain a little bit longer.

‘How many people have I dealt with so far?’

About 20 people.

There were still about half of the troops that were left inside the laboratory.

And seeing that they weren't approaching him, it was clear that they were preparing to encounter him from the inside of the laboratory.

Most of all, he could feel that gaze...

The gazes that aimed at him from the gaps of the pipes that covered the wall.

Eyes that were glaring at Ludger.

‘Is it black magic that utilizes insects?’

Hans had said that there were two black wizards inside.

He had heard that some of the black wizards could also explore areas that were difficult for others to discover by utilizing insects' vision.

Maybe it was him who was watching Ludger.

“Pheew.”

Ludger exhaled lightly while swinging his right foot and walked lightly on the ground.

Clang.

The noise of the floor as his boots stomped on it.

It became an echo and spread wide and deep to the inside of the laboratory.

* * *

The inside of the laboratory...

The scientists there were bound to be very anxious.

“Are you sure this is all right? We need to destroy the data right now and pack the experiments’ drugs...”

“Oh, it’s all right.”

It was the blonde man with a tattoo on his neck that stopped the feeble scientist.

The blonde man’s outfit was also quite light, and he didn’t look like he possessed any weapons, so it seemed as if he had come out just for a trip.

But everyone knew that the man was the most influential black wizard in the laboratory.

The same went for the giant bald man who was sitting quietly next to him.

The bald man’s name was Veron.

The blonde man’s name was Bruno.

Although they weren’t related by blood, the two were black magicians who had their own reputations in the underworld—they were called the insect brothers.

“Because there’s only one opponent.”

The younger brother, Bruno, stated the information that he had confirmed through

an insect.

Yeah.

Surprisingly, there was only one intruder.

He couldn't believe that it was only one guy who had wiped out two people with reinforced armor and one troop that was armed with guns all by himself.

"Who... who on earth...?"

"We don't know that either. Maybe the Empire's security department has discovered us."

"Sec-security department!"

Security department.

—An organization that consisted of only of the most elite troops within the Empire.

Among them, there was one Knight Order affiliated with the security department.

—The Nightcrawler Knight Order

Of course, they were a little different from the ordinary Knights.

The scary thing about them was not only that each of them had brutal individual power but also that they would use any means necessary to achieve their goal.

They were Knights, but they didn't act as square as the other Knights.

Rather, they killed their enemies by thoroughly prying into their opponents' weaknesses, then piercing into those weaknesses and killing them.

They were Knights who could kill even a three-year-old child without mercy if the child was judged to be harmful to the Empire.

It was no wonder that they were called the devils of the underworld.

"But the way he fights is a little strange."

He wanted to identify his appearance a little bit more through insects, but he didn't know what trick that intruder was doing because all the signals were cut off from the insects that he sent.

Did he notice that they were watching him?

He was not an ordinary person either, considering the fact that he was coming alone.

"Brother, we need to get ready."

"Yeah."

The older brother, Veron, stood up. The laboratory's guards were also very nervous and held up their shields and weapons.

The passage from the entrance that was heading to the center of the laboratory...

It was when they were all prepared while staring intensely at the passage to encounter the intruder...

A strange wavelength swept through the interior of the laboratory, and soon all the lights went out, and darkness engulfed that place.

"Wh-what?! Hurry and turn on the lights!"

"Turn the backup power on!"

Looking at his men, who were moving in a hurry, the younger brother Bruno looked at his older brother.

"Brother. I think he's playing tricks on us, though?"

"..."

"Brother?"

There was no answer from Veron.

Bruno looked back at Veron. Even in the dark, his large size could be clearly distinguished among the silhouettes.

The silhouette of Veron...

His head was cut off, and his corpse rolled on the floor.

CHAPTER 33

A STEP TOWARD THE TRUTH (2)

“Damn it! Brother!”

Bruno reacted as soon as he confirmed that Veron’s head had been cut off.

Countless insects wriggled through the gaps in his clothes.

Bruno quickly racked his brain.

‘What that man used was the sound waves... And he even used metal magic...’

Elemental properties were divided into 10 elements:

Fire, Water, Wind, Earth, Plants, Electricity, Metal, Ice, Darkness, and Light.

There were also unknown properties that had yet to be revealed.

In the case of sound magic, it was often seen as an offshoot of wind elements because it uses atmospheric vibration.

And what Ludger used to stop the Tesla gun was the Metal property magic.

‘Metal is an element that is derived from the earth. The elemental properties that can normally be handled by the wizard are made up of only similar characteristics.’

According to Bruno’s judgment, Ludger’s elemental magic that he was able to handle were Wind, Earth, and Metal.

Usually, in the case of wizards, there were about two to three properties that they could handle.

No matter how skillful they were, they could only handle up to four properties.

If they could handle five properties, it could be said that they were within an area of

natural talent.

As a result, wizards basically casted three elements that their opponents had to deal with.

That was basic common sense, and it was an obvious thing.

'If he's dealing with wind elements, the characteristics of small flying insects won't be good against it. Then I'll have to solve it with my men who have giant builds.'

Since he wasn't sure yet, he could not rule out the possibility of Ludger having a fourth element.

A giant centipede with a thick crust poked out of Bruno's sleeve.

It was an insect that could not be seen in a general ecosystem, created through black magic and subspecies hybridization of specific insects caught in the southern jungle.

But the centipede's neck that Bruno pulled out was cut off in an instant.

It took less than a second for the sharp sword to aim at his neck.

"Urk!"

Bruno twisted his body and escaped Ludger's blade.

Hidden underneath his clothes, hard beetles were wrapped around him like chain armor.

'He's willing to have a close distance fight? Is he a war mage?'

Bruno immediately tried to distance himself from Ludger.

At that moment, a spell technique was carved in front of Ludger.

Bruno's eyes widened.

'That's Fluttering Flame!'

A spell technique that seemed to form a burning flame was carved in just a few

milliseconds.

The spell of the 3rd-tier flame element, Fluttering Flame, engulfed Bruno in less than a second, emitting intense flames.

“Aaaaaaaaargh!”

The fire broke out along with Bruno’s scream, brightening up the surroundings. The soldiers, who were staring at the entrance, looked back and opened their eyes wide.

“It... it’s the enemy!”

“How the hell?!”

But in the meantime, Bruno twisted his body inside the heat.

The most difficult magic element for a wizard who dealt with insects was definitely the flame property.

He couldn’t believe that the intruder was utilizing an element that had nothing to do with the other three properties.

It was unbelievable.

“H-how the hell?”

All the insects that were burned barely managed to survive, but Bruno’s condition was not very good either.

As he was half-melted from a burn on his whole body, he stared at Ludger while collapsing on spot.

He thought that he hadn’t let his guard down, but he also didn’t expect that his enemy would be this extreme.

“Who... the hell are you?”

“...”

Bam!

Instead of answering, Ludger drew a revolver and shot through Bruno's head.

At the same time, the backup power was activated, and the light turned on inside the laboratory.

"Oooh!"

"No... no way, the insect brothers are dead."

The soldiers who were in charge of the inner security looked at the bodies of the Bruno and Veron brothers and were at a loss.

Even if they all combined their power, they would still lose in the hands of one of the brothers, and the intruder alone had overpowered both of the brothers.

The soldiers lost their fighting spirit.

There was no way they could fight a monster like that.

Everyone stepped back from Ludger in fear, and a change was happening in Veron's body, which had been decapitated and had collapsed.

Whoosh!

"...!"

Ludger responded immediately. As soon as the body flew forward, a huge hand scratched the space where Ludger had stood just before.

—It was an insect's front leg, full of sharp spines on its smooth shell.

Everyone else watching the scene was also stunned.

"Weren't you dead?"

Ludger looked at Veron, who was moving his body and asked that question.

Veron's body, which had been decapitated, rose from its spot again. It was his bizarrely transformed right hand that had stuck out at Ludger.

Veron stretched out his left hand, which was still in human form.

There was a mouth in his palm.

“I was surprised. I didn’t expect such an ambush.”

“...Is it your insect form?”

“Oh. So you know?”

It was Bruno whose specialty was dealing with insects.

On the contrary, his older brother, Veron, had a big body and didn’t deal with bugs, so Ludger had wondered why they were called the insect brothers.

‘Was it because of that?’

Veron was a black wizard whose body itself mutated like some kind of insect.

Such a body wouldn’t occur naturally, so he had actually used his own body as an experiment of black magic.

Veron was an example of why black wizards were full of crazy people.

“Even so, your head was cut off, so I didn’t expect you to be fine.”

“My body is no longer that of a normal person’s.”

At the same time, when he said that, Veron’s body mutated with the chilling sound of crunching.

The black robe surrounding his body expanded, and countless spines popped out.

Ludger backed off.

Veron—who already had a giant body—looked down at Ludger as he was growing even bigger.

He had a horrible form of monster that looked like a mixture of various insects.

At that point, it was hard to tell whether he was a black wizard or a Cryptid.

[I can't believe you killed my younger brother. I'm not sad, but I'll make you take responsibility for it.]

Veron's arms pulled back and shot at Ludger like arrows.

Ludger immediately flew up using a wire launcher.

Veron's stab passed by Ludger's feet and penetrated the soldiers who were lining up behind.

"Aaaaaah!"

"Run!"

Veron didn't care, even though his men screamed and died.

[Oh my. You're quick to make a move. You're literally like a flying insect.]

Veron looked up and tried to find Ludger.

Boo-boom!

At that moment, the steel structures on the ceiling collapsed and fell over Veron's head.

Baam!

Veron was fine, even though a considerable weight of iron had fallen upon him. There was only a slight scratch on his shell, and there was no wound.

[Were you trying to draw my attention with this?]

Veron turned his huge head and looked at Ludger, who slowly landed on the ground with a wire.

It was obviously a provocative act, but Ludger didn't respond much.

'What a bother.'

Veron's body was already out of the ordinary insect's league.

The shell surrounding such a huge body was also hard, so it was no wonder that he was called a monster beyond a mere black wizard.

'This is why they're black wizards.'

Ludger, who was about to shoot his revolver, quit and withdrew all his weapons.

He realized that even a hundred shots wouldn't work for Veron.

[Oh. Are you giving up?]

Veron laughed at Ludger's actions, but Ludger stretched his hand out toward Veron instead.

[What is he doing?]

Ludger's actions, who stretched his arms toward Veron, went beyond provoking Veron's curiosity and even triggered his displeasure.

[Is he trying to use some kind of magic?]

However, it is practically impossible to attack Veron unless it was a spell above the fourth tier.

Ludger, according to his judgment, was a 3rd rank wizard.

His spellcasting speed was so fast that it was bizarre, but that was all.

He didn't think that Ludger could deal proper damage to him.

[It's not bad to give a little generosity and see what this cute intruder is trying to do.]

Veron made that judgment.

"I didn't want to use this in this situation, though."

[Hmm?]

“Well, it can’t be helped.”

As soon as Ludger finished his sentence...

The interior of the laboratory was filled with white light.

* * *

“Huu. Haa. It’s still chilly.”

Hans, who was waiting for Ludger outside the abandoned factory, trembled as he reached into his pocket in the cold, still night air.

It’d already been half an hour since Ludger went inside.

‘It’s almost time for him to finish it.’

Ludger had tried hard to not make it obvious, but Hans realized that he was very angry.

Well, he would be angry as well.

He couldn’t believe that those nuts had kidnapped a seven-year-old kid and his parents and used them as human experiments.

No matter how much he was someone who couldn’t be fair and square, there was a ‘line’ that should be protected, even by people who did his kind of job.

That Shamsus school crossed that line too hard.

‘He’s a bit late. Was it hard since they had two black wizards?’

All the more so if the black wizards were the insect brothers, who had their own reputation in the underworld.

But Hans didn’t think that Ludger would die.

They’d known each other for years.

Ludger was a man who should have died a long time ago.

There was only one reason why he hadn't died:

He was that strong.

'He doesn't seem to intend to make it obvious.'

He was a hunter who had hunted the monster in Jévaudan alone in the first place.

There were more than five knights that the monster had eaten, and Ludger had hunted such a monster alone.

Moreover, Ludger did not use only the identity of 'Abraham Van Helsing' as a hunter.

He was also a private detective,

A mysterious thief,

A criminal consultant,

A mercenary,

An artist,

And so on.

He had many faces, and each of the masks he had used in the past had always made a great impact.

Startle!

Just when he thought it was about time, a strong light that made his eyes hurt came out from the entire abandoned factory.

Whiiiiirrrrr!

At the same time, the light turned into flames, transforming the abandoned factory into a sea of fire.

It was a terrifying power that blew up the huge factory.

Hans knew very well who had done that.

‘So he used it.’

Hans himself referred to that skill as ‘it’, but in fact, Hans also didn’t know what kind of ability it was.

He had asked Ludger about it once before.

The only words that he had heard was Ludger’s strange answer that it was ‘a real magic’.

‘Magic is magic. What’s real magic anyway?’

Anyway, Ludger’s use of that skill meant that the opponent was that tough.

And it showed how serious Ludger was about it.

* * *

Ludger put the data from the laboratory and the experimental drugs that they had used for the experiments in a suitcase and went outside.

Hans, who was waiting outside, greeted him.

“You came? Let’s leave this place first. The police will come here even if it’s an abandoned factory since what you did here is quite fancy. How about the inside?”

“I’ve taken care of everything.”

Ludger had checked deep into the lab after dealing with Veron.

The horrible experiments’ appearances that were trapped in a cage in the dark...

They were all ordinary people who had enjoyed their daily lives.

But their daily lives were eventually broken.

They were those people who suffered from crossing boundaries where their bodies mutated. They had lost their reasoning and were no longer able to be called human.

The only mercy Ludger could give them was to let them go to the hereafter without any pain.

Ludger had blown up the entire laboratory, killed the scientists, and came out with their research reports and experimental results.

“Is this it?”

Hans asked when he saw an ampoule containing red liquid inside the suitcase that he received from Ludger.

“Yes.”

“The world has become so scary. Who would have thought that there were people who do human experiments in a place like this? I never imagined that scientists and inventors would have joined hands with the black wizards.”

“That’s not all.”

“Yeah? What else is there?”

“How do you think they got a secret laboratory that big?”

“That’s...”

“There’s someone behind them who’s been giving them a huge amount of money.”

“...That’s obviously a big problem.”

It must have required a huge amount of money to build a laboratory like that secretly.

It meant that there were a lot of people behind the scenes who supported their backs.

“Don’t worry. I already know who it is.”

“Are you for real?”

“Yes.”

Hans felt uneasy at Ludger's answer.

"Don't tell me..."

"Why?"

"It's not... that... right?"

Ludger did not ask what Han meant. He just stared at Hans once.

Ah.

Hans couldn't stop him, then.

Hans, who immediately realized it, accepted the suitcase.

"I'll go to the hideout first. If you're going to stop by there after work, just come."

Hans walked away without listening to Ludger's answer.

Ludger stood still in his spot for a while.

The bright red flames of the burned factory in the distance brightened the dark abandoned factory zone.

It was like the most spectacularly burning candle just before the fire went out.

* * *

"You brought me this kind of food?!"

Praang!

In the interior of a luxurious mansion, the millionaire Belfort Ricksen threw a plate of food that was brought by the maid.

The maid, who was struck by the plate, flopped down, her forehead bleeding.

The food on the plate stained her clothes and face.

But no one could assist or help her.

An old man in his 60s, whose white beard had been growing for years, showed a loathful glare at his maid and clicked his tongue.

“Are you telling me that was food? What a load of crap for something I paid for.”

Belfort stood from his seat and left the dining room.

He was a man who stood tall as a very successful capitalist in this era of revolution.

But when he was successful, it was an old man full of wrinkles whom Belfort saw in the mirror.

After all, he had dedicated his youth in order to gain his position.

So he wanted to regain his youth.

With that wish in mind, he had aided the black wizards in doing some kind of experiment.

Recently, some of the experiments had escaped, and he was told that the experiment was messed up.

‘Damn it! Idiots! Useless trash!’

‘How much money do you think I’ve invested in you?!’

Belfort returned to his room in a rage.

‘Still, the experiment itself wasn’t meaningless. Sooner or later, there will be a decent result from it.’

A drug that would bring the weakened human body back to its prime...

The ability to gain back his youth was not far off.

He wanted not only to be young again but to also be healthier and stronger.

It was the moment when he tried to turn on the light in his large room that had

previously been dark while being immersed in such thoughts...

“Belfort Ricksen.”

“Wh-what?! Who are you?!”

There was someone in the center of the room.

Belfort tried to turn on the magical light, but the light didn't turn on because something was wrong.

Belfort was trapped in the room alone with an unidentified intruder in the darkness without moonlight.

“S-security! Security!”

“They won't hear you, even if you call them.”

He had already spread out a sound barrier in the room. Of course, since it was a millionaire's house, if someone used that kind of magic, the alarm would ring right away.

Ludger's magic was so secretive that even the magic in the alarm wouldn't catch it.

Ludger, who was sitting in a chair, stood up.

And he slowly approached Belfort...

“Belfort Ricksen, let me ask you a question.”

“Wh-what?! Who are you?! Reveal yourself!”

“A seven-year-old kid is desperately trying to survive this terrible reality, witnessing himself and his parents becoming monsters...”

Baam!

Ludger stretched out his arm, grabbed Belfort by the collar, and pulled him close to his face.

His eyes glowed red in the dark.

“How do you think the person who knew they had no choice but to burn them to death feels?”

CHAPTER 34

A STEP TOWARD THE TRUTH (3)

Ludger still couldn't forget that moment.

—The kid's clear eyes that had looked up at him while licking his injured mother.

Even when Ludger had used his spell to kill them, he had shown a genuine smile as if saying 'thank you' to him instead.

He couldn't forget it.

He could never forget it.

"I... I don't know! How am I able to know? More than that, who the hell are you?"

"You don't know?"

Ludger threw Belfort Ricksen, whom he held by the collar, down to the floor.

Belfort, whose body was in bad shape due to his old age, grasped his waist as he fell on the floor.

"Argh. Who, who the hell are you?"

"Do you know what this is?"

Ludger took an experimental drug that he had prepared in advance out of his pocket and threw it in front of Belfort.

It contained a red liquid that seemed like a melted ruby inside a transparent glass tube.

There was no way that Belfort, who had instructed the scientists to make the drug, could not recognize it.

“This... this is.”

“Do you know it now?”

“What... what do you want from me? Do you want money?”

Belfort realized that the opponent had his weakness and went on with showing a submissive attitude.

In addition to him being able to sneak into his room skillfully, the opponent even had the drugs of the experiment he was involved in, although Belfort didn't know how he had gotten it.

‘No way, is he affiliated with the Nightcrawler Knight Order from the Security Department?’

‘Damn it! How the hell did those insect brothers not do their job?’

What did they think he was thinking when he invested a lot of money in it?

Not only did they miss the experiments who escaped, but they had also let this mysterious man come to his residence.

However, he could not immediately express his complaint.

He didn't know who the man in front of him was, but there was no doubt that the man was clutching his life in his grip.

“I... I won't hold you responsible for sneaking in here. And since you secretly came to find me, you must have something that you desire, right?”

“Something I desire?”

“Yes. What do you want? Because I have a lot of money, I can give you as much as you want.”

But the answer that he heard from Ludger was far beyond Belfort's expectations.

“Answer.”

“Wh-what?”

“Answer the question I just asked you.”

“The question you asked me, you said?”

Belfort racked his brain as hard as he could and recalled the question Ludger had asked him before.

It was what he thought about a seven-year-old kid.

Belfort opened his mouth in wonder.

“Was it you who got rid of the experiments that escaped?”

“...”

“Hahah! I see! It was you! Why didn’t you tell me? Ahem. If you suddenly threw me down like this, there was bound to be a misunderstanding. Thanks to you, the incident didn’t spread like a wildfire.”

“Just answer what I ask you.”

“I... I get it, I get it! That seven-year-old kid, he’s an experiment, right? What’s the problem? He’d rather die since he had already become a monster so he won’t be caught by others.”

“...”

“Isn’t he someone from a lower class whom people don’t even know existed anyway? Is it something to be sad about if many of those guys died? They had made a noble sacrifice of their lives to produce excellent results instead.”

A noble sacrifice...

Belfort Ricksen genuinely thought so.

What did it have to do with him if some of those lowly people rolling in the mud of society, whether they were laborers or poor people, died?

They were rotten eggs that did nothing for society.

Rather, if they became cornerstones as experiments that helped the completion of drugs that would bring back human youth...

Wasn't that their way that would have normally been beyond their capabilities to contribute to humanity?

"Even if those dirty, low people work in a factory for 100 or 1000 days, could they really get some money?"

It was much more productive to use those meaningless lives in a more valuable way.

—To be someone's experiment for drug development.

That's what they meant to Belfort.

"Did you finish giving the answer?"

"Yeah, that's enough."

"Then..."

"You were too full of yourself and got blinded by it."

Grab!

Ludger grabbed Belfort by his neck.

Belfort opened his eyes wide and grabbed Ludger's forearm with both of his hands, but his rough grip was too powerful for his old body to fight back.

"Cough! Why... why?!"

He answered it properly!

Belfort's eyes showed complaints toward Ludger.

Instead of answering, Ludger put a bottle of medicine in front of Belfort's face, then poured it into his mouth.

Bloop bloop!

Belfort tried desperately to resist the drug, but even that was impossible because he was being choked.

Gulp.

The red drug flowed through Belfort's throat.

At the same time, changes began to take place in Belfort's body.

"Urk! Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaargh!"

With a severe pain that seemed like his body was tearing apart, Belfort's body slowly began to swell.

Ludger let go of Belfort's neck, then he stepped back and watched the scene.

His skin, which was full of wrinkles after being swept away by the tides of time, turned tight, and soon, his skin split from side to side, then fur grew out in a massive amount.

But his mutation didn't stop there.

His growing fur fell out, revealing his red skin, and the skin began to swell like a bubble.

Belfort had drunk all the drugs in the bottle.

In fact, in the case of the experiments, only a small fraction of the drug was injected into them, considering they couldn't even handle it and that it would cause severe mutations.

The amount of drugs that the old Belfort had drunk had already exceeded his own capability.

"Aaaaaaaaaaargh! Why?! Why?!!!"

While his body was torn, twisted, and mutating, Belfort had no choice but to shout toward Ludger.

It was when his face was strangely distorted and half mixed with the appearance of a beast...

It was not a human cry or a beast's cry that was shouted out of Belfort's throat, but a voice that belonged to something else.

Aaaaaaaaaargh!!!

"No matter what I say, you won't even understand it, let alone repent."

'Then he doesn't have to understand.'

'Instead, he should also feel the pain he has caused to others.'

Ludger lifted the sound barrier that had been spread.

Brrrrrrinngggg!

At the same time, a mana-detecting alarm rang out throughout the house. Following that, the shout of Belfort, who had become a monster, echoed.

Aaaaaaaaaaargh!

"What's this sound?!"

"It's an intruder! The voice was heard from Master Belfort's dwelling!"

"Master Belfort! Master Belfort!"

Bam! Bam!

Security from the outside knocked on the door strongly.

Soon, the locked door broke, and bulky men rushed inside.

Among them was a freelance wizard who was hired to protect Belfort.

"It... it's a monster!"

"Where did this monster come from?"

“Everyone, get out of the way!”

The wizard immediately casted fire magic and burned the monster.

The monster was burned easily, unlike its hideous appearance.

It had a very persistent vitality, so even though the body was burned, it continued to regenerate, but that just made the process of burning the monster last longer.

The wizard also felt some kind of threat and poured all his mana into the flame magic.

When an hour passed like that...

The monster’s body collapsed; it was no longer regenerating.

“Haah. Hah. It’s finally over.”

“How about Master Belfort?”

“Find him!”

No matter how bad he was as a person, he was still the employer who paid them salaries, so the people were eager to find Belfort Ricksen.

However, no matter how much they wandered around, they couldn’t see Belfort, and they couldn’t find any trace of him.

Everyone in that place eventually had no choice but to reach one conclusion:

It was that Belfort Ricksen had been eaten by that monster.

It was an absolutely absurd situation.

At the same time, they didn’t know...

The secret safe that was hidden in Belfort’s room...

A safe containing Belfort’s property that was hidden in a secret space behind a large portrait...

It had been taken by someone.

* * *

“You came?”

The hideout that Hans told him to meet at was a shabby house located deep in the alleyway of Leathevelk’s commercial district.

Worn out signboards, creaky doors, and exterior walls and windows that were filled with oil stains.

However, that only applied to its exterior, and when he went inside, there was no smell, and the interior was very clean.

It looked like a normal pub on the outside, but it was just trickery.

“You chose a pretty good place.”

“It’s in the commercial area adjacent to the factory area. I had a hard time getting this.”

“How about the surrounding location?”

“I’m not done checking yet, but I’m sure that the back alleys of Leathevelk are pretty complicated. I need more time.”

“I see.”

Ludger said so and put the safe he had brought on the floor.

Hans opened his eyes wide when a *bam* sound was heard.

“What’s that? You must have had a hard time bringing it here.”

“Not really.”

“So is this a safe? It looks exactly like one.”

“Yeah. It was magically secured, but I released the security magic on my way here, so

you can open it right away.”

Hans didn't argue with such words.

Hans, who opened the door of the safe and checked its contents, immediately closed it.

“...There are too many.”

“Use some of it as a supply for your work. Hide the rest of its contents in the right place for now.”

“Well, then I would have no objection. Rather than that, are you going to go now?”

“Yeah.”

“You look a little tired. Why don't you take a break first before you go? I have a separate room for you.”

“I'll check it out later. I think I'll be back here soon anyway.”

“What identity will you use when you come here?”

“The most suitable identity to do activity in the underworld.”

“Oh, you mean that?”

Hans didn't ask any more questions. More than anything, Ludger must have been pretty exhausted from the day's fight.

“Please rest well. I'll finish my work as soon as I can too.”

“Yeah.”

Ludger stepped out of the hideout with tired steps.

The air in the back alley, where people rarely come and go, was stale and warm, and the humidity adhered to the skin like glue.

Whenever he walked on a road with a stale smell, he could feel the gazes that were

exploring him beyond the darkness of the deeper alley.

—Hyenas of the back alley.

They looked at Ludger like they were going to scan through him, and eventually, they realized that he wasn't someone they could mess with, so they stepped back.

When he was completely out of the alley, Ludger took off the hood on his head and pulled down a hood that covered his mouth and nose.

As he was staring at some steamboats that were still wandering around Ramsey River, a loud bell rang out from the clock tower standing in the center of Leathevelk.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

It was the sound that notified people of midnight.

Ludger continued to stare at Ramsey River in the dark.

Until the memory of the eyes that the child had shown him completely washed off into the river.

* * *

[The millionaire Belfort Ricksen is dead]

It was the front page of the newspaper's headline published in the city of Leathevelk the next day.

The death of Belfort, the evil entrepreneur and one of Leathevelk's millionaires, was enough to heat up Leathevelk.

—Even more so because the cause of death was a werewolf attack.

The monster was eradicated by a wizard who had been guarding the inside of the mansion, but the death of Belfort was a big issue.

Some said that Belfort was punished by heaven, and the others said that Belfort met a disaster when he used evil black magic and couldn't control it by himself.

Reporters clamored for days in front of the Ricksen's mansion, begging to get inside of it.

Creeaaak.

Then a black car stopped behind the reporters.

“Huh?”

The reporters stared at the person who got out of the car, as they were full of curiosity.

‘Who is it?’

There were a total of three people who got out of the car, and all of them were wearing the same attire.

—A black uniform with a golden epaulet on the shoulder.

The eyes of the reporters widened as they recognized the attire, which was commonly called the black coat, that only authorized people could wear.

“Sec-Security Department!”

“The Nightcrawler Knight Order, too, moreover!”

The security department was not a particularly secretive organization. Rather, they had a tremendous reputation in the light and a terrible notoriety in the dark.

The reporters gulped down their saliva.

They had gone to the entrance of the mansion simply for gossip, but if the security department stepped up, it would be a different story then.

Exclusive...

Such a word continued to linger in the reporters' minds.

‘It... it won't work like this. Since I won't be able to go inside anyway, I'll have to write something related to the security department.’

‘If even the security department is stepping up, it means that this is really a big deal. Moreover, the person who stands at the lead... ’

—Cold, silver hair that contrasted perfectly with a black coat that had a combination of gold and red embroidery.

The sharp-looking woman who tossed her hair up to show her forehead was a very famous person.

Terina Lionhowl.

She was the head of the Lionhowl Marquis family, which symbolized the protection of the Empire.

She was the Knight Commander of Nightcrawler Knight Order, who was affiliated to the Security Department.

Her widely famous nickname was ‘Lord Protector’.

The lion’s cry had become a symbolic phrase for her, who had so far eradicated countless people who posed a threat to the Empire.

The reporters were split side to side and made way for Terina, who walked unhesitantly toward the mansion.

With her sharp charisma, she was the idol of all the female Knights within the empire.

“Open the gate.”

As the security department stepped up, even the guards guarding the entrance were bound to be drenched in a cold sweat.

“We... were told not to let anyone in.....”

“The gate.”

Terina spoke while pointing her finger at the guards.

“Open it.”

“Yes... yes!”

The guards whose faces became pale immediately moved.

The tightly closed gates of Ricksen’s mansion opened wide.

CHAPTER 35

NIGHTCRAWLER

Ricksen's mansion became filled with tension after Terina Lionhowl and her two lieutenants appeared.

The police inspecting the scene noticed Terina and saluted her as they quickly stood up.

"Ma-Marquise Terina! It's an honor to meet you! My name is Inspector Teboran!"

"Oh, yes. You've worked hard."

"May I ask, if you don't mind, what brings you here, Marquise Terina?"

"Didn't you hear the news? Starting from now, all investigation into the murder in the Ricksen mansion is under the control of our security department."

"S-security department, you said?"

Inspector Teboran, who had a long mustache and whiskers, gulped down his saliva.

He also didn't believe it was just a simple murder case, but if the security department came forward, it meant that the case was extremely dangerous.

The security department didn't take action unless the case was really serious.

"Please... please excuse us! Everyone, withdraw!"

The Inspector and his subordinates fled the scene quickly.

All they had left to do was block the reporters who looked like hyenas, flocking in front of the gate while still watching the events inside the mansion.

As the staring eyes disappeared, the young-looking female Knight of the man and woman lieutenants following Terina relaxed her shoulders.

“Phew. I was having a hard time setting the mood.”

“Oho. Enya. You should still show the honorific behavior of the Nightcrawler Knight Order, even if there are no eyes watching us.”

The female Knight, Enya, scowled at her senior, Lloyd’s, nagging.

“Well, Senior. But still, we don’t have to act like that now.”

“Enya you...”

“Stop it, Lloyd. You only have to be like that in front of others.”

“See. Even the Captain said that.”

“This little junior is really...”

Deputy Lloyd eventually shook his head and raised a white flag.

The Nightcrawler Knight Order was a place where only elites gathered, just like the Knights who were guarding the center of the Empire were supposed to be, but it was also a place where they spoke comfortably among seniors and juniors.

It was all because Terina herself, the Knight Commander, liked such an atmosphere.

However, it did not mean that their regulations themselves were loose.

It had also been a long tradition of the Nightcrawler Knight Order to deal with what had to be done in a more surefire way than anyone else.

Most of all, the fact that the Nightcrawler Knight Order did not collapse was evidence that their current Captain, Terina Lionhowl, had great power of command and charisma.

“Don’t forget about our purpose for coming here.”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

Rather than being an ordinary case, the incident was evaluated as such a serious matter that even the security department had to take part in the investigation.

In particular, it was not just a usual 'serious case' because Terina, the Knight Commander, had stepped up by herself in the connection between Cryptids and Black Magic.

"It's just a rumor so far, but the dead Belfort was a man who had been suspicious and was on the list of people that we, the security department, were to keep an eye on. It's not just a mere coincidence that he was suddenly killed by a monster."

Lloyd and Enya nodded at Terina's words.

The three immediately began to investigate Ricksen's room.

—Broken windows that appeared to have been caused by the intruder and black stains that could be said to be signs of a burnt monster.

—And the blood that was supposed to belong to Belfort that was scattered around.

Witnesses had said a monster appeared, and Ricksen was killed.

Given that their statements are all identical and consistent, they didn't think those witnesses were lying.

After more than 10 minutes, they moved in search of possible clues, but there was no sign of anything.

But as soon as Lloyd was about to say something after he thought that he had searched everything...

It was then that Terina, who was thinking hard with her arms folded, suddenly strode toward one wall.

"Captain?"

"So it's here."

What Terina stared at was a painting hanging on the wall.

As one of the richest men in Leathevelk, Belfort had decorated his spacious room with all kinds of colorful artwork.

Terina, who moved closer to the wall, touched the border frame of the painting and then picked up the mural in the corner and put it aside.

“Captain? What’s with that painting?”

“There’s a space behind it.”

Before asking if it was for real, Terina’s fingertips, covered in white gloves, touched the center of the wall.

Then the wall opened with a rattling sound as if it was pushed aside.

—A secret space that had a length and width of only one meter.

“What on earth is this?” Enya asked while staring at the empty space with a curious gaze.

Terina raised her voice in an apathetic tone while folding her arms.

“Based on its size and location, it was probably the place where his secret safe was hidden.”

“Secret safe?”

“Belfort Ricksen was notorious for being a rich and evil entrepreneur. There must have been money that he hid to avoid taxes and some black money to avoid the surveillance of the Empire.”

“Is this the safe where he put that money?”

“But there is no safe...”

Lloyd opened his mouth with a heavy face as he realized something.

“Someone took it away, I see.”

“Yeah.”

“Then who took it away? The employees of the mansion? Should we interrogate the butler, who was the most suspicious, first?”

Terina shook her head at Enya’s remark that was already full of desire.

“No. It will be meaningless. The butler has nothing to do with this.”

“Pardon?”

“There is no way a man like Belfort could have confided his secret funds to someone else. He probably hid it thoroughly so that only he knew about it.”

“But it’s empty here.”

“Just because he didn’t tell everyone doesn’t mean no one knows about it.”

Didn’t Terina also find that secret space right away?

“Businessmen, millionaires, and merchants all have similar ideas. They’re not that happy to open a bank account. They always want to keep valuables or gold coins within their reach for the moment—only then would they feel at ease.”

“Then who took it away?”

“We’re going to find out about it now. It’s just a guess, but the person who stole the safe must have had something to do with Ricksen’s death.”

“But they said that Belfort Ricksen was eaten by a werewolf.”

“I doubt it’s a werewolf. Look at the traces left behind. Nearly half of the floor in this large room was burned. It was burned by magic, so it didn’t escalate to a fire. It was only a precise range that the flames covered and burned, but it’s still that big.”

“That means...”

“Cryptids and werewolves, no matter how big they are, are only three meters tall. They’re also very big, but if you burned them to death, there wouldn’t be a mark that big”

And it was said that those who actually witnessed the werewolf initially mistook him

for a 'monster'.

Since it was dark and the people were frightened, they may have had some kind of illusion.

That wasn't the case, judging from the traces.

"The result is that someone is involved in the death of Belfort Ricksen... An unnatural death, the appearance of a monster, and even the bad rumors about Belfort—There's a lot left to check."

What bothered Terina most of all was the ability of the mysterious intruder to take the safe that was supposed to be inside without leaving any trace.

She lit her eyes and tried to find traces, but the intruder had left no evidence—as if he was a professional.

As if the safe didn't exist in the first place...

'No way. There was definitely a safe here... And it was here until last night.'

Her evidence for that was that there was no dust on the bottom of that empty space yet.

No matter how enclosed the space was, air and dust were bound to enter.

'Then who on earth took it away?'

Her feeling that was as if she was trying to hold a blurry mirage with her hands was not unfamiliar.

'I'm so used to it that I feel like It's déjà vu.'

It was inevitable that Terina Lionhowl brought up the memory of her past all of a sudden.

A couple of years prior...

* * *

There was a thief who had created chaos throughout the continent.

He was so mysterious that no one had ever seen his real face because he was blurred as if he were surrounded by the darkness of night, and his movements were extremely elusive.

He was the one who had easily penetrated any heavy security measures wherever he wanted and taken away valuables without leaving any trace, causing many rich men to shed tears and anger.

The thief, Arsène Lupin.

'Don't tell me that thief... No, no way. It's been a few years since he stopped his activities, yet he moved again now?'

But the method that had been used still disturbed her mind.

Even if it was not him, she could not deny the possibility of the intruder being his acquaintance, accomplice, or disciple.

"Lloyd."

"Yes, Captain."

"Is there anything else unusual that happened in Leathevelk?"

"Oh, well, there was one thing."

"What is it?"

"One of the abandoned factories was burned down in flames; that's also the same day when Belfort died."

"So it's there."

What happened in the abandoned factory that had been set aflame?

Even the location was a remote place that people no longer visited.

"Let's go."

The werewolf case that caused chaos in Sören and Leathevelk ended with the death of the evil millionaire.

I was lying sick on the bed in the room of my accommodation.

‘Uurgh. If I knew this would happen, I would’ve prepared a little more before I went. I’m glad I didn’t have to teach any classes today; otherwise, I would have been in big trouble.’

Rather than a sore body, my spinning head and the following migraine were the most painful to me.

I took out three pills and poured them into my mouth while lying in bed.

Munch munch.

Others may think the pills were something like headache medicine or painkillers, but I was literally chewing mana pills that replenished mana.

Usually, if someone was recovering their mana, it was common for them to recover their mana automatically over time or to drink mana potions.

But because pharmacology had developed...

It had become possible to grind mana recovery pills into powder and drink them in water or to mix the starch like I had and turn them into pills.

Powder and pills were easier to store and carry than carrying them around in the form of potions.

In other words, it was a world that thought the pills that restored mana were not that marvelous.

The distinction was just in how the same medicine had the best effects.

Therefore, what was important in pharmacology was how good the efficiency displayed by its ingredients compared to the others.

Effect...

Risk...

And efficiency.

Combining those three factors, the drugs could be rated from the best level, which was 1, to the lowest level, which was 10.

The pills I was taking were my own original recovery pills.

It was the pill that maximized its effectiveness at the expense of raising its risk a little because of my 'body type'.

Since it was my own special drug, it didn't go through any clinical trials, but it also didn't have any rating tag.

I think that pill would probably have a pretty high rating, and I was chewing those pills instead of rice.

'It was a problem because I used too much of my energy. I always won my fights at a swift pace, but who knew that he would be a black wizard who changed his body in that way?'

Insect brothers...

Because of the older brother, Veron, I had been given no choice but to use 'real magic', not the magic of this world.

It was magic that combined the occult and mythological knowledge in the world I used to live in, not magic techniques or knowledge from this world.

The problem was that the magic's aftereffects were no joke.

Taking drugs that replenished mana regularly was also something I had to experience because I had learned that magic.

[—————]

Sound...

The sound that kept bothering me slowly faded and then disappeared.

That voice could only be suppressed by using mana, so I had become a person who consumed mana just by breathing.

Therefore, it was necessary for me to make up for the lack of mana periodically.

‘It’s a bit better.’

I was immersed in a different thought when my headache went away...

The werewolf case at that time was able to be finished after I had stepped up.

I had burned it all down without a trace, so they couldn’t find any evidence of the werewolf experiment.

The only problem was that there was a witness at the scene.

‘Aidan.’

—The freshman who had blocked me from killing the werewolves.

—Someone with a sympathetic impression along with brown hair that didn’t stand out that much.

But the greatest thing about him was his personality.

His action to risk himself and throw his own body into danger to protect his friend or standing up by himself without knowing that he was in danger was a rare sight, even in Sören.

Yeah.

If I had to define him, he was like the main character in an anime or novel.

In the case of the students who were taking my class, I remembered all of them, and the Aidan I recalled was a model student who focused on my class with shining eyes more than anyone else.

Unlike other people, who were learning magic as if they were being chased by

something, he was a hardworking type of a person who had entered Sören purely because he liked magic and enjoyed it.

Such a fellow had witnessed the secret of the werewolves.

If it was a game, I think the title [Act 1. Sören's Werewolf] would come straight to my mind.

'He might be suspicious of me for killing the werewolves against his will right there.'

Fortunately, Leo and Tessie Friad, who were there with him, didn't notice that.

If Aidan had told them, it would be a different story.

How could a freshman get caught up in such an incident and get closer to the truth?

He didn't mean to be caught in it, but the situation had gotten so screwed up that it became like that.

I put my hand on my forehead and swept my hair back.

'If it became like this...'

There was one method that came to my mind.

'Should I kill him?'

CHAPTER 36

ELEMENTAL PROPERTIES CLASS (1)

While I was contemplating whether to kill Aidan or not, I remembered when he had carefully approached the werewolves.

—His stupid act of pulling out a crude recovery potion and smiling at the werewolf's child.

—It's okay. I won't hurt you.

Thinking about Aidan's life or death, I shook my head.

I couldn't kill him.

I could be as careful as I could if I did the work I had to do, but I couldn't completely rule out the situation where I was suspected by Aidan.

'Should I bring up the situation where I became a professor in Sören after I was caught up in terrorism while getting on a train?'

In the end, it was natural if something completely unexpected happened.

There was a saying of 'black swan theory'.

—When an event that's completely unexpected occurs, it analyzes the event by fitting together the cause of the event through the results of it, and in fact, it claims that there was a prelude to such an event and that it was possible to predict it.

It meant that post-analysis was easy, but pre-investigation might be harder to do and that the event's causes were forced to fit together.

But looking at my situation...

It was impossible to fit the string of causes together, even if the black swan's theory was being considered.

'Most of all, I can't disturb Aidan anymore because he's getting attention from the principal.'

Of course, I was the one who had suggested giving him award points to the principal.

But that was inevitable. I couldn't deny that the trio of Aidan, Leo, and Tessie were at the scene at the same time.

And what could have been the result if I were to punish Aidan thoroughly when the principal had not yet completely cleared me of her suspicions?

In fact, the principal did not like the aristocratic-centric atmosphere in Sören and was satisfied with the appearance of a commoner boy who played a big role.

'Moreover, although Aidan is a commoner, he possesses the rare Uncommon Magic.'

According to his data, it was his teacher—a wandering wizard—who had taught him when he was young.

It was a funny thing for him to be able to learn Uncommon Magic quickly just because he had been taught about it, and it was even funnier that his teacher was a wandering wizard.

If it wasn't a strange fate, what was it, then?

Anyway, Aidan was a boy who knew how to use such uncommon magic and had been secretly receiving the attention of the principal for a long time.

It was a dangerous thing and I would gain suspicions if I messed around with Aidan.

It was better if...

'Why don't I use Aidan?'

As with the Uncommon Magic that he had, I had a strong feeling that something about him would bring about all kinds of events.

The same went for his actions and his mental attitude.

—It felt like he was born to bring along righteousness.

I thought that a person like Aidan might be able to face the Black Dawn Society hiding in Sören.

‘It’s not bad, but I’ll just leave it open as part of the possibilities.’

After that night, I didn’t even know what Aidan thought of me, and no matter what method had been used for him to learn uncommon magic, he was still only a student.

It was better to watch over him for the next few days or weeks, judging from the severity of the situation.

It wouldn’t be too late to make a judgment then.

‘Let’s concentrate on my recovery for now.’

The voices had completely gone, but my body was still sore from the aftereffects, so I had no choice but to take a rest.

I was worried about class the next day, but at that rate, I thought my recovery would be almost completed by morning.

I closed my eyes while thinking so.

* * *

Terina Lionhowl frowned while looking at the burnt-out evidence.

All burned to the ground...

The site that used to be an abandoned factory was nothing but burnt traces.

“Captain... What can we investigate if the situation is like this?”

“It looks like everything got burnt.”

Just as the two lieutenants said, the factory was burned down, and there were no clues left as to why it happened.

Terina tapped the ashes with the tip of her military boots.

“As expected, this is strange. A fire breaks out in an abandoned factory where people don’t visit often, and everything around here has been burned down.”

“Did they burn down everything because they didn’t want to leave behind a tail?”

“I suppose so.”

When she heard the news of the fire, she had vaguely guessed that it would be like that.

Looking at the ruins where there was nothing left, something tasted bitter.

Terina patted her chin and arranged her thoughts.

‘The death of Belfort Ricksen... A mysterious thief... Werewolf... Fire in an abandoned factory... All happened the same day.’

All of those puzzle pieces were put in one place, and they formed a picture to a certain extent.

But there was a big hole in the center of the puzzle, the most important piece...

It was not known who was behind the incident.

“Lloyd. Were there any other cases besides this?”

When Terina asked him, Lloyd pushed the rimless glasses on his face with his fingertips.

Lloyd, whose hair was neatly brushed in pomade, had more of a scholarly appearance than a knightly one, so to speak.

And in fact, his main tasks were related to obtaining and organizing information and incident identification.

“There were no other special cases except for this one, but...”

“But?”

“I also heard that werewolves appeared at Sören Academy.”

“Sören Academy?”

It wasn't that Terina didn't know about Sören.

It was the Empire's best educational institution that fostered wizards.

Established with the full support of various kingdoms, empires, and magic towers, Sören was also a place with history and tradition that was over hundreds of years old.

In particular, it was also a famous place for giving equal opportunities to the commoners and those belonging to the lower class if they had the ability, not just for the nobles and the rich.

Sören was located within the empire, but it was a place that was free from the empire's touch.

‘Werewolves appeared in Sören, he said?’

“Yes. It appears that werewolves from Leathevelk infiltrated Sören through a sewer pipe.”

“It must have been a big deal for the students.”

“Fortunately, there were no deaths. There were about two people injured, but even their injuries didn't affect their lives.”

“What happened to the werewolves that hid in Sören?”

“The currently appointed professor dealt with them.”

“I see. If it's a Sören professor, then they're bound to be an exceedingly decent wizard. How about the werewolves? Is there anything left?”

“None. The professor burned them all.”

“Burned?”

For a moment, she thought it was similar to the burning of the factory, but it was too much of a speculation.

In the first place, it was common for flame spells to be used as the elemental magic to effectively eliminate monsters such as Cryptids.

“Hmm. Sören. Sören, huh...”

“Do you want to go to Sören? You might get some clues.”

Terina shook her head at Lloyd’s question.

“No. Not yet. For now, I’m focusing on gathering the clues around here.”

However, it seemed necessary to keep in mind that there was also one possibility in Sören.

“Someday, we’ll find out.”

That’s why she had come forward.

The people who were doing their activities secretly in the Empire...

She needed to uproot them and restore national stability—that was the mission and significance of the Nightcrawler Knight Order.

* * *

The classroom in which Ludger taught spellcasting...

The students gathered there while talking among themselves about what had happened last time.

Of course, the subjects of the conversation were werewolves and Ludger.

“Did Professor Ludger really hunt the werewolves?”

“They said he was a soldier. I heard that he also achieved a military achievement for hunting Cryptids, so it’s probably true.”

“Whoa. I already thought the atmosphere that he had was no joke from day one, so it was real.”

In addition, Ludger had stopped the fight between the commoner Lynne and the aristocrat Dynema Romley, and even his adult-like speech was also mentioned in the middle of their conversation.

Before the first day of class, Ludger's evaluation was not so good among the students.

That was because he hadn't said much about what he would teach in his class and had also announced conducting joint classes for the first and second-years.

He had boasted that they would know what he was about to teach when they came into his class, but how many people believed in that remark?

It was said that he was a new professor, so why would he be so confident?

His evaluation had improved when his past track record was revealed a bit, but there were still some negative judgments toward him.

However, the source code that he presented on the first day of his class was a groundbreaking spell.

From the moment he showed the spell, the students' evaluation towards Ludger was bound to change.

Not only did the students who didn't attend Ludger's class regret not taking his class just because he was a new professor and a fallen aristocrat, but there were also some students who tried to change their course time so they could enter Ludger's class.

Even the fourth-years, who were getting busy preparing for graduation, were rejected for applying to his lecture late.

As time went on, more conversations about Ludger's lecture circulated around.

Even fellow professors were interested in Ludger's source code spell, and rumors had been circulating that the news had also entered the magic tower.

The werewolf case was like a cherry on top for Ludger's achievements.

Among the first and second-years, the name Ludger Chelysie was bound to be known.

'Professor Ludger's name is mentioned a lot these days, huh.'

Elendil, who was still listening to the story about Ludger, recalled Ludger's appearance that day.

—The man who said the words he wanted to say coldly toward her, who held the status of a princess.

No, his attitude, which seemed rather oddly hostile to her, clearly made her dumbfounded.

No matter how she had done something wrong, he didn't have to speak in such a harsh way.

'Moreover, he actually treated my junior, Lynne, tenderly.'

At that time, the situation was so urgent that she decided to overlook it, but now that she thought about it, she felt it was somewhat unfair.

She couldn't believe that there was someone in this world who looked down on the princess and cared more for commoners.

Wasn't it usually the other way around?

Of course, such a thought came to her mind when she saw Ludger fighting with the werewolf under the moonlit night.

Just in time, the back door of the classroom opened, and a girl came in.

She had ash-gray short hair and relatively long side hair.

It was Lynne.

Her shoulder shuddered at the burdensome gazes some students had toward her.

Because of her incident with Dynema at the beginning of the semester, the aristocratic students did not look at Lynne favorably.

As a result, Lynne was in a situation where she went around alone without making friends.

Seeing that the seats in the classroom were almost full, Lynne had to go to the only empty seat.

It was the most burdensome seat since it was beside Elendil, the princess.

“Hello, Lynne. How have you been since that day?”

“I... I’m fine. Elendil.”

The seat next to the third Princess.

Even the aristocrats who wanted to make connections with the imperial woman were avoiding such a burden, yet the commoner Lynne sat there.

Even when Elendil greeted her in a tender manner, some students’ eyes were bound to stare at them profoundly.

‘What is that commoner doing? When did they become so close?’

Lynne couldn’t raise her head, as the gazes toward her were getting more intense.

‘Aaah. Why are they doing this only to me?’

To be frank, it was her honest feelings that she didn’t want to be involved with anyone.

What happened at the beginning of the semester was just something light.

No, it was not light, but it was just something that happened accidentally.

After her mistake, Dynema was punished accordingly, so she didn’t mean to say anything about it anymore.

But it was just uncomfortable for the third parties to step up as they pleased as if it was their business.

Because of that, it was not normal for her to be hated by the aristocratic students.

Creeaaak.

The front door of the classroom opened.

All the students shut their mouths.

“ .. ”

“ .. ”

Everyone sat upright and stared at Ludger, who was entering the class through the open door.

The man was exactly as looked on the first day. His movements were restrained, and his footsteps were silent.

The only thing different was his attire.

On the first day, he had worn a gray suit and a black frock coat along with a silk hat, but what they saw was different.

He wore a white longcoat with a black suit underneath along with a red necktie with the addition of a wine-colored scarf that was wrapped around his neck.

He didn't wear a hat.

His sharp gaze and sculptural appearance were clearly revealed.

The students were focused on the sight.

Some of the girl students stared blankly at Ludger.

“I'll start the class.”

Along with those words, a pile of papers that Ludger brought was scattered in the air.

A total of 80 sheets of paper flew in the wind and settled naturally on the students' desks.

They were printed materials by a copy machine containing what he was about to teach that day.

“Today, I will explain the basics and principles of spell casting, one of the specialties of the Elemental Property.”

—One of the four specialties of spell casting, Elemental Properties.

It was the most important field for the wizards, and it was also the most popular specialization that most people thought of when they thought about ‘magic’.

Even then, when magic had developed in various ways, the students would still think of fire, water, ice, and wind when they thought of magic.

In other words, however, it was the most basic knowledge that most of the freshmen who had just entered Sören had already learned.

When they heard that they were going to learn it again, the students’ reactions, who expected some marvelous class, were bound to be somewhat disappointing.

It was then that Ludger continued his explanation.

“But this alone will not satisfy your passion and desire for learning magic, so I’m going to show you a new method here today.”

“New...”

“Method?”

Was there anything they needed to know for the elemental magic?

When the students were all wondering, some of them who had already learned the advanced course noticed what Ludger was trying to do.

“This is a method to increase the power of elements that you can use from at least 20 percent to at least 80 percent.”

“There’s such a thing?”

They couldn’t dismiss it as a lie, as Ludger had shown his own unique ways so far.

“What do you think?”

Ludger asked while skimming over the classroom.

“Are you interested now?”

CHAPTER 37

ELEMENTAL PROPERTIES CLASS (2)

Some of the students looked puzzled.

It was also a bad thing to raise their curiosity and not satisfy it right away.

Ludger pointed to a student who was sitting in the front row.

“The student in the front row there. Are you Anthony?”

“Yes, yes! You are right. Professor!”

“Which one of the existing element properties can you use?”

“Th-that... water, ice, and plant.”

“Three, huh. It’s moderate. What are you most confident about among those three?”

“Well, it’s the ice element.”

“Then can you implement and showcase your ice element here?”

Listening to Ludger’s words, Anthony said yes and floated a sphere of mana above his right hand.

Basic mana release had begun, and the property of mana was genuinely embedded in it.

—A white sphere.

To be exact, it was akin to a snowball that was tightly squeezed in his hands.

“That’s normal.”

“Th-thank you.”

“It means that it’s insignificant.”

“...”

Anthony’s face sank sullenly as he listened to Ludger’s words.

“Look how I do it.”

Ludger floated a sphere of mana in his right hand.

It was a lump of ice that was similar to the one that Anthony had made.

It was very much the same as Anthony’s ice property, but something was different.

No, it was still changing.

“Can you feel it?”

The students did not respond to Ludger’s question—they were just staring at the lump of ice that he created as if they were being possessed.

If Anthony made a big snowflake...

The element that Ludger launched was much colder and sharper than that, and it felt like perpetual snow that was lying deep underneath the northern continent.

Ludger’s element was not a mere white round ice, but it was more strongly condensed and took the form of snow crystals.

The blue crystal emitted cold air around it, causing the illusion that the classroom itself would be covered with ice.

“Can you tell the difference?”

Ludger dispelled the crystal.

But the students still stared blankly at the place where the element had existed.

It was the same ice element, but Ludger’s and Anthony’s were very different.

Was it because he had put in more mana?

It was not like that... It was different in the efficiency itself.

And that's what Ludger was going to teach them that day.

"Something's very different, right?"

"How on earth did he do that?"

The atmosphere in the classroom gradually heated up.

They didn't understand well when they only heard his explanation, but when they saw the magic in person, they became greedy.

There was no wizard who would refuse the chance to improve their magic skills.

"Half of the two hours of today's class will be spent learning basic theories, and for the rest of the time, you will learn how to increase the efficiency in casting the element properties that I teach you."

All the students focused on Ludger's words with sparkling eyes.

"Before we go into the principle of spell casting, let's start with the basic theorem of Elemental Properties. It's in the content of the papers that I shared with you."

All the students looked through what was written in the handout.

"Element properties are so specialized in history and pedigree that they appeared immediately after the release of mana in spell casting."

Magic could only be used with the existence of mana.

And primal magic, the very primitive form of magic, was based on the casting of this mana.

That was the first specialization of spell casting.

It was Mana Release.

What developed from the Mana Release was the Elemental Property, which contained natural elements in mana.

“Now it has become a part of spell casting, but in the early primitive forms of magic, element properties were called the foundations of all magic.”

Ludger said so and floated four mana spheres into the air.

“At present, natural science has established itself as expressing the power of the system to suit one’s own magic, but when wizards were casting the element properties in the beginning stages, the emphasis was on the relationship between nature and humans.”

Each sphere of mana began to form a property.

Each was fire, water, earth, and wind.

“These are the first four properties. Compared to the current age where the number of properties has increased to more than 10, the number 4 is too little and simple. But we can’t just view these as mere properties. These four elements don’t mean pure elements, but they contain the symbolism of the people’s mindset back then.”

Earth was hard and strong.

Fire was powerful and destructive.

Water was soft and compliant.

Wind was freedom.

The students listened to Ludger as if they were being possessed.

Theoretical lessons about the origin of magic should have just been boring.

But no one thought it was boring.

‘Huh, I already know everything.’

Flora was unhappy with it.

As a person who knew all the origins of the element properties anyway, it was boring having to listen to what she already knew all over again.

However, even though she knew it, her pride was hurt as she saw herself secretly attracted to Ludger's voice.

'Really. What's so interesting about his explanation?'

"Since then, elemental properties have evolved and have begun to be analyzed with rational eyes rather than some natural symbols. The four elements increased to ten elements afterwards."

'He keeps going on and on about what I already know.'

"There was also a conflict between the mystical school that valued tradition and the natural science school that tried to apply modern science to further develop the element properties."

'He just has a handsome face and a good voice.'

"In the end, however, we have no choice but to adapt to the changes in the world. Not by the teachings of the school, but by where we should use this natural magic."

'...But it's still worth listening to.'

Ludger, who dispersed the mana that had been floating in the air, glanced through the classroom and asked a question.

"Do any of the students here know for what purpose the magic of element property has developed so rapidly for? I'll give five award points to the person who gets it right. The example is the flame element."

The students immediately raised their hands.

Ludger pointed to the students one by one.

"There."

"It's to light up the fire and drive out the darkness."

“Wrong. Next.”

“To burn and cultivate the forest.”

“It’s cliché. Next.”

“Oh, hmm. Is it to eliminate the primal fear of human beings that was symbolized with darkness?”

“You’d be better suited to writing poetry.”

Laughter broke out among the students.

Flora Lumos, who couldn’t stand hearing those answers any longer, raised her hand proudly.

“Right. Flora Lumos.”

“It was to burn something to death.”

At that moment...

There was silence in the classroom.

Flora’s words were that straightforward and shocking.

“Can you tell me exactly what that something is?”

“Of course it’s another person.”

The students rolled their eyes while being speechless.

Everyone there had the same thoughts: Ludger would give Flora a strong rebuke.

But Ludger nodded instead.

“Correct. Flora Lumos. You receive five award points.”

‘For real?’

Flora had acted arrogantly as if saying that it was nothing.

The students' eyes were staring at Flora before heading back to Ludger.

* * *

They stared at Ludger as if asking if it was true, so Ludger opened his mouth.

“What did element property magic develop for? It's to slaughter.”

After civilization was established and formed its shape, magic had continued to develop.

As the hierarchy was divided, the higher the magic hierarchy was, the stronger and higher the power to kill others.

Yes.

It was 'the power to kill'.

“The first target was monsters, but even after the monsters were driven out beyond the backbone of the giant, to the shadow of the continent, magic was still getting stronger. Why, huh? Because of Cryptids? However, there are very few Cryptids wandering around. So why is magic getting stronger and sharper?”

It was because of human beings.

Magic was developed to kill human beings.

War. Colonial rule. Violence.

That was the driving force behind the further reinforcement and development of magic.

This was the era of peace where the war disappeared.

So for the students who were learning magic, those words were taboo.

To compare magic with its history and tradition to murder people...

Ludger was like telling everyone there that they were a potential killer.

But that was a fact without question.

It was also a reality that the tradition-oriented wizards persistently denied.

“Fire is to burn people, water is to drown people to death, wind is to cut something, and electricity is to electrocute someone. The magic that developed with human history grew on the back of the driving force of war and slaughter. That is absolutely undeniable. Yes. After all, this element property that we learn is from the Tower of Babel that was built on the blood of countless lives and corpses.”

He took a breather for a while.

Then Ludger continued his words.

“You who learn that subject are the executioners of the slaughter.”

Gulp.

The classroom was so silent that the sound of someone swallowing saliva rang loudly in it.

As such, the topic that Ludger talked about was sensitive to all wizards and not only to the students who were learning magic.

“But we can change it.”

And Ludger’s voice that was heard...

Gently blanketed the whole classroom.

“There is no guarantee that we will do the same thing right now and in the future just because we did it in the past. Now that the world has changed, fire is not used to burn something. Take a look at the back pages of the handouts that I handed out to you.”

Come to think of it, there were handouts that he handed out as soon as he entered the classroom. They were so focused on the teachings that Ludger gave that they forgot about the handouts.

The students hurriedly flipped over the handouts and examined the contents of the back page.

There were crude photographs of various constructions that were printed in ink.

However, there was no difficulty in recognizing the photographs themselves.

“Fire is not just used to burn, but it also provides energy with its burning power. In the cold, fire is a symbol of survival, not destruction.”

The flowing water spun a waterwheel, and the river where the water gathered became a passage for countless boats to travel.

Winds provided wind power to the spinning windmills, and the electricity itself replenished energy and emitted light.

Water and ice washed away the heat in the burning desert.

“The meaning of element properties depends on how we behave in the future after learning it.”

Ludger’s voice echoed in the classroom.

—To build something, not to destroy something.

—Not to get rid of the world, but to lead it in a better direction.

“That’s the basic mindset you have to learn before you study element property.”

No one dared to speak recklessly.

It felt like a big wave came in all at once and swallowed their bodies whole.

But what they felt was not displeasure but rather refreshingness, as if something that had been weighing their head was taken off.

Even Flora Lumos stared at Ludger with her mouth wide open.

Although they were obviously just flattering words...

The feeling of that approach was different because Ludger did it himself and not anyone else.

“Use your strength for a better world. My teaching of element property class is for that.”

Ludger smiled at the students and stepped down from the podium.

“We will now begin to genuinely implement the element property.”

The students gathered in the classroom began to implement the elements.

What elements they were specialized in were basically discovered from the time they first learned magic.

The students who had been taught about magic even before they entered Sören did not have difficulty in launching their mana and adding their own elements into it.

Ludger slowly walked around the classroom and pointed out the elemental spheres made by the students one by one.

“Joseph. Focus on the flow of your mana a little more. The element itself is fine, but the mana that you released is immature. Are you a Sören sophomore? Don’t lose your concentration.”

“Yes, yes!”

“Irena Caromen. Are you casting a plant element right now? Plant properties must have the freshness of nature itself, but yours seems to be seen like decaying leaves on the ground in late autumn. Get your senses together. Make sure you have a strong image of the sprouts that have just penetrated the ground in your mind.”

“Yes...”

Ludger never spoke kindly. Every time he said a word, the students’ faces collapsed ghastly.

But what was more unfair to them was that Ludger was not wrong at all.

More than that, his advice was far too accurate.

It might have sounded harsh, but Ludger was looking properly at the students' weaknesses and at the same time provided a method on how to make them better.

At first, he seemed to hurt their pride, but if they reflected on what he said, they would find out that he was not just nitpicking their flaws.

However, it was true that Ludger's Spartan style teaching itself was frightening to the young students.

Whenever Ludger headed their way, the students were not able to properly implement their element property because they were too focused on Ludger.

Whenever that happened, Ludger's nagging could be heard.

"What are you doing now? Do you see magic as a joke? If you can't stay focused, it's not worth it for you to take my class."

"I... I'm sorry!"

"Pay more attention to your magic before you speak. Close your ears and keep your eyes on what's in front of you."

"Yes, yes!"

One by one...

Whenever Ludger passed by, the students' murmur spread like a ripple, forming a harmony.

Aidan, the commoner boy who took Ludger's class, sweated as he watched the professor getting closer to him.

Because...

That was because Aidan had yet to be able to express a proper element property.

Stop.

Ludger stopped in front of Aidan.

His sharp eyes turned to Aidan, who couldn't do anything.

CHAPTER 38

ELEMENTAL PROPERTIES CLASS (3)

I looked down at the sullen Aidan and was rather taken back inside.

‘What’s wrong with him?’

At first, I thought that he was going to rebel against me.

Was he expressing his subtle dissatisfaction because I had sent him away with wind magic when he had asked me to stop at that time and had been keeping it in his mind?

‘Looking at his reaction, I don’t think that’s the case.’

He couldn’t be acting with his face that looked like he was genuinely sorry and didn’t know what to do.

In other words, Aidan really didn’t know how to release his property, which was the basis of the element property magic.

I couldn’t believe it.

A rare Uncommon Magic possessor couldn’t do such a basic thing?

Wasn’t it like saying that a kid who was able to do backwards tumbling couldn’t even walk properly?

‘What should I do with this?’

I thought he was telling me to look forward to it, but I didn’t think it was the case when I saw him stuck.

Was it because of his Uncommon Magic that he was able to enter Sören in the first place?

'I can just ignore him like this...'

I didn't have to pay attention to those who couldn't even follow the basic lessons.

The more I did that, the more I wasted the precious time of other students.

Hadn't I said something when I let the first and second-years take my class together in the first place?

I didn't intend to be considerate of the students who couldn't keep up with my lessons.

It might be a good thing to me that Aidan, who might know my secret, was falling behind in my class on his own.

Yes...

I didn't have to show any affection to him.

The world, by nature, was such a cold place.

* * *

"Aidan. What are you trying to do right now?"

Aidan closed his eyes tightly while thinking that the time had finally come.

"Uh, that's..."

"You aren't even doing any element implementation. Are you going to rebel against me now?"

All the students' eyes were on Aidan and Ludger.

Ludger frowned and looked back at the students.

"Have the students who are paying attention to me and Aidan already perfected your own element implementation so you can look away from it? Then I'll have to remember your faces and check it out myself."

Heeek!

The students immediately turned their heads and began to focus on their elements again.

Aidan was drenched in a cold sweat and was at a loss as to what he should do.

Ludger spoke while folding his hands behind his back.

“Aidan.”

“...Yes?”

“Have you not been able to cast your element properly yet?”

“...Yes. Shamefully.”

Aidan wanted to hide in a mouse hole.

All the other students who entered had entered were following the class brilliantly, and he felt like he was falling behind and something was holding back his ankle.

Aidan was also able to enter Sören due to some kind of ‘exception’ that was applied to him, he still lacked basic things that others could do naturally.

“What elemental properties can you use? You know that, don’t you?”

“Fire, water, and wind.”

“Three, huh. That’s normal.”

Ludger thought he would be specialized in more elements because he was able to deal with Uncommon Magic, but that wasn’t the case.

It was basic common sense that the more talented people were, the more elements they could handle.

“Then let’s start with flame.”

“Yes, pardon?”

Aidan thought he had misheard Ludger's words. It was the same for Leo, who was sitting next to Aidan, and Tessie, who was sitting behind him.

"It means I'll teach you. I can't let the students fall behind because they can't follow my teachings from the first lesson."

"B-but I..."

"I extremely hate the idea of having such a person in my class. I don't take any disagreements. Focus."

"Ah, yes!"

"Gather your mana. You can do basic casting, right?"

"Yes."

Aidan nodded and made a sphere of mana.

It was a basic process that could not even be called first-tier magic that anyone could do once they were introduced to magic.

"Think of turning that mana into an element. As I just said before, it's a flame."

"I will try to do it."

Aidan stared intensely at his mana sphere as if that was everything he could do.

Tessie and Leo gave Aidan a cheering stare without saying a word.

"Hnnng."

However, it was difficult for Aidan to properly implement the flame property, no matter how much he was focused.

As soon as he thought that it wouldn't work like that, Ludger opened his mouth after watching him silently.

"Relax your mind; don't think about it too much. No matter how hard you try to think of flame in your head, it will still be hard at first, so don't just think about it with

your head, but feel it with your senses.”

“Senses...?”

“You can compare the characteristics of the flame to your individual senses. The first one is sight. Imagine the figure of a burning fire. Close your eyes and focus.”

“Yes.”

Aidan focused on the image of fire in his head after listening to Ludger’s advice.

However, it was not easy to think of the shape of fire that kept wavering in his head.

“Focus. Remember the moment when the fire was most intense in your memory.”

“Yes, yes.”

Since Ludger said that, it made Aidan feel like he had an idea of what to do.

Aidan, who was focusing his mind, was slowly able to bring out the most impressive moment in his memory.

—When he was burning the firewood in his country home, the senses he felt at that time.

A fire that was burning in the fireplace.

His own family had been watching it.

The scarlet fire at that time wavered and shook from inside the heater.

Ludger’s voice rang in his ears.

“Now think of the sound of fire.”

Instead of answering, Aidan followed Ludger’s instructions.

Crackle crackle.

The sound of fire and burning firewood in the wind.

The sound of fluttering embers put an end to the serenity and cold in the chilly air.

Ludger's voice was heard again.

"Next is the sense of smell."

No, it was close to guiding him deep into his inner side.

Aidan wandered deep into his unconsciousness.

The smoky smell of fire that was burning the firewood... At the same time, he could detect the subtle scent of charcoal.

Aidan's family had even cooked stew over that fire.

"Since fire doesn't have a sense of taste, think of its sense of touch. Recall the senses in your skin when you faced the fire."

Following Ludger's guidance, Aidan evoked the memories of his past like he was staring at a painting.

His senses which were being guided one by one clearly recalled the memories of his past.

And he could remember it...

Eight years prior...

In the cold winter when it snowed...

It was a day with a raging blizzard over the dark blue window outside.

Wrapped in thick clothes to avoid the cold, he had put firewood in the heater so that the burning fire wouldn't go out.

His two younger sisters had clung to Aidan while whining that they were feeling cold.

That was how the whole family had gathered in front of the heater harmoniously and eaten together.

His younger siblings chattered, his mother nagged, and his father smiled softly as he bore witness to such a scene.

—Even though they couldn't eat fancy food and there was a cold wind blowing through the gaps of their clothes that weren't properly sewn. Obviously, the memory of that time was as vivid as if it was just happening.

The fire was not hot.

He wasn't even scared of it.

Just...

The flame that he felt back then was so warm.

He remembered that he could spend a warm winter because of it.

“That's exactly it.”

“Ah.”

As if it was a ripple on the calm water, Aidan opened his eyes after he heard Ludger's voice.

And then he saw it...

The small flame sphere that was burning in front of his eyes.

“...!”

Aidan opened his eyes wide in disbelief.

It seemed to have summoned the warm flame that existed in his memory.

The flame was closer to warm rather than hot, and closer to soft rather than destructive.

‘Did I really implement this?’

“That's pretty good.”

Aidan was stunned by Ludger's praise.

It was the first time that Ludger, who had been brutally pointing out the flaws of the students who were called geniuses instead of praising them, complimented someone.

Aidan didn't know if he could call that a compliment, but Ludger spoke a positive sentence from his mouth.

Other students, who pretended not to pay attention while pricking up their ears, were also shocked by Ludger's words.

"The flame transformed beyond the ordinary elements to become your own flame. Instead of imitating others and blindly implementing only what others have taught you, you showed the element of fire that you felt by yourself. Aidan. That's your own magic."

"This is... my own magic?"

Aidan stared at the sphere of the flame he had created like a man who had sent half of his soul flying away.

Was it because he lost his concentration?

Fwoosh.

The fire disappeared like a mirage without a trace.

But it felt like its lingering scent was still in the air.

"Aidan."

"Yes, Professor."

"Don't forget that sense."

* * *

Ludger left such words behind and moved on to approach the next student.

Aidan was still feeling like he was dreaming.

Leo and Tessie, who were watching nervously from his side, tapped Aidan's arm.

"Aidan. You are awesome!"

"How did you do that just now?"

"Huh, huuh?"

Ludger's praise for Aidan fueled the motivation of the students who had yet to be evaluated.

Ludger glanced at the students and opened his mouth.

"I'm sure you've noticed, but this is the method I wanted to teach you before I went into this class."

The students all pricked up their ears.

"It was the application of your senses through your own experience."

The students waited for his next explanation after the words "application of senses".

"The elemental property should be based on a basic understanding of the related element. Even a three-year-old child knows that the fire is simply hot and the ice is simply cold. If you're a true wizard, you have to put something special in it."

"Something special?"

"Think of the elements that you want to cast as intense moments that you actually face, not as some vaguely encountered memories. Not just simply your sight but your five senses should also feel the elements."

—Don't just simply follow with your eyes.

—Feel the elements with your five senses.

When they followed his advice, the students responded with joy.

“Oh, ooh? It works!”

“Whoa! It’s much better than it was before!”

The students, who were happy to learn such magic, were more focused on not forgetting the lesson.

Ludger’s words were not a lie.

Their memories and experiences were combined so the elements were more carefully recalled and implemented, so an element that was much more intense than the previous ones was implemented.

Even the feeling of the element itself changed depending on their experience and tendencies.

The element was painted in their own color.

At that moment, a loud shout broke out from somewhere.

“Whoa. Crazy. What’s that?”

“Overlapping element? You’re already able to use that?”

Flora Lumos was at the center of the shocked gazes.

She had created that element with a confident expression.

To be exact, it was a combination of two elements.

Fire and ice.

The shape of the burning fire had turned into the light blue color of ice, but the ice was still swaying a little.

It was the so-called frozen flame.

‘Hmph. This is nothing.’

At first, Flora had intended to implement just one element properly.

Because she thought it would be enough for her not to be disapproved by Ludger.

She was already learning how to implement elements through her five senses, and because of her unique magical synesthesia, she was able to implement properties that were much more complete than others.

But when Ludger had carefully taught a first-year student and even given him a compliment at the end...

Something had heated up in Flora's heart.

Her pride had not approved of the situation.

'Let's see if he will compliment me as well.'

It was not enough for her to simply fully implement one element.

She was Flora Lumos.

She was people's favorite in magic who had never let go of the title of genius, even in Sören.

If the magic she casted was only a single element, it would obviously hurt her pride.

—So she casted two elements.

And those two elements were flame and ice, which could be said to be the opposite of each other.

If the two magic techniques were coordinated and woven together so that they did not infringe on each other, fire and ice could coexist.

Rather, each element's characteristic was combined to change into a new form.

Just like she had done.

The overlapping of elements was called the advanced level of Elemental Properties.

Flora Lumos could easily combine the two elements.

Flora suddenly became greedy.

Maybe it was because she was in a strangely good condition and she was spiritually high.

At that moment, perhaps... she could succeed in triplicating the elements, which she had been unable to do before.

‘Frozen fire... If I put the wind element in here and make it swirl...’

A magic that was created by overlapping two techniques...

Flora started creating another new technique from there.

—Three overlapping elements by adding one element to the existing two elements.

It was a magic that had always failed before, but somehow, she felt like it was going to work.

She was already laughing while imagining Ludger’s face that would be ruined in a good way for her when she completed the technique.

It didn’t take long for Flora’s complexion to change.

‘Oh, oh?’

Flora first ‘saw it’ through her own eyes.

As soon as the three colors were about to beautifully blend, they suddenly deviated from their shape and began to collide with each other.

Stench permeated through her nose.

It only meant one thing:

It was the moment when the magic flowed in a different direction than what she had intended and ended with failure.

‘No!’

In the end, greed only caused misfortune.

Three properties collided with each other, generating an intense energy.

Flora clenched her teeth and tried to suppress the energy, but it didn't work out as smoothly as she wanted.

The magic that was already beyond the threshold was out of her control.

As the three elements merged into one, they began to emit intense light.

"Oh, oh?"

"W-wait."

The intense mana was felt in the center of the classroom, and the students realized that something was strange.

"Flora? Flora! Hurry up stop!"

Her best friend Cheryl, who was sitting next to her, shouted, but Flora could not answer her.

Biting her lips, she could only desperately suppress the out-of-control mana.

...But it started to get harder and harder.

'I should block it, no matter what!'

At that rate, it would explode.

With the determination to at least avoid damaging the surroundings, Flora put a magic barrier around herself.

Even if the magic exploded, the magic storm wouldn't spread outside.

Then, Flora closed her eyes tightly.

At that time...

Her hands touched something warm.

“Oh?”

Flora opened her eyes.

Ludger stood in front of her.

While facing her, his hands gently wrapped around the back of her hand as he was holding the magic as tightly as possible.

‘How on earth?’ She was sure she had spread up a magic barrier.

Ludger, who had easily broken down the magic barrier, spoke while adding his mana.

“Focus, Flora Lumos.”

“Pr-Professor?”

“Don’t give up; control your mana.”

Flora stared blankly into Ludger’s eyes.

Despite the impending explosion of mana, Ludger’s eyes showed no sign of fear.

“Because I will help you.”

CHAPTER 39

FLORA LUMOS (1)

Ludger's mana gently wound around over the mana that was about to explode.

Blue mana wrapped over the white light that was at its bursting point.

The overlapping elements that expanded in all directions and seemed ready to erupt became a spherical form and gradually stabilized.

Flora was breathless while staring at such a sight.

At that moment, Ludger's voice awakened her senses.

"It's not over yet. Don't distract yourself."

—Ludger's thick and warm hands that were holding her hands together, and his reprimand that seemed to reproach her.

Flora came to her senses again and focused on dealing with her mana.

"If you stop here, your magic will disappear without you being able to accomplish anything. Do you want that?"

Flora clenched her teeth at his words.

The magic that was deviating gradually regained its stability, but if she stopped there, the magic would not become anything.

Ludger spoke.

He was telling her that since she had come that far, she should see it through.

'Yes. Rather than leave it as a failure...!'

She couldn't let the magic that she was trying to cast disappear.

Flora responded to him by squeezing out all her remaining mana.

In order to meet Ludger's expectations, who was helping her, she had to complete the magic.

Whoooong.

The three round elements gradually decreased in size and eventually began to take on the faint shape of something.

Flora opened her eyes wide to the sweet smell that brushed past her nose.

The color...

The scattered and wild colors returned to their original places.

No.

The colors went beyond returning to their original shape, they started to beautifully harmonize.

'Oh.'

She stared at the magic that was being implemented in front of her with trembling lips.

It had started due to stubbornness and sudden greed.

The previously failed triple properties...

Her reason for attempting it had been, in fact, a childish act to get a word of appraisal from Ludger's mouth, who had been looking down on her.

For Flora, who was born with a talent for magic, even difficult high-tier magic could eventually be achieved.

Therefore, magic was considered too easy and natural for Flora.

She was not pleased with her success,

She didn't dwell on her failure.

It was because any magical feat was something that she could naturally achieve someday.

She had thought that such a mindset wouldn't change.

She had thought that, even if she succeeded in what she had failed so far, she would feel no joy.

That's what she had thought.

"So you succeed."

Flora did respond Ludger's words.

She felt something choked up in her heart.

Her eyes were stuck to the finished elements.

The white wind revolved fiercely in an atomic orbit around the frozen flame like a sharp awl.

Fire, ice, and wind were combined into three superimposed elements.

Flora felt the illusion that not only her gaze but her soul was being swept away by the brilliant beauty that it created.

"It's beautiful."

Cheryl said so as she was watching the scene anxiously from the side.

Yes...

The magic that she had wanted to create was as beautiful as looking at a work of art.

Flora's reaction in particular was much more passionate than other students.

What excited her were more than simple senses of sight and smell.

It was the sense of spiritual inspiration that bubbled like a foam deep in her heart.

The sense of accomplishment of being able to cross the wall that she felt when she completed a magic that she had not been able to achieve so far.

Although it was not achieved by herself, she still could not resist her joy.

Ssssss.

The impressive magic soon disappeared into a colorful powder of light.

As she watched the scene as if she was being possessed, Ludger opened his mouth.

“Flora Lumos...”

“Yes, professor Ludger.”

Flora answered Ludger’s call calmly.

...But she was only calm on the outside, not on the inside.

She might burst into tears of joy if Ludger spoke an appraisal from his mouth right there.

That’s how excited she was.

“You’ve done something foolish, I see.”

“Yes... pardon?”

But along with the cold words that came out of Ludger’s mouth, Flora belatedly realized what she had done.

Ah.

She had almost put every student in the classroom at risk for her own greed.

As she was faced with the reality that she had forgotten due to the joy of her successful magic, Flora had no choice but to bow her head gloomily.

“Anyone who challenges and fails at a new magic can be like that, but it must be the wizard themselves who has to bear the cost of their failure in the end. Not the other students, but you.”

“...I’m sorry.”

What Ludger had said was correct a hundred times over.

She had almost put her other classmates in danger.

At the end, she had felt that she was responsible for it and put up a magic barrier to surround the exploding mana, but could she have completely prevented the damage?

If Ludger didn’t step up...

Someone might have died.

“But most of all, what I reprimand you for, Flora Lumos, is the amateurishness of your magic.”

“Pardon?”

Amateurishness of her magic, he said... What on earth did he mean by that?

“When you first overlapped the elements, you mixed the elements of fire and ice, right?”

“Yes. I did that.”

“Fire and ice are the opposite of each other—that’s why it’s hard to mix them together. Beyond putting up an effort to make the techniques not conflict, you also needed to create a stronger effect by harmonizing both techniques.”

“Yes. You are right.”

And Flora Lumos had done it successfully.

She had implemented a magic that became one by mixing opposing forces with each other.

“...Then what’s so amateur about my magic?”

Her voice was bound to be mixed with disappointment.

If he was just going to reprimand her, he just had to do it because of her excessive effort to triplicate her magic.

Why did he point out her perfectly accomplished overlapping elements of fire and ice?

Flora thought that Ludger might be trying to undermine his evaluation of her established overlapping elements using her mistake.

‘No, but even so...’

When she was in danger...

Ludger had helped her control the mana that was out of control after going through the magic barrier that she had spread.

Beyond the understanding of mana and the ability to see through the magic structure, if one did not have an excellent control of mana, it was them who could end up in danger.

Ludger had helped her to put up with that danger.

There was absolutely no reason for Ludger to just ruthlessly undermine her.

But she still felt somehow unfair about it.

She just wanted to hear a compliment.

As soon as she was about to be disappointed, Ludger created a sphere of ice and flame based on his mana.

“I’ll show you why it was amateurish starting now.”

Ludger combined the two elements that he created into one.

He adjusted the techniques so that the mana from the properties did not collide.

He combined the two techniques into one...

And he forced the overlapping elements to harmonize with each other.

Flora stared intensely at the sight so she wouldn't miss a thing.

The whole process was obviously similar to what she had tried before.

But the result was not the same.

"Oh?"

Flora's overlapping elements, which had simply cased the flame to become as beautiful as ice, and Ludger's overlapping elements that he showed were fundamentally different.

Flora Lumos compared the overlapping elements that she had created with the overlapping elements that Ludger created.

The combination of fire and ice...

There was certainly no difference in terms of the elements.

However, the results of the two elements were entirely different.

Appearance? That was also true, but fundamentally, the energy that was contained in the overlapping element itself was different.

Flora, who was especially sensitive to magic, could feel it more clearly than anyone else.

The color and smell were different from hers.

It was clearer and more fragrant.

"Flora Lumos. Do you know what kind of overlapping elements I've created?"

Flora hesitated for a moment and nodded.

It was impossible for her not to know.

“...Yes.”

“Then explain it.”

“...The overlapping elements that you created have a different dependence on mana. The spread of the flame and its power to engulf the surroundings and the coldness of the ice property coexists with it.”

“On the other hand, how about yours?”

“Pardon?”

“I’m asking about yours.”

Flora just moved her lips slightly and was speechless.

Eventually, Ludger spoke instead.

“Flora Lumos. The overlapping elements that you created was just magic that was beautiful in shape and had not the slightest bit of practicality.”

Flora shuddered at the scathing remark.

‘You don’t have to be so harsh.’

Such words surged up to her throat, but the moment she met Ludger’s sincere gaze, those words were swallowed all the way in.

* * *

“Magic should be practical. If not, at least, there should be no meaningless magic. It’s the basic foundation of all magic.”

Ludger had said as much before entering the lesson.

They had to use magic in a better way...

To make and achieve something, not to kill something.

—That would lead the world in the right direction.

“But Flora. How was your magic?”

“I...”

“Frozen flame. It’s a basic flame-burning form of magic technique surrounded by elements of ice. Yes. It’s obviously beautiful because the shape of a burning fire was frozen.”

Ludger spoke in his usual tone of voice.

“But that’s all.”

“...”

Flora had no excuse for that.

Because everything that Ludger said was true.

“Are you thinking of getting a job in a circus with this magic, or did you plan on going to the Crystal Palace in the capital and displaying your magic beautifully?”

“...It’s not like that.”

“Then what is the significance of the existence of your magic? Is it just a self-parade to show off that you can use overlapping elements?”

Self-parade...

Ludger’s point was irrefutable.

She didn’t know where she would use it, it was just a beautiful magic.

She was just proud about being able to use the overlapping elements, nothing less and nothing more.

“I’m sure I’d appreciate the fact that you mixed a wind element in it and gave some purpose to the magic to an extent, but even that attempt failed.”

Flora bowed her head at his last words which were full of truth.

Cheryl, who was sitting next to her, looked at her worriedly, but she couldn't convey to her any comfort in that situation.

Ludger scattered the Scorching Cold that he had created into the air.

The overlapping elements that climbed close to the high ceiling of the classroom exploded like fireworks.

Whirrrr!

For a moment, all the students in the classroom felt the illusion that they heard the sound of 'burning' ice.

Cold air that resembled white frost spread throughout the classroom without touching the ceiling and scattered subtle snow.

It fell down and melted away before it could reach the students.

However, all the students who had gathered in that place could feel it.

It was a magic that had extremely opposing elements since there was also a spreading flame within it.

It was the best magic to extinguish a fire.

"Flora Lumos. Your overlapping elements were quite interesting. I've never seen a wizard at your age displaying that skill."

Flora's eyes, which were distracted by Ludger's magic, turned to Ludger again.

It was the moment when she stared at the man's face who was looking at her with a pitying look...

She felt somewhat guilty and emotional.

"But the intention of what you did was wrong. I'm not talking about your skill. I'm talking about something much more fundamental than that."

"..."

“Do not use magic just to show off. That kind of action, Flora, lowers your value.”

“My... value?”

“Yes. This is heartfelt advice for you.”

He had been biting her harshly so far, but he was talking about value?

But Flora had no choice but to agree with Ludger.

The magic she had created was just beautiful in its outward appearance because of her intention to show off her skill in order to get a compliment from someone else.

On the contrary, what Ludger had made was much more practical, even though it had the same overlapping elements as hers.

The power of the flame also had its own firepower, but once it was attached to the other elements, it did not extinguish properly and spread in a flash.

Big incidents that happened due to fire always occurred from a big spread of fire.

Ludger had captured such characteristics with the chilly air.

The chilly cold air that spread like an infectious disease the moment it exploded...

The purpose of that magic was to extinguish and devour the spreading fire instead.

Considering that it was a magic that so far had been used to launch and shoot ice purely in the form of a weapon or to cause a wide range of snowstorms...

What Ludger had created was very practical.

‘I lost... again.’

She thought she’d get recognition that time, but she didn’t.

Let alone being proud, Flora realized how impatient and foolish she was.

‘I’ve never been like this before.’

Most of all, the sincere gaze that Ludger had shown toward her...

It didn't escape her mind.

It was an attitude of genuine concern, not intended to ridicule or to have contempt for her.

'Has anyone ever looked at me like that?'

No.

There were always only two kinds of stares that headed towards her:

Envy...

And jealousy.

Not to mention her own family with her brothers and sisters that she didn't want to see...

Even her seniors were jealous of her.

And so were Sören's professors.

Flora's talent had caught up with their teaching in an instant, even though they had learned magic for many more years.

Whenever that happened, the professors' eyes were always filled with an unbearable flame of jealousy.

Flora knew it, but she hadn't shown it outwardly.

Because that's what real talent was. There was no need to be joyful or sorrowful over the gazes of those who were jealous of her talents.

But she didn't mean to let it slide either...

So she had trampled on their pride while presenting them with a more overwhelming appearance.

She had thought that it was obvious.

But just then...

Flora was confused for the first time in her life by Ludger's unfamiliar attitude.

'Professor Ludger...'

He had saved her from her nearly failed magic.

He had helped her to overcome the wall of the three overlapping elemental properties which she had not been able to overcome until then.

Then he had looked her in the eye and given her a harsh lecture.

Flora belatedly realized that she was dizzy and out of breath.

Mana depletion...

She had consumed too much mana to implement the three overlapping elements of magic.

'I'm tired to death here, but is Professor alright?'

Ludger, who had suppressed the mana that was about to burst, would have consumed much more mana, but his breathing was still normal.

It was the first time...

That she felt a real 'wall'.

And the wall was so high and thick that she wasn't sure if she could cross it.

...But she didn't want to give up.

Flora felt a sense of competition.

Flora made a strong resolution to herself that she would definitely go beyond him next time.

‘What is this?’

Grit.

Ludger, who was chewing on the mana recovery pill that was secretly hidden in his mouth, trembled unconsciously.

CHAPTER 40

FLORA LUMOS (2)

After I gave my advice to Flora, I looked at the situations of several other students and gave them advice as well.

‘It’s not hard to teach them.’

The casting of elemental properties was the most basic subject.

Some may have thought that it was easy and nothing, but there was nothing more important than Elemental Properties to build a proper foundation.

Elemental casting used five senses that were close to a form that had developed with a framework at the ‘basic’ level.

‘Actually, I didn’t know that the basics would be that important either.’

The magical elements that were created by the mana that was used by the wizards were slightly different from the elements that simply existed in nature.

To be exact, the mana that was floating in the atmosphere was closer to imitating the elements with its strange power.

Of course, if the world recognized the ‘mimicry’ itself as ‘real’ and was hit by fire magic, the world would have been burned.

Naturally, it could be implemented with mana and did not occur naturally, such as the warm and cozy flame that was casted by Aidan a while ago.

In other words, the elements that were created with magic were fake and real at the same time—two literally contradictory characteristics coexisting with each other.

It was called the mystery of magic.

The elements that were created by such magic naturally followed the tendency of the wizard.

The ice magic that was used by cold and cool-headed people and the ice magic that was used by people who were full of passion and were hot-blooded would show completely different results, even if they were using the same spell.

Wizards who had traveled the world and experienced many more varied experiences could carry more diverse 'emotions' in their magic than the magic that was used by wizards who were confined to the corner of their room.

Right...

In the end, magic itself was more like putting human emotions into mana.

—Just like there are songs that have emotions and songs that don't.

However, as the magic of that time was only casted thoroughly by theory and calculation, the emotional method was a very old method that was no longer left in the history books.

Perhaps it was still written in an old and worn-out book in the far corner of the library in the magic tower.

It was not that no one knew such a method, but it was still a little-known method compared to what it was in the past.

I knew it because my teacher had taught me.

'My teacher taught me how to maximize the elements through the senses.'

It was a method that only I, the disciple, was informed of, and this dull-witted disciple was releasing his teacher's tips to the whole world in order to survive.

'I'm sorry, teacher.'

But if I hadn't done that, my life would have been in danger.

Anyway, magic was such a mysterious study.

'It reminds me of the first time I learned it.'

When I had first learned that magic existed in this world, I had believed that I would become a great wizard whose name would remain in history.

The fact that I was reincarnated from another world was enough for me to hold such hope.

Of course, such a dream quickly came to an end.

...Because I had no outstanding talent in learning magic by myself.

It was possible up to the basics, but that was all.

It was practically impossible for me to be a great wizard who would remain in history.

Therefore, I had no choice but to change my direction of learning magic.

Basically, my limit was easily using magic up to the 3rd tier.

If I overdid it, I could use basic 4th-tier magic.

If I looked at my level, I'd be at the beginning point of a 4th rank wizard, and that was my best and my limit.

I couldn't use magic beyond that, so I improved the quality of magic that I could use up to the 3rd tier.

That was the reason why I had kept strengthening my basics.

Most of all, I had memories of my past life, so I could look at magic with a slightly different perspective than the others.

—Source code was the representative example.

In addition to that, I had received Spartan-style teaching from my teacher, so I could be proud that the basics of my magic were more solid than anyone else's.

And the method that I had been sticking to so far had finally shone in Sören.

'At the time, I had complained about why they had asked me to do this, but now that I think about it, there's nothing better than this situation.'

Perhaps magic that used the five senses was a method that even the magic tower had not taught them.

At least, it was like a secret sauce of a famous restaurant that was given in hints only to the important talented people who were being promoted from within the cooking schools.

I had just made it public.

In fact, the students were also satisfied because there were noticeable changes in the outcome of their magic.

'But I can't let my guard down. Flora Lumos... Who would have thought that she could use overlapping elements at that young an age?'

Overlapping elements was not just about combining different elements.

It was a risky move that could have more serious consequences if the wizard handled it incorrectly, so the method of formulating the magics had to be altered to make sure they didn't collide with each other.

Therefore, when the wizard was using the overlapping elements, elements that were well-suited to each other were often combined.

Just like water and ice, fire and wind, wind and electricity.

However, Flora had overlapped elements that were opposite to each other, which were fire and ice.

Perhaps that was not enough for her, overlapping three elements, all of which had quite a high-level difficulty in elemental properties, was also attempted.

It was just not a skill that a wizard could show at that age.

I realized again that Flora was not called a genius in Sören for no reason.

'Even so, she almost failed.'

An out-of-control mana fluctuation...

I also felt dizzy from using too much mana because I had frantically suppressed it.

Fortunately, I was lucky that I had recovered quickly because there was a mana pill in my mouth that I had secured in advance, otherwise, I might have stumbled disgracefully in front of the students.

So I slightly felt like wanting to scold Flora, albeit severely.

In the past, I had also been very confident in my new magic creation when my teacher had shattered my confidence terribly.

At that time, I had done a lot of dangerous things to cast great magic.

When I thought about it when I was about to sleep, I might have kicked the blanket with my feet loudly because of it.

Flora, who had succeeded in overlapping two elements and was overly proud because of it, coincided with my old self when I had been learning magic from my teacher.

The memory of that time came to my mind and the panic button was pressed on its own.

That was also why I had pushed Flora a little too hard.

I belatedly thought that I was a bit harsh, so I said, 'Actually, it's because I'm worried about you. You know how I feel, right?' as an excuse.

'Maybe she's terribly hurt inside from that.'

But she was called a genius, so she'd get through it easily, right?

I decided to turn my attention away from Flora and focused on the rest of the students.

'As expected. Maybe because it was Sören, but everyone is already good at it, even though I just gave them a few simple tips.'

I saw some students who were particularly noticeable.

The first thing I saw was a student who was casting the elements of the compressed earth.

It was a brown-skinned girl with animal ears on her head who implemented an element that looked like she pulled up a vein of the ore that existed deep underground.

‘Was her name Iona Obeli?’

I had seen her on the first day as well—she was the only beastperson in the classroom, after all.

She looked back at me as though she felt my gaze. I just nodded lightly to express that she had implemented the element admirably.

I wonder if I had done something marvelous because she opened her mouth wide with an ‘ah’.

I ignored her and looked at the next student.

It was someone with a plant element.

A dark-blue-haired girl with braids and large, round glasses that were covering half of her face unfolded such magic.

She looked like someone who said ‘I’m good at studying,’ just through a glance, she was a girl who was sponsored by the alchemy school, and she had her own reputation among the freshmen.

Was her name Clara Haniss? She was pretty good, too.

Other than her...

There were twin sisters who were from a rather famous aristocratic family in the Eastern Kingdom, and there was even a rookie who was being sponsored by the magic tower.

Even that rookie seemed to have quite a sense of rivalry toward Flora Lumos.

'I heard that this year's freshmen consist of only amazing students. I'm entering the Academy at such a peculiar time, too.'

It was called the golden age.

I thought I had heard Professor Selena say that there were many such children in the first year.

And surprisingly, most of them were taking my class.

I was going crazy due to too much pressure.

I had a little hope of wanting my class to be somewhat moderate.

It felt like I was losing my energy because of teaching those smart kids one by one.

It was just then...

As the class was nearing its end, I found the only student who could not float the elemental property.

'That kid is...'

* * *

Her face was familiar; that was because I was bound to notice her bright gray hair and heavenly beauty.

She had been there when something happened at the first training ground the previous day, and she was also there during the werewolf incident.

But most of all, I knew that kid well for another reason...

I approached her.

"What happened, Lynne?"

"Oh. Professor Ludger."

"Is it not working well?"

“No, no. That’s...”

Lynne hesitated to answer.

Next to her seat was the princess, Elendil.

‘What? Did the two get close since then?’

Elendil shook her head in silence when I looked at her as if asking what had happened.

Then Lynne sighed and released her mana and floated the sphere.

Since Lynne was also able to enter Sören, she had basic knowledge and talent for magic, so it was possible for her to float the mana.

It was fine so far, but the problem happened afterward.

I precisely caught on to what the problem was.

“Your casting of the elemental property doesn’t work well, I see. No. To be exact, does the property itself not exist?”

“...Yes.”

Lynne was the possessor of mana without any properties, which appeared very rarely.

* * *

‘I’m doomed.’

Lynne was afraid that she might have taken up a lot of time pointlessly.

As she bowed her head like that, the clock bell rang in the classroom to announce the end of the class.

“This is the end of today’s class. Everyone, review what you learned today. I’ll replace the homework with that.”

“Oh!”

“But don’t try to get away with it. I’ve remembered all the properties you used today, so I’ll check them out in the next class.”

Some students, who were happy with the news that there were few assignments that time, hurriedly redirected their eyes when they met Ludger’s gaze.

“I will be able to spot those of you who don’t practice properly. I’m looking forward to that.”

“Thank... thank you for today!”

The students ran away from the classroom.

As soon as Lynne was about to get out of her seat, Ludger called her up.

“Lynne.”

“Yes? Yes!”

“You follow me to the professor’s office.”

“Oh!”

Lynne swallowed her breath unknowingly.

The remaining students looked at Lynne with pity.

In the spell casting class, the elemental property was the second most important specialization after the release of mana, but those without any properties didn’t work like that.

Perhaps he called her because she couldn’t carry out his lecture properly, so he would recommend that she attend another class.

That was only the second week, but Ludger’s class had already been rumored to be the best in Sören.

His teaching in particular, which strengthened the foundation of their elemental

properties, was enough to hedge the students' expectations.

Not being able to take such classes in the future went beyond just missing a teaching in Sören, it was almost half the loss of their life.

If they didn't know from the beginning, they wouldn't know.

It was a different level of problem to quit his class that they had already taken and experienced themselves.

Of course, most students were relieved that they were not the target.

The person concerned, Lynne, was about to cry.

Following Ludger, who walked slowly in the hallway, Lynne moved with quick steps to chase him from behind.

Lynne couldn't hide her ominous feelings while following Ludger.

'Why did he call me? Is it a personal interview? So is he about to kick me out of his class?'

Although it was only the third time she had seen him, including the incident in the training ground before, Lynne fully understood what kind of person Ludger was.

If she thought of Ludger's extremely sharp personality, she would be able to attend his other lecture in a good case, and in the worst case, she would be kicked out of Ludger's class.

'Aaaaah! I'm doomed.'

Lynne was depressed for some reason and bowed her head.

It was better to change her class as soon as possible because it was still at the beginning of the semester, but it was very painful for her to leave Ludger's lecture and not another professor's lecture.

She would not be that sad even if she happened to pick up a jewel on the road and had to throw it back on the side of the road.

“Come in.”

As they had already arrived at the private professor’s office, Ludger opened the door that had his nameplate on it and went inside.

Lynne entered Ludger’s office as if she was a prisoner on death row who was heading to the gallows.

Inside the office, the interior itself was quite sophisticated and neat.

The place resembled its owner, indeed.

That man used a place with an antique atmosphere.

“Sit down.”

“Yes, yes.”

Lynne sat on the sofa after she heard Ludger speak, frozen.

The leather on the luxurious sofa was obviously so fluffy that she should have been comfortable, but Lynne had no choice but to keep straightening her back.

Ludger sat at his office desk, and then he opened the drawer and pulled out a pile of papers.

Lynne closed her eyes tightly at the sight.

‘Aaaaah! As expected, he’s about to send me away to another professor’s lecture!’

‘Would he nag if I knelt down and begged him to let me take his class? What if he despised me more?!’

At the moment when her mind was getting more complicated, a thin book was being pushed toward Lynne.

Lynne closed her eyes tight and cried out.

“I will do my best! I’ll do everything you told me to do, so please don’t tell me to stop taking your class! I’m in trouble if I don’t take your class!”

Despite Lynne's desperate appeal, Ludger was unwavering.

"What are you talking about? It's not like that."

"Yes, yes? This... This is not a lecture change application form?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Pardon? I... I thought I couldn't take classes from you anymore."

"You're saying something weird. Just hurry and pick it up."

Lynne politely accepted the book that Ludger had given her with both hands.

'What kind of book is this?' With that thought, Lynne, who looked at the title of the book, had no choice but to widen her eyes.

[Understanding Non-property Magic]

The large letters on the cover of the book caught her eye.

CHAPTER 41

REVERBERATION OF THE PAST (1)

“O-oh? Professor Ludger? What on earth is thi...”

She had heard that those who did not have any property could not handle the element itself properly.

She had heard that people like her were so rare that no one taught them the method to use their ability.

So they had a book about non-property magic?

“Read it.”

“Yes, pardon?”

“If you read what’s there, you’ll at least see a path you haven’t known so far.”

Lynne still didn’t understand how things were turning out.

Why did he bring her to the professor’s office out of nowhere and give her a strange book?

“Is... is this for real?”

Lynne stared at the title, [Understanding Non-property Magic], with an incredulous look on her face.

As far as she knew, non-property magic was extremely rare and the method to use it had never been properly discovered.

When she looked closely at the cover, the book did not have any author’s name, nor even a stamp of where it was published.

‘Isn’t this fake?’

It was natural to have such doubts.

“It’s natural for you to doubt it.”

“Hm? Ah! N-no! It’s not like that...!”

Had it been revealed in her expression? Lynne hurriedly adjusted her cheeks and controlled her expression.

Fortunately, Ludger didn’t seem to have any intention of berating her.

“It’s okay for you to judge it after reading it first. It will be more helpful than not knowing anything.”

“There was no information related to non-property magic, even in the magic tower...”

“Did my source code spell exist in the magic tower?”

“...”

Lynne closed her lips to such an excellent retort.

‘So is this really real?’

“Wh-where did you get such a precious—”

“Fate brought that book into my hands.”

‘Fate brought this book into his hands, he said?’

Lynne’s head tilted slightly to the side at such a remark.

Was this something that could be ‘obtained by fate’?

Lynne was confused as she spoke to Ludger.

“...Uh, Does Professor Ludger know anything about non-property magic?”

Ludger, in Lynne’s observations, looked so natural in treating her that she had no choice but to think that he had actually encountered non-property magic by himself

and gained some knowledge about it.

She had expected that if it was Ludger, who had created the source code spell, then he might know something that others didn't know.

"A little bit."

"Really?!"

"I met a person with non-property magic once before."

"Oh my Gosh. I didn't know there was another possessor of non-property magic besides myself. So where is that person now?"

"Gone. That person is dead."

"Ah..."

Ludger's voice seemed to be somewhat remorseful as he said so.

At least that was what Lynne felt. The usually cold and sharp Ludger somehow felt like wet cotton at that moment.

Lynne became cautious as if she had asked something unnecessarily bad.

"I'm sorry."

"Never mind. It happened a long time ago anyway."

"Then... did that person leave this book before they died?"

"Yes. It is the result of their study of their own magic throughout their life. It doesn't even exist in the magic tower."

"Why did...?"

Why did he give it to her and not pass it to the magic tower?

Lynne couldn't manage to say the last words.

“Because she wanted it.”

‘Ah. So it’s a she.’

Rather than that, what did he mean by “she wanted it”?

Lynne suddenly wondered who the possessor of the other non-property magic was.

“But isn’t it better to hand it over to the magic tower from most people’s point of view?”

“Even if I hand it over to the magic tower, that place is full of greedy old people who will not acknowledge this book. No, some of them may acknowledge it, but they won’t show it to anyone else and they’ll just use it amongst themselves. It’s much better to give it to someone who really needs it—that’s why I’ve been keeping it.”

— It was to hand it over to someone suitable for the book someday.

Lynne saw Ludger again as she heard that response.

“I see.”

“If you read the book and practice hard, you will definitely discover a new path there as well.”

“Then... is there any way for me to learn the magic of the other properties?”

“As far as I know, no.”

Ludger’s answer made Lynne feel depressed for some reason.

Although she didn’t reveal it on the outside, Lynne also had a desire to use elemental magic that was as marvelous and beautiful as the others.

“Are you disappointed?”

“To be honest, yes. I wanted to try to deal with just one element at least.”

Others were able to deal with two, three, or more elements, and the talented people were able to deal with five or more than five elements.

Suddenly, Lynne remembered the appearance that Ludger had shown her in the class.

‘Come to think of it, how many elements is he able to handle?’

He had shown fire, water, earth, and wind, and had even used the ice element in the first session of the class.

‘Then... five elements?’

‘As expected of a Sören professor.’

“One element, huh.”

Ludger actually pondered what Lynne had said calmly, not knowing what was in her mind.

“Lynne. You said it because you didn’t know anything, but only being able to use one element isn’t something to be taken for granted.”

“Pardon? Isn’t it a good thing to handle at least one element?”

“Everyone, to be precise, wizards, is born with being able to handle at least two elements, so if they’re only able to handle just one element, what do you think they are?”

“Oh, hmm. Are they talentless people?”

“No.”

Ludger shook his head.

“Those who can only handle a single element are those who have limitless talents that are unrivaled in that element.”

Lynne opened her mouth in disbelief as she listened to Ludger’s words.

But Ludger’s words were not a lie.

Although it was only a very small minority of the wizards, there were those who

could handle only one elemental property.

But just because they couldn't handle other elements, it didn't mean that they were weak.

On the contrary, they were beyond it.

“Lynne. Do you think the elemental magic that a wizard uses can affect the magic of the same property? For example, could a wizard who deals with the fire element property subdue the flames of a hot fire?”

“Oh, that's not possible, is it?”

Lynne had at least that much common knowledge.

Being able to use the flame element didn't mean you could handle real fire.

It was also a factor that people misunderstood a lot.

—That if one was a fire wizard, it meant they could handle fire, so they wouldn't be affected by hot fire.

—If one was a wizard who's able to deal with metal, they'd be able to handle all kinds of metal, so they'd display great power in the war.

That was a false saying.

The 'casting' of an element and the 'handling' of the element were completely different concepts.

“Yes. Usually, that's the case, but there are wizards who were born with only one element; the magic they use is completely different from the properties of ordinary wizards.”

When the others could use at least two elements...

Single property wizards could only handle one element.

Instead of being unable to deal with other elemental attributes, they could 'rule over' the elements they dealt with.

“For the single attribute wizards who were well-known to the world, the magic tower gave them titles as ‘colors’ of the related element. It means that they were all the ones who had reached the peak of their own elements.”

“So that’s what it’s like to deal with a single element...”

Lynne fully realized that her knowledge was shallow and her face became red.

* * *

She would have looked ridiculous from Ludger’s point of view when she said ‘just one element at least’ without knowing anything.

Even the single element that she looked down on was such a great wall to her.

So did she really have to live like that for the rest of her life without being able to deal with any elements?

Lynne was frightened.

“Lynne. What on earth do you think about non-property magic?”

“Oh... Doesn’t it literally mean that they don’t use any property?”

Lynne pondered and answered according to what came to her mind.

“If you asked that question to a little kid passing by, you’d hear the same answer.”

“...I’m sorry.”

“People say that it’s non-property, but in reality, it’s not clear whether there really is no element in non-property magic.”

“Pardon? Are you for real?”

“A typical example would be sound magic.”

Lynne opened her eyes wide and tilted her head slightly when she heard the words ‘sound magic’.

“Does sound magic exist separately?”

“Yes.”

“But sound, to be exact, is a kind of wave that’s transmitted through a medium called atmosphere...”

“So do you think that it’s like the wind element?”

“That’s what I thought.”

“No. You’re wrong. Wind property and sound property are completely different. Although it’s derived from the wind element, the sound property is more of a vibration-induced wave, to be exact.”

“Oh, so they’re different?”

“Even if it is not through the air, sound waves still spread through the water. Does that mean the sound property can be called a part of the water property?”

“It’s... not like that.”

Ludger suddenly asked one more question since he was a little interested in explaining it.

“Then what is poison?”

“Poison... you said?”

“It’s a little more common than non-property magic, but wizards who handle poison are also rare. Can the poison they deal with be called an element of nature?”

“Oh, hmm..... isn’t it... plant element?”

“Then what about an animal’s venom?”

“Th-there’s also that.”

Lynne explained poison according to her knowledge.

“Hmm. Poison or venom itself is a kind of self-defense tool created by plants and small animals to survive in the ecosystem in the first place, right? Wouldn't it be a little vague to call it an element of nature?”

“Yes. With the development of science and chemical knowledge, it is unreasonable to see poison as a property of nature. But poison exists as a property. What is it if the mana itself decomposes something and melts it if it's not poison? If it's not a poison, then the decomposition property may have to exist separately.”

“That's... true.”

“However, in the top 10 elements, except for the non-property, poison cannot even be included as one of the elements. The same goes for sound. So why on earth is that?”

“Oh, is it because the number of people who are using it is really small?”

“If that's the case, then those who possess the magic of light and darkness are also included in the minority—they're rare cases, as well.”

“But light and darkness exist in nature.”

“Then I'll ask you. Lynne. What do you think nature is?”

“Pardon? Well nature is...”

Lynne tried to say something before shutting her mouth.

What is nature?

And what are the properties and the elements implied in nature?

Nature? Isn't that the world? But is calling nature as the world too inclusive? Then what's an element?

“Your face looks complicated.”

“Oh, hmm, yes... Now that I think about it, I don't think I can define it clearly.”

“Of course not. Because human beings can't define the world recklessly in the first

place.”

“Pardon?”

As she was listening to the words that seemed unlikely to come out of the professor’s mouth, Lynne looked dumbfounded for a moment.

Looking at her mouth widely opened mouth, Ludger spoke while maintaining his relaxed expression.

“Wizards judge themselves to be rational beings, and they try to put the world in such a frame to fit that rationality.”

“Th-that’s obvious. In the first place, magic expresses the mystery of human rationality and volition—”

“That’s what I call a stereotype mindset, Lynne. You should have a more liberating way of thinking. When do you think the metal element that currently exists in the top 10 properties appeared?”

Metal was not originally evaluated as a property element.

Metal was derived from the ground, after all. That was because it existed after being lumped together as soil and the earth property.

But as science progressed and all kinds of iron-made machines and tools became increasingly popular...

Metal was proudly included in the top 10 elements.

“That’s also the case for the ice element. Ice is just a change that happens when water eventually goes down to the freezing point. Then aren’t water and ice the same thing after all?”

However, in the end, the properties of water and ice were separated.

The same went for light and darkness.

“Lynne. You’re thinking is that the magic in the current age is already perfect and can no longer be improved.”

“Ah...”

Lynne felt like lightning struck the top of her head as she listened to Ludger’s words.

Her shoulders trembled, and she stood stiffly.

Up until then, she had thought that magic itself was something that could no longer be changed, something that had reached a distant stage.

But was that really the case?

Couldn’t magic change any further?

It wasn’t like that.

Ludger shook his head when he noticed that Lynne had finally realized something.

“You finally realized it. That’s the point: a wizard should rule magic, not be ruled by magic.”

Ludger rose from his seat and walked toward the window.

Beyond the transparent window, he could see Sören Academy’s landscape that would take charge of the future of the era.

It was definitely a great place.

But if someone asked him if it was a perfect place, the answer would be no.

“The world changes, and of course, we, as a part of the world, also change; the same goes for magic. The previous four elements have already developed into ten elements, but it doesn’t mean that those ten elements constitute everything. There may be unknown properties that have not yet been revealed. It could develop into 20 elements or maybe more than 30 elements.”

And it was a heart-pounding situation for not knowing when it would stop developing.

“The same goes for your non-property magic. Now it’s still a non-property, but later on, that may be named as a new property as well. If not now, then definitely at some

point in the future.”

Lynne had a vague vision of something as she listened to those words.

—Her successful appearance in the future where she had made great achievements in one field.

It was the image she had dreamed of, and it was so dazzling that her delicate hands unwittingly clenched into fists.

Ludger, who averted his eyes from the window, turned his body around.

Ah.

As she was dragged back to reality, Lynne unknowingly uttered an exclamation.

Ludger looked so different from the coercive look he usually showed as he was looking at her with his back against the light that was pouring down from the window.

The man who had seemed to be a pillar of steel was nowhere to be found.

Standing in that place was a magic explorer just like her.

“Don’t be afraid of being different. Don’t be afraid of the unknown. Believe that you can be a pioneer in history, and be different from anyone else.”

Lynne parted her lips to say something, but nothing came out.

Just as something heavy and huge was weighing on her chest, even her thoughts were muddled and could not be shaped into words.

But she didn’t feel stuffy or painful.

It was an extreme delight that she had never felt before.

Ludger’s remark tore apart the unsettling future she had been seeing so far.

There were no words coming out of her mouth.

But even so, she had to at least say ‘thank you’ to show him her gratitude...

“So do your best from now on. Make sure you read the book I gave you today. This is personal homework that I give to only you.”

There was a slight wind after Ludger said so.

The wind gently swirled around Lynne’s body, lifted her up from her seat, and guided her out of the professor’s office.

“Oh, I...!”

When she crossed the doorsill of the professor’s office, she could breathe easily again after the magic was lifted.

Lynne turned her body right back around and was about to say something to Ludger, but...

Click.

The door closed faster than her impending words of gratitude could emerge.

CHAPTER 42

REVERBERATION OF THE PAST (2)

After her face-to-face talk with Ludger, Lynne walked down the hallway with a dreamy look on her face.

She held the book of non-property magic that she had been given by Ludger in her arms.

Even though her consciousness seemed to be preoccupied with something, she instinctively felt that she had to treat the book precious.

Lynne, who was walking down the hallway with quick steps, stopped when she heard a voice calling her.

“Lynne.”

“O-oh? E-Elendil?”

It was a soft and sweet voice that had called her.

She was a second-year student who took the same spell casting class as Lynne, and she was the third princess of the Empire who was certainly the best on the continent and was even famous in Sören.

Elendil looked at Lynne with a worried look.

“What brings you here...?”

“What do you mean? I was waiting for you because I was worried. You were summoned by Professor Ludger.”

“Pardon? Ah, ah! Yes. Right. Hehe.”

“Hmm?”

Elendil felt even more suspicious at Lynne's strange reaction.

"Lynne... Did you experience any harassment from professor Ludger...?"

Elendil had not thought of Ludger's behavior prior to that in the best way.

It must have been because his first impression was the worst to her.

During the first orientation, Ludger had shown his guts by not telling the students what he would teach in his class. Because of that, there were a lot of talks among the students in <Akashic Records>, so his attitude must have been really surprising for them.

In fact, it was Elendil who had asked that question to Ludger first in a slightly sharp tone.

For her who had the right values of righteousness, Ludger's actions were simply unacceptable.

Afterwards, the teachings in his class were quite incredible, so she admired them, but that alone did not immediately erase her bad perception toward Ludger that was stuck in her mind at the beginning.

Rather, it was even more upsetting for her to see Ludger's unexpected cold-hearted attitude toward her in the werewolf incident last time.

It was obvious for her to have bad thoughts when Ludger took Lynne to the professor's office.

"It... it's not like that!"

Lynne hurriedly defended Ludger.

"Professor Ludger just gave me some advice...! Well, he didn't touch me or anything like that! Professor Ludger is not such a pervert!"

"Whaat?"

It was Elendil who was rather embarrassed when Lynne said that.

Elendil blushed and spoke in a rather startled tone.

“I... I didn’t mean to say it like that. Lynne... You’re quite sly, I see.”

“P-pardon?”

“I was just talking about him telling you to change your class or forcing you to take another class and kicking you out of his. I... I can’t believe that it was an intercourse between a man and a woman that came to your mind...”

“O-oh? W-wait! It’s not like that!”

Lynne also blushed full of embarrassment when she realized that she had caused a big misunderstanding.

As she was looking at Lynne, who was desperately trying to say something in embarrassment, Elendil burst into loud laughter.

“Hahaha. I get it. Since nothing that I’m concerned about happened, I’ll take it in a good way.”

“...Really?”

“So was there really nothing that happened? Nothing at all?”

“Yes. I told you that there was nothing.”

“Then what’s that book?”

“Ah.”

Elendil had noticed that Lynne was holding a book that she had never seen before in her arms and pointed at it.

She had noticed that Lynne Lynn had been handling that book carefully like it was something very precious.

Of course, she was bound to be curious about it.

“This is the book that Professor Ludger gave me.”

“Professor Ludger?”

Lynne nodded her head. Elendil opened her eyes wide, as it was a little bit unbelievable to her.

She didn’t know much about Ludger, but she never thought that he’d take care of Lynne when she couldn’t keep up with his class—mostly because of his personality.

She thought that he’d kick Lynne out of his class instead.

“Yes. He told me that if I learn this book, it would help me a lot in following his class.”

“Really?”

Seeing Lynne smiling faintly made Elendil feel even more incredulous.

‘Ludger did this much of a favor for her?’

‘Didn’t that man sharply and brutally point out the flaws of the students’ implementation of elemental properties in the last class?’

Of course, his words were all true, and she understood that it was his method of motivating his students by irritating their pride.

Elendil didn’t really like that kind of method.

‘Wait. I think he was especially nice to Lynne at that time as well.’

When the werewolves had attacked Sören...

She remembered that Ludger had been rather harsh to her, who held the title of a Princess, and had spoken a little softly to Lynne.

Of course, the memory of that time was slightly distorted because of her bad views toward Ludger, but the overall context did not change.

If she looked at the fact that he summoned Lynne separately and even gave her a book...

No way...

Elendil had some words in her mind, but she didn't say them out loud.

At that time, Lynne was concerned about something and asked a question in a careful manner so that only Elendil could hear it.

"Do you think that, perhaps, the professor likes me?"

"..."

Lynne actually uttered the thoughts that Elendil had only in her mind.

Elendil shook her head while contemplating how to explain it.

"No, that's not it."

"No?"

"Yes."

"I see."

Lynne also thought that what she said wasn't true.

However, after saying that, she had some doubts as well.

'Doesn't it mean that Professor Ludger likes me for real?'

If she said it like that, it sounded like she was boasting, but Lynne was confident in her appearance.

'But aren't I pretty enough?'

Lynne was actually a woman with a really beautiful appearance who could catch the eye of even a decent aristocrat.

Her hair color was also quite rare, but her heavenly beauty that matched it was enough to make Lynne's name known amongst all the boys in Sören.

Suddenly, Lynne imagined the scene where she was together with Ludger.

She thought that they would be a good match, but Lynne shook her head immediately.

‘No, no matter how good we might be... To be together with someone I don’t really know yet...’

Lynne had a quite strong conservative personality when it came to that kind of thing.

Elendil, who was looking at Lynne as she was shaking her head after showing a blank face all by herself, spoke carefully.

“Have you already eaten?”

“Pardon? N-no. Not yet.”

“Then do you want to eat with me?”

“Can... can I really do that?”

Lynne was elated at the Princess’s offer to eat with her because she had never expected it.

That was because she thought that if it was Elendil, there would also be other people eating with them.

But it was Lynne’s misunderstanding.

Elendil had rarely hung out with anyone thus far. Her status as a princess was great, but she was avoided by other students because the status that she held was so high.

There were students from noble families who occasionally talked to her, but they only communicated with her for political purposes. They didn’t approach her purely because they liked Elendil as a person. What they saw was the third Princess, not Elendil.

Yes...

Elendil was, quite frankly, a loner who went around by herself, even in Sören.

Because Elendil was like that, she courageously offered, for the first time ever, to eat with her junior who had become close to her.

‘Oh my Gosh. You’re the first person who has asked me to eat with them!’

And in Lynne’s eyes, who had been lonely all along because of the incident at the beginning of the semester, the offer seemed like a great mercy that was given by her senior.

Maybe Elendil thought Lynne’s delayed answer was a rejection, she twisted her blonde hair with her fingers and spoke.

“Well. I can’t help it if you don’t like it or feel uncomfortable...”

“No! I want to eat with you!”

At that moment, Lynne and Elendil, each for the first time, finally had a close friend with whom they could eat together with.

* * *

After sending Lynne away, I sat alone in the professor’s room and recalled my meeting with her.

I didn’t think she knew it, but I knew what power she had.

‘Non-property magic... It’s not a surprise that the property itself doesn’t exist.’

For me, non-property magic was a new form of magic that had never been discovered, so there was nothing new about it.

—Because magic had always been new to me.

Because I had lived in a world without magic before, the magic that existed in this world always gave me a mysterious experience.

Ironically...

I, who had memories and knowledge of another world, appreciated magic even more than the wizards who were the residents of this world.

The recent wizards with a narrow way of thinking were isolated and stagnant in their own lives.

Having experienced death and a new life, moreover, realizing that magic existed afterward, I was one level higher in accepting something than the others.

Should I say that the limiter in my brain had been loosened?

The other wizards who discovered the new magic would say:

-Non-property magic? There can't be something like that!

And even when they were foaming at the mouth, I would say:

-Non-property magic? This is a world where magic exists, so there can be something like that.

It had reached beyond the point of being flexible.

The perspective that I had and my way of perceiving magic itself were that different from the wizards of this world.

Even my strict teacher used to click his tongue with that particular topic when he was teaching me.

However, what I cared about while looking at Lynne was not her magic, but her eyes.

Non-property magic was just a part of her power.

The real power was her 'eyes'.

'Those eyes... No wonder I thought that I'd seen it somewhere.'

My old teacher had all kinds of antique books that were typically hundreds of years old that the wizards could no longer find about monsters and demons.

It was said that there were no monsters except for a few Cryptids, but in the past, the continent had been full of all kinds of monsters.

And there were even demons who had handled those monsters.

‘It was only a brief moment, but the eyes that she showed me...’

I recalled Lynne’s eyes.

Her eyes had a subtle blue color.

But when we had talked a little while before, I had noticed a subtle change in the color of Lynne’s eyes.

Among her deep blue irises, there were white lights that shone like the starlight in the sky.

Her eyes resembled the calm surface of the Milky Way in the night sky.

I was bound to recognize such peculiar eyes.

‘Eyes that distinguish good from evil, the Judgment Eyes. If I’m not mistaken, Lynne is the owner of those Judgment Eyes.’

The Judgment Eyes were eyes that distinguished the good and bad in others, and beyond that, clearly showed whether or not they had hostility towards the owner.

It was an ability that could not be called magic, but rather, it was literally close to miracle and mystery.

The greatest thing about the Judgment Eyes was that the owner could spot the ‘demons’ hiding in the cracks of human beings.

‘Right now, those demons are mostly treated as legends.’

To people of the current age, demons were just evil beings with red skin and horns on their heads that only came out in fairy tales.

—The product of lies to frighten children.

However, according to the literature, it seemed that the demons had actually existed.

‘There must also be demons in this world where magic exists. I died and came back to life again, so why couldn’t there be something like demons?’

And Lynne's eyes had a strong connection with demons.

I had seen with my own eyes that the Judgment Eyes, which were only written as a record, actually existed.

In other words, the existence of the Judgment Eyes that distinguished demons also proved the existence of demons.

Another characteristic of the Judgment Eyes was that, if they appeared, a big event would occur, regardless of the period in time.

Fortunately, Lynne's Judgment Eyes were not in a fully awakened state, and she probably did not know that she had such ability.

But one day, she would realize it.

'Is this also what they call fate?'

The book about non-property magic that I handed over to Lynne...

I didn't expect that the book written by 'her' would circulate and return to Lynne's hands.

I didn't think Lynne remembered it herself.

'It's a bit of a headache.'

The fact that I realized that she was the owner of the Judgment Eyes and the fact that I was being faced with the connection to my past again like that.

'I can't believe I'm getting involved in this kind of event in Sören.'

I got up from my seat with a sigh.

Suddenly...

Some thoughts came to my mind.

If Lynne could use the Judgment Eyes properly, she might be able to find all of the members of the secret society that were hiding in Sören.

The most threatening thing to me was especially the other First Order, who was still hard for me to identify.

I couldn't figure out who the hell he was and what he was doing, but that didn't mean I could ask Sedina Rothen about him.

'I intended to raise my guard as much as possible, but I need to be able to make a guess first in order to do that.'

Unless I knew where they were and what the other First Order was doing, I had to be as careful as I could.

But if Lynne's Judgment Eyes worked properly, maybe it'd help me a lot.

The Three Musketeers, including Aidan and his friends, plus Lynne...

If I use the power of those children cleverly, then maybe...

'No, never mind. Let's get off work for now.'

When I opened the door to leave the teacher's room while wearing my overcoat, I had no choice but to stop when I heard a scream outside the door.

"Aaaaah."

The dark-blue-haired girl was sitting on the floor with her hand holding her head as if her forehead had bumped the door.

Looking down at her, contrary to my confused inner thoughts, I uttered in a cold voice.

"What brings you here, Flora Lumos?"

CHAPTER 43

FRAMEWORK

“Flora Lumos, what the hell are you doing here? Moreover, you’re like a thief hanging around the door while hiding your presence.”

When Ludger pointed her out, Flora stood up quickly from her spot and coughed while dusting off her school uniform skirt.

Flora’s forehead was still burning red after Ludger opened the door, but she opened her mouth while desperately pretending to be okay.

“Ahem. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Professor Ludger. I came here just because I wanted to ask you something.”

‘Act in a proud and elegant manner.’

She acted while repeating those words in her head, but she couldn’t hide the subtle trembling of her voice.

Ludger was about to point the slight tremble out, but he decided to let it slide.

“I don’t mind if you come whenever to ask me questions about the lesson, so you don’t have had to wait outside like this.”

“No. Not that. I’d like to thank Professor Ludger, first of all.”

“Thank me?”

“I... uh... You saved me from a spell failure that almost went out of control.”

He was wondering why she was there. Was it because of that?

But she was there to say ‘thank you’?

Flora was furious when Ludger stared at her with a surprised gaze.

“Why? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Nothing.”

“Urgh.”

Flora felt very awkward about herself, perhaps because she had never thanked someone like that before.

Speaking her gratitude made her feel something ticklish in her skin, but she was determined to say it no matter what.

“Uh, thanks to you, I didn’t get hurt either.”

“I just did what I had to do as a professor.”

Ludger’s voice, which sounded so flat, seemed to say that he had never been the slightest bit interested in her gratitude.

Flora knew that it was obvious for him to be like that, but it also strangely hurt her pride.

No matter how he had no interest in it, couldn’t he at least ask if she was okay?

He was a man whose sensibility was so hard to find.

Still, she decided not to complain because she had gone there to apologize as well.

“And, uh... I think that professor’s words back then were not wrong.”

She said so while twisting her fingers in her bangs.

Ludger tried to seriously recall what her remark was about.

‘Not wrong?’

And he immediately realized what she was saying.

—What she meant was his nagging when she used the overlapping element magic.

-Use meaningful magic. Don't lower your value.

Was it that?

"As long as you knew that."

"...More than that, uh, are you alright, Professor?"

Ludger wriggled his eyebrows as he listened to Flora's question.

"What are you talking about?"

"You must have consumed a lot of mana. I was exhausted from suppressing the mana, too, wasn't it harder for you than it was for me? Usually, it should be many times more burdensome for the person who helps in that kind of incident."

"It was nothing."

Ludger said so, but in fact, he had almost fainted from mana exhaustion.

He was lucky that there was a mana recovery pill that he had prepared in advance in case of an unexpected situation, otherwise, he might have collapsed disgracefully in front of the students.

It was fortunate for him to have a lot of pills in case of lack of mana.

Of course, he was almost out of the medication that he'd prepared due to having to stop Flora's out-of-control mana.

'Well, I can just make those pills again.'

The place was Sören.

Obviously, there were places where people studied in pharmacology classes, and there were also pharmacology rooms in the research building where professors could freely enter.

Since the drug room, where the professors could make as many drugs as they wanted, was equipped with a lot of materials, the professors could just fill out the entry list whenever they wanted and do their experiments right away.

“Uh, how many elements can you deal with?” Flora asked while fiddling with her fingers.

“Why do you ask me that?”

“Just because... You dealt with five elements in the class. Isn't that a lot?”

Ludger suddenly wondered why Flora was asking him so many questions.

Most children who were geniuses did as they pleased, and they did not continue to have a conversation with others for long because they had a strong ego.

Ludger thought Flora was one of that kind. He also thought that she had tried to use the triple overlapping properties in the class before because of that.

Still, students are students.

They wanted to see how good the professor who taught them was.

Ludger pondered about what to say.

‘Actually, I think that I can handle most of the elements.’

The ten elements that most people commonly referred to...

Ludger knew how to use them ‘all’.

He could be said to be the opposite of a single attribute wizard who could only use one element and could achieve the peak of the related element.

—An all-property owner.

However, that was why none of the elements that he dealt with had achieved a certain level of proficiency.

He might seem like an all-around talented person to others, but Ludger evaluated himself as a jack-of-no-trades.

‘Even so, it'd be a problem if I said that I could use all of the properties here.’

Among the wizards who were in the history of the magic tower, the wizard who was known for dealing with most elements had only achieved eight.

The wizard had the official number one record that was specified in the <Wizard Book> that could be called the history of wizards.

But Ludger had already smashed that number one record.

If that were to become known, the magic tower would probably be overturned once more and be in chaos. If there was a short-tempered wizard, then they would want to dissect Ludger alive.

In fact, Ludger did not find it unusual that he could deal with all 10 elemental properties.

‘My teacher didn’t say anything nice to me in the first place, anyway.’

Of course, he was the number one teacher who had the greatest influence on Ludger since he was born again in this world after his life in the previous world.

He was the person who had taught Ludger magic since childhood, and he had also taught him how to live in this world along with giving him other tips and knowledge.

He had chosen Ludger as his disciple purely because he was unique and interesting, so he just thought of Ludger as a pet.

Even considering that, Ludger was quite grateful to his teacher.

However, he was such a cranky person that he only evaluated Ludger’s source code spell as ‘not bad’.

Of course, he was also such a teacher who had advised Ludger—who was able to use all of the top 10 elements—by saying, ‘If you go anywhere and show it off, you’ll get hit by rocks’.

So, under the serious advice and instruction of his teacher, Ludger never felt conceited or great, even if he knew how to handle all of the top 10 elements.

However, Ludger was objectively aware of the severity of knowing how to use all 10 elements, so he had not informed anyone about it.

So Ludger had decided to just limit it to the five elements that he had shown the students in his class.

“Those five elements are everything.”

“Five elements, I see... That’s surprisingly a lot.”

“Is that the end of your questions?”

“Oh. There’s also a question related to the source code: are you going to teach the source code to all of the students in the class?”

In the first class, Ludger had deliberately shown the source code and attracted the students’ attention.

It didn’t end just as a show-off, either. Ludger actually intended to teach students the source code.

However, he had not properly explained to whom, how much, and when he would teach the source code.

* * *

“Well. Come to think of it, I didn’t give you any notification. I won’t teach the same thing to everyone because this spell is like a foundation to me. There are conditions to learn it.”

“What are the conditions?”

“That I’m only going to teach it directly to the top five students.”

Flora smiled at his answer with interest.

“Five students, huh. It’s a little bit small... Still, the total number of students are 80 people.”

“Because the spell holds that much worth.”

“What’s the evaluation? Are you going to give the evaluation at the end of the semester? In Sören, the students are evaluated by dividing a total of four parts in a

semester. It'll be hard to decide because the rankings keep changing for each evaluation."

"I already anticipated that and came up with a method. It's this..."

Ludger immediately casted a spell technique on his palm.

It could have been seen as monotonous because it was made up of only white lines of mana, but the complex structure that it evoked made the spell not look ridiculous.

Flora also voiced a slight admiration for the color that she felt in the spell itself.

"It's... a part of it, huh? To be exact, it's a part of the source code spell that you showed us."

"You saw it precisely."

Ludger nodded.

Just as Flora said, the spell technique that he showed was one of the source code's main components.

"I call this the Framework."

"Framework....."

"That Source Code, the spell that I casted, consisted of a total of four Frameworks."

"Then are you going to give this Framework to the top 5 people in every quarter of the semester?"

"Yes. The semester is divided into four parts, and I will teach the four Frameworks in each part of the semester. In other words, the students who can't steadily reach the top five won't be able to learn the right spell."

In the end, if the students wanted to be properly taught the Source Code spell, they had to take classes with a burning passion, submit assignments steadily, and do well on the tests for the whole semester.

Realizing that, Flora stared at Ludger with a slightly bewildered look.

“...So you have carefully calculated it.”

“Did this solve your curiosity?”

“But can you really show this to me?”

“What do you mean?”

“The Framework that you casted... What if I’m analyzing it?”

Flora pointed to the Framework spell that was still floating in Ludger’s hands.

No matter how few other people saw that spell, it was unlikely for a wizard to continue exposing their spell technique like that.

It was impossible to do unless the wizard trusted the person they showed the spell to that much.

‘Oh.’

Ludger belatedly realized his mistake.

Wizards basically didn’t show others the spell techniques that they had developed for a long time.

If maybe they had submitted a paper or a patent related to the spell, it would be a different case, but if someone copied the spell technique and insisted that it was theirs, it would be a headache.

In fact, that kind of case happened frequently.

That was the reason why wizards thoroughly kept their own vision magic a secret.

Ludger recognized his mistake, but he decided that it wasn’t a big problem.

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Pardon?”

“It doesn’t matter if it’s you who saw it.”

Especially if the one he was showing it to was Flora Lumos.

Flora Lumos was a genius.

Ludger also didn't know if she was an actual genius because he had only heard it through rumors, but when he had only helped her a little bit with the triple overlapping elements in class, he had realized that the rumor was true when he saw her ability to complete it.

-Ah. She'll get first place no matter what she does in my class.

Even if she didn't get first place, she'd consistently be in the top five, so it wouldn't be a problem if he showed her one Framework anyway.

Because she'd be able to learn the whole Source Code spell.

"P-pardon?!"

But Flora took Ludger's words differently.

Her face flushed red and she soon began to stutter out of the blue, unlike her usual arrogant behavior.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-what on earth do you mean by that?!"

"Why are you so flustered? I don't think it's wrong. You're going to take first place in my class and get the Framework anyway."

"N-no, well, that's that, but..."

But it was foul play for him to say that.

Flora Lumos replied in a low voice so as not to be heard by Ludger.

It didn't matter if he showed it to her, he had said.

It was just like he had given her special treatment.

However, while she thought so, she couldn't stop her heart from pounding hard.

Even though she pretended not to be that blunt on the outside, the corners of her mouth kept slightly raising at the fact that this man was having a good view of her.

“Then I’ll be on my way.”

When Ludger turned his back, Flora called him unconsciously.

“Oh, Professor!”

“What else? Do you still have more questions?”

“No. That, it, it’s nothing.”

When she looked back at Ludger’s face, who was looking at her with an unwavering gaze, Flora’s face turned red as if it was going to explode.

Having heard such words a moment ago, she couldn’t possibly face Ludger.

Just by meeting his gaze, her skin became ticklish and she got goosebumps.

It was weird. She had never experienced that before.

Ludger looked at Flora with a flat gaze, who was embarrassed on her own and was at a loss of what to do, then soon turned his back and left.

Flora, who kept looking at Ludger’s back that was getting farther away with a vacant stare, was finally able to barely regain her senses and calm down her excitement.

‘Right. Calm down, Flora Lumos. You weren’t supposed to be like this.’

She was always arrogant and confident and easily made fools of others with her own abilities.

In Ludger’s case, although she had challenged him on the first day and failed disastrously and then lost again this time, her volition hadn’t crumbled yet.

Didn’t she make up her mind to exceed him next time?

She shouldn’t have been that feeble already.

Flora strengthened her weakening heart.

'Oh, come to think of it, I was going to ask him what he talked about with the commoner girl earlier, but I forgot it.'

Even if she pretended not to show her interest in it, she was curious as to why Ludger had called Lynne away separately.

CHAPTER 44

A RISKY BET (1)

After the pharmacology class taught by Professor Mary Ross ended, Aidan was immersed in practicing his magic while recalling the visualization of the elemental properties that Ludger had taught him.

Next to Aidan was Leo, who was clinging to him everywhere just like a best friend, and Tessie, who had recently joined the duo and often hung around with Aidan.

The trio materialize their own elements in the first training ground and worked hard to master the elements.

“Pheew. I almost did it.”

Aidan wiped the sweat that was flowing over his forehead while looking at the wind element materialized in his palm.

—The memory of the warm and cool breeze that he felt while running through the wide fields of his hometown.

Even though it was not perfect, the element in front of him was visualized nearly akin to the wind from his memories.

Aidan couldn't hide his excitement at the fact that he was able to visualize an element at that level, even though he didn't know anything about the elemental property beforehand.

It was all thanks to the method that Ludger had used to teach him.

‘As expected, he’s awesome.’

His advice was so practical that there was nothing that he missed.

Ludger's advice as well as his manner in helping Aidan when he had been struggling before was enough to touch Aidan's heartstrings.

'As expected, was it a mistake that I suspected Professor Ludger back then?'

Ludger's words and actions were always cold and frigid, but Aidan could feel how much he loved magic and seriously appreciated magic through his tone of voice.

People who liked magic couldn't be bad.

Most of all, if Ludger was a bad person, he would not have passed on such a precious method of visualizing elemental properties to his students that the others did not teach them.

'I'm not really sure yet.'

Aidan vaguely felt that there was something about Ludger. But even so, he didn't feel that Ludger was a bad guy.

Was it because his contradictory feelings had made his mind complicated?

The wind element that had finally materialized soon disappeared without a trace.

After smacking his lips, Aidan looked at Leo and Tessie.

The two were also sweating and eager to visualize the elemental properties.

It was because the two people were also deeply impressed by the warm flame that Aidan had shown in the class before.

Aidan didn't want to interrupt their good serious appearance, so he was only watching, and just in time, a group of students came into the training ground.

'Those people...'

Some of the students who arrived at the training ground caught Aidan's attention.

The person who had dark blue hair with a hint of azure color lingering in the hair...

The person who had a neat hairstyle with parted hair to show the forehead...

On the contrary, the one with white skin that even looked pale, with a sharp nose, and sharp, narrow eyes stood out the most.

He looked like a sophomore with his natural elegance flowing in his attitude, and all the students nearby him gathered around him.

'Who is he? He made the aristocratic students gather like that. He must be an extremely incredible person.'

While Aidan was watching them like that, the man turned his head and looked at Aidan.

Their eyes met in the air.

Aidan suddenly remembered what Leo had said.

Leo told him not to make eye contact with aristocratic students for long and not to pay any attention to them.

Aidan was not stupid enough to ask, 'It's good if we get closer to each other afterward, so why?' So he naturally averted his eyes.

The man didn't give any comment after Aidan did that, either.

Aidan had already taken a proper break, so he was going to focus on practicing magic again.

"Oh? Who is this?"

It then that one of the flocked aristocratic students approached Aidan and spoke in a loud voice.

Leo and Tessie, who were distracted by that voice, also looked at the aristocrat student while halting their practice.

It was a boy student who was rolling up the corners of his mouth as he showed a mean smile while staring at Aidan.

"Oh, you."

Just when Aidan thought that he looked familiar, he realized that the boy was apparently the eldest son of Baron Felio, who had argued with Aidan at the beginning of the semester and stepped down after hearing bitter words from Leo.

“Why is he suddenly acting like he knows us?”

Leo’s face quickly rotted as he recognized that boy.

Jevan Felio did not care about Leo’s question and deliberately approached Aidan’s party.

“Aren’t you Aidan, who wasn’t even able to visualize the elemental property properly?”

Jevan strongly criticized the moment when Aidan couldn’t visualize the elemental property intentionally.

Aidan and his other friends must have known his innermost thoughts.

“Hey, Jevan. We’re busy practicing magic right now, so why don’t you just get lost to that corner over there?” Leo replied with a cynical smile.

“Hah. I was wondering who it was, are you the arrogant commoner from last time? You two ended up hanging around together, huh?”

Leo’s eyes were staring at the aristocratic students, who watched the situation with excitement over Jevan’s shoulder.

They didn’t seem to have any intention of stopping Jevan. More than that, the man who stood at the center of the group kept disturbing his mind.

“Jevan. Are you trying to show a good appearance because the seniors are here?”

Leo knew very well who the senior at the center of the aristocratic students was.

In the first place, there weren’t that many gentlemen who held that much fame in Sören.

—Freuden Wolfsburg.

(TL/N: Change the prior translation of Wolburg into Wolfsburg to fit the context better.

He was the eldest son of Wolfsburg, one of the three Ducal families of the Exileon Empire that symbolized the wolf.

Leo also understood why Jevan had suddenly started a quarrel.

In order to stand out in that man's faction, who could be called as the center of aristocratic students, Jevan deliberately took action to create a deep impression about himself.

"We don't want to play along with your pranks, so get out of here right now. This is a space for practicing magic."

"A mere commoner like you. Don't you dare tell this noble-blooded body what to do," Jevan responded with a snort as he listened to Leo's words.

"It's because you don't understand the situation yet....."

"And it's Aidan that I'm talking to, so why does a little boy like you interfere with us?"

Grit.

The words "little boy" were just about the most triggering words for Leo.

Because Leo was especially short compared to his peers.

Some girls thought Leo was cute, but Leo extremely hated being treated like that.

For Leo, his small height was like an Achilles tendon.

"You..."

"Leo. Calm down. Just leave it to me."

Aidan stepped forward to stop Leo from getting angry.

At that rate, the situation itself wouldn't seem to end soon.

"Jevan, I don't know what's wrong with you all of a sudden, but please just pass by us quietly. I don't want to fight with a friend."

Jevan grimaced at Aidan's words.

"Friend? Why am I your friend? This dirty trash."

“W-were you not?”

“Are you crazy?”

That was why he didn't like that commoner.

* * *

It was also annoying to see Aidan looking at him with such clear eyes as if he was detached from the whole world.

“If you are a commoner, act like a commoner and bow your head in front of the aristocracy.”

“...Jevan. I don't know what on earth it is about me that bothered you, but I'll apologize about it here. I'm sorry. So can you just pretend that it never happened?”

According to Aidan, those words were him raising his white flag and they were his effort to be as considerate to Jevan as he could.

The boy didn't want to bring himself into a fight, as he had never been unprovokedly hostile to anyone.

Jevan responded with a snort to Aidan's words.

“Never happened? Alright. Then I'll let it slide, but you should do one thing...”

Then he pointed at his feet with his hand.

“Kneel down.”

“You...!”

Tessie stepped up, as she couldn't stay still watching his behavior that was crossing the line.

“That's enough. Don't you even have any dignity as an aristocrat?”

“What? How dare a mere fallen aristocrat interfere?”

Tessie's face froze at his sinister question.

"What?"

"Shut up if you're from a family that's too embarrassing to be called a fellow aristocrat family. I think I'm going to smell that disgusting stench."

"...Do you want to die?"

For Tessie, her family affairs were the most taboo topic.

But Jevan had salted Tessie's wounds as if it was nothing.

As Tessie's body was surging with mana, Jevan sneered at her.

"I'm afraid you're not even a fallen aristocrat since you're not properly educated..."

"Jevan Felio."

"Huh?"

It was none other than Aidan who called his name.

But Aidan's voice was different from usual. As his tone of voice was heavier, Jevan flinched unknowingly.

"Jevan. I can't do anything about your complaints toward me. If you insulted me with that, then yes, I could let it slide, but..."

Aidan strode toward Jevan.

His eyes that were blazing with anger glared at Jevan.

"Once you start messing around with my friends, I will no longer restrain myself."

"Ha, haha. So what if you don't restrain yourself? Oh? Okay. Then let's see."

As if he had been waiting for it, Jevan took a white glove out of his pocket and threw it at Aidan.

“It’s a magic duel. If you’re scared, just run away.”

Aidan shook his head as he looked at the gloves that hit his chest and slid down on it.

“Do we really have to do this?”

“What if I said we have to?”

“...Alright.”

Aidan nodded.

“Aidan!”

“Hey, what the hell are you going to do?”

Tessie and Leo tried to stop Aidan, but Aidan was serious as well. His instinctive intuition was telling him that he must not back down there.

His fight with Jevan was inevitable.

He didn’t want to avoid either.

“Good. Then bring it on. And the loser is going to kneel down and beg the winner for an apology. What do you think? It’s good, right?”

“As long as you promise to keep those words.”

“Hahaha! Yes! Whenever! As long as you can beat me.”

Jevan was confident.

Although they were fellow freshmen who were the same age, Aidan was a beginner who had not even learned the basics of magic properly yet.

Jevan didn’t know how the hell he was able to get into Sören, but he must have benefitted from being a commoner.

Jevan was confident that he could win against Aidan because he had been learning magic from his private teacher since he was young.

It was the moment when the fight between the two boys was about to take place...

“What are you doing right now?”

The cold voice weighed heavily on the shoulders of all the students on the scene.

* * *

I was on patrol.

Although the werewolf crisis was over, the patrol would continue for a while due to the principal's words that stated that she did not know when or what some other incident would happen again.

It was annoying, but it couldn't be helped, so I was just walking around with the thought of cooling my head.

No matter how many students existed in Sören, would there be more trouble just after the werewolf crisis was over?

—And it took me less than five minutes to realize how complacent my thoughts were.

“What are you doing right now?”

I asked cautiously, looking at the two students who were on the verge of fighting.

Yes. I was a little annoyed, but I still needed to hear the details of the situation.

So I asked it quietly without getting angry.

Some of the students' faces turned pale, perhaps because they did not expect me to show up.

Really. People would think that some kind of ghost had shown up.

“You two there, what are you doing?”

I asked while pointing at the two students who stood at the center of the incident.

One of them was especially familiar, and after I wondered who he was, it turned out he was Aidan, the brown-haired country boy.

‘...You again, huh.’

I would jokingly say that he looked a lot like a shounen character, but at that point, I thought he was really serious.

Was his opponent an aristocratic student? I think his name was Jevan Felio.

Seeing that he didn’t look that familiar, he was just a kind of guy of no importance.

I sighed.

“Just because you can’t sharpen your magic on the training ground doesn’t mean you can fight with each other here.”

As I approached them slowly, the students who were gathered nearby avoided me and opened the way for me.

Strangely, their treatment towards me troubled my mind, but I decided to just think of it as them getting out of the way on their own.

I just ignored Jevan and passed him by, and then spoke to Aidan, who was in the center of the situation.

“Explain exactly what happened.”

“Th-that...”

“This is a fair match!”

Then Jevan shouted behind me.

I looked back at him without a word.

Was it because he thought I was ignoring him? He was huffing and puffing while staring at me without concealing his anger.

“A fair match?”

“Yes. I’m about to have a magic duel with Aidan. It’s definitely not a fight.”

“Magic duel, I see. It’s funny that the first-year students who just came to Sören are suddenly having a duel.”

“Can’t the first-year students do that?”

‘Why is this guy being like this? Did he eat something wrong?’

I was a little confused when a boy who usually wouldn’t even meet my eyes properly shamelessly stepped up instead.

And I could realize why.

It was because of the other students who were standing behind Jevan while seemingly supporting him.

All of them were aristocrats.

One of them especially stood out the most.

‘That guy is... ’

It seemed like I’d seen him before.

Is he the Captain? He seems to be the one roughly commanding the men surrounding him.

He also looked at me and gave me a slightly odd stare.

‘A confrontation between the commoners and the aristocracy in the first training ground, huh. I’m familiar with this situation from somewhere... ’

I was thinking about why I was used to that situation, it turned out that it was similar to the fight between Lynne and Romley.

However, in the case of Lynne, it was a surprise attack, and with Aiden, I think they were about to fight with each other.

I had a headache.

It was not strange if boys were fighting, even in a world like this, but why did it have to happen when I was on patrol?

Moreover one of them was Aidan, whom I had even been paying attention to since before.

“Jevan Felio and Aidan. I don’t intend to hold you accountable for what hasn’t happened yet, so just let’s call it a day and go back to the dorm.”

“Professor Ludger!”

“I told you to go back.”

As Jevan spoke strongly while glaring at Ludger, he clenched his teeth to see if he could challenge the authority of the professor, even though he was having a noble faction on his back.

“Why don’t you let them be?”

It was then...

I heard a new voice.

The students’ eyes turned to the entrance that was the opposite of the entrance I had entered from.

I saw a man approaching while staring at me from there.

“Professor Chris.”

He was Chris Benimore, a new professor and a member of the aristocratic faction who had joined Sören with me at the same time.

CHAPTER 45

A RISKY BET (2)

The atmosphere that had been sorted out flowed strangely after Chris Benimore's appearance.

The response of the aristocratic students was particularly passionate, and the reason was simple:

Chris Benimore was of noble descent and a professor who pushed other noble students from behind.

Ludger stared at him and opened his mouth.

"Professor Chris Benimore, I don't understand what you're saying."

"It's not a difficult sentence to understand because it has a literal meaning."

"Literal meaning?"

"No matter how we're the professors, we can't control all of our students' behavior. Even from what I heard, it seems that both students are trying to spar on their own, but isn't it too much of an infringement on their freedom for a professor to step up and stop them?"

Ludger wriggled his eyebrows slightly as he listened to Chris's sly words, but it was also for a very short time.

Ludger sneaked a look at the atmosphere of the other students.

As he was looking at their reaction, he saw some students nodding at Chris's words.

Some even said that it was an abuse of a professor's authority to intervene in a fair spar with each other, even if the professor was Ludger.

'I got a sharp retort, I see.'

Chris Benimore was a professor who favored aristocratic students.

His appearance raised those students' vigor considerably.

Ludger decided to step back.

"Even so, it can be problematic for students to engage in an arbitrary magic duel without a professor's permission. If these students got badly hurt, it would be a loss, even for Sören."

"Of course, it's true. But how about this...?"

"How about what?"

"Both of us are going to observe it"

The students buzzed at Chris's words.

"Professor Ludger and Professor Chris are going to observe it?"

"Do we need to have a magic duel in front of two professors?"

Just imagining it made them feel burdened and frustrated.

Some students were confused, but the aristocratic students were different.

Their eyes were filled with a certain shine.

Since the professors said that they would step up and observe it themselves, they wouldn't be able to prevent the duel under the pretext of it being dangerous.

"Or are you going to stop me by saying it's dangerous, Professor Ludger Chelysie?"

Chris purposely gave a sarcastic smile to provoke Ludger.

"I didn't know you cared about them so much that you wanted to be overly protective toward them."

"It's not that I'm overprotective, I'm just considering the chances of possible danger."

“But if the two of us step up, such a risk won’t exist. What do you think? Those two students want to battle against each other.”

Ludger could roughly guess the situation from Chris’s words that seemed to have an explicit intention toward him.

Chris Benimore hadn’t thought of Ludger Chelysie in a good way since even before that.

Unlike Ludger, who was said to be the new professor in Sören from a fallen aristocrat family, Chris was still an active aristocrat.

For Chris, who had a strong aristocratic tendency, Ludger’s existence itself had annoyed him for a long time.

‘Ludger Chelysie... I haven’t liked him since the first time I saw him.’

Other commoner professors still acted accordingly as commoners—their behavior was full of rashness; no nobility or restraint at all.

But Ludger was different.

He shone more than anyone else on his spot. He was much more aristocratic than the aristocracy themselves.

He didn’t lose his shine, even when he was a mere fallen aristocrat. Chris didn’t like it.

‘What’s so good about the downfall that made him stand stiff with his neck tightened?’

Was he not even embarrassed about it?

It was the same when he had met Ludger for the first time. Chris had thought something was churning inside his stomach as he looked at Ludger’s behavior, who just nodded his head without showing any surprise at all when he saw Chris.

‘I didn’t like it when Professor Hugo wanted to ask him to join our faction either.’

Ludger had even declared in front of Hugo that he would not enter such a place.

He felt relieved, but somehow, he felt repugnant about it as well.

‘Such a place? What does he mean by such a place?’

What did he believe in for him to act like that? Chris had heard that Ludger had created a great spell called Source Code, but that was all.

Chris didn’t understand. The more time went on, his dark feelings toward Ludger only gradually deepened.

And at that moment, Chris got a chance to give Ludger a proper blow.

“What do you think, Professor Ludger? Isn’t it enough?”

“I will hear the opinions from the students.”

Ludger said so and looked back at Aidan.

It was a stare that seemingly asked Aidan whether he really wanted to have a magic duel with Jevan.

“...Yes. Absolutely.”

Aidan nodded with firm determination.

At first, Aidan thought he wanted to solve the case with nice words without having to fight, but Jevan had crossed the line too far.

How could Jevan say such a mean thing to his friend?

Aidan couldn’t forgive Jevan because of that.

Ludger looked back at Chris again while sighing inwardly at Aidan’s persistence.

“Since Aidan said he’d do it, I’ll allow him to do it under our observation like what Professor Chris said.”

“Oh, that’s a relief.”

“Then...”

“Oh. Professor Ludger. Wait a second.”

“What else?”

Chris had no intention of letting go of that hard-earned opportunity.

“Why don’t we make a bet as well?”

“Bet? That’s such a sudden offer.”

“According to my point of view, you seem to care a lot about that commoner kid.”

“He’s not a commoner, he’s Aidan. I hope you watch out for discriminatory remarks.”

“Ah, Aidan, I see. I didn’t know because he didn’t take my class. Anyway, I consider Jevan Felio to be a pretty talented wizard.”

It was obviously flattery, but Jevan already looked thrilled like he had taken that compliment sincerely.

Ludger replied in his usual cold voice.

“So what exactly do you want us to do?”

“To decide who will win the duel. Of course, I’m betting on Jevan Felio here to win the duel.”

“It’s funny that a professor said something about making a bet in front of the students.”

Chris was annoyed by such words, but he managed to hold it back and maintain his smile.

“So what do you think? Well, if you don’t want to, then there’s nothing I can do about it. Indeed, if I was Professor Ludger, I wouldn’t bet on the losing side either.”

The students spoke noisily at his words.

As Ludger subtly cared about Aidan, then naturally, Ludger and Aidan became rivals to Jevan and Chris.

Really...

Ludger found Chris's behavior funny.

He could have ended it by efficiently refusing that offer and walking away.

However, even if he did that, he would not be able to erase his regret afterward.

It was Chris who had encouraged the duel that could have been stopped in the first place, and it was Chris as well who subtly irritated him even at that moment.

He couldn't just ignore it and pass by, there were too many eyes that were looking at them, and Ludger was annoyed.

'Why should I step down?'

So far, he hadn't cared much about Chris—who had been showing his hostility toward Ludger—just because he didn't feel the need to do so.

Because he didn't have to occupy his mind with thinking of people who didn't like him from the beginning anyway.

But...

If those people irritated Ludger directly, then the story would be different.

'Yeah. I'll play along with you for a little bit.'

He had already wanted to properly check Aidan's real skills with the duel anyway.

Ludger nodded.

"Since Professor Chris wants it so badly, I'll go with such entertainment for once."

"Oh. That's surprising. I didn't think Professor Ludger would accept this offer. So, which student do you think will win?"

"Aidan, of course."

* * *

Aidan widened his eyes at Ludger's unwavering voice. Aidan never thought that Ludger would choose him there.

The same went for the other students.

On the other hand, Chris seemed to know that it would happen.

Well, he nodded satisfactorily as if he had looked forward to it happening.

"Good."

"What will be the outcome of the bet?"

"Outcome? Hmm. Well, even though we're professors in Sören, we're still wizards. We're professors who teach the same spellcasting lessons, as well."

"Spellcasting, you said?" Ludger asked back, as he was slightly surprised at the remark.

"..."

Ludger was asking because he really didn't know.

But Chris's face turned red because he had perceived Ludger's words as making a fool of him.

"This damned fallen aristocrat!"

The mere fact that such a shout didn't come out of his mouth was no different than a display of great patience for Chris.

That was one of the reasons why Chris hated Ludger.

Chris Benimore had gone into Sören to teach spellcasting class confidently. He was proud of that fact.

However, he suddenly found out that a fallen aristocrat named Ludger Chelysie was in charge of the same spellcasting class as him.

Moreover, Ludger was in charge of the second year, and Chris himself was in charge

of the first year, lower than Ludger's.

It was natural for a more competent person to be in charge of a higher year. In other words, Chris Benimore basically had been one stage below Ludger Chelysie already.

Ludger had even committed the atrocity of stealing a large number of talented students out of his class by allowing both first and second-years to attend his class.

He had every reason to dislike Ludger.

'How dare you think that you're going to be safe after humiliating me that much?'

In fact, Ludger was not aware of the actions that he had committed.

He didn't even know that Chris Benimore was a professor in charge of spellcasting like him.

That fact had trampled on Chris Benimore's pride even more severely.

Ludger understood Chris's behavior just barely.

'No wonder... I was wondering why he was strangely hostile toward me. So he's in charge of the same spellcasting class.'

It was no wonder that Chris was angry. He'd also be full of anger if he was being compared to a professor who taught the same lesson as his.

Moreover, he also taught the Source Code and elemental magic visualization through senses—tips that would normally never be taught in classes.

Chris barely calmed down his anger and fixed his glasses.

"Ahem. Anyway, let's each provide a part of the magic and theoretical fields that we've researched in the spell casting world. Oh, of course, it shouldn't be at the level of being an important piece of our research data, but shouldn't we do that much to make a bet?"

"Shouldn't you also specify how high the level of theory that we need to provide is?"

"We'll leave it to our own discretion."

“Our own discretion”. There was nothing more difficult to understand than those words.

It was like saying to put in an appropriate amount of ingredients when compared to things like food.

If he give a piece of information that was ridiculously useless, he would be revealing that his level was only to that extent.

But if he gave a piece of information that was too good, it might cause an enormous amount of damage.

In the end, the term ‘appropriate’ among wizards meant that it was right in the middle line that wouldn’t damage their reputation and wouldn’t make them suffer too much from the damage.

Ludger didn’t really care, either way, so he decided to accept it.

“Alright, but it’s too much for them to have a duel right now, so let’s take some time before starting the duel.”

“How long do you want to wait, then?”

“Three days will be fine. We’ll have an open duel then.”

“Hmm. Three days, huh. Well, it’ll suffice.”

If they waited longer, there was a chance for the opponent to take some kind of measure to counter the student they were fighting, so three days was the limit.

Even geniuses couldn’t learn new magic that was being taught to them within three days.

It was really all about analyzing the opponent for the rest of the three day period or maintaining the best body condition.

“Then let’s gather here again in three days.”

“Of course.”

It was an open match with the consent of two professors.

It was enough to spread a big wave throughout the entirety of Sören in a flash.

* * *

When everyone scattered to spread the rumor about the meeting, Aidan was at a loss when seeing Ludger, who was still in his spot.

Thinking that Ludger might have been carried along by the incident just because of him, he opened his mouth while being determined to at least apologize because he felt guilty.

“Uh, Professor Ludger. I’m sorry. Just because of me—”

“Never mind.”

Ludger cut Aidan off coldly.

“Pardon? But—”

“It’s already happened, Aidan. What you need to be concerned about right now is not how to be sorry for what has happened, but how to win against Jevan Felio in the duel.”

“Oh, hm. That’s right.”

Ludger’s words were correct because it was too late to regret the past.

But Aidan wasn’t confident about something.

He didn’t realize it when his anger surged, but when he thought about it rationally, it was unclear whether he could win against Jevan or not.

He was just a beginner in learning magic, but Jevan wasn’t a beginner.

“What are you contemplating so much about?”

Ludger glared at Aidan and cornered him strongly.

“Are you going to say you can’t do it now?”

“Th-that’s...”

“Aidan, you told me you’d do it yourself. Then was your answer back then just a lie because you were swept away by the atmosphere and had no choice but to say it?”

“...That’s not it.”

“Yes. Of course it’s not. I accepted it because I knew you were that sincere.”

“But a real fight is...”

“Different. Jevan comes from an aristocratic family and must have had a personal education even before he entered Sören. Both of you are already different from the starting point, so you also knew it well.”

Aidan was unable to refute the statement.

—Because everything Ludger said was right.

“However, it is too early to conclude that we will definitely lose. Aidan, what do you think is important in a fight?”

“Oh, hmm. I’m not sure. Is it skill?”

Ludger shook his head.

“No matter how great a person might be, it’s common for them to die at the hands of a person weaker than themselves. The world doesn’t just run because of power. The outcome of a fight could be overturned in a split second.”

“Then what on earth is it?”

“You already have it.”

Aidan shut his mouth at Ludger’s remark.

Ludger must have been talking about the Uncommon Magic that he possessed.

“You only have to use it at important moments.”

There was only one reason why Ludger easily accepted Chris’s bet:

Because he was confident that Aidan would win the fight.

“But I... I want to win purely with my skills!”

But Aidan was different.

Aidan was surely grateful for the magic that had let him enter Sören, but he didn’t feel like wanting to win the fight with it.

“Professor Ludger! Please give me a lesson!”

Aidan stared at Ludger with an unwavering gaze.

Ludger inwardly felt confused as he was looking down at Aidan with a cold stare.

‘Why is he like this?’

CHAPTER 46

A RISKY BET (3)

Honestly, when Chris first offered me a bet from a duel between Aidan and Jevan...

I hadn't shown it through my expression, but I was secretly pleased.

Because it was a bet where I was bound to win.

I wasn't saying that Jevan's skill was not good enough. He was also a student who was walking on the magic path and had entered Sören. Obviously, he had some talent and sufficient skills.

Rich merchant families and aristocratic students had been thoroughly educated since childhood, so it was natural for them to be far ahead of the commoners from the beginning of the semester.

Within just two weeks after the start of the new semester...

The time was still lacking for commoner students to catch up with the aristocracy.

But it was okay.

—Because Aidan was different from ordinary students.

I wasn't recognizing the kid as a 'shounen main character' for no reason.

'Professor Chris Benimore doesn't seem to know that at all.'

If he was in charge of the first-year spell casting class, he must have checked the list of students who were unique among the first-year students.

But nevertheless, Chris didn't value Aidan very much.

I realized one fact there...

Chris Benimore didn't even give the list of commoner students a look.

'He probably only memorized the names of students from noble families that he should care about the most.'

It was a disqualification as a professor, but I understood.

He was a person who was born as an aristocrat and had been living as an aristocrat and would continue to live as an aristocrat.

Of course, it would be unpleasant to put a commoner who lived in a completely different world from him in his memory.

Rather, it was quite wise for him to choose not to even pay attention to those commoners.

I didn't intend to blame him for either committing discrimination or judging them by status.

Because that place was that kind of world.

'But he must've never thought that it would hold him back.'

Aidan was able to enter Sören, even if he lacked magical knowledge, purely because of the Uncommon Magic that he had.

He received some kind of admissions benefit, but that didn't mean Aidan had a bad ability.

The principal wanted more students who had learned rare magic to gather in Sören.

'It is probably too late for Chris to realize what kind of magic Aidan learned.'

The bet was already settled. Insisting on invalidity was rather an action that would reveal his lack of information which he did not check in advance.

Even if Chris realized Aidan's ability afterwards, he would have no choice but to continue the bet.

'But what the hell is this guy saying?'

What? He wanted to win just by using his strength?

For a brief moment, I didn't understand what the hell he was talking about.

I had no choice but to belatedly realize how single-minded and righteous Aidan was.

He was a person who came forward to help even the werewolves who had threatened his life.

I was thinking of telling him to come to his senses, but I was slightly concerned about it.

'It might not be a bad idea to take this opportunity to check it out.'

I wonder what level it was that Aidan possessed.

Yes. Just as he said, if I only pushed him to use Uncommon Magic, wasn't it just pushing him to only rely on one tool?

It didn't seem that bad to make certain of his volition and talent for learning something new.

The casting of elemental properties was so basic that it was impossible to argue about Aidan's talent with that alone.

Then...

'I'll have to teach him something more certain.'

I glanced down at Aidan.

As he felt my gaze, I could see Aidan's shoulder shudder.

"Aidan."

"Yes, yes."

"If that's what you want, then fine. For the remaining three days, I will teach you how to prepare for the duel."

“Pardon? Are you serious about that? But that’s...”

“The dice have already been cast. Maybe Professor Chris will also give Jevan some advice or teach him some basic magic techniques. This isn’t a match between Jevan and you, it’s a matter of pride between me and Professor Chris. As professors... As wizards.”

“Then... Am I also going to learn magic from Professor Ludger?”

I shook my head. Teaching magic was impossible in the first place.

“There is no victorious magic that I can teach you. There are only three days left in the first place. That’s a ridiculously short amount of time to learn something in the meantime.”

Implementation of elemental properties was completely basic, there was no need to review it anymore.

“But that doesn’t mean there’s nothing for me to teach you.”

A duel between wizards did not happen purely with magic.

Speed of spell implementation?

Having a massive amount of mana?

Magic accuracy?

No.

Those alone were not enough.

It was nothing more than a preconception that when a wizard fought, they only fought with magic.

“Aidan, I’ll teach you how you should fight when you fight against a wizard.”

“R-really?”

“Yes, but the remaining time is three days. What I can teach will be a very basic thing

because the time is tight. It will be very hard. You may fail as well. Do you still want to do it?"

"Yes! I will do it!"

Aidan answered loudly in determination.

Yes. That was a good attitude.

Of course, I didn't mean to go easy on him, even if he refused to learn it.

"Then let's get started today."

"P-pardon? Are you sure?"

Aidan's face became slightly stunned because he didn't know that we would start right away.

I nodded and glanced at the two people who were watching both of us from a distance.

"The same goes for both of you."

"Pardon?"

"Us... us too?"

Leo and Tessie. When I called them, both of them were confused but couldn't refuse me.

Of course, it wasn't like Aidan was the only one who was going to move, and they seemed like they were going to stay together forever.

If I was going to improve the skills of one of them, I had to pour my teachings to all three musketeers.

The remaining time was three days.

Chris and Jevan must have been celebrating it early, thinking that they would win.

I had no intention of disturbing their toast of celebration.

It was up to them if they wanted to celebrate prematurely in their imagination.

However, would they be able to enjoy their freedom even after seeing what was going to happen in three days?

Just a little bit...

I started to look forward to it.

* * *

“Aaaargh. I’m dying.”

On a dark night when the sun was completely gone...

Returning to the dormitory, Aidan dragged his tired body to lie down on the bed.

He was proud to have never missed a single training since he had arrived at Sören, but Ludger’s training was beyond his imagination.

Was it because he was a soldier?

As Aidan recalled Ludger’s hard training, who was teaching Leo and Tessie along with him, he massaged his aching body.

‘I didn’t expect that I would use my body that much.’

What Ludger taught them was not spellcasting or spell technique, but it was literally how to use their body.

Well, they did use their brain.

It was because they had to use their body and brain at the same time.

Aidan didn’t know how many times he rolled on the floor in the training ground because of that.

He couldn’t believe he had to do that for another two days.

'Still, I feel like I've improved.'

Ludger's teaching was hard enough for him to overwork his body, but Aidan carried it out silently without complaining.

Because he instinctively felt sure that the method was helpful to him.

'More than that, why did Professor Ludger say he would trust me?'

Did it mean that he didn't think Aidan would lose to Jevan? Then what on earth was the reason for that?

'Is it because of the magic I use?'

There was that kind of probability. Professors basically had the right to browse through students' information.

He still didn't understand why Ludger had certainty in him with that alone.

Ludger had never seen him using Uncommon Magic himself, so why was he so sure?

The magic he learned was passed on by his teacher himself, so it would be hard to understand the magic just by hearing its name.

'Does Professor Ludger happen to know anything about my teacher?'

Aidan closed his eyes with that thought.

The day was so tiring that he fell asleep without even thinking about changing his clothes.

* * *

Two days later...

Aidan was running on the outdoor training ground until he was out of breath.

"Haah haah."

Ludger stood with his hands behind his back on the street where Aidan was running.

Aidan accelerated his run further as he saw Ludger.

Ludger, who was keeping his hands behind his back, stretched out his right hand.

At that moment, a white mana sphere flew toward Aidan from Ludger.

“Urgh!”

Aidan turned sideways while clenching his teeth as he looked at the sphere, and when he was about to cast a spell at the same time...

Tak.

“Oh?!”

He twisted his legs and fell on the spot.

Aidan had avoided the magic, but he had to roll several times on the ground.

Ludger slowly approached Aidan.

“Mana circulation and moving your body are separate things. Don’t try to overlap them, but perceive them separately.”

“Yes, yes!”

Aidan, who was covered in dirt, stood back up from his spot.

“You failed again this time, so do another lap. Run around.”

“Yes!”

Aidan ran around the training ground once again.

Leo and Tessie, who were resting on chairs in the training ground, stared at Aidan like they were looking at a devoting monster.

“Oh, my God. We are already tired and don’t have the strength to run anymore, but Aidan really has the stamina.”

Tessie was purely admiring Aidan's tireless physical strength.

She had been building up her physical strength even before she had entered Sören, but it was not at a level that was even close to Aidan's.

She had tried to catch up with Aidan by clenching her teeth, but she had eventually put up the white flag.

"He's very determined."

On the other hand, Leo was the first to take a break because he was physically weaker than Tessie because his body was small.

But Leo's ability to see things was sharper.

According to what Tessie saw, he looked fine, but Aidan had actually reached his physical limit.

Nevertheless, the fact that he kept running was probably due to his determination to not lose in the open duel.

"Hnggg."

Tessie listened to Leo and stared blankly at Aidan.

A boy who didn't say that he didn't like her even though her treatment toward him was so bad...

He had smiled and asked her to eat together and reached out his hand as her friend first like a stupid person.

She couldn't take her eyes off Aidan's appearance as he was working hard in his training—he looked dirty with all the sweat and grime, but was it too much for her to think that even that was cool?

Before they knew it, Aidan had already run around a full lap and rushed toward Ludger.

Ludger raised his hand.

'It's coming.'

Leo and Tessie were nervous at the same time.

A cold sweat flowed in their clenched fists.

Ludger's magic flew toward Aidan, who was gasping and almost on the verge of exhaustion.

It was a basic spell of Shining Stone.

It would hurt if he got hit, but it would be easy for Aidan to avoid if he just focused on the magic, as Ludger was going easy on him.

The problem was that it was not easy to avoid the magic while running.

But...

Tessie, who saw Aidan twist his body sideways in a running position and avoid Ludger's magic, jumped up from her seat unconsciously.

"He avoided it!"

"Not yet. The important thing is the next step."

It was as Leo said.

—Aidan needed to avoid the magic and then strike back.

Aidan immediately gathered his mana. Without stopping his run, he used his mana and deployed a spell technique.

It was a technique that required a wizard to use their head and body separately in order to cast magic while moving their body.

At first glance, it might seem simple, but nothing was more difficult than that for a person who had not yet mastered magic properly.

It was more difficult than drawing a square with one hand and a triangle with the other hand.

—A division of thought.

And he had to move his body and cast the magic separately.

‘Aidan. If it’s you, you can do it.’

Leo clenched his fist.

A wizard must concentrate his mind to the extreme in order to cast their spell—that was why the process of carving magic was important.

—Because a wizard couldn’t move when they used magic.

That was why wizards were always exposed to danger.

Wizards had taken the method of wrapping a barrier around themselves or shortening their spellcasting so they could safely cast their magic.

However, there were some people who took a completely different method.

There were people who thought that if it was dangerous if they could not move when using magic, they should just use magic while moving.

They were wizards, but they did not just stay still but practiced their magic by training their bodies to the limit.

Unlike those who learned and explored magic, they were eccentric people who moved around the world and adventurers who always challenged the unknown to fights.

—War Mages.

The method that Ludger taught him was Moving Magus, the most basic way of fighting that those war mages learned.

“Hap!”

Aidan took a deep breath and boosted his mana.

He did not stop his legs from running; he didn’t even have time to catch his breath.

There was no need to talk. The important thing was his will.

He moved his body and charged his mana separately at the same time.

A magic emerged on Aidan's hands, who was running nonstop. Leo and Tessie, who were watching the scene from a distance, opened their eyes and mouths wide.

And the spell that Aidan casted...

It was a basic first-tier spell, the same Shining Stone that Ludger shot at him.

Even though it was more insignificant than Ludger's spell and more like a blurry spell than a shining one...

He clearly casted the spell properly and it flew towards Ludger.

Baam!

However, Ludger lifted his gloved right hand and grabbed Aidan's Shining Stone easily.

Leo and Tessie, who were watching the scene, unwittingly exclaimed, "Ah!" and expressed their frustrations.

They thought he could land at least one shot.

"Haah, haah."

Aidan, who was gasping, stopped in front of Ludger and regained his breath.

"Aidan."

"Haah, haah. Yes, Professor."

"You passed."

Drop.

As soon as he heard Ludger's answer, Aidan sprawled on the ground.

—With a complacent smile that he finally did it.

“The duel is tomorrow, so get enough rest for the last time today.”

“Haah. Haah.”

Aidan couldn't afford to answer that.

Ludger smirked at the sight and turned his back.

“If it's you, then you can do it.”

Aidan was too tired and couldn't hear it.

CHAPTER 47

STUDENTS' DUEL (1)

Chris Benimore, who received a letter in his private office, read the letter once and immediately burned it down.

“Yeah. As expected, I already knew it.”

The report had been sent by a Sören employee

The content of the report was news on Ludger Chelysie.

“He’s eagerly teaching that commoner kid? He’s desperate to win the bet even though he pretended not to be like that, I see.”

He muttered and laughed at Ludger’s desperate attempt, but Chris Benimore didn’t stay still, either.

He turned his head and looked at the boy who was standing nervously in front of him.

“Jevan Felio.”

“Yes!”

“I think you already know what I want to tell you.”

Jevan nodded his head with a determined look.

“Yes. I know it. I have to win this open duel against that arrogant commoner.”

“Just winning the duel is not enough. You should properly show the gap between aristocrats and commoners with overwhelming power.”

It was a rather hard request to the point that it felt burdensome, but Jevan Felio did not think he would fail.

When he heard that Aidan was being taught something by Ludger Chelysie, he was somewhat anxious, but he had Chris Benimore by his side.

“Take it.”

Chris threw a chemical bottle at Jevan.

“This, this is?” Jevan asked back with a bewildered face while looking at the blue liquid filled inside the bottle.

“It’s a mana boosting drug. Drink it before you enter the duel.”

“A-are you for real? But won’t I be disqualified if I drink this?”

“No. It’s alright. It’s the specialty of the Benimore clan to not leave a trace if you take the drug in advance, so you won’t get caught.”

“This...”

“If you drink it, it will boost your power instantly, but it lasts less than five minutes.”

“Five minutes, huh. It’s quite short, I see,”

“Yes. Of course, it’s short. That’s why you won’t even get caught in the preliminary examination. It doesn’t boost your existing mana, but it increases the limit of your mana output, so it’s closer to drawing out your mana. The trace of the drug will disappear immediately, leaving only its effect, so watch out for mana exhaustion after half an hour.”

Jevan gulped at Chris’s words.

In fact, it was more like a drug that allowed him to use the mana that he possessed all at once.

His pride did not allow him to drink such a drug to go against a mere commoner, but...

‘But if it’s for a definitive victory...’

Since Ludger was behind him anyway, he might have received something just like

Jevan.

Because he was a dirty commoner...

He might commit a very serious foul play.

Jevan put the boosting drug in his pocket with a stiff face while thinking so.

Chris laughed at the sight.

“Well thought out. Now, shall we go?”

* * *

More than half of the seats at the second training center were filled with people who came to see the day's freshmen's magic duel which was about to be held in public.

Most of the first-year students had gathered, and that time, the second-year students and other professors were also unexpectedly gathered in between.

If it was just a fight between the first-years, they would have just passed it by, but if it was a duel where the two professors officially gave them permission and observed it, then it was a different story.

Ludger Chelysie...

Chris Benimore...

The two professors had just been appointed to Sören, and they both had something in common: they were in charge of spellcasting class.

However, one of them was a fallen aristocrat, and the other one was a prestigious high-ranking Count.

They had a considerable difference in their status.

Moreover, Ludger supported commoners, and Chris Benimore supported the aristocracy.

The upcoming duel went beyond a mere fight between new students into a single-

round match between commoners and aristocracy.

“In the end, who will win?”

“Isn’t this a fight between freshmen? Then the aristocracy side has more of an advantage. They have been receiving a private education from a young age, right?”

“But I heard that the commoner freshmen who entered Sören this time can’t be looked down either, though? I heard he also made a great contribution in the werewolf incident last time.”

“But he still didn’t catch the werewolves, can he be the aristocracy’s opponent?”

“We don’t know, right? People had been talking a lot about how Professor Ludger helped him.”

“In that case, Professor Chris is helping the other side, though?”

“I don’t really know that Professor. Is he in charge of the first-year students?”

“Yeah. They’re teaching the same spellcasting class anyway, but I think he’s quite determined when compared to Professor Ludger.”

“You totally got me.”

While they were talking like that, the people’s eyes were heading to the upper seats among the audience where only the professors could sit.

“Hey. Look, look. They came.”

“Oh. It’s for real, huh?”

Chris Benimore, who had just entered the professor’s seat, sat calmly while keeping his dignity as an aristocrat.

Because of his intelligent appearance, the girl students’ eyes naturally followed Chris with admiration.

Chris also subtly enjoyed such gazes.

The way they looked up at him made him realize that he was a greater man.

At that moment, the students' buzz grew louder—the buzz was quite different from when Chris had shown up.

'What?'

Chris wondered who it was, and it turned out it was that man.

Ludger Chelysie.

—A man with long, black long hair that was tied into a ponytail.

—His sharp jawline and high nose bridge.

—His vigorous facial features and deep, calm eyes that made women's hearts cry.

—His black, cotton pants and black dress shirt. His necktie was black as well, and even the long coat on top of it was also black.

His overall impression came from the combination of black color, which literally reminded Chris of a raven.

With a staff in his right hand, he looked like the head of a prestigious magic family.

* * *

"Whoa. Look at Professor Ludger."

"His atmosphere is no joke, though?"

All the students' eyes, which had been distracted by Chris's appearance some time ago, were directed at Ludger.

However, Ludger went straight to the empty professor's seat and sat down without even caring about how much attention he received.

"Did you see that?"

"Yeah. His atmosphere is really no joke. I understand why the rumors about him are

so popular.”

“Is he really a fallen aristocrat? I thought he was more aristocratic than other aristocratic professors.”

Chris clicked his tongue as he overheard the students talking like that.

His crude eyes, which did not hide his unpleasant feelings, turned to Ludger, who sat in the next row after him.

Ludger should have looked at him as well, but the man was staring at the training ground with expressive eyes and Chris didn't know what Ludger was thinking.

Chris gritted his teeth in response when Ludger seemed to pay absolutely no attention to him.

‘Hmph. His smug attitude will be over now. I will make you feel defeated in front of everyone.’

That fight would be won by Jevan Felio, anyway.

Aidan? Wasn't he a commoner?

Chris didn't even know there was such a student. He hadn't even checked the list of commoner students.

He felt that it was a waste of time trying to check out the list.

‘A commoner is a commoner anyway. Even if those who are not properly educated enter the Academy with some special favor, in the end, that's their limit.’

When he was thinking so inwardly, the uproar of the audience reached its peak.

Feeling that the uproar was louder than when Ludger appeared, Chris looked back and was able to realize why.

“Your honor. You came?”

Chris jumped out of his seat at the appearance of Elisa Willow and greeted her.

The principal accepted Chris's greeting with a beaming smile.

"Hello, professor Chris Benimore. Whoa. There are so many people here, I see."

"What brings Your Honor here..."

"I heard that something interesting happened, so I came to see it since I have spare time."

"I see."

The professors who followed the principal to assist her were Mary Ross, in charge of Pharmacy, who was known to have been Sören's longest-serving professor, and Hugo Bourtag, who led a faction of the aristocratic professors which included Chris.

When all the most famous people from Sören gathered, the students expressed their surprise, as they didn't know that the duel at that time was going to be so great.

It was the same with Chris. He just thought the two students would fight moderately and then end their duel, so he didn't expect the principal to show up.

'As expected, was the principal bound to show up because it was a fight between a commoner and an aristocratic student?'

The principal was nominally completely neutral without siding with either faction, but Chris knew.

—That the principal valued the commoner students more than those from the aristocracy instead.

That's why Hugo was at odds with the principal in the first place.

'Is it going to be okay?'

Even after the principal showed up, the man just sat still without looking back.

What an extremely insolent act.

But he thought that it was just like Ludger's usual self, so Chris was annoyed with himself for some reason.

“Professor Ludger! Long time no see!”

The principal greeted Ludger first with a bright smile.

Only then did Ludger’s head, which was still, turn to see the principal.

He slowly rose from his seat and bowed to the principal.

“Hello, Your honor.”

“Yes. Have you been well, Professor Ludger? How are you?”

“Yes. I have been well.”

“I was really surprised. Suddenly, I heard that Professor Ludger and Professor Chris would watch the students’ duel. I was wondering what was going on.”

“We just made a simple bet.”

“Hmm. Bet, huh. Who did you bet on winning, Professor Ludger?”

The principal asked subtly as if she wanted to hear it from Ludger himself, even though she already knew the answer.

“I betted on Aidan’s victory.”

“A bet doesn’t work unless each party chooses the opposite, so does Professor Chris bet on Jevan Felio’s victory? “

“...Yes. You are right.”

Chris had no choice but to reluctantly answer.

The principal smiled beamingly and clapped her hands.

“I’m really looking forward to it. Of course, the priority is for the students not to get hurt, right?”

“You don’t have to be concerned about it. We’ve prepared as much safety equipment as possible,” Mary Ross answered from the principal’s side instead.

No matter how formal the duel between students was, it was highly likely for them to hurt the other person.

Therefore, they put on light protective gear in advance before entering the duel.

They were metal protectors that could be attached to the chest, shoulders, and knees. The metal protectors resonated with each other and created a thin barrier of magic over the students' bodies.

The mana energy of the barrier would be consumed to prevent external magic shocks.

In other words, it was a safe method that wouldn't put someone's life in danger at all, someone would be defeated when all of their barrier's energy had been consumed.

"Then it's a relief."

"Oh, the participants arrived just in time."

The first person to stand at the center of the training ground was Aidan, who looked very nervous.

He looked like he was already going to throw up because he was not used to the spotlight.

However, he felt like he was desperately holding it in because it was the position he had to bear with, after all.

"Aidan! Cheer up!"

"Just break that impudent Jevan's nose!"

Thanks to Tessie and Leo, who shouted and cheered at him in a loud voice, Aidan nodded his head with a more comfortable face and waved to the audience.

The commoner students cheered wholeheartedly for Aidan, hoping that he would boost the status of the commoners.

At that time, Jevan appeared through the opposite entrance.

“Jevan! We believe only in you!”

“Show us the pride of the aristocracy!”

The aristocratic students cheered for Jevan. Jevan nodded with his smug smile as if he was already familiar with this situation.

The two stood face to face. Jevan mocked Aidan.

“You didn’t run away, huh?”

“..”

“Are you nervous? Tsk tsk. I’m sure commoners are not used to this kind of position. Why didn’t you just run away? If you had run away, you wouldn’t have had to suffer a horrible defeat in front of everyone.”

“...If I win.”

“Huh?”

“You should apologize for saying harsh words to Tessie. To Leo as well.”

“What? Hahaha!”

Jevan burst into laughter, as he didn’t expect Aidan to say such words there.

“Alright. If you win, I’ll kneel for you.”

“I definitely heard those words.”

“But I’ll only have to do that after you win against me, though?”

Jevan was confident.

The powerful mana that filled up his body... It was from the mana-boosting drug that he drank just before going on stage.

The item duration lasted for such a short time that no one would know if he used it or not.

There was a condition that he had to fight properly and win in less than five minutes, but with this power, it didn't seem that it would be very difficult to do so.

'If we're using the same magic anyway, my body that is currently overflowing with mana will win.'

There was nothing more advantageous than firepower in a wizard duel.

Even if both of them casted the same magic at the same speed, he could overpower Aidan with his strength.

Jevan was in a state where it was possible for him to do so.

It was only five minutes, but it was a very sufficient amount of time.

Before entering the duel, the judge had checked the conditions of Aidan and Jevan's bodies.

It was to check if irregularities were involved in their bodies before the duel. Jevan took Chris's word for the inspection, so he agreed to do it proudly.

In fact, the judge could not notice the irregularities in Jevan.

The judge, who checked Aidan's body condition soon after, opened his eyes wide when he saw the object hanging on his waist.

"Student. What's this?"

"Oh, this is my own staff that I'm going to use for the duel."

Aidan replied with a smile, but the judge still looked confused.

It was because Aidan's staff was different in shape when compared with the staves with a unique material that was usually handled by wizards.

The staff was...

In the form of a sword.

CHAPTER 48

STUDENTS' DUEL (2)

The judge wanted to ask why he brought a sword for the magic duel, but the shape of the sword was somewhat strange.

—The tip of the sword was blunt, and the thick blade looked like it was an object meant to strike, not to cut.

It was more like a magic staff in the shape of a sword instead of an actual sword, so in fact, the danger and killing power of the sword itself were both close to zero.

The judge contemplated on it for a while before letting it slide, thinking that it would be okay.

“Alright. Get in your positions, you two.”

At the judge’s instruction, Aidan and Jevan stood at opposite ends of the stadium.

The audience, which was shouting out loud, also shut their mouths and became quiet.

Silence fell in the second training ground.

At the center of the training ground, Aidan and Jevan stared at each other with intense gazes.

“Start!”

As soon as the judge’s shout was heard, the two aimed their staves at each other.

At the same time, they weaved their mana like threads to cast their magic spells.

The first spells were to check whether they could deal damage to the other person.

The most fundamental aspect of a match between wizards was for each to analyze

the gap between the opponent and themselves.

It was done with a first-tier spell exchange.

Zaap!

The spell that Aidan casted was a first-tier water property release-type spell, Flowing Water.

On the contrary, the spell Jevan casted was Shooting Fire, a first-tier fire property release-type spell.

“Oh. They’re fast.”

“Is it the same speed?”

Their spells were casted at the same time with no way obvious way to tell who had implemented their technique faster.

In other words, Aidan, whom people had originally thought the duel would be disadvantageous for, had implemented his spell technique faster than expected.

And there was also a difference in the elements that were casted by the two.

Aidan had shot water...

On the other hand, Jevan had shot fire.

It was needless to ask which attribute had a greater advantage.

‘As expected!’

Aidan exclaimed inwardly with joy.

In order to take away the dominant position from the opponent in the first exchange, it was necessary for him to occupy the advantageous position with the correct elemental property.

It was a sort of rock-paper-scissors, but it wasn’t just determined with luck.

'I already thought that Jevan would use a fire element spell.'

If Jevan hated him and had a fiery personality, Aidan predicted that it was highly likely that the magic he used first would be fire magic.

And he was absolutely right.

Aidan had read the opponent's magic in advance through psychological warfare and had prepared the magic that would counter it.

Some students might have thought that it was just a coincidence, but the professors were different.

"Ooh. He's already leading the fight from the start."

Hugo retorted sharply while not hiding his expression of discomfort from the principal's side, who spoke joyfully.

"The winner has not been decided yet."

Just as Hugo said, the situation did not lead to Aidan's victory.

Water and fire... When the two magics collided in the air...

Contrary to peoples' predictions, it was the flame that eliminated the water magic.

"Oh my Gosh."

"What? He beat the water with fire?"

"Is the difference in their mana that big?"

No matter how dominant one property was over another, if the opponent's mana was higher, even such dominance would be ignored.

Jevan was exactly like that.

The flame evaporated the water in an instant and soon flew toward Aidan.

Aidan hurriedly bowed down to avoid the flying flame, and his incredulous gaze was

directed at Jevan.

“Haha. Did you see that? This is the difference between you and me, you petty commoner.”

Jevan didn't stop utilizing his mana, even when he was talking.

While Aidan moved to avoid the flame, he immediately prepared the next spell.

Aidan also immediately invoked his spell as he fixed his posture.

That time, each of them casted first-tier magic again.

Jevan shot out a lightning element, and Aidan shot out a fire element.

Boom!

The two spells collided and cancelled in the air.

However, if there was an evident difference, the place where the magic was cancelled was a little closer to Aidan.

Aidan was being pushed back.

“Haha! Is that everything you can do?”

Jevan used his mana again, and so did Aidan.

Both spells collided again in the air.

Aidan knew that he was almost being pushed back by Jevan's firepower, so he put in more mana and casted his spell.

Boom!

The third collision happened right under Aidan's nose.

He was getting pushed back.

“Urgh!”

Aidan stumbled due to the shock of the magic explosion.

“Aidan was pushed back!”

“As expected, is there nothing he can do as a commoner?”

Jevan was excited to hear those people chatting among themselves in the audience seats.

He was going to take the opportunity and end the duel completely.

They had used magic at the same time not long before, but in their next exchange, Jevan was much faster.

Jevan casted his spell again.

Aidan straightened up his posture and tried to aim his staff for defense but immediately corrected his action.

‘No. It’s too late to use magic now!’

Jevan had already entered into a stage of spell implementation.

Even if he tried to catch up to Jevan in a hurry, Jevan would still cast his spell first in the end.

If he was focused on speed and used a simple spell, his magic was highly likely to fail.

Jevan’s power was also overwhelmingly dominant.

In that situation, if he had Ludger’s Source Code, he could cast a spell first to knock down his opponent.

‘Because it’s impossible in the first place.’

Before that, he realized that their speed of spell technique implementation was the same, so it was time for him to take a different method.

‘From here on, I’m going to use what I learned from Professor Ludger.’

He had been practicing hard until he had torn himself apart in the last three days for that, after all.

Instead of aiming with his staff, Aidan stormed out of his spot and rushed toward Jevan.

“What?!”

“Is he going to run over there?”

“Did he give up?”

There were bursts of confusion everywhere.

Most of the audience thought Aidan was giving up everything and just throwing his body at his opponent.

The fact that he used his body was an unwise judgment as a wizard.

Was he going to rush in and punch Jevan?

“Barbaric. So commoner-like.”

“Aidan... What on earth are you going to do?”

While everyone was either looking down on Aidan or feeling ashamed.

Jevan’s spell had been completed.

“Hah! Are you giving up because you know you can’t win in the end?!”

Jevan used the second-tier spell Burning Thunder with a cruel smile.

It was a very powerful spell among second-tier spells that pierced the opponent’s body like lightning with a quick bolt.

He wouldn’t die because he had a safety device on his body, but considering the overflowing mana in it, the spell could make Aidan feel pain as if he were dying.

Jevan aimed the spell exactly at Aidan’s forehead.

“Take it!”

Aidan was running fearlessly towards him.

‘Commoners are commoners, after all.’

‘That must have been Aidan’s limit.’

Jevan thought so while invoking the Burning Thunder.

Zzzzzzt!

* * *

The yellow current in the air soon became an arrow and flew toward Aidan.

Everyone watching the scene thought the duel was over.

‘It’s over. Jevan won in the end.’

Chris smirked as he watched the duel go in the direction that he expected.

He had already looked back at Ludger while looking forward to what kind of ruined face he would show.

“...What?”

Ludger was just staring silently at the duel with his casual face.

—As if the duel wasn’t over yet.

“...!”

Chris’s eyes rushed to look to the stadium.

In his eyes...

At the same time, he saw Aidan responding to the magic that was flying at him.

Aidan avoided the magic that was flying straight at him while he was running by

turning his upper body and head sideways.

Zzzzt!

“Uurgh!”

The Burning Thunder flashed past Aidan’s cheeks and shoulders. Aidan’s face was slightly distorted due to the pain, but that was all.

Aidan didn’t stop.

Chris was inwardly shocked to see the sight.

He noticed how Aidan had avoided the attack.

‘Even in the midst of his disadvantage, he didn’t take his eyes off his opponent?’

Usually, when new students engaged in a magic duel, those who were not yet familiar with fights between wizards tended to act like beginners.

They might turn their eyes away from their opponent, or they might close their eyes and raise their arms instead of defending themselves against the magic.

When they realized that pain was approaching, their body instinctively moved.

That couldn’t be helped.

—Because it was a human being’s instinct.

There was no way to reduce that but to train for a long time.

But Aidan was a freshman who had just entered the Academy. He was a beginner who didn’t know much about magic.

Wasn’t he a commoner who didn’t have the environment to receive education like others?

‘But...’

Aidan was not scared and did not stop running while not averting his eyes even

though the magic flew toward his forehead.

He did not simply avoid the magic by luck.

—Courage. A strong will to overcome pain.

It was possible because there was confidence that he would avoid the magic which was accompanied by courage.

‘No. It will still take time for him to get back into his position and use magic from over there!’

Chris’s judgment was correct since Jevan still had the lead anyway.

As if to live up to his thoughts, Jevan also took action.

After being bewildered for a moment when he realized that his attack was off the mark, Jevan prepared the next magic.

There was no time for Aidan to use magic, as he was still moving...

“...!”

However, Jevan was bound to open his eyes wide when he saw Aidan’s spell technique was being formed under his nose.

It was the same for Professor Hugo, Mary, and the principal, who whistled with interest.

Not to mention Chris.

He immediately noticed the technique that Aidan used.

“M-Moving Magus!”

Moving Magus.

A skill for actual fighting that war mages learned to use by casting magic while moving their bodies.

Chris turned his head and looked back at Ludger.

The man hadn't taken his eyes off the duel since a while ago.

He had a slight, faint smile on his mouth.

'No way, did he teach this to Aidan?'

Since it was a victorious spell, there must not have been enough time for Ludger to teach such a thing, so there must have been a limit to Ludger's method when he was teaching it.

That was why Chris had handed over the mana-boosting drug to Jevan.

It was alright for him to act cowardly. Just win the duel.

But Ludger wasn't like that.

In a short period of three days, that man had taught that commoner the Moving Magus, a skill that put him one step ahead of his opponent in the duel.

'He learned that only in three days?'

No. Of course not.

It wasn't that Ludger had taught him in three days

Aidan had mastered the Moving Magus in only three days.

'A mere commoner was born with that talent?'

Chris didn't know how hard and fiercely Aidan had been practicing under Ludger's teaching while Jevan and Chris had already spent their time complacently and were drunk on the toast of victory.

He didn't know how much they had worked behind the scenes to change things when Chris and Jevan had hastily concluded that nothing would change.

He would never know about it.

He probably wouldn't know even after someone told him that.

That was how ridiculous he thought the current situation was.

'Jevan! You stupid brat! Stop your spell!'

Chris wanted to shout it out, but the last remaining rationality that he had kept his mouth shut.

If he shouted to give instructions toward Jevan there, it was an act that would ruin the fair duel and undermine his own image.

He had no choice but to just wish that Jevan would notice by himself and take another action.

'I was wrong.'

Chris closed his eyes tightly.

Jevan was preparing for the next spell, as he never expected Aidan to use magic while running.

It would have been better for him if he had been puzzled by Aidan's dodge and stopped preparing his next attack.

However, Jevan's natural ability became a shackle to his ankles in the middle instead.

He had quickly responded to the abnormal situation that he encountered for the first time.

There was nothing wrong with his judgment, but Jevan could not respond at all to the abnormal situation that was unfolding not only once but twice in a row.

"Oh?"

After belatedly witnessing a completed spell technique in front of him, Jevan realized that the situation was going awry.

However, there was no way he could complete casting the current spell technique first.

The spell that Aidan shot was the Shining Stone that he had practiced so much.

It was a simple first-tier spell technique.

—But it was very deadly, as it was a spell that was casted amidst an opponent's carelessness and surprise.

Boom!

The shining stone penetrated through Jevan's spell and destroyed it. The spell did not stop there, but it also hit Jevan's forehead hard.

"Aargh!"

It was not fatal, but it did not completely erase the pain.

The giddy shock in front of his eyes caused Jevan to fall backward.

His movements slowed down, and the accident froze him as if he was submerged in icy water.

The short attack didn't even take five seconds.

The attack played a decisive role in determining the outcome of the fight.

Jevan stood up hesitantly.

But...

Aidan, who had taken over the opportunity to attack, did not just stand still and watch.

'So it's over.'

Ludger was pleased at the sight.

The flow of the fight completely leaned toward Aidan.

If it were a brawl that was decided with fists, there would still be a possibility for Jevan to win somehow.

But a magic duel didn't flow that simply.

It was a fight that was thoroughly decided by flow.

From the moment a wizard lost his condition and lost the flow of the fight, their defeat was already set.

Aidan aimed his staff at Jevan.

"Now it's my turn."

"N-no!"

But despite Jevan's cry...

Aidan's spell, which had been invoked immediately, hit Jevan's body countless times.

As soon as the total amount of defensive mana armor surrounding Jevan's body reached zero, the outcome of the duel was decided.

CHAPTER 49

ANTI MAGIC (1)

The duel was over.

“The winner, Aidan!”

Along with the judge’s yell, shouts erupted from the audience.

All of them were shouts of the commoner students who had come to cheer for Aidan.

“Aidan! You’re cool!”

“You are so dope!”

“You are awesome! When on earth did you learn that skill?”

Leo and Tessie’s joy was particularly significant.

On the contrary, the aristocratic students openly expressed their displeasure and then glared at Jevan, who was sprawled on the floor in defeat.

“Tsk. Jevan, that punk, has disgraced the honor of the aristocracy.”

“He was always a sucker. He was a mere baron, yet he was trying to sponge off us like he was something, and that became bothersome.”

“I can’t believe he lost against a commoner. He’s a disgrace to the aristocracy.”

Words that could be heard noisily were very sharp.

Jevan looked around with a blank face.

‘I... lost?’

He couldn’t believe that it was real

But when he tried to wake up from this dream, he didn't wake up. Because it was not a dream, it was a reality.

The scornful gazes and the criticism that flew at him were all real.

On that stage, it was not him, but a petty commoner that he had been looking down on so much who was drunk with the joy of victory.

'No. Something, something must be wrong here!'

There was no way he had lost.

'Yes. There must have been some mistake. That dirty commoner must have used some kind of cowardly foul play.'

If that wasn't the case, then there was no way that he could use magic while moving.

'This damned commoner brat!'

Grit.

Jevan had erased the fact that he secretly drank a potion and doped because of it from his head.

If he knew that it was a shameful act in the first place, he wouldn't have done that.

All he had left was endless hatred for the commoner who had insulted him in front of everyone and his will to murder the commoner.

'I will kill you!'

Jevan began to wring out all of his mana.

When everyone was so focused on Aidan, who was within the spotlight as the winner, no one would notice Jevan's behavior.

Anyone would think so.

Who would expect that a man who had lost a fight would suddenly get up and use a spell as a surprise attack?

Jevan squeezed out all of his mana and prepared a second-tier spell.

It would take about four seconds before the spell was casted.

It was quite a long duration if his opponent was focused on him and dealt with the spell, but four seconds was a very short duration when everyone was off guard.

“Oh?”

Aidan was the first to notice the oddity. Something was wrong with the spirit that Jevan radiated as he was bowing his head.

Just as he looked back at Jevan, his eyes met Jevan’s, who was glaring at him.

“Jevan?”

Jevan’s eyes which were glistening due to murderous intent were bent like crescent moons.

And what Aidan saw was the spell technique that he was secretly implementing.

It was a second-tier fire magic, Raging Wave.

Now that the duel was over, Aidan had removed the safety device attached to his body.

Moreover, Raging Wave was an attack with the widest scope among the second-tier magics, making it practically impossible for him to avoid it.

However, it was impossible for him to defend himself from it because time was running out.

The magic had been casted.

Red flames swirled and surged toward him.

“Oh, ooh?”

The judge, who was about to check Aidan’s physical condition, was also bewildered.

Never thinking that Jevan would do it, he hurriedly took out his cane and charged his mana.

He was a Sören employee, but he could also use magic to some extent.

But it was too late.

The spell had already reached just under his nose.

The hot flame approached them like a wave that was about to engulf them.

Fwoosh.

Aidan moved his body first before even thinking.

Aidan, who bounced like a spring, grabbed the back of the judge's neck, then threw the judge to his back.

Then he clasped the sword-shaped staff with his hands.

Within the slow flow of time, he could see the surprised audience with their eyes wide open.

The professors also jumped from their seats one by one as they belatedly realized the situation.

But it was already too late for them to step up.

—Because the waves of flame had just reached Aidan.

“Aidan!”

Tessie's cry echoed throughout the stadium.

But Aidan didn't look back at her.

He kept his eyes fixed to the front and lifted his sword-shaped staff.

He charged his mana...

And struck the flame.

Whoooooosh!

“Oh?”

“Wh-what?”

Then, something unbelievable happened.

Following the trajectory of Aidan’s staff, the magic of Raging Wave that Jevan had used was split precisely down the middle and scattered.

Whiiiiirrrrr.

Eventually, the Raging Wave lost its power and disappeared after it was scattered into the air.

“What... was just happened?”

“He cut... the spell?”

While the students murmured blankly at the incomprehensible sight...

Ludger stared at Aidan as if he knew that would happen.

‘Did he use that spell because it was a moment of crisis?’

Aidan was a wizard who could use Uncommon Magic.

Unlike the other four types, Uncommon was not properly classified by modern magic, and spells that weren’t widely known formed a mainstream classification.

It was the same with what Aidan had just used.

One of the Uncommon magics, Anti Magic.

In other words...

A spell that erased another spell.

What Aidan used was exactly that.

“No... no way!”

Chris was simply on the verge of fainting.

He was already going crazy because of Jevan’s cowardly act, and to make things worse, Aidan, whom he thought was a commoner, had used Anti Magic.

‘Don’t tell me... that man already knew it...!’

Chris’s gaze turned to Ludger.

He had sat still in his seat and wasn’t surprised when Aidan was attacked.

It’s not that he wasn’t surprised.

That man had no reason to be surprised in the first place.

—Because he already knew everything.

He had known that Aidan would win the competition and that Aidan was the owner of an Uncommon Magic.

“Oh, my God.”

It was the same with Jevan Felio.

When he saw the Raging Wave that he had used with all his mana disappear in vain...

And the fact that Aidan was the one who cut the spell off...

He looked stunned.

Aidan walked toward Jevan, who had completely lost his fighting spirit.

“Jevan...”

“You, how the hell did you do that? How come a commoner used that magic...?”

“That’s it. Clench your teeth.”

“What?”

Before Jevan could ask again, Aidan moved.

Baam!

His clenched fist hit Jevan’s cheek hard.

Jevan’s body rolled on the ground.

Looking down at the fallen Jevan, Aidan spoke while glaring strongly at him.

“I thought that you’d at least take your defeat well, but I didn’t know that you would be this much of a piece of trash.”

Jevan could not answer him.

He had already been completely physically and mentally defeated by Aidan, so he could not maintain his rationality.

* * *

The judge belatedly rushed out and checked Aidan’s body.

“Aidan! Are you alright?”

“Yes, I’m alright. But are you alright, Mister? Are you hurt anywhere?”

“Oh, no. Thanks to you. I’m grateful. I would have been in danger if it weren’t for you.”

Aidan said that it was nothing to the judge, who kept his head bowed down and apologized instead.

The professors and audience, who were watching the scene, were bound to see Aidan in a new light.

“Oh, my God. I heard he’s an Anti Magic owner, so it was real.”

Mary Ross, who had already vaguely heard some news about Aidan, put her hand around her mouth and chuckled.

Hugo's and Chris's expressions, on the other hand, were simply dejected.

It was just Ludger who had been expecting that to happen and maintained his unchanging attitude.

The students' response was simply enthusiastic.

"Did you see that just now? He cut the magic with a blade!"

"You idiot. It's not a blade but a staff."

"Whatever it is!"

"Even so, I didn't feel him casting a different spell. What the hell was that?"

"He erased magic? Is that possible?"

For the students who did not know about the existence of Anti Magic, Aidan's performance was almost like a fairy tale.

After an incredulous thing done by Jevan...

Aidan's magic was so great that even the incredulous event could be forgotten in an instant.

Among the surprised students, there were some who noticed what Aidan's magic actually was.

"That kid... Did he just use Anti Magic?"

A beautiful girl with white hair and a snow-cold impression stared intensely at Aidan.

Her tone seemed to consider Aidan lower than her, but she was also one of the freshmen who had just entered Sören.

The girl was definitely enough to be discussed as the one who held the best position

among Sören's freshmen.

She was the top student who had entered the Academy that year and the most promising extraordinary rookie from the magic tower.

—Julia Plumheart.

She looked at Aidan with interest.

'I just wanted to kill time at first, so I came to look around here for fun. It turned out that I witnessed something interesting.'

With her personality, she wouldn't even care about that kind of event.

—Because no one was curious about the result of the students' duel.

However, that time, the incident was bigger, and it had moved into a fight between commoners and nobles and not just one between students.

Moreover, the news that it became a pride fight between two professors had spread after that, so she had only come to see the duel briefly.

'When they fought for the first time, it was so horrible that it was hard for me to keep my eyes open, and I thought I'd go back right away.'

She was glad she didn't leave.

She couldn't believe that she was witnessing Anti Magic in a place like that.

'His name is Aidan, right? Where on earth did a commoner learn to do Anti Magic? Hmm. I got a little interested.'

Julia left the stadium as she saw Aidan knock out Jevan.

Other than Julia, there were also some people who were interested in the magic that Aidan had shown.

It was the same for Freuden, who had the most power in his second year and posed as the head of the aristocratic faction.

'Is his name Aidan?'

When Jevan, the eldest son of Baron Felio who wanted to join his faction, said he would fight Aidan...

Freuden hadn't bothered to stop him. His true intention was that he didn't even care about it in the first place.

No matter who Jevan fought with, he thought that it was ok as long as Jevan didn't become aggressive toward him.

Who would have thought that the opponent whom Jevan had fought against was a commoner who could use Anti Magic.

'I heard that all the newcomers in the first year can't be looked down on, so it was true.'

Freuden had a personality that could admit things neatly.

He highly valued Aidan's Anti Magic.

Of course, he didn't know how much Aidan could deal with Anti Magic, but his value as a human being was at least higher than that of the aristocracy.

"Let's go."

Freuden stood up from his seat while glancing at Jevan, who had fallen with a pathetic stare for the last time.

The students from his faction stood up in lines following Freuden.

Before Freuden left, he glanced sideways at Ludger, who was sitting in the professor's seat.

'That professor...'

Freuden, who had been staring at him for a while, soon turned his eyes as if he was not interested in him and left the stadium.

That was how the people left one by one and made a lot of ruckus about the duel

incident that day.

The appearance of a new prodigy.

—Aidan, a wizard who could use Anti Magic.

“Oh, my.”

Aidan scratched his head.

He originally had no intention of using Anti Magic in the duel.

Well, he also didn't intend to use it in the future while studying in Sören.

His teacher had said that such magic was very important, so he shouldn't use it unless he was really in a crisis. If he didn't do what his teacher told him to, he would be in trouble.

‘So this is what my teacher meant.’

Looking at the passionate eyes of the students who already had high expectations of him, Aidan instinctively felt that his life at the academy would be very tiring in the future.

‘Oh, yeah.’

Aidan immediately turned his head to the place where the professor-only seats existed.

—It was to find Ludger, who had helped him win the fight.

Fortunately, Ludger remained in his place, and it was not difficult for Aidan to find him.

Ludger's black outfit definitely stood out.

Ludger had his usual expression on his face and wasn't visibly happy about Aidan winning the duel.

After both of them looked at each other in silence...

Nod.

Ludger just nodded his head once.

“...!”

Of course, that was enough for Aidan.

When Ludger admitted that he did well, Aidan finally realized that he had gained the victory.

“Aidan!”

“You did well! You won!”

Tessie and Leo came up to Aidan and smiled beamingly. Aidan also smiled at his friends.

After watching the three for a while, Ludger got up from his seat.

Because the duel was over, it was time for another business.

“Professor Chris.”

Chris Benimore, who had been standing uncomfortably in his spot the entire time, shuddered at Ludger’s call.

His eyes turned to Ludger.

“We still had our own business left, right?”

Chris’s face collapsed even more disastrously at his words.

CHAPTER 50

ANTI MAGIC (2)

Chris thought that something destined had finally come.

He had made a bet with Ludger.

They had decided who would win the contest among their students and declared that the loser would give one of their magic research papers to the winner for free.

It was Chris himself, and not anyone else, who had suggested it first.

He had declared that he would make the bet in front of many students, so he couldn't even make an excuse and say no.

Chris tried to say something, and he glared at Ludger sharply.

"You... Did you already know that the commoner student is an owner of Anti Magic?"

"Yes. You are right."

Chris shouted out full of rage at the answer that Ludger gave as if it was too obvious.

"Did you make this bet even after you knew it?!"

"Hmm. I don't understand why Professor Chris is so angry."

"What nonsense..."

"So you didn't know that Aidan is an owner of Anti Magic?"

"..."

Chris became tongue-tied at his words.

It was just as Ludger had said.

He hadn't known that Aidan was an owner of Anti Magic.

Yes. He hadn't known it, and that was why he had allowed that duel.

"I heard that Professor Chris is in charge of the first year, but didn't you check on the first-years who entered the Academy this time?"

"..."

"Most of all, Aidan never used Anti Magic throughout the whole duel. Did his mastery of Anti Magic affect the outcome of the duel?"

Chris shut his mouth.

Just as Ludger said, Chris was not in a position to argue about the match.

He could have known it, but it was he who didn't want to know about it.

He didn't pay attention to them because they were commoners and because they were insignificant kids. He didn't think paying attention to them was necessary.

The narrow-minded way of thinking that he usually had eventually turned around and flew toward him like a boomerang.

Who the hell should he blame for that?

Was it Ludger, who knew about it but didn't tell him?

Was it Aidan, who had learned Anti Magic as a mere commoner?

No.

It was him who was wrong, after all.

He didn't even prepare for anything thoroughly and had mistakenly thought that he would definitely win without thinking of gathering any information in advance.

His arrogance was the cause of his defeat.

"If you had checked thoroughly what specialties the students had, an incident like

today's wouldn't have happened."

"..."

Chris just chewed his lips without being able to answer anything.

Yes. It was obviously his mistake in not realizing the Anti Magic that Aidan had.

But what hurt his pride more than that was that the outcome of the duel was not determined by the Anti Magic.

Aidan didn't even use his Anti Magic in the duel.

He had simply knocked down Jevan using only what he had mastered and learned since coming to Sören.

There was no way he could spit out words such as 'cowardice' or 'foul play'.

The moment he said those words, he would have really lost.

Looking at Chris, who was shaking and couldn't say anything, Ludger took his luck.

"I remember you told me to use a magic academic paper as a price for the bet."

"...I did. Alright, what can I give you?"

"Nothing."

Chris was puzzled by his words.

"Now, what on earth...?"

"I won't take anything."

"Any... thing? Why all of a sudden.....?"

"It's not all of a sudden. I was going to say this from the beginning."

Chris couldn't understand his action as he heard Ludger's words.

No. He actually understood it, but it was more like he was trying to deny the reality.

“It’s cheap to rob the others’ teaching material as the price of a bet.”

At the end of his sentence, Ludger turned his back and left.

—As if he had no intention of continuing the conversation with Chris.

Chris looked stunned at the sight.

‘Cheap, he said?’

He wasn’t that annoyed when he was ignored by Ludger or when he had lost the bet.

But after Ludger had won the bet and said that the bet itself was cheap while not even taking anything from it...

Chris went beyond feeling irritated and even felt a sense of dejection.

That man was like a mirror... A heart mirror that reflected his ugly side so clearly.

The more Chris glared at him with hostility and growing hatred, the more he felt disgusted by his own appearance that Ludger showed him.

‘I... Chris Benimore... Cheap?’

Chris bit his lip; a stream of blood ran down his mouth.

He didn’t even think about wiping it, he only glared at Ludger’s back with bloodshot eyes.

‘Ludger Chelysie...’

How much more did he have to trample on Ludger’s pride to get rid of his anger?

He couldn’t forgive him. It was unacceptable.

Next time, he would surely repay Ludger with double the amount of humiliation that he had experienced.

“Professor Chris.”

Hugo approached and called him, but Chris did not respond.

Not wanting to show his ugly appearance to anyone right then, he hurriedly went away from his seat.

Hugo distorted his face at the sight, and he had no choice but to hold his irritation when looking at the principal, who was smiling softly.

That would be remembered as a day of great shame for the aristocracy.

‘Ludger Chelysie...’

He was thinking of the man who was the culprit behind all of it.

Hugo Bourtag gritted his teeth silently.

* * *

Aidan, who was drunk on the joy of victory with his friends, suddenly remembered the promise he had made with Jevan.

His gaze flitted toward Jevan, who was getting up from his spot.

The three people looked at each other, then nodded and approached Jevan.

“What?”

Jevan looked at Aidan and his friends coming toward him and spoke in a weak voice.

“Was there anything left for you to laugh at me for?”

“Jevan, you didn’t forget the promise you made before the duel, did you?”

The word ‘promise’ made Jevan’s face crumple severely.

He couldn’t think of it because he couldn’t get away from the shock of defeat.

“Jevan Felio, you should respectfully apologize to my friends here right now for

saying harsh things to them.”

“How dare you... You told me to apologize, now?”

“You were the one who made the bet and participated in the duel, Jevan, I’m just telling you to keep your promise. Hurry and apologize... Respectfully.”

“...”

Jevan clenched his fist, but that was all.

He was completely defeated by Aidan; even his surprise attack had failed.

It wasn’t a mere defeat, it was an ugly defeat after he desperately tried to win.

There was no place left for him to stand in Sören.

Jevan cried out of frustration.

“Damn it. All of it because of you! Because of you, I—!”

“Jevan.”

“Shut up! Don’t call my name! If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t have been suffering this ugly appearance in front of everyone! Yes! It’s all your fault!”

“...”

Tessie was about to step up, full of rage, when she saw Jevan talking in a frantic state of mind.

But Aidan raised his hand to stop her.

“Aidan... Why?”

Aidan knew it—the fact that no matter what Tessie said there, Jevan wouldn’t listen to it.

Aidan realized something when he saw the action that Jevan showed.

Two people had fought because they didn't understand each other, and he believed that the story would have been different if they understood each other.

He thought that people could get to know each other while having a conversation with each other, and then they could get closer to each other after that.

But Aidan still couldn't forget Jevan's face that had been full of murderous intent.

Jevan's expression swayed his thoughts.

Meanwhile, Jevan shouted even more desperately.

"Damn it! Fucker! Because of you dirty commoners, I can't even stay in Sören anymore! The Felio family can't raise our heads anywhere in the future! Because of you! Because of all of you!"

Jevan had already erased his foul play and cowardly acts from his memory.

He just couldn't understand why he had to go through this to the point that he felt resentful and cheated about it.

"Why?! Why does someone like you have that ability?! Why don't I have it?!"

"Jevan."

"Damn it. Damn it. I just... wanted to raise the reputation of my family!"

Jevan bowed his head and screamed.

He wouldn't have stopped, even if he knew the method he used was wrong, because he had that objective as his purpose.

Aidan was about to say something while looking at Jevan, but he shut his mouth tightly

In that state, it was difficult for them to continue a proper conversation let alone him receiving an apology from Jevan.

Even Tessie, who would normally have been angry while telling people to act properly, was reticent when she saw Jevan's ruined state.

She also felt something that was tightening in her chest when she saw Jevan had done that to raise his family's status.

'Maybe I... could have been like that as well.'

She shuddered with fright at such thoughts.

At that moment, a cold voice was heard between them.

"What are you doing here? The duel is over."

"Professor Ludger..."

Ludger, who was dressed in all black, had a strange atmosphere that they could not resist.

He stared at Aidan and his friends, then glared coldly at Jevan, who was sobbing and collapsed in his spot.

"Jevan Felio, what are you doing, showing such an unsightly appearance after you lost in the duel?"

"..."

"It's not enough for you to lose the fight, you didn't accept your defeat and even attempted an ugly surprise attack. What's so unfair about it that made you cry? Do you deserve to cry now?"

"Pr-Professor Ludger."

No matter how bad Jevan's behavior was, Aidan thought that Ludger's words were too harsh, so he stepped up, but Ludger didn't stop.

"You are petty, I see. You are so petty. Your current appearance is far worse than the commoners that you have always hated and despised."

"...What do you know?!"

In the end, Jevan, who couldn't resist Ludger's words, stood from his spot and glared at Ludger.

"What... what do you know about what I'm feeling?!"

"Do I have to know?"

"...Wh-what?"

"Do I really need to know that?"

"You, you...!"

Jevan was about to shout something, but when he saw Ludger's eyes, he swallowed back his words.

His burning anger quickly blew out, and fear dominated his emotions instead.

—Ludger's eyes, and the cold gaze that was directed at him.

It was like facing a nightmare in the dark.

"You picked a fight, and you lost the bet. It's all your own fault that you didn't even accept your defeat and collapsed. But after that, you want others to understand how you feel. Why should we know how you feel?"

"Th-that's..."

"You think this place is still your home? Do I look like a babysitter who listens to your complaints?"

"I, I..."

"You're such a bad kid who can't even take care of himself, and now you're screaming your anger like a baby bird. You, who doesn't know how shameful your actions are, have been disqualified as a wizard. Aristocrat and wizard, my ass."

Jevan couldn't maintain his right mind as he listened to Ludger's nearly violent words that were unlike his usual self.

“I, I...”

“Shut up. I don’t even want to listen to your excuse. I’ll refer you to the disciplinary committee for your behavior that I saw a moment ago, so get out of my sight now.”

At Ludger’s warning, which was close to threatening, Jevan, whose face turned pale, stepped back with a shaky step and then fled the stadium.

The three musketeers, who watched the scene silently from beginning to end, all had the same thoughts.

‘He definitely served Jevan right, but wasn’t it too much?’

Aidan’s expression was especially not very good.

“Aidan.”

“Yes, Professor.”

“You’ve practiced the Maneuver Technique properly. Good job.”

“It’s all thanks to you, Professor.”

“But you don’t look that happy about winning the duel, I see.”

“That’s...”

Aidan could not understand why his mood was so low.

Obviously, he had won the duel in front of everyone in a cool way. He could not disagree if someone said he had to be happy about it.

Maybe it was because he had heard Jevan’s scream afterwards.

“I... don’t really know why.”

“You don’t really know, huh?”

“I obviously felt delighted at first. Jevan humiliated my friends and started a quarrel with me. I’m sure my intention to defeat Jevan remains unchanged. But... the

problem is after that.”

“Did you just get swayed by Jevan’s whining?”

“I definitely didn’t have to listen to his words. Yes, it would be enough if I just ignored him, but... I couldn’t do that.”

Aidan showed a bitter smile and spoke frankly.

Ludger looked at Aidan in silence.

He had already known that Aidan had been overly righteous and possessed righteous values since before, but he didn’t know that Aidan would have a heart so weak like that.

He even had sympathy for Jevan, who had ignored and looked down on him.

But if someone asked Ludger if it was a bad appearance, he would say no.

Aidan was still young and a student who studied in that shining world called Sören.

Because he was a student and still young...

That was quite possible. That was okay. Ludger couldn’t blame him while saying that Aidan was stupid and that it frustrated him.

—Because that was how he looked at the world.

“Aidan...”

“Yes. Professor.”

“As you live in this world, one day you will run into various types of people.”

“Pardon?”

“Keep it in your mind. It means that not everyone is like you. Someone will hate you, dislike you, and be hostile toward you. In the end, it’s going to be like that because your world and the others’ worlds are different.”

“...Is that so?”

“But it changes depending on how people behave.”

Aidan, Tessie, and Leo looked at Ludger as they were slightly surprised at those words.

“It’s not a bad thing to take care of your own things. And your deed that sacrificed your everything is not stupid either. But in the end, what you need to live in this world is moderation.”

“Moderation...”

“Only half of them. Aidan. You can just pick half of selfishness and selflessness. If I give half to someone instead of taking half from them, then there will be a day when both of us understand each other.”

Aidan looked back at Tessie at Ludger’s words.

He obviously remembered that his first time meeting her wasn’t so good.

Tessie was like a rose full of thorns.

But at some point, the two became close and hung around together often.

“I’m not telling you not to yield and not to be considerate to others because it seems impossible to you. That’s why I said this. It’s okay to not be fully considerate of others, but it’s also alright for you to be at least half selfish.”

Half...

Aidan felt anxious, as he was catching something from those words.

“I spoke too much. I will leave now.”

“Uh, Professor Ludger!”

“What?”

“Those words... I will definitely keep them in mind.”

Looking back at Aidan, who answered with a determined face, Ludger left the stadium with a light nod.

The three stared silently at Ludger's back until he disappeared.



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