

# 転生王女は 今日も旗を折る

イラスト…雪子 Yukiko

ビス  
Bisu



2



あのウソ親父!!

馬鹿そっち  
はしょうが!!!!  
でしようが!!!!

1500万回  
読まれた物語!

転生王女によるダメンズ!? 攻略対象、更正ストーリー第2弾!

# Tensei Oujo wa Kyou mo Hata o Tatakioru

by Bisu

[Novel Updates](#)

Translation Group: [kirileaves](#)

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# 登場人物紹介

**レオンハルト**  
・フォン・オルゼイン

ネーベル王国近衛騎士団長。  
国一番の剣の使い手。  
ローゼマリーの想い人。

**ランドルフ**  
・フォン・ヴェルファルト

ネーベル王国国王。ローゼマリーの実父。

**イリーネ**  
・フォン・アルトマン

魔導師長。ルッツとテオの師匠。

**ローゼマリー**  
・フォン・ヴェルファルト

前世の記憶を持ったまま、乙女ゲームの世界に転生した少女。  
ネーベル王国第一王女。平穏な未来のために、攻略対象達の性格を矯正しようと決意する。

**テオ**  
・アイレンベルク

炎属性の魔法を使う魔導師。  
明るく面倒見の良い少年。

**ミハイル**  
・フォン・ディーボルト

【攻略対象キャラ】  
ディーボルト子爵家の次男。大神殿の神官見習い。  
大人しく口下手な少年。ゲーム中では魔王に体を乗っ取られている。

**ルッツ**  
・アイレンベルク

【攻略対象キャラ】  
氷属性の魔法を使う魔導師。  
百年に一人といわれる逸材。  
クールで人嫌い。

**ゲオルク**  
・ツォー・アイゲル

【攻略対象キャラ】  
アイゲル侯爵家の一人息子。  
ローゼマリーの元婚約者候補。

**ネロ**

ミハイルに命を救われた黒猫。ローゼマリーの飼猫になる。

# Chapter 26: The Reincarnated Princess's Discussion ①

“.....”

Wha-what should I do...?

Some ten-odd minutes have passed since I hugged Sir Leonhard. Now that I've just come back to my senses and realized what sort of situation I'm stuck in, and how shameless I've been, I'm breaking out in a dripping cold sweat.

I couldn't hold back my emotions and hugged him, but was that okay or not okay? Which was it?

Depending on the situation and the perspective, would I be charged with the crime of a groper for jumping on another person without their consent? No, if I considered the difference in our statuses, it probably *was* sexual harassment...

I wasn't flat out rejected, so I decided it was probably within the bounds of what was acceptable, but I was being quick to jump to conclusions. Even if he was reluctant, the princess couldn't just be pushed away, could she?

*If I can think that far ahead, then I need to let go immediately.* That was my thought, but I couldn't find the right moment to break away. Now? Maybe now?! Someone, please do a countdown! From three...no, my heart needs to prepare itself, so from ten, please.

“Your Royal Highness...?”

“Eeee—!”

I'd been trying to sort the chaotic activity in my head, begging an imaginary friend for a favor when Sir Leonhard's soft whisper brought me crashing down to reality.

Shocked out of my reverie, I made a weird sound and jumped back.

Witness to my eccentric behavior, Sir Leonhard stared at me in amazement.

Ugh, even if I say it myself, I did think my sudden movement quite resembled those of a frog. I wanted to die.

I knew heat was slowly but steadily gathering in my face. Would I become as red as a tomato?

I hadn't wanted to display any more disgraceful behavior, but it had been out of my control.

Sir Leonhard blinked several times from what he'd seen, and then a laugh coughed out of him.

Unintentionally, it seems, and I could feel no malice in his laughter.

But it was still *embarrassing*. He noticed I'd begun to tear up, so he covered his mouth with his right hand and cleared his throat.

"Begging pardon..."

Ugh. Someone, please bury me deep...

"I'm sorry, too. On top of losing my composure, I hugged you as well. I really sorry for all the trouble I've caused, Sir Olsein."

Resisting my desire to run away in shame, I hung my head.

"Please, do not call yourself a bother. Personally, I want you to rely on me more."

"So you did not...find it disagreeable?"

"Most certainly not," he said, nodding.

Encouraged by his positive response, I tried asking about what had been troubling me the most, and he swept away my worries without pause as soon as I posed the question to him.

I'm so glad.

It didn't seem like he didn't dislike it, so I sighed in relief.

"However...Your Royal Highness?"

"Uhm...what is it?"

Although I felt a moment's relief, I was dismayed to find him sending a meaningful glance at me.

Huh? Maybe it wasn't okay after all? And it became sexual harassment?

My expression froze, but Sir Leonhard smiled like he was having fun, eyes like those of a child up to no good.

"Perhaps, princess, it is time you called me Leon."

"!!"

I was reminded of all the times I'd behaved in a shameless behavior. My heavens, I'd done it again, hadn't I?

"T-that is...umm, well..."

Right away, voice was given to my longing; desire made itself apparent on my face. In my mind, I've always called him that.

I needed to dodge the question somehow, but all the ideas that came to mind were completely useless. I'd be more likely to come up with a full confession of my wickedness than an excuse.

Whatever the case, I can't recover my image. Coming to my conclusion, I gulped and took a deep breath.

"May I...call you that?" I asked timidly, covertly looking at him. I waited for his answer, trying to keep the pressure of my heart beating from the jitters under control.

Anyhow, if I couldn't worm my way out, then I decided I might as well savor the opportunity. I mean, only my older brother has been invited to call him that, it wasn't fair! I want to call him that, too.

"Certainly," he said, smiling at me.

"Th...thank very much...!"

*Wooooohooooo!!* Even though I pumped my fists inwardly, I was careful to not show any change outwardly. Not only was my demeanor unbecoming of a princess, but I was also weak to his charms.

"It is a small matter you need not thank me for."

His eyes smiled as he looked at me, like he saw something pleasing to the eye—an animal or a child, perhaps.

Seems like my true character has not been revealed.

“Then...Sir Leon.”

I tested his name again. My voice wavered slightly from nerves. I wanted to chat casually with him forever, but time was limited. Christof was keeping Klaus away, so I needed to take my chances *now*.

“Will you listen to my story?”

Sir Leon’s eyes opened wide, and he wiped the smile off his face.

“Yes,” he said, nodding.

His low voice and solemn expression made me nervous.

I gathered my resolve, and began to tell him my story.

“When I was still very young, I had a dream.”

“A...dream?”

I nodded.

“It was the typical dream, of a not very much changed reality. With familiar scenes, and familiar figures...but, I was filled with slight sense of unease. The people I kept seeing were slightly older.”

Sir Leonhard’s breath caught, and he whispered in a hoarse voice, “Visions of the future...”

“It was nothing so grand. I don’t believe I’ve been gifted with a divine power. However, the dreams I had for that short period of time only were different somehow... And I couldn’t find evidence to otherwise prove I made too much out of nothing.”

There was certainly reluctance to lie on my part. However, to divulge the entire truth would have been too big of a risk.

I have no idea if he’d believe me if I told him I’d been reincarnated with memories from my past life, but leaving that aside, what was even more difficult to explain was probably the fact we were inside the world of a game.

In a world without even a single TV, I didn’t think I’d be able to make sense of those things called “video games”. It was something I should never attempt to do in the first place.

If he learned the world he was living in had been artificially created, then he was bound to be shocked no matter how strong of a character he had. Besides, there was still no proof that this world was the same as the one from “Welcome to the Reverse World”. It could be a very similar parallel universe, for all I know.

Right now, what was important wasn't me failing to disclose everything. I'm bringing Sir Leonhard into my confidence, giving him what knowledge I possess, to avoid the events that will happen in the future.

So that Sir Leonhard will become my ally.

# Chapter 27: The Reincarnated Princess's Discussion ②

“.....”

Sir Leonhard sank into silence with a troubled expression on his face after my simple explanation.

I had no way of guessing whether he would believe in me or not. Before we can even get there, it was a mystery if I'd sufficiently conveyed everything with my limited words.

I wanted to keep my lies to the bare minimum, so I only said I'd seen it in a “dream”.

“Your Royal Highness,” Sir Leonhard finally spoke after an elapsed silence.

“Yes?”

“To summarize, you have knowledge of a future that may occur, but not of everything. This knowledge is limited to the people around you, and only within a certain time frame, so there are still a lot of unclear portions, and many things you have no knowledge of. You cannot predict when these many events you will happen. But your current actions have shown there is a possibility the future can be rewritten. Have I gotten everything correct?”

“Yes...”

It must have been an unbelievable story to told to.

Although the story I'd given, I was shocked. If my friend had suddenly told me something like that when I was still alive in Japan, it would've been very hard for me to accept it immediately.

However, from Sir Leonhard's reaction, there was nothing to indicate him being lost. On the other hand, I became bewildered.

He folded his arms and rested his chin in his hand. He looked down, like he was deep in thought, and said *I see* in a faint tone.

“You knew the future. In order to divert the misfortune occurring to the people around you, you were forced to move on your own. You only had yourself and Klaus to rely on, and it would have been difficult to decide how much it you could permissibly explain. In addition, the disparity between the future you knew and...”

“Wai-wait a minute!”

Uninterested in listening to him continue, I interrupted him. The eyes he’d narrowed in thought rounded as he stared at me.

“...what is it?”

“My story, you believe it?”

I was self-conscious of the absurd story I’d told him. Furthermore, I was a 10-year-old child. Even if he was putting a little girl’s wild tale in order, I thought it couldn’t be helped.

“I do.”

And yet, Sir Leonhard declared that without a hint of hesitation.

“...why?”

“Well. There are several reasons, but the incident that happened half a year ago stands out as the best example. The plot to kidnap the wizards Lutz Eilenburg and Theo Eilenberg had been a confidential matter, limited to handful of knights within the order. The likelihood of someone leaking that information was not out of the question, but your knowledge in that situation was unfathomable. Because you acted even faster than we could.”

“Huh?”

“You had Klaus investigate Hilde Kramer, did you not? Around that time, we had suspected Niklas was a spy, but had not yet become aware of Hilde Kramer’s existence.”

I see.

I’d suspected Hilde Kramer, and barely managed to connect her to Niklas. However, to Sir Leonhard and the others, Niklas had led them to Hilde. It was the reverse.

Even if they'd obtained information, and could follow up on that lead, it was impossible to trace it.

"Furthermore, I cannot believe you to be someone who would ever lie."

"!"

At his words, my conscience was run through with a knife.

It was not without reason, but, the lie was being told. No matter what the reason, I couldn't change the fact that I was deceiving him.

My heart was in stabbing pain. It made me want to apologize immediately.

Instead, I chewed on my lips and endured.

This was how I was going to proceed from now on. There was no going back.

"Thank you...very much."

For that reason, I smiled as I thanked him. I *had to* say it.

"....."

Sir Leonhard held quiet, smiling bitterly. His expression was conflicted, but he still looked at me warmly.

Perhaps he'd noticed. That there was no way I'd explained everything, and everything had not been the truth.

Even then, Sir Leonhard did seem like he would press me for answers despite my fake smile.

"Your Royal Highness."

"Yes?"

"If it does not hinder you, then I would like to ask, will there be an event that must be avoided at all cost in the near future?"

The first thing that came to mind was, of course, "The Dark Lord's Revival". If I wished to live in peace, it was a flag that I must absolutely break down. But it was still not the right time to destroy that flag.

"There is still some time before that happens, but right now there is something I must do without delay."

"Well, then. Is there anything I can do to assist you?"

“!.....Yes!”

This was exactly what I'd been hoping would happen. I controlled my expression, and nodded strongly.

“But this conversation...has taken much longer than I expected.”

“That is true. Klaus should be returning any moment now. That man is not someone who can ‘wait’ if you tell him.”

*Especially when it comes to you,* Sir Leonhard said, laughing.

“I would like to arrange a time to meet with you again before long. May I speak with you when that time comes?”

“Of course.”

I sighed deeply in relief. As if I'd had to continuously had to brace myself until now, I loosened the hands I'd been unconsciously holding in fists. In the next second.

— — — *BANG BANG.*

“!”

Like it had been perfectly timed, knocks came from the door.

It was the capable yet bothersome, “cannot ‘wait’ if you tell him to wait” man, Klaus. My guard knight had returned roughly about five seconds after I promised to meet with Sir Leonhard next time.

His timing had been too good to be true. When I froze, Sir Leonhard smiled wryly.

“You are safe, he did not hear,” he said in a quiet voice as he walked past me to the door.

On the other side of the open door, sweat dotted on the forehead of the heavily panting man. It did seem like there was no cause for concern, so once again I sighed deeply.

# Chapter 28: The Reincarnated Princess's Encounter ①

In bygone days, the world was on the verge of destruction because of the Dark Lord.

Evil spread, and the hearts of the people were colored with fear and despair. Darkness began to cover the world.

That is a tale of olden days, now several hundred years in the past. When the Dark Lord was sealed, the Dark Ones disappeared as well. The people who lived through those chaotic times are long gone, and the entity known as the Dark Lord has been turned into a nursery tale.

Magic's significance as the first line of defense against the dark creatures has been lost—much like how the Dark Lord was gradually forgotten by the people.

However, that does not mean he has disappeared.

In light exists shadow, and in life exists death; all went together, like two sides of the same coin. They were not things that could be separated from the other, and one by itself can never be completely whole.

The hearts of humans were the same. Love existed with hate, hope with despair, and only powers that were the same possessed the ability to draw close to each other.

Existing alongside the prayers of the people, the Dark Lord will never be completely erased.

In one of the great number of temples standing in Nebel\*, he still lies in quiet repose.

If this world followed the same path as the one in the game, in the not far future he will be stirred awake.

The one who will be most deeply affected by the Dark Lord's revival was the Priest, Michael von Diebold.

He was not born the Dark Lord.

Michael had been a very ordinary boy, the second son to a viscount.

As the son of a noble, he had known no discomfort his entire life, but he threw away his social status and decided to follow the path of serving God. He became the priest of a great temple in the royal city.

Had peace continued endlessly, Michael would never have become involved with the Dark Lord. He may have lived in peace his entire life, offering prayers to God. When he was thirteen, however, the Kingdom of Nebel began to experience much troubled times.

A war broke out between Vind and Sckellz. With a standing alliance between Nebel and its neighbors in Vind, the kingdom eventually became involved in war. The conflict stretched over a year without cessation and the five kingdoms on the western half of the continent were dragged in. It was a difficult situation no one could not extricate themselves from.

In the year after, a neighboring kingdom to the northwest took advantage of the opportunity exhaustion had created in the kingdom due to the prolonged war. The Kingdom of Laptah invaded the Kingdom of Nebel and a new war began.

To add to the distress, disease began to spread from the southern regions of the kingdom.

A kindhearted boy, Michael worried about the devastation of the land and the suffering of the people.

Though he might wish otherwise he possessed no special powers, but that did not prevent him from deciding there must be something he could do. He rushed out of the great temple, determined to visit the entire country.

Tending to the wounded and the sick, helping the children, and offering prayers for the deceased, Michael traveled throughout the ruined kingdom tirelessly.

Finally, he arrived at a remote village near the battle fields. Light rain began to fall around early evening, the many inhabitants of the village ran for cover. Left without shelter, Michael had no choice but to spend the night in a nearby shrine.

Inside the ancient and crumbling building, he searched for a spot to weather

the rain.

Moving deeper and deeper inside, he found a hidden door by chance, and inside of that narrow room was an altar. Enshrined there was a single stone, the size of a fist.

While he found it uncanny, he would only have spend a single night in a nook of the room, so he decided to rest.

Unfortunately, that very night the old shrine was caught between the fighting and it was destroyed.

Michael was crushed beneath the debris, and he died.

The stone on the altar was destroyed in the very same instant, the Dark Lord who had been sealed took possession of Michael's body and successfully revived himself.

...with more information to go on, I thought I could understand the great number of things I must do, and the huge disparity between the game and reality.

To be honest, I was having trouble sorting out my thoughts. I'd wanted to write everything on paper, and meet with everyone. But, well, I can't do either for many reasons.

Leaving anything behind on a piece of paper posed too much of a risk, and having a meeting was impossible for now because the only adviser I had—Sir Leonhard—was kept busy because of his work.

Speaking of the things I could do, I've been making a list of them one by one inside my head.

Honestly, it was overloaded long ago...

Eyes focused far away, I stared outside the window with a sense of escape. Was the reason why I felt so much irritation with the loveliness of the clear blue sky because my own heart was not pure?

“.....”

I sighed deeply.

I lightly slapped my cheeks twice, and got up from my seat.

“Princess Rosemarie, where are you headed?”

“The library.”

There were some books I would need.

Briefly informing him of my destination, I began to walk there. I went to the library with my troublesome guard knight, the usual face that followed me everywhere.

“Hmmm.”

In the big, unpopulated library, I surveyed the bookshelves and groaned a little.

Which one should I start from?

My objectives were mostly separated into three parts.

First, war evasion. Second, defenses against the spread of disease. And lastly, how to prevent the Dark Lord’s revival.

They sound like completely different problems, but they were in fact all linked together.

In order to check where I’m going, I’ll first need a map.

The sound of my footsteps were followed by the sound of another pair of feet, like nothing was out of the usual.

I instinctively killed the sigh that was about to fall out, and turned around. I looked up at the face of the handsome man who stood even taller than one or two heads above me.

“Klaus. You will wait for me by the entrance.”

“Why must I? I am your guard. If I am not near at hand, I cannot accomplish my duties.”

No, no, no!

You made it sound like it was extremely reasonable, but I’ve never seen another guard with a complete lack of regard for personal distance like you. Your assigned charge has a thing called *privacy*, more or less.

*Don’t have so many mental breakdowns*, I’ve been driven to telling myself in pity, and that’s because your sense of personal space is so messed up.

“I asked you to wait by the entrance. If something happens, I’ll call you immediately.”

“I cannot assent.”

“.....”

Son of a *bitch*.

Without a moment of hesitation he asserted *NO*, and with the anger I suddenly remembered my own impending crisis.

I'll be turning eleven years old soon. I was rushing into the years society called the most difficult for a child. Getting stuck with a male guard around the clock was bound to have its own unpleasantries.

Besides, it was different when it was me with the contents of a woman with twenty plus years inside, but the Priestess might not be able to endure this lack of distance.

In the future, Klaus will become her guard, not mine.

As long as you didn't flip his switch, it wasn't so bad when it was the gentlemanly Klaus from the game, but the thought of handing over the current Klaus made me feel really guilty.

From now on, for my sake, and eventually the Priestess's as well...  
I must teach this man how to “wait”!

“Klaus.”

“Yes.”

“Kneel.”

“Certainly.!” Klaus said in a low voice, his breath taken away. But he immediately regained his composure, bending his knee with clean efficiency that wasted no energy. The height of his eyes was a little below mine. Far from being malicious, I was simply curious whether his position on the floor would make him lose some dignity.

But Klaus was blushing from some nervousness or another. Even if he was not particularly frightened, I had no intention of physically punishing him.

“Your master is His Majesty the King, the one who said that was me. However, you are not allowed to ignore my words.”

“I have never, in any way...”

“Be quiet, and listen!”

“Yes, m’lady.”

“If I ever make an unreasonable order, I won’t mind if you reject it regardless of your position. However, *unless* I otherwise say so, *unless* it is a situation where you absolutely cannot agree to my demands, then you are obligated to obey me,” I said, choosing overbearing words on purpose.

I don’t even need to say I didn’t want to order him around. If I think about the hereafter, he’ll be absolutely unbearable if he remained like this.

There were things I needed to do. When I thought of about them, this inconvenience had to be resolved right now.

“I am a princess, and you are a male guard. From now on, you won’t always be able to stay by my side. Well, there should be a lot of places you can’t go together with me. When that happens, what will you do? If I am not within reach of your sword, will you give up?”

“No,” Klaus immediately answered. Expression resolute and voice ringing with dignity, he declared, “I will never abandon hope when it comes to your protection. Upon my pride as a knight, and my life, this I swear.”

Like a knight in shining armor girls dreamed of, he was gallant and handsome, and I—pulled back.

*I never you asked you to go that far!*

“If what you say is true, then learn how to protect me even if we’re separated.”

Schooling the facial muscles that had begun to twitch, I managed to keep myself serene. I’d exerted great effort to appear as calm as possible.

“Don’t just stare at me. If you sense something out of place, try to pay attention the movements the people in the surrounding. Observe their words, any odd behavior, and various other details. You are not only guarding me; do your best to take action while keeping the time, place, and situation all in mind. If it’s you, then you should be able to do it.”

*And my privacy will also be protected,* I desperately wished.

“Princess Rosemarie,” said Klaus with deep feeling. His palm pressed against his heart, like he was trying to keep the lid on his powerful emotions to stay shut. His dark green eyes scrunched up in pain as he looked at me.

“.....”

Right then, I felt a chill go down my back.

Seeing me shiver from the dark atmosphere, Klaus bowed his head.

“By your will,” he said tersely.

For some reason, those briefs words stayed in my ears for a long time.

I had a bad hunch. Very.

There was a saying that sometimes you must lose a battle to win the war, but I couldn't help feeling I'd done the complete opposite. Like I may have destroyed something I'd been protecting for a long time in order to fix this urgent matter.

But it was already too late to go back.

“Well, then, Klaus, wait for me here.”

“Certainly.”

While bearing a headache from the man who seemed to be obeying with complete delight, I began to walk around looking for books.

Many apologies to those who were hoping for a different character? Anyway, Michael is the reason why all of the characters in the Cast are blanked out. His character was the only one that would have been majorly spoiled.

\*Also, from now on, Nayvel will be Nebel. A very insightful comment by FellDragon has made me realize that perhaps these kingdoms were named for different weathers/elements. Nebel would make Nayvel the “Kingdom of Mist.” The older chapters still have the previous spellings, but I'm lazy so bear with me until I edit them.

Vind was previously Vint.

\*\*I have no idea what Laptah Kingdom (ラプター王国) stands for. If my German readers have any suggestions they would like to contribute??

# Chapter 29: The Reincarnated Princess's Encounter ②

The hard sound of my footsteps resounded throughout the not very wide room.

This was one of the libraries in the palace, but it was more like an extension. The total volume of books kept here weren't that many.

But, there were a lot of valuable books that the main building inside the palace grounds did not have. On top of that, only those who had permission were allowed to access, so I didn't need to worry about being observed.

Between the shelves and the stairs, there were a lot of blind spots so Klaus must be out of his mind with worry, but security was tight so it would be difficult for suspicious persons to sneak in.

The dimensions of the windows weren't big enough for people to use it as an entry point, either.

Safe, and most importantly, quiet. As a place of concentration, it was a great spot.

I stopped in front of a shelf and took a book. It was quite old, but maintenance must have been on point because there was no smell of mold.

I went up the short stairs, advancing inside. Now carrying two volumes in my arms, I ventured even deeper inside.

An atlas, a medical journal, and lastly...

".....?"

I heard the sound of a small clatter.

The only thing in front of my eyes were bookshelves, so I turned in the direction of that sound. A small window had been placed at the end of the wall to prevent damage to the books.

In front of it stood a single man.

"!"

I hadn't noticed his presence, so I instinctively took a step back in fright. However, without sending a single glance at me, the man quietly turned a page in the book.

He was...*not* a brazen intruder. With his face in profile, he looked very familiar.

Platinum blond hair I had originally mistaken for white at first shone from the narrow light streaming in. Different from my curls, fine hair without its own tendencies cast a shadow on a beautiful forehead.

His eyes, framed by long lashes, were the color of a bright winter sky. In profile, from the clean bridge of his nose to his thin lips, his facial features were very well put together but lacked any fragment of emotion.

"Are you also here to read?" he asked, not even bothering to look at me.

"....."

Even though it wasn't a reproach, I was choked for an instant.

"Why are *you* here..."

Without answering him, I asked him a question in return. My voice worked itself out of my throat, but although it wasn't hoarse, it was quite stiff.

"....."

After several seconds had passed, he closed the book.

Even if it hadn't been a very loud, my shoulders tensed nervously from the sound. He slowly raised his face to look at me. His light-colored eyes reflected my image.

"Is it strange for me to be inside my own palace?"

Even the motion of lightly tilting his head to the side seemed like it had come straight out of a painting. Though he was in his mid-30s, there was nary a blemish nor a wrinkle on his face.

Receiving a hard stare from this man whose good looks seemed like it couldn't possibly be real made me want to run away screaming, but I dug in my heels and shook my head.

"No, father."

"I see."

The name of the man who stood before me was Randolph von Werfald. His Majesty the King, the current ruler of Nebel. My father.

I called him my father, but there was practically no connection between us as parent and child.

We didn't have a relationship where I could freely meet with him, and I'd never felt any affection, either. More than anything else, I found this person difficult to deal with.

It wasn't like I had no questions about the head of the state wandering around in a place like without a single companion, but quite frankly, I didn't want to get involved.

Let's find what I came here for and leave without delay. I made up my mind to concentrate on finding the books as I'd originally planned.

*...but.*

"....."

What I was missing and the shelf I was looking for couldn't possibly be in front of that person, could it?

If I remembered correctly, materials related to history were supposed to be at the very end.

I stole a quick look to the side. Father made no move to get out of the way, and slowly turned the pages of the book. Hey, you must sense me telling you to move out of the way.

Move, make way, please step aside. I tried sending him my thoughts, but it was ineffective.

He moved at his own sweet pace. Everything about him, from his impassive eyes chasing the characters to the bony, pale finger flipping the pages, seemed to say there was no one else beside him.

His indifferent profile, which irritated me so much, was nothing but a pretty face.

"You'll burn a hole in me staring like that."

"!"

How long had I had been staring at him?

I remembered his fingers going back and forth four or five times. I didn't keep count after that so I wasn't sure, but an appalled sound came out of me.

"If you have business with me, say it. What do you have a mouth for?" he asked dispassionately.

"....."

The words he said were very reasonable. But it really ticked me off. *Asshole*. Mentally bunching my hands into fists, I pasted a smile on my face.

"Excuse me. I wanted to read a book on history," I said, implicitly telling him to move, but my father didn't look like he could be bothered.

It seemed like he had no intention of yielding his spot. He looked at me and the shelves, and after a short while he opened his mouth.

"Which era?"

".....?"

"I'm telling you to state the subject you wish to research."

Why was he asking about that?

I was puzzled. When I didn't answer him, he expressionlessly asked, *Are you slow?*

ARGHHHHH! I'M SOOOOOO PISSED OFF!!!

"The Dark Lord!"

The moment I shouted at him in irritation, my father stopped moving for a moment.

Those unique eyes with its color like thin ice reflected my image. His emotions couldn't be read, and I faltered under his stare.

"Do you want a fairy tale?"

"...no."

His low voice was as flat as ever. Anger and delight were absent; no fragment of emotion could be detected.

But for some reason, I was terrified. As if a blade was being pushed against the

back of my neck, and my heart cowered in fear.

Perhaps I'd unwittingly brought the dragon's wrath upon myself.

Still, I couldn't help but negate him.

"The Dark Lord is not a character inside a story. He does not exist as a fable to lull a child keeping late hours to sleep."

"You wish to say he was real? Something that is no more, and remains only in the descriptions of ancient texts?"

"Documents were the living proof of our ancestors. Several hundred years' worth of time have passed, but even after the memories of people have faded, the gift our ancestors have left behind are the methods we can use to struggle against the dark."

Unintentionally, I began to get worked up as talked back to him. I couldn't back down *precisely* because I knew the Dark Lord existed in this world.

How much horror did the people who fought against the Dark Lord face? How much did they suffer?

They were witness to a strength that defied knowledge, that single-handedly laid waste to all. But even when they continuously lost their homes, were killed, and trampled underfoot, they struggled without giving up hope. I couldn't help but hold awe and respect for those people.

For their military success, for the proof of a miracle. For the way of life they continued to go against.

A descendant from the kingdom that sealed the Dark Lord, the ruler of that kingdom, was not allowed to ridicule it as a fairy tale.

"I said I wanted to read a history book. Please, do not misunderstand."

From below I glared at him like I was facing off with him. Clamping down on my panic, I somehow put on a brave face, but my father was neither angry nor surprised.

All he said was, "I see."

.....huh? That was it?

Even tricks have a limit. Earlier, you seemed angry enough to instantly execute me if I made a single wrong comment.

The intimidating air vanished. After a while, nothing remained and I even thought it had been an illusion.

Closing the book in his hand and returning it to the shelf, my father passed by me.

Really, what just happened!

“If that is the case, you should stop by my chambers later.”

“Huh...?”

I had a delayed response to the words he dropped as he left, before rounding my eyes in shock.

Confused, I turned around. Feet moving without pause, my father continued like we were trading gossip.

“Books relating to the Dark Lord are in my control. If you wish, I will show you.”

I merely stood still, unable to say a single word in response to his parting back.

# Chapter 30: The Reincarnated Princess's Reflection

“Have they been shown to you?”

“Not...as of yet.”

Sir Leonhard sat across from me inside the carriage. When he questioned me, I looked down.

My father was too busy, so I've had difficulty catching him during the day, and even when dark fell. I considered imposing on him right before he went to sleep, but couldn't manage to work up the courage.

Under one of his absolute zero stares, if he were to question whether I lacked common sense or not, I'd cry. Yeah no, that was a lie. I'd probably flip out.

“He's busy throughout the day, and I lose courage when I think of disturbing his work. But, the sooner the better, right? I've decided I'll ask him to make time, even if it takes a few days.”

It sounded like I was trying to justify myself, but the words just fell out of their own volition.

When I peeped up at him with a *You must be surprised, right?* look, for some reason Sir Leonhard looked uneasy. Rather than shock, it seemed like he was worried about something.

“What troubles you?” I asked him timidly.

His jet black eyes seemed to settle on me with hesitation.

“Have you said a word of your meeting with His Majesty to Prince Christof?”

“I haven't,” I said with clarity.

Sir Leonhard's expression became even more clouded.

Looking at his brows furrowed in worry, I was impatient. What was it, have I messed up?

Though I did encounter my father—who I hardly ever saw—I hadn't

considered it information I needed to go out of my way to report, but had I been mistaken?

“Uh, umm...”

Silent the entire time, Sir Leonhard took notice of my self-doubt forming and softened his expression, like he was trying to let me calm down.

“Ahh, it was nothing. I am not criticizing you, princess. Please, do not make such a worried face.”

I must have looked absolutely pathetic.

Sir Leonhard smiled, like he was trying to make a child feel better. I wasn't exactly happy to be treated like a child, but right now my relief far outweighed my concerns.

I'm so glad...I didn't make him mad.

“Your Royal Highness...”

“Yes?”

“The story you have inclined to share with me, have you not considered sharing with Prince Christof?”

“Huh?”

At the unexpected question, I stared with eyes wide.

It took a moment for my brain to catch up. The story I told Sir Leonhard...in other words, telling my brother? About me knowing about the future?

That was...

“No.”

It slipped out, speedily and without hesitation.

“I can't tell him. If I must, I would rather tell my father,” I said decisively.

Sir Leonhard's eyes opened as wide as mine had.

Mouth dropped open, and eyes rounded. I wanted to take my time enjoying him make such a rare expression, but the timing was entirely inappropriate. I cleared my throat to cover up my split second of fascination, and continued to explain myself.

“My story makes no sense, but I’m sure my brother would still believe me. Additionally, I *do* believe it would be to my advantage for any course of action I take from here on out.”

“Then, whyever?”

“While Chris *is* my older brother, at the same time, he is *also* the heir to the throne. I mustn’t do anything to influence him, such as giving him information that may or may not be true. The future I saw has already begun to change, and not one thing remains that is for certain.”

“Your Royal Highness...”

“That is where I stand.”

After I gave him a plausible reason, my serious expression remained unchanged as I added another thought.

“If the future I have seen was to come true, somewhere down the road my brother will one day have to use me for the good of the kingdom, won’t he? Not as my brother, but as the prince.”

“.....”

Sir Leonhard did not refute me.

He remained silent, expression grave. He offered no temporary words of diversion, but that was very much like him.

Even if the reality was hard, he would never cover it up with a kind lie, and his honesty was what I loved about him.

My expression softened with the strength of my feelings.

“However, I’m sure it won’t be because he is cold and unfeeling. My kind brother will surely suffer from worry, because he treasures me and Johan a lot.”

The night the royal palace was attacked, I had believed him to be able to use me for his purpose.

He needed to be able to draw a line between the two; it was not a matter of him using his little sister, but being capable of making the princess fulfill her duties. I myself wished to be useful, so there was no need for him to feel indebted to me.

And yet, Chris had protected me the way an older brother would his little sister. He had spoiled me, and hugged me close. Even though he was probably the same when it came to not having anyone to spoil him.

Like hell I'd be able to tell someone like that to, *Use me for what you need.*

"My real intention is, very simply, commonplace selfishness."

I was still content to be a child.

I'll stay his spoiled little sister.

Until my brother does not "use" me, and places his confidence in and "trust" in me.

"I have no desire to be used by my brother, and I don't want to let him use me, either."

"....."

Sir Leonhard stared at me, and a long silence fell inside the carriage. Only the sound of the wheels hitting the ground was audible, but it wasn't unpleasant.

How much time has passed, I wondered.

Sir Leonhard sighed briefly and smiled.

He wasn't upset with my outrageously selfish reasons, and only looked upon me kindly.

"I understand. If it is as you have you said, this conversation will go no farther than us."

"Sir Leon...thank you very much."

"Not at all."

It is not something you should give thanks for, he smiled wryly.

The next second, his expression became serious, and he bowed his head.

"I am merely your lowly servant, but I have overstepped my bounds. Please, forgive me."

It was apology that would accept nothing but a clear explanation of what he thought of himself.

I also liked this side of him a lot. But, it felt like I was being pushed away, so I felt lonely.

If I wasn't the princess, would he be more willing to be at ease with me? I wondered.

But if that were the case, he wouldn't be able to protect me like this.

"Your Royal Highness? What is the matter?"

"....."

If I thought about it, his interactions with the Priestess was because she was the Priestess.

He didn't just pamper her. He scolded her, and at times, he cheered her on as well. He called her name with that deep voice. And patted her head with that big hand of his.

How nice... It wasn't fair.

I also want that big hand to pat me. *You're silly*, I want him to joking say to me. I want him to give me a light poke and affectionately say, *There's no helping you*.

"Sorry. It's nothing."

But, none of it was possible. As the princess, I had my limits, and it was a wish that could never come true.

A whim as impossible as asking for the moon.

It was saddening, but that was reality.

There was no use hoping, so I couldn't bring trouble to Sir Leonhard again.

I made up my mind, and smiled at him to put him at ease, but...

"Your Royal Highness."

"Um...y-yes?"

"It does not appear to be nothing."

Sir Leonhard wasn't deceived at all.

On the contrary...he looked a little angry. Was it just my imagination?

# Chapter 31: The Reincarnated Princess's Selfishness

Sir Leonhard folded his hands between his knees and abruptly leaned forward.

His serious eyes were overpowering, and I unintentionally pulled back, but a lack of space behind prevented me from putting much distance between us.

“Your Royal Highness.”

“Yes...”

He spoke with his voice even more devoid of emotion than before, and my spine straightened itself out.

My sense of unease was right on point. He was beyond angry.

I had almost no memories of getting reprimanded from the moment I was reborn in this world, but I did in the previous world. My parents, the teachers, and the elderly would scold with their voices, while their eyes flashed admonishment.

Oh, how I've missed this feeling, but I had no time for indulging in sentimentality. All I could do was brace my shoulders, and wait for the words to come.

H-he was a kinda scary, though...

“Pardon the rudeness, I have something I would like to say, if I may. Is that acceptable?”

“Ye—es.”

The only thing I've been saying for a while was “yes”. There are so many different ways you can say “yes”, I thought, like I was trying to escape reality. But there was no way out.

Sir Leonhard asked permission to speak, but his words no longer held the semblance of a question. It was a statement, leaving no room for argument. Perhaps I should say *Yes, you may speak*. Though he was not asking, said my

inner voice.

“Earlier, princess, you said would not tell His Royal Highness. In other words, the only one who can directly lend you aid in this matter is myself.”

Acknowledging his words with my eyes, I nodded.

Like a bobblehead, shaking my head over and over. His gaze was sharp as he stared at me.

“And yet, you continue to swallow your words. If you held back until even I, the only one aware of your situation, am shut out, then whoever did you intend to ask assistance from?”

“.....”

Exposed to his displeasure, my body jumped with a start.

Even though he noticed me gulping in terror, Sir Leonhard’s expression did not soften at all.

“When one is forced to deal with a difficult problem, expecting support from others first instead of giving more effort than one can handle on their own may seem lacking in integrity to a hardworking person like you. Perhaps, it may go against what you perceive to be right. But justice does not necessarily exist in what is correct.”

*Do you understand?* Sir Leonhard looked at me to confirm.

Without a word, I nodded a little.

Strangely enough, I felt no resentment. Was it because his experience with people lent weight to his words? Or was it because I didn’t have a character that fit appropriately for my age?

Either way, his words easily soaked into me.

Even if it wasn’t right and I wouldn’t know intuitively, there was a clear line between doing the “good thing” by giving my all to do my best, and depending on others to take care of everything.

For someone like me who hated to be wrong, I continuously chose to lean towards doing “the right thing” whenever possible. If I did that, I could find myself peace of mind.

But I’m sure it was merely another type of escape. To me, it was nothing more

than choosing the easiest path to walk down.

A concept such as righteousness was undoubtedly different depending on who was looking, and the angle they observed it from.

“After this, the path you have chosen will be terribly harsh on you. I do not know what pitfalls lie in wait for you, even when the way may seem paved. Before you take a step forward, please take my hand. Don’t think about whether you’ll have gone there on your own where you can.”

My back straightened with his words.

I guess I understood, and also not at all.

I see. I’d invited Sir Leonhard onto this road where unknown dangers lurked. Only one person, and it was him.

I made the decision to set things into motion myself, so the only person I’d planned to have take responsibility for my actions had been me.

But I was mistaken. If something were to happen to me, Sir Leonhard would absolutely put the blame on himself. Even if it was not something the law would punish, he would probably judge himself. He was that sort of man.

Regardless of the heavy burden I’ve allowed him to carry, without a single word of condemnation for me, he’ll only try to help.

“There must be a lot of things you cannot consult with a boorish man of obdurate nature like myself. However, if you do not share all that you wish to, your heart will be filled with trouble. No matter how small the worry, or how insignificant you have deemed it, please voice everything. Hold nothing back, because I have already decided to stand by you.”

“Yes...”

I nodded, holding in my urge to cry.

His expression softened. I was even more moved to tears at the kindness in his eyes, which only offered praise.

When I wiped away the tears that had formed, his hand moved with a twitch. His large hand had lifted from his knee, but stopped midway, and clenched into a fist.

“.....”

Had he been about to wipe away my tears?

Sir Leonhard was a gentleman, so the possibility wasn't zero. But because I was the princess, he had probably hesitated to touch me.

In the end, his hand returned to his knee without doing anything, and I looked on regretfully.

"Is something amiss...?"

Sir Leonhard looked at me strangely, noticing the way I stared at him with meaning.

No, I tried to deny at once, but kept my mouth shut. This was what had made him disappointed in the first place.

But it had absolutely nothing to do with avoiding the dangers of the future. Only my desires.

Round, and round, and round my thoughts went in circles. It was a completely useless exercise, leaving only an empty, creaking sound.

Sir Leonhard did not try to press me for an answer. His dark eyes only continued observe.

If he had scolded me and said *I just said it earlier, didn't I?* it would have been easier to speak. I could make an excuse, and my feelings of guilt would diminish. But I shouldn't think like that.

"May...may I..."

I broke off.

Even if I was not minding my appearance at last, the words did not seem to want to come out. For a moment, I cut off my words, and took a big breath. I cleared my throat once.

"...say something s-selfish?"

"By all means."

His eyes gently smiled at me.

I wished he wouldn't look so amused, like he was taking care of a small child.

It saddened me, but it was my reality. I was an awkward child, and I wasn't good at being demanding of others, but this was how I looked to others. That

was why I needed to live up to the maximum of my potential.

“I would like you to be more rude to me.”

“.....pardon?”

Huh? Something was wrong. When I tried voicing myself, I couldn't find the right expression.

Sir Leonhard froze for about ten seconds from what I said. His expression remained petrified as he asked me again.

I've definitely chosen the wrong words.

“A little...different from discourteously. Crudely...roughly?”

“Whichever it is, the same meaning is retained. Your Royal Highness, what in the world are you thinking about?”

With every word that flew out of my mouth his expression became more thunderous. Sir Leonhard put a hand on his head and looked down. He took a deep breath like he was holding back tremendous shock, and looked at me with suspicious eyes through a crack in his fingers.

“Sir Leon, I believe the way you treat me is too polite.”

“.....”

I'd wondered if he'd be upset, but his eyes became rounded. He'd been struck dumb by my unexpected words.

“The Commander of the Royal Knights deferring to the princess with courtesy is the utmost correct conduct. I understand. However, I can't help but feel a great distance between us.”

“Your Royal Highness...”

When I looked down, bewilderment mixed in with Sir Leonhard's voice.

“I was happy when you scolded me earlier. It was the first time anyone was mad at me, so it was bit scary, but...it will always be better than being treated like glass. From now on, if I do something wrong, I want you to scold me. You don't need to excuse yourself ahead of time. I won't mind at all if you poke me, either.”

“I would not dare!”

“So you find it disagreeable...”

I glared at him in reproach. Bashfully, he held his tongue.

“.....”

“No one ever tells me what to do. That’s why sometimes even I am at a loss and don’t know where to go. I want to be scolded and praised like any regular girl. And also, if at all possible, by *you*...”

“!”

My desperate expression was reflected in his bulging eyes. Even if I had to face him when he was confused, I had no intention of drawing back. Letting go of my pursuit meant not obtaining what I wished for.

This was the first battle. Good luck, Rosemarie.

“I don’t mind if you keep up the same appearance in a public location. I’m fine if it is only at a time when we are alone, but I want you to feel comfortable to be yourself. It’s only a little, so please let me get closer to you.”

“.....”

Sir Leonhard continued to stare at me like a stone statue. Well, I suppose. If the little princess were to suddenly throw out impassioned words similar to a love confession, anyone would be thrown off guard. He’d be left wondering what to do. Yeah.

After several seconds, he came back to his senses and covered his face with his hand. I couldn’t see the expression on his face as he dropped his head down, so I had no idea what was going through his mind.

“Sir Leon...?”

“...ahh—.....”

“?”

Groaning, he looked up. The brows creased in displeasure were drawn together, but his cheeks were slightly red so he wasn’t entirely scary. Sir Leonhard stirred up his hair into a mess, and sighed deeply.

Did I anger him...?

“I’m not angry.”

Seeing how worried I’d become, Sir Leon smiled wryly.

*Great.* I sighed in relief. Then a different question took my attention.

“What...? Did I speak out loud?”

“It was written on your face. Your thoughts appear quite easily.”

Seriously? I thought I was born from a lineage full of expressionless people. Flustered, I grabbed my cheeks, and Sir Leonhard smiled like he was exhausted.

“You’re unusual. Normal women would be more delighted to be treated with politeness. To think I’d ever be asked to treat you with rudeness...you really are a genius of messing with me.”

“B-but...”

“You should be proud. The only one who could manipulate me is most likely you.”

His eyes narrowed in mean-spirited laughter.

A big hand gently patted my head.

“.....”

For a split second I couldn’t comprehend, *Have I woken something up?* My eyes were opened until they could get no bigger, and he chuckled in amusement.

“When I poke you, you must forgive me. Princess.”

Without a doubt, I had confidence I was the happiest person in the world right now.

# Chapter 32: The Reincarnated Princess's Inquiry ①

*I'm so glad I went for it.*

I was fit to burst with happiness, and only childlike thoughts like that were coming to mind.

“Your face is bright red.”

“!”

When he pointed it out, I covered my face with both hands in a panic. My cheeks were definitely hot. If I were a steamed bun, it would seem like steam was blowing off me.

Sir Leonhard burst into laughter as he watched me try to cool down somehow, flipping the palms against my cheeks to the back of my hands.

He's *terrible*. He was covering his mouth with his hand, but I could tell. Trying to cover up with a cough when his act was already exposed!

“You must be enjoying yourself...”

I couldn't help it if I stared at him rather coldly.

Trifling with the tender heart of a young girl in love was not permissible behavior just because he happened to be Sir Leonhard.

“I'm sorry.”

He readily apologized, but his eyes were laughing.

I was struck by sudden understanding. Had he always been slightly mean?

He asked questioned me from the opposite seat.

“Do you dislike this side of me?”

“Not at all,” I replied instantly.

Sir Leonhard gazed at me in wonder.

It seemed like he hadn't been expecting my answer.

Don't get me wrong, it didn't particularly make me pleased to get teased, got

it?! It was because he was different from Klaus and the others, he didn't have a fetish like they did!

My reason was very simple!

"I'm happy you're not keeping up appearances with me."

I truly was very happy to be able to see his true self.

When I poured out my feelings honestly, Sir Leonhard made a face like he'd swallowed a frog.

Why did he have to look like that? Seeing my expression, he gave me a troubled smile.

"I don't mind with you."

"Huh?"

Not understanding the meaning his words hinted at, I gave him questioning look, but he stopped talking.

"Well. Let's leave the chitchat here and get down to business."

"OK..."

He seemed to be distracting me so that I couldn't understand, but he was right to say we had no spare time for idle talk. He went to great pains to detach Klaus from me, so I should use my time effectively.

Young girls in love wasn't a frivolous conversation, though...

"This time you're starting measures that can prevent disease?"

"Yes."

Sir Leonhard pulled out a map from a pocket with a hardened expression.

"Excuse the proximity."

"What?"

He stood up from his seat and settled beside me.

His handsome face was right next to me, and I stared with my mouth open.

S-so close...!!

In contrast to how I'd turned to stone from earth-shattering nerves, Sir

Leonhard was in complete work mode. His profile as his gaze dropped down to the map was the image of seriousness itself.

I became ashamed of my of shaken composure, and chanted a spell to myself for the beating of my heart to *Settle down, down!*

“You were saying the disease spread from the south, but do you know the exact location?”

“I don’t know for certain, but...I’d like to say south-southwest. Close to the national border with our neighbors in the Kingdom of Vind.”

Taking my cue from Sir Leonhard’s calm voice, I gradually calmed down. After sucking in a deep breath, I turned my attention to the map.

At the heart of a giant continent shaped like one side of a bird’s wing was my kingdom, Nebel. Blessed with great weather, the peninsular portion that jutted out at the bottom was tropical in nature. Even to the north, warm lands accounted for a great portion of it, and the only area where snow fell in a notable density was in the northernmost mountain ranges.

I’m happy it was such an easy place to live in, but not everything was good. A virus can’t move in a cold place, but made itself right at home in my kingdom it made itself right at home, even among the upper crust.

“Isn’t that the peninsula?”

“Yes.”

In the peninsula with its tropical climate, numerous diseases were likely to thrive, but people who made their homes there had built up immunity, so they didn’t take as considerable the same damage.

Furthermore, the portion of the land connected to the continent was extremely thin, drawn tight like an hourglass. Of course there was communication between the two, but they had their own culture and rarely left their territory, so even the disease had a hard time spreading through the continent.

“Perhaps the disease spread because we became involved in the war between Vind and Sckellz.”

“Your reason?”

“The first is the season. Within a year of the beginning of the war, disease

began to spread. Two, inside my dream, the skin color of the people persecuted as ‘the source of the disease’ were different from the citizens of Nebel.”

Resting his chin in his hand, Sir Leonhard took a moment to think, and arrived at the same conclusion I did.

“Skin color...! Meaning, refugees?”

I nodded my head, and continued.

“I’ve heard that there are people with dark skin living in the massive forest that stretches throughout the southern lands of Vind. Driven out of their homes, I think they might stream into Nebel.”

“If I’m not mistaken, were the horrors of war to see the forests burn, instead of escaping north to a land situated right in the middle of the conflict, it would make more sense for them aim for the neighboring kingdom. If the disease began to spread at the same time refugees began pouring into Nebel, don’t you find it odd these targets who stood out became the scapegoats?”

“Yes.”

“Did you yourself also believe the source to be them? Or did you also find it a suspicious accusation?”

“Taking sides is dangerous...but I don’t believe they were the carriers.”

If it was the same as the world I was previously from, then many viruses likely existed in the jungles of this world as well.

For the dark-skinned groups that have lived on those lands since ancient times, the severity has not increased because they became used to the disease, but it was a different story for the citizens of Nebel who had absolutely no developed antibody.

We were fortunate it wasn’t a disease with a high mortality rate, but the exhaustion caused by the war and the lack of adequate medicine seemed to hasten its spread.

“I am of the same opinion. Similar to our kingdom’s peninsula, the southern forests have many unknown diseases. Vind is exceedingly unlikely to start a war for the time being, but refining preventive measures against disease is sound

practice nonetheless.”

*Immediately, if possible,* he added.

At his additional words, I lifted my head and directed my gaze in his direction.

I knew it was necessary to provide measures because the threat had not disappeared.

But why did we have to rush? It was a bridge that would need to be crossed quickly, but there were a lot of other tasks that needed doing. My face reflected my questions, and Sir Leonhard nodded.

“Even if it was not caught in the flames of war, there is a chance the forests will still be lost,” he said.

Trade could increase with Flamme to the southwest, contingent upon Vind destroying the threat against them known as Sckellz.

Flamme was a kingdom surrounded on three fronts by the sea, and there were many people who took jobs that were affected by voyages and fishing. Naturally, the shipbuilding was also a prosperous industry, and in order to build their ships, they needed timber.

That meant the resource Vind had their eyes set on selling to Flamme would be the southern woodlands!

“So they’ve begun deforesting the woods,” I murmured.

“You save me with your quick understanding.”

Sir Leonhard looked at me with approval.

“Stopping them is...impossible, isn’t it?”

No matter how many alliances existed between our kingdoms, a foreign princess had no say in this matter.

No one knew better than me, but I dropped it without giving up hope. But, Sir Leonhard wasn’t the type to spout pointless words of consolation.

“Some will have to experience it firsthand before they are willing to listen.”

I held my tongue at his straightforward opinion.

I had no disagreement. It was sad, but I thought the same.

There was no time for me to be depressed. There was much for me to

do.

I pulled myself together, and opened my mouth to speak.

“Then...—?!”

And then it happened.

The horse whinnied, and the big carriage shook.

“Highness!!”

Without a moment’s delay, Sir Leonhard pulled me into his arm and drew his sword from its scabbard.

What in the world?!

# Chapter 33: The Reincarnated Princess's Inquiry ②

After the shock, the carriage came to a sudden standstill. I'd slipped off the seat, with Sir Leonhard supporting me. His handsome face was a harsh mask, and the atmosphere had become tense.

"I will go assess the situation. Your Highness, take care to not move from this spot."

I nodded silently. Sir Leonhard released me, and put a hand on the carriage door.

"I am terribly sorry!"

However, a voice from outside called out slightly faster than he could throw open the door.

"Your Highness is not injured?"

"Her Highness is safe. What happened?"

Sir Leonhard kept me safely behind him as he directed his question outside.

"Sir, someone suddenly jumped in front of the carriage."

"....."

When Sir Leonhard opened the door, I saw my escort and the ashen coachman were on the other side.

It occurred to me that I was probably just as pale as the coachman. Wait, what? He said someone jumped out? Th-that person wasn't run over, were they?! It was such a big crash...were they okay?!

"The wounded person?"

"Avoided, so I believe they are safe, but—"

Sir Leonhard alighted from the carriage, and shut the door while he held a conversation with the coachman.

Left to my own devices inside the carriage, there was nothing else to do but imagine what had happened outside from their conversation. According to the broken snippets of their conversation I could catch, it seems like a young boy had jumped in front of the carriage.

Seems like he somehow managed to avoid injuries to himself, so things were looking up.

I breathed a little easier, feeling relieved. But the conversation suddenly came to a halt. I sensed no disturbing indications, but there was surprise in Sir Leonhard's voice.

What was it? I became extremely curious.

"Your Highness."

"Y-yes?"

I'd opened the door a crack, and could hear the voices outside. That meant I was improperly positioned with my head stuck against the door, ears pricked. In a panic, I flew back to my seat.

His impatient tone of voice changed to one of surprise, but Sir Leonhard continued without minding my conduct. Rather than say he ignored my strange behavior, it was more accurate that he was ignoring such a slight concern.

"It has become a small problem."

"Please give your report," I responded, fixing my sitting posture. I didn't think someone like *me* could do something about a matter Sir Leonhard would call *trouble*, but the person with the highest social standing was me. That meant I was responsible.

I was fired up to do my duty, but in contrast to my enthusiasm, Sir Leonhard only admitted after an uncomfortable stretch of silence, "The one who jumped out is the son from the noble household of the Viscountcy of Diebold."

"....."

Diebold. It sounded awfully familiar.

Closing my eyes, I brooded. Even though I'd heard it before, I couldn't remember. *Diebold, Diebold, I*

repeated to myself, searching my memories.

“.....!”

I suddenly had a flashback of the graphics of a man with a bewitching pretty face.

Long, black hair with a tinge of blue, and long-slitted eyes of the same color. Thin lips that always sported a mysterious smile,\* and made it difficult to read his emotions.

His was entirely dressed in the pure white robes of a priest. With a single glance he felled the people into disarray. A man with a dangerous appeal—Michael von Diebold.

*So, it was him.*

I was ecstatic over what I just remembered, then became pale in the next instant.

*Isn't he the Dark Lord!!*

Diebold's son was the Dark Lord, wasn't he!!

Completely unprepared for this turn of events and the bomb that had been thrown at me, I was greatly muddled and at a loss for what to do.

In the end, I escaped from reality. Like so. *The House of Diebold has two sons, if I remembered correctly.*

“Is he the eldest son?”

Sir Leonhard did me the honor of politely smashing my useless attempt at denial. He sounded somewhat astonished.

“He is Michael von Diebold.”

*And so he is!*

“Your Highness. There is no danger posed to you here. Will you not do us the honor of descending?” Sir Leonhard asked. Perhaps he thought I wasn't moving fast enough.

His words did remind that Michael wasn't the Dark Lord yet, so I breathed a sigh of relief.

The day he became the Dark Lord was still many years in the future. Supposing I

failed to destroy the flag.

“I understand.”

I took a deep breath.

I opened the door, and climbed down the carriage with my hand held out in demand. The one who met me was the guard with his lowered head, the coachman, and...an unfamiliar boy.

“.....”

*Who?*

A question mark floating over my head, I stared at the boy fixedly.

I thought I heard Sir Leonhard say Michael was here, but there was not a trace of beautiful, dangerous young man—who had looked perfectly at home against the moonlit night, bathed in blood.

“Ah, um...”

Black hair with a tinge of blue, evenly cut to the back of his neck. Long-slitted eyes peeked through the space between his long bangs.

He was tall but thin, so I couldn't get rid of my lanky impression. The words *a gangly child* came to mind.

His shoulders were hunched forward. He looked around restlessly, eyebrows drawn in worry like the shape of a roof. Nonsensical moans leaked out, his voice plaintive. Whichever direction I looked at him from, I couldn't find in this boy the Dark Lord who had been filled with brimming self-confidence.

The boy stirred, growing uncomfortable under my appraising eyes, and I fell silent for a moment.

What was the point of making the Dark Lord (the guy who will become him) have stranger anxiety?!

“Highness,” Sir Leonhard reproached me, like he was unable to watch from the sidelines when it seemed the boy was about to tear up.

Like he was trying to protect himself, Michael made a cute cry that sounded like *meow*.

Hm? Why a meow?

When I looked closer, there was a completely black cat in his arms. A pair of blue gems stared back, looking at me doubtfully in suspicion. Most *definitely* cute.

“It seems like he was trying to save the cat from getting run over when he jumped in front of the carriage.”

“Is that so? Are you unhurt?”

Michael blushed furiously, and dropped his head.

“Eh—uh...y-yes,” he replied with scarcely any words in a very thin voice.

Even if I tried to look at it in a favorable light, he wasn't very attractive like this...but, I did think he was cute. It was probably rude to think of an older boy as *cute*, though.

“Ah—I, I am apprenticed to a priest. M-my name—is Mi-Michael von Diebold. I—was u-unaware this was a carriage of the royal house. Please—forgive—me.”

*STOP ALREADY!* I silently yelled.

I felt guilty when he tried so desperately to apologize even though he had difficulty getting the words out, but I could handle no more. To be frank, because I had memories of it from my previous life, I couldn't think this fault that turned his speech inarticulate from nerves to be anyone else's problem.

“It is a blessing none of us were hurt,” I said, and aimed a smile loaded with forgiveness at him.

The blushing boy lowered his head into his chest even more.

It was pitiful looking at his form curling into itself, so I wanted to let him go quickly, but there was something on my mind.

What was Michael doing in a place like this alone?

Though we were in the middle of town, we were a great distance away from the Great Temple. Wasn't it a bit far for an errand?

“What brings an honorable priest of the Great Temple here?” Sir Leonhard asked the question in my stead.

Did he also sense something amiss?

Michael mistook the words for an accusation.

“Er—aahh um, I had no intention of doing som—anything wrong.”

The blood drained from his face, and he desperately shook his head.

“Worry not. I am not criticizing you. I thought perhaps to offer help if something troubled you.”

Sir Leonhard gave him a nice business smile, and the tension fell out of Michael’s shoulders. Unconsciously? he squeezed the cat in a hug. The human-friendly cat did not make any attempts to run away.

“M-my work is done, so the time is mine to use, and I go to the orphanage.”

According to his story, after his duties were complete at the Great Temple, he would make his way to the orphanage and lend a helping hand.

*It’s probably out of self-satisfaction,* he added, and looked down.

Who was this little angel?! Such a good child!

“Not at all. I think you are amazing,” I said with a smile, and Michael’s face beamed.

“T-truthfully, I want to go to distant villages, too, and not just the ones in the royal city. I-I have not yet, received permission.”

“!”

I had been making *yeah, yeah!* sounds of encouragement, feeling like I was doting a small child as I listened to the words Michael spoke with such delight, but I pulled up short on the way.

He said he wanted to go to the distant villages?

Even though the war didn’t break out, and the disease wasn’t spreading yet, the future hadn’t changed?

The apprentice priest was brimming with energy to set out and make his rounds around the entire kingdom if only he could obtain permission. His ability to take action vividly overwhelming his introverted nature.

“ .....

Bad timing. Seriously bad timing.

I needed to do something, one way or another, but I only felt the pressure and

could think of nothing good.

Sir Leonhard, who had been keeping quiet, intercepted.

“Your Highness, I have a request.”

*A request?* I turned to him questioningly, and he slowly blinked his eyes twice to send a message.

“I have a report to make of previously detected suspicious individuals in this area. Something may happen to the sir priest if he returns alone. If Your Highness sees fit to grant permission, I would like to travel together with him. Once Your Highness’s tasks are over, how do you find the suggestion of sending him as far back as the Great Temple?”

“I approve!”

“You are very gracious.”

Nice move, Sir Leonhard!

That’s right, this way we can kidnap him, and persuade him along the way! Even if it sounded unreasonable, the next time we meet it’d be nice to get him to make an agreement with me!

“Er, um—huh?”

Unable to keep track of the development, Michael became confused and in his arms the black cat carefreely cried *Mweoow*.

# Chapter 34: The Reincarnated Princess's Inquiry ③

The carriage finally made its way to the front a giant estate made of stone. It did not have the gaudiness of baroque architecture—the uniformity of the color blended in with the surrounding landscape, revealing the refinement of its owner.

Leaving the wide entrance hall behind, I was guided through a hallway decorated with paintings to a parlor.

The man waiting inside stood up. He watched my approach, expression gentling as it recovered from shock.

“I have been expecting you, Miss Marie.”

“It has been a long time, Master Julius.”

This fine figure of a man who lifted my hand and kissed it in an elegant gesture was Julius zu Eicher.

He was the uncle of Georg, one of the love interests, and an excellent trader in the process of spreading his network throughout the continent.

I'm indebted to him for all he did for Georg's mother, and even after that case I continued to keep exchanges with him. Mostly in order to satisfy my private wants.

“Truly. You have become still more beautiful in the short time I have not seen you.”

*You have become such a lovely lady, I can no longer thoughtlessly pick you up in my arms,* he said with a mischievous smile.

Ooh, very skillful.

I felt more admiration than shyness at his smoothly delivered compliment. Was it an innate ability of his to deliver his words without a hint of sarcasm, and also not make one feel disgusted?

None of the other men in the family, neither Lord Eicher nor Georg, had the

same skill. The head of the family was the type to speak with a force of attitude, and the current Georg was a naive boy.

He was good looking, tall, a gentleman, and rich to boot. On top of that, even though he was only a second son, his lineage came straight out of a Margraviate household. It was a miracle such a good catch was still unmarried at age 28. Well, the man himself probably had no intention of settling down.

“I apologize for suddenly imposing on you. You must surely be busy, were you forced to changed your schedule?”

“No, I am overjoyed you decided to contact me.”

Or so he said, but I was conscientious of how high-highhandedly I forced him to accommodate me.

I didn't want to interfere with his work, but catching people who bustled from country to country was quite difficult.

The man who loved his older brother's family worried greatly about his sickly sister-in-law, his brother's inability to be honest with himself, and his diffident nephew. Whenever he could, tried to be close to home.

However, when all problems were removed, his days were spent on trips to make his business bigger, happily traveling to various places.

“Occasionally Georg will even do nothing but criticize, telling me to be more appropriate in conduct.”

“Georg will, you said?” I questioned him.

I couldn't imagine Georg ever doing something like that.

“Yes. Lately he has become more and more unendearing. I *am* happy with the growth of my nephew, but I am troubled by his incessant nagging.”

“.....”

Seeing the way I frowned and kept silent, Master Julius grinned wryly.

“Hard to imagine, is it not? It must be because the Georg you knew was timid and gentle like a young girl. I think you will be surprised when you meet him.”

The last time we met was for Georg's 9<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was two years older than me, so he should be 13 years old now. In these

four years this older boy would have certainly gotten bigger, but has the person inside changed as well?

“He should be working in another room today. I’ve kept your presence here a secret, so shall we go give him a surprise?”

Master Julius placed a finger against his lips, lowering his voice like we were having a secret conversation. He looked to be enjoying himself. Even though he was one of the finest men around, the boyish quality remaining told me he was still be the same gap moe person.

“Certainly,” I answered, lowering my voice in a similar fashion.

He broke out in a delighted smile.

“I have a lot of souvenirs for you. Whenever I happened upon rare ingredients and seasonings, I was reminded of you.”

“!”

“Would you like to see?”

Ingredients! Seasonings!!

Eyes sparkling, I took his bait.

“Yes!”

Master Julius only procured goods that were rare to our kingdom. Sometimes, goods that reminded me of Japan were mixed in, so I was secretly hoping that the day I got my hands on sticky rice was close.

I cheerfully let him take the lead, when a lost voice suddenly came from behind.

“Ah...”

It was a small voice that seemed like one could easily ignore, but the moment I heard it I suddenly remembered.

I turned my head to look at the figure of a boy standing idly about.

Which reminded me, I forcibly brought him with me. I was terrible for completely forgetting about him, lured by having what I wanted dangled in front of me.

“This boy is...?”

Following my line of sight, Master Julius took notice of Michael.

“An introduction is long overdue. This is my friend, Michael.”

“Mi-Michael von Diebold, at your service. Gr-great Temple’s...I am, apprenticed, to a priest.”

Michael bowed his head deeply.

I *was* sorry for making him feel small on top of suddenly forcing him to come with me. I *was also* sorry for introducing him as a friend when he was nothing of the sort.

I couldn’t think of a better way to introduce him...

“This is Master Julius zu Eicher. Master Julius, after all you’ve done today, it’s inexcusable, but...” I said, making a mess of my words.

He nodded cheerfully.

“I don’t mind.”

I felt guilty for taking advantage of his generosity, but I was glad I wouldn’t have to make Michael wait inside the carriage.

Once my head collected itself, I remembered the true purpose of my visit. Before I could ask him to show me what he had, I cut to the main issue.

“Medicine, you ask?”

“Yes.”

As long as there was potential for the disease to spread, I wanted to do everything I could.

Inside the game, patients suffering from serious illness appeared one after another all over Nebel. Medicine and able-bodied persons were in short supply because they were exhausted by the war, but one of the reasons will also be due to the lack of a specific medicine.

In other words, I believe the medicine available in Nebel had little effect.

It was nothing above wishful thinking to hope that medicine would exist in another kingdom, but surely there was nothing to lose by advancing the study of medicine.

Besides, with the lack of that miracle drug, it was better to have a lot of medicine to mitigate the symptoms and its weakening effects.

“The threat posed by Sckellz disappeared, and exchanges with the southwestern kingdoms have increased. If the number of people coming and going has increased as well, what flows in will not be limited to only culture and money. Don’t you agree things with less cause for rejoicing will also be included?”

“That’s true... There are things such as endemic diseases, and people will pick them up from the places they visit. Are you suggesting we should be prepared for any eventuality?”

“Especially in the south, where feverish maladies spread easily, I hear. I’d like to increase the variety of antipyretics and painkillers we have, and talk with Miss Irene as well.”

After hearing what I had to say, Master Julius said *Hmm* and fell into deep thought.

After a moment, he said, “Recently, I found something of deep interest, but... there is a little problem.”

“A problem?”

I looked at him questioningly.

Before he would explain, Master Julius left his seat, suggesting we change our location.

Not knowing where he was going, we followed.

Master Julius came to a stop before a room at the end of a long hallway. When he gave the solid door a knock, a boy’s voice invited us inside.

“You’re bothering me.”

I couldn’t see who was inside because of the back of the tall man in front of me.

“What do you want?”

“Ahh. I am here for the medicine in question.”

“I believe that conversation is over. No matter how effective it is, we don’t

have spare money or time when we have *no method* of producing it, *no location* from which to harvest the raw materials, and *no clue* of how much variety there is.”

*That means you're on your own*, he said, the words curt and dismissive. His voice was pleasing and clear to the ear.

“It’s a bad habit of yours to become too fixated on what you take interest in. If it’s not a matter of trade but your personal hobby, then do whatever you please.”

“See? Not cute at all.”

Master Julius turned to me and smiled wryly, allowing me to see the person inside.

A young man stood on the other side of a desk stacked with books and a rounded pile of documents.

Soft platinum blonde hair reached his shoulders, tied by a navy blue ribbon, leaving only the side of his face clear.

His skin was beyond fair, and the eyes that were framed by long lashes were violet like his mother’s. That face was very similar to Lady Emma’s, but I no longer thought them girly like I used to.

His build had also stretched out quite a bit, his body now that of a man’s.

This pretty boy with the intellectual air put down the pen made from the flight feathers of a white bird and looked in our direction.

His eyes clashed with mine.

“.....”

Within a heartbeat he became wide eyed.

He stared so hard it seemed like he’d burn a hole through the spot I stood. *I wonder what’s wrong?* It was uncomfortable.

“...Miss Marie...?”

“It has been a long time, Georg.”

We met again at long last, and Georg has finally become a young man capable of grabbing the hearts of marriageable young girls everywhere.

# Chapter 35: The Reincarnated Princess's Inquiry ④

The Georg in my memories had a wishy-washy air, and was like a bright ray of sunlight in Spring. He and his mother were like two peas in a pod with their sweet good looks; his shy demeanor when he blushed was very charming.

I now got a completely different impression from the boy standing before me. He had the same coloring, and I could sense the blood relationship between him and his mother from his well-defined features, but everything else was different. From his cool-headed point of view, to his tone of voice, and even the way he silently looked at others; rather than Lady Emma he probably took after the head of...he took after his father.

I smiled, come face to face with this boy who was clad in a cold and dignified air, like a wintry morning.

“It must have been four years since last met in person. If I remember correctly, the last time was for the celebration of your ninth birthday.”

“.....”

Even daunted to some extent by the atmosphere which made it hard to approach him, I forced myself to make conversation.

It really had been a long time, so I didn't know how to start, but it was less discomforting than keeping silent. He wouldn't respond, though!

“You've grown really tall. Although we were around the same height before.”

Silence.

“Is auntie doing well? It has been more than half a year since I've been able to visit, but I trust her physical condition hasn't gotten worse?”

“.....”

Silence.

“She seemed to be in good spirits from the letters I received, but there really

are a lot you wouldn't know unless you met in person."

"....."

Silence.

Hey, please make some sort of response. This is really awkward.

Could it be he didn't remember me? .....*can't* be, earlier I swore I heard him say my name.

Georg kept looking at me like a block of stone, silent. It bothered me.

"Georg...?"

".....Miss Marie.....?"

Oh. He finally spoke.

Georg blinked, lashes so long women would be jealous slowly moving. I followed the motion with my eyes, and I smiled in response.

"Yes."

".....!!"

There was the sound of breath catching. His stared at me with wide eyes. Unknowingly, I copied his expression. What was his problem?

I tilted my head to the side, staring back at the confused and lost Georg. His beautiful face flushed bright in an instant.

"?"

He was red to the tips of his ears like a ripe fruit, and I stared, a little taken aback. I had no idea what was going on at all.

What, what? What the hell happened, young man?

"Eh, ah...uh."

Mumbling incomprehensibly, Georg took a fumbling step forward, and I wanted to tell him he shouldn't.

"Uh, Georg..."

"Whaa?!"

And then, sure enough, he wavered.

Right away, he planted his hand down on the desk to save himself, but the stacked books were knocked and they began to fall from the desk.

“Gaah!”

The sound of rustling pages rose into the air with the avalanche of books and documents. Georg’s outstretched hands fumbled through the air, and his elbow knocked over a pot of ink with great enthusiasm.

“Ahhh!”

The emptied pot fell hard on the floor, but thanks to the the carpet it did not break. The mahogany surface of the desk was left in a tragic state, and Georg picked up the safe documents in a panic.

However, like lively fish splashing around, the documents fell to the floor. What a disaster.

“Agh! Wait...”

“Um, maybe...”

*TRIP. SPLAT.*

“.....”

“.....”

It might be difficult to tell from only sounds, but you could probably take a good guess what happened.

What I just witnessed live was Georg first taking a precarious step and falling over himself as he chased after the documents. But the scattered books and documents were at his feet.

He lost his footing, and fell when he pitched over the books, diving to the floor. There was nothing else to explain.

An extremely unpleasant hush fell inside the room. I stood stock still, unable to do anything.

What sort of expression should I make at a time like this?

“I want to die,” Georg whispered in a low voice from where he’d face-planted on the floor.

I understand your pain, but live on!

And then, stand up quickly as if nothing ever happened.

“...—fft.”

“.....?!”

After the long silence, a stifled sound burst through the air. Speechless, I turned to my neighbor, wondering if some sort of escape method had appeared.

I trusted Master Julius to do something to break the ice. That he would come up with a smart and elegant response the rest of us couldn't deal with the situation, saving his nephew's pride and myself the worry.

But, heartlessly, the figure in the guise of a gentleman standing next to me was clutching his stomach and mouth, desperately holding back his laughter.

“Uhhh...Master Julius.”

“Pff...ft.”

Wait a minute, this was unbelievable. Even though the rest of us broke into a cold sweat, worrying what the right response to make would be, the gentleman I'd believed would set an example for others was snickering over the disgrace of his nephew. The next moment, he seriously began to roar with laughter.

“Hahahaha...!! I, I can't! This is *too good!*”

The cheerful sound of it began to fill the previously silent room. A bit excessively, and he did not hold back. Confused, I lost my mind and began to wonder if laughing would make the cut sting less. No, no, *no*. That was definitely not the right way to go about it. Throwing the spirit of a young man with a bright future into a mixer after smashing it, then pulverizing it, was the act of an ogress.

My fallacy was evident in the way Georg clutched the carpet—trembling at the humiliation.

“You find your nephew's blunder so amusing...?” he asked.

“N-no. S...sorr...pft.”

“Master Julius!” I said.

“I-I apologize. Could you, *snicker*, hehehe, *cough*, wh-wait a little? Ahahahaha!”

“.....”

Without finishing his apology, Master Julius relapsed into another round of laughter. It was horrible, even for him, and I tried to stop him but to no avail. Tears fell from the corners of his eyes as he continued to laugh, even through a coughing fit.

“You...old...*fogey*.”

The words were unsuitable when aimed at a good-looking man in the latter half of his 20s, but I took Georg’s feelings into consideration. I could not stop the tears from shedding for Georg, still lying prone on the floor.

While I was at a loss, Michael had crouched down beside him before I knew it. I watched as Michael quietly handed Georg a handkerchief and looked on him kindly.

“Use it.”

“Oh, thanks...”

Georg abruptly pulled himself up and took the handkerchief, pressing it against his slightly reddened forehead. Michael looked at Georg sympathetically when the other looked down, an embarrassed expression on his face. *Yeah, I understand*, his face said. From the way he was nodding, it seems he recognized a fellow companion.

“Until when will you laugh?”

Georg dusted off his clothes as he stood, looking coldly at the uncle who was still laughing himself silly. At the sharp edge of his piercing glare, Master Julius stopped, raising both hands in surrender.

“It was wrong of me. Don’t be so angry.”

“How well you can say that when you laughed to such an extent.”

“My nephew, famed for his unbelievably capable character, fell flat on his face in the scene I’d been dying to see most...haha...unbelievable, isn’t it?” Master Julius let his words break off, and turned his face away. Another wave of laughter seemed like it was coming.

“So you wish to be killed. I understand. I will urgently prepare a skilled assassin for you,” Georg said, expressionless. I must have seen wrong the vein that popped up on his forehead.

“Sorry. I apologize. I won’t laugh anymore.”

“Even without you kindly telling me, I know I displayed myself in the worst light possible. I also understand that in the most important moment of my life, I irrevocably made a fool of myself. Yes, a nobody who tossed away his golden opportunity. Dregs. *Filth* no longer qualified to be human. So I ask you, what about it, blast you!”

“I’m truly sorry.”

His nephew going ballistic, Master Julius soberly bowed his head in apology. However, Georg had fluently flown into a self-disparaging tirade, and would not stop. Droning on and on like he was chanting a spell, until someone gently tapped him on the shoulder.

“You’re...”

“It’s OK. I often fail at the moments when I want to show myself in a good light.”

“!”

Georg stared wide-eyed, and Michael gave him a thumbs up.

“Besides, it’s natural as a man to be nervous because the princess is cute.”

“.....thank you.”

The youths smiled in secret understanding. A wry smile appeared on the face of the watching uncle.

And now I’ve been ignored for more than ten minutes.  
Someone notice, *please*.

# Chapter 36: The Reincarnated Princess's Inquiry ⑤

“Truly inexcusable.”

“Please, take no notice of it.”

I smiled wryly at the two people bowing at each other inside the residence of the Eicher family.

Right after the last incident, they got around to asking “*By the way, who are you?*” then Georg and Michael began to introduce themselves. It seemed to take a little under twenty minutes before they finally remembered me though. Taking notice of me standing alone and still at the entrance, everyone rushed to apologize.

I wasn't angry. However, I *was* envious of how quickly the boys became friendly with each other.

More important was the “medicine” Master Julius had mentioned.

I promptly broached the subject, and Georg explained it to me without putting on airs.

This is what happened. A merchant working below Master Julius had chanced upon it.

While he was staying in a Nebel port city, a sailor staying at the same inn developed a high fever.

When the merchant first heard of it, however, he had no interest because it was nothing out of the ordinary. If a voyage was long, naturally the body's health declined, and those who fell ill were to no small extent few. Since the season was Winter, it was likely a cold.

At best, a few days would see the sailor recovered.

That merchant's expectations were half-on point, half-off.

The next day the fever quickly broke, and the sailor seemed to have recovered, but developed a high fever again two days later.

The physician had prescribed an antipyretic, but it was practically ineffective,

and the sailor became noticeably weaker.

That was when the physician realized it was not a common cold, but it was the first time even he had been at a loss upon seeing the symptoms. It was when everyone believed the worst that aid came from the most unexpected places.

Coincidentally, a foreign ship had docked at port to avoid a storm, and when one of its sailors heard the story, he delivered a medicine to the physician. He had seen the symptoms before.

With a word of caution, seven days' worth of spare medicine were left with the physician, and it seems like he departed when the storm broke.

Taking the words of the foreign sailor to heart, the physician and his associate frantically nursed their patient.

In the end, the splendid fever lowered, and the illness was cured.

Master Julius's subordinate thought this an undoubtedly incredible medicine, and bought the remainders.

However, this was where the problem stood in their way.

Like Georg had mentioned previously, the raw materials, production method, production site were all unknown. There was no technology that could possibly analyze its properties like the modern world, even if they had the actual product at hand.

If the port entry logs were searched, the kingdom of the foreign ship with the key individual would probably be revealed, but finding that him was next to impossible.

Even if he was found, getting in touch with him would again take time. On top of that, the physician said that it seems the sailor himself had inherited it from someone else.

Everything was against us, was exactly what it meant.

"It's a most fascinating item, but...we have too little information to go by. As a commodity and an item with unknown properties, it would take a vast amount of money and time, and that will not do," Georg said with a sigh.

Master Julius smiled wryly.

"And there you have it, turned down for such a feeling."

“It is not that I do not trust your judgment, but I believe it is not an item we should go after now. Handling it while we are in the middle of expanding poses too much risk.”

That was the biggest problem. With practically no clue, even if they found something, something that may not even be added to their goods had a huge risk of expending a lot of money.

Even if my head understood, I could not give up. Something was making a ruckus in my chest. If we’re speaking of the game memory, no words came to mind, but I had a feeling choices were being laid in front of me right now.

Whether I searched or gave up, the future will change. I had a feeling I was standing on a turning point.

“May I hold it...?”

“Go ahead.”

Permission granted, I reached for the cartridge on top of the table. Even looking at it from up close, none of us had the slightest idea by what means it was made.

I tried smelling it while it was in my hand, but it was faint. Compared to traditional Chinese medicine, it was an almost odorless object. And, just barely, it had the fragrance of the earth or plants. That was all I got.

I’ve had a lot of opportunities to come into contact with medicinal herbs, so I had some hope I’d recognize something, but I was wrong. I was completely in the dark.

I was weary of my own low specs. I’m learning many things, but even if I planned to become good at them, in my case ultimately lead to the shortcomings of a jack of all trades, master of none.

Unconsciously, I almost sighed.

“.....?”

Noticing something in the corner of my eye, I turned to look, and found Michael staring at the medicine with keen interest.

“Would you like to see?” I asked spontaneously, and he nodded.

After I handed over the medicine, I shifted my gaze from Michael to Georg.

“Master Julius. Georg.”

“Yes?”

“What is it?”

Looking at the two, for a moment, I was filled with indecision.

*If*, I began to say, and stopped. I wasn't asking a favor from a friend. It was business. There was no point in assuming.

I blinked once. Taking a deep breath, I began again.

“Will you sell this medicine to me?”

“.....”

Georg's eyes opened wide, and Master Julius's expression changed.

“In the palace there are wizards and apothecaries. They have more knowledge than I do, and if they take a look at the original I think they could examine it and offer advice. Of course, I will also look into the harbor's logs.”

“You mean to say you will investigate it?”

“Yes.”

If I tried and discovered a clue, then I could try to come back and negotiate with these two. But, a business deal with so many uncertain factors can't be called a deal.

It boiled down to simple selfishness.

“May I ask for your reasons?” asked Georg.

His clear amethyst eyes looked hard at me.

“Our kingdom will continue to have diplomatic relations with many other kingdoms. Our harbors especially will be receiving the ships of faraway kingdoms. It will be too late once people begin to suffer from the same illness similar to what the sailor experienced. In addition, depending on the circumstances, it's not unlikely for others to become infected.”

Going by Georg's story, it was winter when that sailor came down with illness. The route of infection was unknown, but in case there was an infection vector,

because it was dormant in the insects and animals which became intercessors, they probably won't spread it to other people. I simply can't abandon the possibility of luck being on our side either.

"There is an illness that cannot be cured with the medicines in our kingdom, and there is a possibility it can be cured depending on my efforts. My reason is quite simply that."

"Miss Marie..."

"Please don't misunderstand. I am not condemning either of you. I won't say something foolish like you should throw everything away to save lives if you had the power and money. A charitable enterprise and business is different. There are different things you should protect in each, so there is no need to feel ashamed."

My knowledge and skills cannot prevent a pandemic. It was difficult enough with the use of modern medicine, so a little girl like me had almost no chance doing anything in a world without proper equipment. But it was different for Princess Rosemarie. Even without knowledge of medical science, she had *power*.

"However, I am the princess. In order to protect the people and their livelihoods, I want to do everything I possibly can."

"....."

The silence dragged. Georg sighed deeply, and looked at Master Julius next to him.

"Understood," Master Julius said. He nodded, for some reason smiling with lively eyes. "There are three of the medicine's reserves. Please take one of them."

"Ah...!"

"I have to beg forgiveness regarding the other two. We too will begin to investigate, so we have absolute need for them."

"Huh...?"

*Thank you*, I opened my mouth to say and froze.

I was simply astounded by this rapid development.

*What* did he just say?

“May I request for you to look into the port entry logs? It would probably be faster to have you investigate it than for us to put in a petition and wait for it to be processed. If the kingdom and boat is identified, we will take over.”

“Uh...”

“In any case, the doctor has no wizard acquaintances, so may I also bother you to ask the palace wizards their opinion? If possible, one with an earth attribute would be best, but I wonder if there is anyone in this day and age?”

“Eh, umm. There are no earth attribute wizards.”

“Well then, let us see if I can unearth any in this district. Even with low magical power, someone with plant knowledge is preferable to a wizard with a different attribute.”

The conversation progressed rapidly while I was still in a state of confusion. I’m not sure how it came about but these two men of the Eicher House were joining in my investigation, but why? When I didn’t even ask them to? Have I been sleeping with my eyes open?? ...no, no, that’s stupid.

“If there is any progress, we will report it in detail...”

“Um, excuse me!!” I interrupted Master Julius.

“Yes?”

“You two...are helping me?” I asked, hesitantly.

“Yes.”

The question I approached while preparing to be thoroughly mortified if I’d misunderstood was immediately affirmed.

“For what reason...?” I asked in a lost voice.

I’m supposed to be saying *There are things I must establish, could you accept that?* so even if I accepted this turn of events tell myself I should be pleased, my confusion did not disappear.

I must look rather pathetic, because Master Julius smiled with an expression

that made it difficult to tell whether he was troubled or having fun. But I didn't feel malice. Those eyes were kind through and through.

"The reason is very simple. You are our...nay, the Viscountcy of Eicher's benefactor."

"Benefactor?"

I flinched.

"If you had not come to our home, my sister-in-law would still be in her sickbed."

I was nothing so outrageous. I'm sure I couldn't do anything by myself.

"That wasn't...through my own power. Rather, my power and the like is a very small thing. With the help of everyone, the fruit was auntie's own effort."

That was what I believed.

Master Julius shook his head. The next moment, his eyes became distant as if he were looking back on the past.

"No. If you had not been here...if Your Royal Highness had not been here, nothing could have been done."

My eyes opened wide to be addressed with that title again.

"My elder brother loves my sister-in-law so deeply he could not bear to be strict with her. Even when I said it was not good for the body to shut oneself away, he spurned my advice, saying the outside was too cold. Even when I brought nutritional foods or medicine, if my sister-in-law refused them there was no choice but resign oneself from forcing her to take them."

*Well, they were not very easy on the palate, so it is no wonder she hated them,* said Master Julius with a wry smile.

I agreed as I listened.

Other than the recipe, the routines of hygiene I came up with wasn't that unusual. Had it not occurred to me, it would not have been able to be put to use.

The head of the family was in no position to refuse, and his partner, Lady Emma who was fond of children, had been willing to try. She called me the

most talented sort of person.

“Despite my belief that someone could change the way things were, I gave up believing before long. Therefore, when you stated you would improve my sister-in-law’s physical condition, it was the first time I was thankful to God for the miracle that had occurred.”

“Calling it a miracle is really too much of an exaggeration...”

“It is not an exaggeration. You were even smaller than my nephew, but to have the wisdom to take care of others is indeed a miracle. Moreover, you not only made the suggestions but offered assistance. Making use of your spare time to come and go between our home and the palace, sharing in our troubles and our joys. Are you aware of how rare a trait that is?” Master Julius said energetically.

The tone of his voice was unusually bouncy, as if it had been elevated, and his cheeks were a little flushed. His eyes sparkled brightly like a young boy’s. Overawed, I leaned back a little before I realized how rude it was, and cleared my throat.

Georg, who had been keeping quiet as he listened, smiled wryly at his uncle and spoke.

“It was because you brought my mother back to good health that my father and my uncle were able to devote themselves to their work, and in the same way, I could study so much. Fearful of the possibility of parting with my mother any day, we came to standstill. There is no mistake that the one who showed us the future and allowed us move forward was you.”

It was a gentle smile.

The distortion and madness within the game was nowhere to be found. It was soft and warm, a tender smile that made me want to smile in return, and I could finally feel it.

That the future changed. One tragedy was averted.

“Your Royal Highness, Princess Rosemarie. To you who brought it upon yourself to save our beloved family, we would like to once again express our gratitude and respect.”

“This time, please allow us to be the ones of service to you.”

Both of them bowed to me with deep reverence.

# Chapter 37: The Reincarnated Princess's Inquiry ⑥

After much deliberating and worrying, I decided to depend on their generosity.

I had reservations. However, more than my little conflicts, the most important matter was definitely the method of procuring the medicine.

*This is not the place to waver*, I snapped some sense into myself.

I requested their cooperation and left Master Julius's residence behind. Inside the returning carriage, I was eager to try my persuasive skills on Michael this time for sure. But, the essential person himself was barely with me. Although he responded when addressed, his mind was absent. He was looking down in silence, and it was easy to tell that his thoughts were occupied.

His hand was gently brushing the black cat sitting on his lap, but in an absentminded manner. Sometimes he ruffled up the cat's fur, and each time it would swing its tail like it was pouting.

It looks like the black cat had its leg bitten by another animal and couldn't walk on it, so it was crouching in the middle of the road when Michael saved it. For now, we've administered first-aid and decided to take it home. Even though it was probably a stray, it was surprisingly docile.

Even when Michael's hand made a slip and touched the cat's tail, it didn't bite. All it did was stop at raising its voice in complaint, *Nyaaa*.

"Michael?"

His head snapped up.

"Y-yes...?"

"The cat is telling you it doesn't like you not paying attention to where you brush it," I said to him gently.

Glancing between me and the cat, he looked shamefaced as he said, "Eh? Ah, I'm sorry..."

Gently brushing the cat, he apologized to it as well, "Sorry to you, too." The black cat closed its eyes partway and purred, as if it was telling Michael it forgave him.

Seeing him look so depressed, I couldn't help saying, "Is there something troubling you? If you'd like, I can offer an ear."

"Princess..."

I only had a short amount of time to speak with him until we reached the Great Temple. There was no time for other talk.

If I didn't persuade Michael here, he'll probably leave to travel the kingdom. And then, somewhere along the way, he'll stop by the temple and lose his life, and probably have his body hijacked by the Dark Lord.

I knew that, but I couldn't think of his Michael's worry as of little consequence.

I can't just dismiss it, saying it was *trivial* compared to the revival of the Dark Lord. I mean, I knew nothing about him. In the game, almost nothing was spoken of his life before it was over.

Silence fell. Only the sound of the wheels on the stone paving was audible. His trembling lips hesitated, then were chewed on. Instead of rushing Michael, I watched attentively and he after a brief spell he finally started talking.

".....Your...Highness.....Princess, how are you...so strong?"

I stared.

How am I so strong...? Was I ever strong in the first place?

It was questionable as a compliment for girls, but not disagreeable per se. The question stuck in my mind, however, because I've never felt myself to be strong.

"Am I really, I wonder?" I questioned, and Michael nodded fervently. He looked the very image of a young child.

I was overwhelmed by a rush of desire to protect him, the way you do when holding an infant in your arms.

"May I ask why you think that way?"

He nodded, eyes going shifty again.

“...earlier Your Highness said that even if a person had power or money, it did not make it their responsibility to help others. Because everyone has their own interests to protect, so there was no need to feel shame.”

“That’s right,” I said, throwing in appropriately agreeable words to keep the conversation going.

“You force nothing on others. You never said, *You have money, so you should give to the especially poor, or You’re strong, so you must protect the weak.* And yet, you believe it is only natural for yourself to carry out the duties of your role as a princess,” said Michael in an eloquent torrent of speech. A few hours ago he had difficulty communicating, but his speech was so fluid now it made me wonder if it had been an act.

I guess if he wasn’t self-conscious, then he could speak with normalcy. I wonder if he was less nervous now because his mind was filled with other worries.

He had a habit of looking down, but he lifted his eyes and looked at me with painful desperation.

“It does not mean you enjoy having been born as a princess, so how can you come to terms with it so readily? Do you ever want to run away, abandon your duties, or has it never crossed your mind?”

Michael kept talking in a rapid manner without pause, as if he did not expect an answer.

“Ah, of course it has.”

“Why...don’t you.....huh?”

But maybe my words registered, because he stopped. His dumbfounded expression was, I’m sorry, so amusing I could not help laughing as I answered again.

“There *have* been times I wanted to abandon everything. It’s only natural.”

“Um, n...natural, you say?”

“Yes.”

His one-folded eyes blinked incessantly.

It seems like my answer was quite unexpected to Michael. His honest eyes could not conceal anything and conveyed his bewilderment. My smile became even deeper.

“I’m a flawed human. Even if I understand how blessed I am, there are days I also feel how restricted my life is now. I want to toss away my studies and lessons, and read a book all day in sunny place. I want to fling off my confining dresses, and run around barefoot through the grassy plains in a cotton dress, you know?”

“The Princess wants to...” said Michael in a daze.

“The reason why I only *think* and don’t put into effect is not because I make a splendid princess. For the future I desire, it’s essential I not run and face what comes head on.”

In itself, there *was* compensation in acting freely. The tempting near future, or the stability of the distant future? Which one will be chosen is dependent upon *that* person. Like ants and crickets, the moral lessons we’ve been taught would have us believe that those who lived in steadiness had the right way of it; but surely there was no true correct answer.

“If there’s something that makes you want to run away, you *are* permitted to imagine. In that moment before you run, which one will you choose? That which you stand to gain or lose?”

I looked Michael straight in the eye, telling him, *The one I choose is you.*

In the end, I couldn’t persuade him at all, ahhhh. But he was so worried, I couldn’t bring myself order him around, telling him his thoughts were useless.

“I think you did well,” said Sir Leonhard as he watched me reflect.

It was a short distance from the Great Temple to the palace. Only the two of us were inside the carriage.

“He may seem timid, but I venture to say very stubborn. Even if you tried to stop him with a legitimate reason, he wasn’t likely to bow down, was he?”

I nodded to show my agreement.

In the game, he left the Great Temple to help people because he had the leverage to. Even if he seemed like the type to give up easily, at heart he was a strong person.

“Furthermore, the troubles he carries are not necessarily completely unrelated. I detect no falsehood in his determination to help others, but he hesitates. Until he comes to a decision and puts his foot down on what he wants to do, he is unlikely to go rushing out.”

“If that’s so, then it should be fine,” I answered vaguely, unable to calm my emotions.

“It will be all right,” he said quietly.

“!”

I automatically looked up and met his calm eyes. He smiled kindly, like he was trying wipe away my worries.

“Men are far vainer and simpler than you think. Though the lovely, younger girl has a strong determination and purpose, as long as her path remains unclear and her steps hobbling and ungainly, they will not follow her lead.”

“Sir Leonhard...”

“It’s alright. You’re not wrong.”

He repeated his litany, and strength poured out from his upright body. My trepidation seemed to be leaking out to Sir Leonhard. *Hoo*, I blew out a sigh, and he smiled again as he watched.

This person was truly skilled at handling me. It’s not like I don’t feel like he has me eating out of the palm of his hands, but even then I find I don’t care.

When he said it would be okay, I finally felt like I wasn’t alone. I’ve never gotten advice from someone else before, so even when I was uneasy, there was nothing else to do but advance. Even when I said *It’s OK, you’re not wrong*, I was only speaking to myself.

Though the words were the same, coming from another person...that’s not right. Sir Leonhard only had to say it, and I’ve already gained so much peace of

mind.

“Thank you,” I said, relishing this feeling of happiness that seems to have lighted up like a lamp in my heart.

Very gently, he accepted.

# Chapter 38: The Reincarnated Princess's Literature Review ①

"Faster than I expected," the king said with characteristic lack of expression.

Just as night fell, I showed my face inside the king's chambers. I was prepared to get yelled at to not be a hindrance, but my expectations were betrayed when he spoke to me with disinterest instead.

"Is that so?" I muttered, feeling drained.

I was expecting him to make fun of me for being late, so I wasn't sure how to respond. In fact, he probably was making fun of me but I had no desire of getting into a fight.

"Then I have kept you waiting."

"Waiting, I was not."

I paused. "*Is that so?*"

This time the words dripped from my mouth.

I was *this* close to snapping. I wanted to go back. I wanted to turn around and walk out, *BAD*.

With no concern for the dead look in my eyes, father picked up a candlestick and began to walk at a brisk pace.

Inside the spacious room with its florid patterns drawn in intricate details with gold on white in the Renaissance style, there was an ill-matched, plain door. He pulled an antique key from a breast pocket, and inserted it, glancing at me once. He did not speak, but I had a feeling his eyes were telling me to hurry up.

Pushing away my desire to walk back out, I followed behind.

The light dimly lit the room, which was devoid any ornaments, a sharp contrast to the opulence outside. The size was a quarter of the previous chamber, and because the walls were lined with bookshelves, it felt all the more small. There

were no windows, but the air wasn't stagnant.

With the exception of the shelves, the only furniture were a table and a couch

Without hesitation, father took a book from the shelf and held it out to me like he was forcing it on me.

Not seeing the bewildered look on my face, he placed the candlestick on the low table and stretched himself out on the adjoining couch.

Pulling a decanter of wine toward close, he poured himself a glass with sloppy movements and drained the cup as if it were water. After doing so, father extracted a bookmark stuck between a thick book and started reading.

He was really making himself at home.

Who was this person? My father? No, absolutely not. *It's probably his double*, I thought.

I stood expressionlessly, confused.

This man before me, Randolph von Wervard, was my real father, but he was a private person and I had nothing to do with him.

So even though his private life was a mystery to me, I had assumed he probably worked even on holidays.

I mean, what would my father be like if he wasn't working? Besides the basic activities like sleeping, eating and the like, I couldn't imagine him as a regular person. In fact, *did* he sleep? That was all I could think.

“.....”

He really made himself at home.

His body sank into the high quality leather couch as he immersed himself in his reading while sipping on a second cup of wine. By no standard anywhere would it be considered good manners the way he sprawled out.

Illuminated by candlelight, his features were softened and my father actually looked like an ordinary human.

“Not reading?” he asked.

“I will,” I automatically responded.

“Then sit. Until when do you intend to stand?”

“.....”

Er, *where?*

Book under my arm, I silently turned and looked at the interior of the room. As I previously mentioned, there was only the table and the chair. That was the end to my hopes for a second chair.

Even if he ordered me to sit, there was nowhere for me to do so.

Don't tell me he meant for me to sit on the floor? I stared intently at the dark carpet laid on the floor.

“Come.”

I raised my head to look at my beckoning father. *Sit here*, he indicated, patting the couch he himself was sprawled on.

“Uh.”

I mean, sure, it was a big couch and there was enough space for someone like me to sit on it as well.

I understood, but my mind was screaming *NO*. What sort of punishment was this, that I'd have to read while sitting so close to my father?

“I can't let you take it out. If you want to read, do it here.”

*I should have brought a chair with me*, I thought. In the end, I swallowed my dissatisfaction and all I said was, “Yes, father.”

It would be unpardonably rude to have an underling shove him out of the way.

*Excuse me*, I said, sitting on the less crowded space next to his abdomen.

If I've come this far, then I can be serious about it. As for father, let's think of him as a slightly novel back of a chair.

I set the book on my knees.

As you'd expect from an antique, the color of the pages have changed and the letters on the cover have worn out and disappeared.

I took a deep breath to calm my heartbeat racing from holding an antique in my hands. I gave the darkened indigo blue cover a stroke and opened it.

“.....”

Turning to the inside of the cover, a page was enough to leave me troubled.

*You're kidding me. NO. This was going to be a problem? Is this really happening?* I thought, dumbfounded.

Actually, to be honest, this should have been the first thing I worried about. I was an idiot for not thinking of it. Why didn't I solve this problem before visiting my father?

Even if I lamented my lack of foresight, there was nothing I could do now.

I might come up with a solution when I swing by next, but did I even really have a second chance?

I gripped my shaking finger.

Ahh, I'm such an idiot. An idiot, a really big one.

No way, don't tell me...

"....."

Don't tell me I can't read it!

I felt sick. The book on top of my knees was written long ago in the past. Naturally, the characters would differ from modern writing. I couldn't read it at all.

Why hadn't I realized something so obvious?

"Can't read?"

A little squeak popped out of me and I jumped at the sudden voice. I slowly turned to look at my father lying face down on the couch, and found he had stopped reading and was watching me. Cold sweat dripped down my back.

"I....."

My voice failed from nerves.

What now? What should I do? Do I tell the truth, or make a bluff? I didn't know

which was the better choice. Depending on the answer, however, it was possible I may lose my chance to read these books.

My head spun blankly. Even if I had a tendency make counter plans, I knew nothing about father.

The answer I came up with was:

“I can’t...read...but I will!”

Before I realized it, I had given him that idiotic response.

I wanted to kick myself. What the hell?

“Can’t read but will”? What was that, if there’s a will, there’s a way? Or sheer effort?

“I see.”

Hold up, no retort?

Don’t tell me he ignored my slip up? I was baffled. No matter how hard I stared, father showed no expression. Not smiling, not angry. Maybe disgust, but I certainly couldn’t tell from his face.

Raising half of his body, father peered at the book over my shoulder.

“Can you read modern history books?”

“Yes.”

If we’re speaking of the library’s history books, then I could read most of them. I’ve been studying since I was five years old, and I believe that alone is an accomplishment.

“Then there should be sections you can read. Look at this part.”

Father reached a hand over and traced a sentence in the book.

“It reads as ‘the Kingdom of Nebel’.”

I—I couldn’t see it.

It honestly looked like patterns instead of words.

“The complicated characters have merely been simplified over time. Naturally, there will be a lot of obsolete geographical names and expressions.”

After he explained that, I thought I could maybe see what he meant...?

When I tried replacing the complex patterns imitating things like ivy or feathers with dots and curves, I did feel like it was similar to our modern language.

The language of my nation, the Kingdom of Nebel, was similar to the alphabet and was comprised of 26 characters.

In other words, if I count the number of patterns, simplified and applied them to the modern alphabet, would that work?

“Father, may I borrow some paper?”

Now that I had a lead, I was suddenly pumped with energy, and I zealously turned around to look at my father.

He told me to use whatever I wanted, so I took paper and pen from the adjoining room and began to vigorously scratch.

At my back, father had returned to reading, but I was no longer concerned with him.

“.....?”

All right, all copied.

Nodding with satisfaction, I reviewed my work. Did I leave something out? I counted and stopped, head tilted in confusion.

No matter how many times I counted, there were 30. Four too many?

“Don’t you have four too many?” asked father with exquisite timing, as if he could hear my inner monologue.

“?!”

I was too surprised to speak. *This man has seriously been trying to shave a few years off my life for some time now*, I thought, putting a hand to my beating heart.

“Forget the rest. Just know that the four are always together.”

“Err...I see.”

He could have been nicer about it, but it was still sound advice. When I referred back to the book, true enough, the four always came in a set.

I excluded them and compared the modern alphabet to the other twenty six characters, discovering in the process just how different the four were from the

rest.

The other characters were modeled after nature and living things, but that set of four were the only ones I couldn't even begin to imagine the origins for. And yet, they filled me with unease when I looked at them.

What did they stand for?

"They represent the Dark Lord."

It was my father opening his mouth to talk again, as if he had read my mind.

"Above all, it was forbidden to mention the Dark Lord by name, so they were careful only to use known characters to refer to him. The set of four characters were created for the express purpose of indicating the Dark Lord and prohibited from other use. I don't know how to read them. A pronunciation does not exist, or it has even been said to be the name of a person from the time, but it is not certain."

I jumped on the words, "Do you mean to say the Dark Lord was human?!"

"Didn't I say it wasn't certain?" he responded coldly.

Meaning more one theory has been passed down to the end?

"Enough, get to reading. As soon as you're done, I'm going to sleep."

Father yawned. I felt like I was seeing something extremely rare first the first time.

Before he kicked me out, I should read what parts I could. Following my father's example, I decided to concentrate on the book and began to read as well.

# Chapter 39: The Reincarnated Princess's Literature Review ②

“.....”

I've been scowling at the book a little under two hours now, vertical lines carved into my brows, and a pounding headache from overworking my brain and eyes.

I stretched and rolled my head around to loosen the stiffness in my shoulders.

I was massaging the furrows between my brows when the back of my chair—which happened to be my father, spoke.

“Could you understand it?”

He was so quiet, I had forgotten he was there. Man, my ability to react was awesome.

“In truth, only a little.”

“Tell me.” He said it without so much as a glance at me, his face turned away.

I thought about it as I replied, “The peace we know of, we owe in no small part to the sacrifices of our forebears.”

“I don't care for your opinion.”

I paused. *“Is that so.”*

He was quick to cut me short when I had put so much thought into my words. I seethed, but did not argue. I had to admit, even to myself I sounded like a school girl writing an opinion essay.

“I understand there is a possibility the Dark Lord's powers were dependent on his hosts.”

According to the book, our forebears decided that destroying the Dark Lord was an impossible task, so they searched for a way to seal him off instead. But even the method they sacrificed so much to create was imperfect and the Dark Lord revived many times.

Over the course of countless fierce battles I believe they were eventually able to fabricate a stronger seal, but until that happened it must have been living hell. It took him a mere five years to come back to life, or so the story goes.

It seemed, however, with every instance the Dark Lord revived he was never imbued with the same strength of power.

“In the nightmare era where half the continent turned to scorched earth, his host was a renowned wizard. Tracing the humans who became his hosts from the previous generation to the ones before even that, I was lead to wonder if perhaps the Dark Lord amplified their magical strength.”

“That’s right.”

Father closed the book in his hands and turned to look at me.

“Magic was necessary to oppose the Dark Lord, but taking anyone with strong magical abilities near him was a risk—a dangerous gamble.”

I looked down solemnly, silent.

All those people turned into hosts must have had so many regrets, having their bodies used to drive their loved ones and their kingdoms to ground.

They held powers capable of opposing the Dark Lord, but because of that they were turned on the world.

Huh?

There was something I wasn’t seeing.

What was it? It was important. I had a strong feeling I was forgetting something.

I was deeply lost in thought when my father said, “Well, then,” and I suddenly felt attacked by suffocation.

“Uguh?!” I shrieked.

“As I said earlier, I’m off to bed.”

“E-even so, please don’t grab me by the back of my neck!”

With the candlestick in one hand and the scruff of my neck in the other, my father left the room.

The moment we were outside, I was dropped.

This—this *asshole*.

I questioned the way he grabbed his young daughter by the neck like a kitten even though she begged him not to. At least show some hesitation!

I glared at him reproachfully, but he was unconcerned.

After locking the library, father turned for his chambers and waved a hand at me like he was shooing a cat or a dog away.

I was pissed, but snapping here would prove extremely immature.

“Thank you for sparing time for me. Please excuse me.”

I bowed my head and left.

But don't think it ends here.

Just wait, Father. I'll definitely get back at you, with interest.

The sight of my guard knight greeted me upon my exit.

I was guilty of keeping him waiting long, but not an inch of slack was shown in his posture. He stood alert and commanding, his form and the austere light in his green eyes as he kept unceasing vigilance reminded me that yes, come to think of it, he was actually a man of influence.

But in the next second, his firm expression dissolved and his eyes crinkled gently as he happily addressed me with lips curved, fierce features softened. It was easy to see his joy.

“Princess Rosemarie!”

Why was he such a faithful dog?

I flinched away from his enthusiasm.

For a moment I worried how I should respond, but I walked on brusquely, no change in expression.

“I have returned.”

“Yes!”

He only said one word, but it made me question what he was so happy about.

I could almost see his imaginary tail wagging vigorously. My grandmother had a dog named Taro, and his reactions whenever I took him on the chore of a walk reminded me of Klaus now.

The difference between the two was that I couldn't see Klaus as cute. Anything but that.

Hey, who was it that said 'tsundere'?

As I walked back to my own rooms with my flower boy of a dog—who happened to be my guard knight—I thought back to the Dark Lord's description. I didn't want to put off as many of my worries as I could until the next day. I wanted to unravel the puzzle by the end of the day.

"Princess Rosemarie."

The biggest piece of information I've gained was the fact that the Dark Lord amplified the magical strength of his hosts.

It wasn't definite, but the possibility was quite large.

"Princess Rosemarie, are you not cold?"

"I'm fine."

No known figure existed for how much the Dark Lord amplified, but if that number was a hundredfold, for example, a host with a power of one then became a hundred, and a hundred became ten thousand.

When it came to the people who were turned into hosts, there must have been a great difference depending on whether they were a fighter or a wizard.

"Once we have returned, would you like me to prepare you a cup of warm tea?"

"No, thank you. I'm just heading straight to bed."

If that was true, letting any wizard near the Dark Lord was probably be a risk. If they had strong magic strength, then to a strong degree, the moment they turned into hosts their potential for damage increased.

"Catching a cold will be tough on you. Please do not strain yourself, I implore you to instruct me."

Among the Dark Ones, there were some types with tough shells and other

types with coats of fur, and many situations where swordsmen and archer units were ineffective. So if you took the Dark Lord's loyal subjects and his own defensive powers into consideration, a wizard was indispensable in a subjugation party.

"It is my pleasure to be of use to you, Princess Rosemarie. Please, let me know if you desire anything."

"....."

I gave up. I couldn't ignore him.

I was trying to think, but the constant yapping in my ears were too damn annoying. Are you a stupid dog? Is that what you are?!

"Klaus."

"Yes, m'lady!"

"I'm trying to think. I want you to be quiet." I looked over my shoulder and gave him a cold glare.

He was silent for a long time before he said, "Yes, m'lady," and hung his head downheartedly.

*H-huh?*

For some reason, I lost my composure when I saw him so dejected. My being cold to Klaus was nothing new. In fact, I don't remember being nice to him *at all*.

I paused.

To think of it now, I'm quite heartless, aren't I? No, well, I did have something of a reason. Klaus triggered unnecessary flags on his own, and he's a pervert. Even though he'll eventually become the Priestess's guard, I don't think he should be so fixated on me. And he's a pervert. It was hard to keep him on a leash because he's quite the belligerent pervert. He's a pervert, you see. A pervert.

Right. Keeping him from getting any closer than necessary also served as self-defense.

Contrary to the fresh flower boy looks he gave off, Klaus came with some

serious handling instructions on the labels.

But let's face the music and admit the truth.

The reason I adopted a cool attitude with Klaus was because I *am*, in a sense, taking advantage of him. No matter what I did, he smiled; and that was a distorted form of trust.

"Klaus," I said after some hesitation.

He carefully peeped a look at me.

He really was a dog. The very image of an abandoned one. I could almost imagine him sniffing at the ground pitifully, asking, *Don't you need me?*

He was probably lonely. Lately I've been sticking close to Sir Leonhard because I ask for his company. And even though Klaus may be my personal guard, I was relying exclusively on someone else.

Of course, there was a justifiable reason for that and I had no intention of apologizing.

But this time, I was at fault.

He only worried for me, and I treated his kindness with disdain.

"I'm sorry, Klaus. Could I have that cup of tea after all?"

He made a sound of surprise.

"I'd like *you* to make it, not the maids."

Eyes rounded, Klaus choked down a breath before he managed to say in the likeness of a server, "My pleasure!"

His earlier despondency seemed a lie when he smiled with his entire face.

I smiled wryly to myself, quietly releasing breath of relief.

I was glad to see him cheered up.

"I will make an absolutely delicious pot of tea for Your Highness," he declared with fresh determination.

"Yes," I answered with a smile pasted on my face after a few hard seconds had passed. "*I look forward to it.*"

I hope he missed how I unintentionally stumbled over my words, and the sudden dread in my eyes. I couldn't help it, because the punishment I just

inflicted on myself will begin soon.

I only leaked it once before, but Klaus was devastatingly disastrous at all work of the domestic type.

There were many reasons for this. For example, he had clumsy fingers. His personality was not the type to heed fine details. Most importantly, he lacked common sense.

Please don't say common sense and the like aren't necessary in housework, it's *pivotal*.

When you're cooking and think there isn't enough of a certain flavor, you adjust it by adding seasonings. Klaus killed the taste of his ingredients by adding no more than a few drops of his secret ingredients. Of course, I meant that in the bad way.

Once he made me tea and I wanted to spit it out. As a princess I had to resist the urge, but my body had instantly rejected the flavor. I wasn't wrong to question whether I had been served poison from its unpleasantness.

Tea tasting bitter or astringent, I could understand. I guess that happens when you use too many tea leaves in addition to over brewing.

But why was it goeey? Why was it bittersweet??

I wondered if he had added jam like they did with Russian tea, but he denied it. He said he hadn't particularly added anything else. Quite the contrary, I remembered with fear.

*Then why is the tea thick, you!* I silently snapped. *Are you some sort of alchemist, able to create something from nothing?*

Suddenly, something niggled at the back of my mind, and I inadvertently stopped moving.

"Princess Rosemarie?" Klaus said in a mystified voice.

I ignored him to focus on my thoughts.

To create something from nothing went against reason. It was impossible.

It's not like I was trying to be critical, but I felt like I had just discovered the answer to worries I had dragged along with me from the king's own chambers.

Right. That was it. It went against reason.

If you multiplied one with ten thousand it became ten thousand, but anything you multiplied with zero was zero. No matter how great the Dark Lord's powers were, someone who had none would not be augmented.

For example, even if the Dark Lord amplified ten billion times over, if his host had no magic strength then it meant nothing.

"Ahhhh."

A sound of dismay fell from my lips.

My derived answer was very simple. Therefore, it was cruel.

In the game, Michael von Diebold became the Dark Lord's host.

He possessed magic.

# Chapter 40: The Reincarnated Princess's Deliberation

“My apologies for the wait.”

I stared at the tea cup in front of me for a long time, frozen. I slowly released my held breath and managed to squeeze some words out.

“Thank you.”

The porcelain white cup adorned with a golden rim was filled seventy percent of the way with an amber liquid. The color was normal. From what I could see so far, there were no hidden dangers.

I took a deep breath and reached for the cup. My hand trembled slightly, and the moment I grabbed the handle the cup clinked audibly.

I brought it close to my nose and smelled it just to make sure.

I never had the luxury of elegantly enjoying the fragrance from the start. This was me trying to gain information from my senses. I was behaving this way to sniff out danger. It was also like a ritual to prepare myself for the worst.

“.....”

I breathed it in and gasped.

Wide eyed, I stared at the black tea (in name only).

It smelled...like black tea...!!

Nothing could have prepared me for such a mundane turn of events. Tickling my nose was not an offensive smell but a rather vibrant and fruity aroma. Judging from the notes of muscatel, he was probably using high quality second flush tea leaves.

Perhaps he used the same ingredients the last time as well, but that time it had no smell at all, far from muscatel. *Completely* odorless. I couldn't even tell if the tea leaves used were Darjeeling or not.

Actually, if you recognized that lethal substance with its odorless yet killer flavor

as high quality second flush tea, I think it would be considered a blasphemy against all black tea.

“Say, Klaus?”

He stood a small distance away from me.

“What is it?”

“*You* made this, right?” I asked him, unsure.

Was it possible he recognized his own fatal household skills and had asked the maids for help?

But he nodded affirmatively, bright expression clouding over with worry.

“Yes. Is something amiss?”

I thought it cunning of him to only show humility at times like these. It was more than scary enough that there wasn't a problem, but to put it bluntly, it was hard to talk about it for some reason.

“No. It smells wonderful.”

It really did, which had the opposite effect of making it terrifying. As soon as I threw him the compliment, his eyes lit up cheerfully. Klaus smiled with his entire face, an attractive line of red drawn across his cheeks as he blushed.

“I must confess, I have been practicing in secret in order to serve you a delicious cup of your favorite tea.”

“R-really now?”

I wondered what the heck his goals were. I inadvertently looked away.

*Stop it, don't do that! This is where you're supposed to be moved.*

I had to stop myself from completely recoiling while I pondered the reasons why my guard knight would feel the need learn how to brew tea. It was probably the moment I was supposed to be touched his dedication would take him so far to do something like that for my sake, but even imagining the suffering of the head maid who likely took him under her wings did not bring tears to my eyes. How cold.

“.....”

Or, rather? If that *did* happen, then this cup of tea...  
Could it miraculously be the real deal?

Hope blossomed in my chest as I stared at the gently swaying surface of the liquid.

I might be able to do this.  
I took a gulp and prepared myself, holding my breath for a few seconds before taking a sip of the amber-colored drink.

“.....!!!!”

My eyes bulged open as wide as those in comics.  
Spreading through my mouth was an extreme bitterness and astringency, followed by a taste bud stinging acidity. A moment later, a thick sweetness came around and washed everything away.

My consciousness slipped into the deep end as the paradise of flavors rushed in with a force strong enough to kill my palate.

NOT A DAMN THING HAS CHAAAAANGED!!!  
Who was it? The *fool* who hopefully said I might be able to survive this? It was *me!*

The color and smell were both on point while the flavor was exceptionally devastating. An unexpected trap—it created a false sense of safety which lulled you into relaxing while cutting you down from behind. This thing deserved a level of treatment on par with a tasteless and odorless poison.

I strengthened the fingers that were shaking so much they might drop tea cup, and lifted it up at an angle.

“.....!!”

My survival instincts told me to spit it out, but I endured and swallowed the entire thing with watery eyes.  
If I put it down I won't have the confidence to pick it up again.  
Gasping for air, I placed the empty cup back into its saucer.

“Than...k you...for the...tea.”

Downing an entire cup goes against prescribed princess etiquette, but I can't say I cared. I felt very accomplished.

My stomach was heavily protesting the dead weight, but it should go away eventually. It's bound to...maybe, surely. The stomach isn't supposed to have any problems digesting *tea*.

Completely exhausted, I looked at him over a shoulder, all life drained from my face.

"There's just one thing I want to know, Klaus. Did you put something in my tea?"

He shook his head, a little perplexed.

"No. Nothing particularly."

"I see."

I sighed. So it really was a miracle compound created from his devastating lack of sense?

"Um," he said, looking as if something had struck his mind.

I hesitated to ask. "What?"

What was it? Did he put in something poisonous after all?

"I placed my allegiance and respect for Your Highness in the tea," Klaus whispered with a sappy smile on his face.

A vein popped up on my forehead. Who could blame me for spectacularly losing my temper?

"Very well," I said with unprecedented frost in my voice.

It seems like the lethal substance's true identity has been revealed. Perhaps the truth of it was that he actually *hated* me?

I was giving him a look of absolutely zero warmth, but for some reason Klaus was staring happily back.

I faltered in the face of his warm expression, which differed from his self-satisfied look from earlier.

"Why are you smiling?"

“It seems you have returned to your normal self, Princess Rosemarie.”

*You frowned the entire time*, said Klaus as he pointed to my eyebrows. I stared at him with rounded eyes.

Certainly, before I entered my father’s room I was coiled up with tension, and then I was preoccupied with thoughts of the Dark Lord after my departure. The way I stared at my feet with furrows in my brows, did Klaus worry for me in his own way?

“I made you worry.”

“No. I could not help myself.”

If he saw my bitter regret, he would tell me to pay him no mind.

Frankly, it was extremely difficult for me to accept that looking at him with absolutely no warmth and being curt with him was my norm, but let’s ignore that for now.

My reaction was exactly what he had been expecting, given our usual banter, so it didn’t bother him at all.

“Couldn’t help it, huh?” I muttered, repeating his words to myself.

He looked at me strangely. “Princess Rosemarie?”

“Say, Klaus. May I tell you something?”

“By all means.”

“This is just an example, but suppose someone was gravely injured. For various reasons, they decide not to show their wounds to anyone and hide the fact. Do you think it would be wrong to forcibly disclose their secret?”

It was almost settled that Michael who became the Dark Lord’s host inside the game possessed powers. Judging from the Dark Lord’s powers, that strength was no small amount.

However, Michael has been trying to get away from it all this time. He *has* been successful.

Would be right for me to divulge that fact?

“I wonder? If left unattended, the wound will probably fester and become rotten, so I cannot really recommend it.”

“Yes, but if they could treat it on their own, they might be able to live normally even if a scar remains.”

I asked Theo before, and he said he wouldn't take off the limiter even though his control was much better now because his magic was easily influenced by rage.

He studied so hard but even he was not without his flaws. Where was my proof that Michael won't run wild?

On the other hand, if Michael has survived these ten odd years until now without anyone knowing better, then he may already have control.

“Completely erasing all evidence of the wound would be impossible, but if properly treated and medicine is taken, it shouldn't get worse. But if you expose what they're hiding, the pain you inflict on their heart won't be a small matter. Even if you think you're in the right, when you look at it from their point of view, they may feel like their hand was forced.”

There will be a lot for Michael to study if he becomes an apprentice, and one day it might even personally help him.

As a fellow comrade with the similar powers like Lutz and Theo, I think the limiter may even help relieve the burden on his soul.

Yet, wizards are faced with many hardships in this world. They're exposed to inquisitive eyes, and have many instances when negative emotions of hate, fear and the like are directed at them. Everyone who has stood beside with them have likely had a drastic change in attitude. Their movements are limited, and they're targeted by scum.

Should I leave him be, or expose him?  
What was the right thing to do as a princess? And also, what did I want to do?

“I'm sorry, I said something strange.”

One way or another, I needed to make a decision by myself. Not being able to hold it in because the burden was too overwhelming was not good reason to involve Klaus.

Nevermind, I said, smiling self-deprecatingly.

Klaus cut me off when I tried to end the discussion, however.

“I can never possess keen insight like you do.”

“Huh?”

“Therefore, I do not know what is right and what is wrong. However, to look at my lady’s lovely appearance, one cannot imagine her being as active as she is.”

It was troubling that I couldn’t tell whether he spoke praisingly or whether he spoke ill of me.

A doubtful look crossed my face, and for a moment I was quiet. Then, with a sigh, my tight expression eased.

“It certainly isn’t like me to stand around piddling.”

“Even if the doing brings regret, will you not regret it more should you do nothing?”

It was a great pressure forcefully bearing down on me. If you don’t do it and regret it, then you might as well do it. Wasn’t that rather sloppy advice?

Ah, but maybe then I can lose these knots in my shoulders.

“Thank you,” I said quietly.

My bothersome and a handful-to-deal-with guard knight smiled at me like an older brother.

# Chapter 41: The Reincarnated Princess's Bashfulness

"Princess Rosemarie, it is almost time."

"What, already?"

Klaus's voice pulled my nose out of the book I was reading, and I blanched when I checked the clock.

Shoot, there were only ten minutes left until the meeting.

I inserted a bookmark and closed the book, getting up from my seat in a rush. After lightly straightening my attire, I left the room.

My pulse was racing, but a princess of the realm does not dash through the halls, so I speed walked with a care for elegance. What the heck does elegant speed walking even mean, a voice mocked.

I had asked Lady Irene for some of her time today, and I'm to meet with her to discuss the fever countering medicine. Georg asked to be present as well whenever the conversation took place, and, for some reason, it seemed like Michael was tagging along as well.

My intent had been to arrive early so that I could greet them in the room, but I was cutting it close on time. I thought I had some leeway to relax, but am I not allowed to do that either?

There was a lot of time to kill before the appointed time, and against my better judgment I opened a book gifted to me by Master Julius from a foreign country. Was that the reason for my downfall?

If you're a bookworm, then I think you'd be able to relate. I love books, and when I read I often forget the time. I slowly tear myself away, prolonging the inevitable as long as possible, telling myself, Just a *few* more pages, just *one* more page. Two to three hours disappearing in this fashion was common.

If you already know what will happen, then don't read! I have no comeback for this.

I mean, I was dying to find out more. The book was of foreign origin; possibly a cookbook.

I'll just take a peek, I lied to myself, and cracked it open, only to find the words incomprehensible. I started by looking at the pictures, but then got curious despite myself, and couldn't help taking a closer look. It seemed to have originated from an island nation under the rule of the Kingdom of Schnee. The language was a little different from Schnee's official language, but I was positive it originated from the latter, for the basic structure was similar.

Maybe it's a dialect, I thought, and the time I spent staring unblinkingly at a dictionary passed by in a flash.

I've inherited a bit of the geek from my previous life. Once I become interested in something I have a habit of becoming invested. It gets to a point where I seem to block out the sound from my surroundings, and I remember how often it shocked my friends and family.

I don't consider it a bad habit, though if it got to a point where it hindered me from making it to appointments on time, then I should probably work on it a little.

I flew down the stairs in a quick pace. I was rushing, so I couldn't help it if my steps were hurried, but I was careful to make as little noise as possible, and...

Hmm??

I strained my ears as the chiming of bells reached me.

The sound was clear and rhythmic. I stepped off the stairs and turned in the corridor, looking down at my clothes.

Today's outfit and accessories shouldn't have bells on them.

My light pink dress was scattered with small flowers, ribbons at the front, and lace on the cuffs, but not a single metallic piece of ornament. Even my lace choker was adorned with a single small rose.

My low-heeled pumps were also very simple simple in design.

I looked down at my feet, and my eyes widened at the speedily approaching small shadow.

Bells chimed with every adorable footstep, and I looked on in stunned surprise as it passed by me and went as far as a meter before before looking over its

shoulder.

The black cat with its glossy coat looked at me with its gem-like blue eyes, head tilted ever so slightly. A silver bell jingled lightly where it hung on the red ribbon tied around its neck.

“Nero!”

The black cat meowed cutely back at me.

My baby is so smart! ... Pull yourself together!

I crouched and picked him up.

Nero made no resistance and settled easily into my arms as I scolded him, No!

“What are you doing here? Didn’t I tell you not to run around?”

I looked at him sternly, but he showed no sign of being intimidated. He looked up at me with big eyes and nothing else but puzzlement.

Damn it, he’s cute! My baby is so cute! So cute the whole world is jealous!

He purred contentedly when I brushed him under the chin in circles with the back of a finger.

I decided to name this cutie Nero. He’s the cat Michael saved from my carriage the other day when I nearly ran it over.

Michael can’t keep pets at the Great Temple where he stays, so I took Nero in instead, and now I’m hopelessly in love.

Like a grandfather enamored with his first grandchild, I’m a hopeless owner who wants to spoil him with everything, but I still can’t allow him to freely wander through the castle.

“You were hurt just the other day.”

Brush aside the fur and at the base of his right hind leg you’ll find a scar.

He was almost run over by the carriage because he couldn’t move, and it must have been a very deep bite, because even traces remain even now.

However, in a strange turn of events, the same day I adopted Nero, the wound had almost completely closed, and in the span of a week with me, he could walk around indoors. The wound was severe enough he might never have been able to walk again, so even now I don’t understand how it was possible.

Well, even if the reason wasn’t clear, I was glad to have him better.

I was just afraid his wound would open up again if given the chance, so I made

him stay inside my room.

I walked while talking to myself. "I don't have time to go back to my room. I wonder if there's someone who can take you back for me?"

Nero protested in a louder voice. I wondered what he was saying. Stretching in my arms, he reached for my cheek with a limb. His paw made firm contact. *Sooo* cute.

I brought my face close to his, and, unable to escape, Nero meowed again.

"Don't you meow at me."

I'm all better but you keep locking me inside. Let me out once in a while, he probably said.

It won't be a formal session, and they're all friends, so even if I take Nero along they probably won't get upset, I thought. Besides, he was a very smart boy.

"You won't cause trouble?"

"Meew."

"OK, it's a promise."

Let's ask everyone, then, I whispered with a little laugh.

"Princess Rosemarie," said Klaus in a placating tone from behind.

I answered without bothering to turn around. "What is it?"

I could tell he wasn't butting in to tell me not to talk with a cat. It was a daily occurrence in my room, so as my only guard knight I hoped he was already used to it.

Making conversation with your beloved cat, and sometimes baby talking them, is the fate of a cat owner.

Obviously, I won't do it carelessly in public, but this area close to the greenhouse has restricted access, so it shouldn't be very populated.

"Princess Rosemarie."

"I *said*, what is...it?"

A little irritated he kept saying only my name, I looked over my shoulder and

froze in place.

He wasn't the only one standing there behind me.

Wide blue eyes stared at me.

Lutz stood rooted in surprise, mouth gaped open.

Theo rested both arms against the wall, head hung down low. I couldn't see his expression from my location. An awkward silence ran through the area.

—*SNOOOOOORK.*

Half a step behind them, Klaus's expression was saying, *"I was trying to tell you."*

Too late now, Klaus. You should have warned me earlier!!

"Hey *you*, what was that?" Lutz asked gravely.

I wanted to die on the spot.

Even if he asked, the only answer I had was, What indeed. I speak to my cat, but I don't exactly have a reason for it. Must I spell it out? All cat lovers have this ability!

"What are you doing? What do you want to do? I mean, what do you want to do with me!" Lutz grumbled in a flat tone. For some reason, he became more and more heated, until he exploded at the very end.

"Um, I have no reason to want to do anything?"

"Ahhhh! What is this I'm feeling! This dark desire burning inside!"

Watching the visibly irritated Lutz, a terrible thought occurred to me, and I paled.

"Um, murderous intent?"

"No!" he growled. He denied it instantly, scratching at his chest. "I don't really ... get it, but anyway, can I ruffle it until it's all messy?"

"Huh? No!"

From a crouched level, Lutz glared in my direction, hands moving excitedly. I held Nero protectively and scooted back a step.

It didn't matter how much Nero had healed up, I didn't want to hand him over to the Lutz. Something scary was happening.

“Cats are delicate. You’ll scare him if you do that.”

“Don’t worry, that’s not what I’m talking about.”

I paused. “What do you mean?”

When I moved further away, Lutz inched closer.

Klaus observed the situation with cold eyes, hand rested on his sword’s handle.  
I want help, but don’t pull out your sword!

“Lutz.”

A big hand landed on Lutz’s shoulder.

Theo was the one who intercepted his suspiciously acting partner. He was supposedly so overwhelmed he had to face the wall earlier, so when did he recover?

He slowly shook his head when Lutz met his eyes.

“That’s not it, Lutz. Just because it’s not a cat doesn’t mean you can be rough.”

“Yeah?”

He spoke admonishingly, but whatever he spoke of was rather ambiguous. My head tilted to the side as I listened to the conversation veer off tangent. The two ignored me as they nodded at each other.

“Girls are even more delicate than cats, and it’s easy to hurt them. Being rough with them is out of the question.”

“You’re right. The truth is, I have an overpowering desire to tackle it to the floor and shower it with affection.”

Lutz chewed his lip thoroughly, and Theo looked on kindly.

The conversation was so far beyond me, I’ve already come back to my senses.

I was keeping Georg and the others waiting, so was it okay for me to leave now?

Deciding it would be best to take my exit, I slowly and quietly took a step away so that I wouldn’t make a sound.

Both of them looked in my direction at that exact moment, as if a signal had passed between them. Theo smiled at me sweetly with his whole face when he

saw me frozen in place, breaking into a cold sweat.

“That is to say, don’t you think one should be gentle, princess?”

“Regarding?” I could not help interjecting.

Just like Lutz, Theo’s hands were moving excitedly.

“This is troublesome. Let’s turn them both to rust on my blade.”

A single guard knight stood behind the two, similarly smiling with his entire face as his sword drew free.

The throbbing vein popping up on my forehead must be my imagination.

# Chapter 42: The Reincarnated Princess's Meeting

My wish must have been heard, because the hard click of footsteps became audible, and a beautiful, slender woman appeared.

She wore a chic blue dress under a blue robe, high heels on her feet, and her black hair was elegantly arranged.

In one slim arm she carried heavy books.

She turned to scrutinize us, one by one, eyes narrowed through her monocle. Her red lips curved into a smile.

“Oh, my. Something very amusing is happening, I see.”

It was the Head Wizard, Lady Irene von Artmann. At her entry, Lutz and Theo visibly panicked, and a tiny groan escaped their lips.

Lady Irene turned her sweet smile on them.

“You must have excess energy to be causing disputes in the corridors. If that is so, then I should have created a body building regiment with no breaks. Shall we rectify that promptly upon our return? Well, my *fool* apprentices?”

“Please forgive us!” the two apologized immediately.

They stood and bowed with a practiced agility that even those who were athletically inclined might envy. You guys, *what* was your occupation again? In spite of myself, I watched with a sense of detachment.

The meeting hadn't even begun yet, but I already felt exhausted.

“You too, Klaus. Put away your weapon,” I ordered, looking at him. He reluctantly sheathed the sword, an unhappy look on his face.

To draw a sword inside the castle when it wasn't even an emergency was *clearly* an issue.

“Good grief! No matter how the times change, men will remain children. How troublesome. Do you not think so?”

After a single cold glance at the group of guys, Lady Irene smiled gently at me.

The difference in warmth was impressive.

I'd break the boys' hearts if I agreed with her, so I hesitated and dodged the question with a noncommittal smile.

"Oh?"

Lady Irene looked down, her eyes growing wide when she saw the black cat in my arms.

The human-friendly Nero displayed no signs of being frightened despite being stared at, and looked up at Lady Irene with head slightly tilted. When he meowed at her, Lady Irene broke into a grin.

"What a dear! Princess, are you raising him?"

"Yes. His name is Nero."

She reached out with the arm not holding the books and tickled him under the chin with the back of a finger. He didn't hate it, and allowed the affection. It suddenly occurred to me that she probably liked cats, because she was even more gentle than usual. If I was going to ask, wasn't now the time to do it? It felt a little awkward taking advantage of Nero's cuteness, though.

"Er, Lady Irene. I apologize for bringing personal baggage with me, but might I have permission to take him inside with me?" I asked timidly.

She nodded readily.

"I would not mind. We are to share a table with acquaintances of yours only, and this one seems very docile and of the well-behaved sort. I trust he will not make trouble.

"Quite the difference from my *fool* apprentices," Lady Irene added with a bit of poison to her words as she gave Lutz and Theo a sidelong glance. The two of them kept their gazes fixed to the floor, their mouths shut.

"I expect neither of you have a complaint?"

There was no longer a question mark at the end of that sentence. Even though it was disguised as an inquiry, wasn't it closer to a command?

The two straightened their backs, their voices overlapping as they spoke in unison, their answer united. "None at all."

Their attitudes as they desperately tried to not incur her wrath was a refreshing change.

I could understand why Lutz, with his slight build, might refuse to take any part in the bodybuilding regiment. But strapping Theo, too? Interesting.

For now, however, let's give precedence to the guests who are waiting. The unexpected situation continued, making us late, but we herded ourselves to the room.

The room was 46 square meters, paintings hung on three of the walls, and the ceiling was decorated with fine ivy details. Beneath the hanging splendor of the chandelier, Georg and Michael stood from their seats.

I apologized for being late and they waved it aside with a smile. Georg looked at me curiously when he saw the cat, and I explained Nero's story.

Next to him, Michael said in a small voice, "*The one from before.*"

"Yes. He's the one you saved."

Michael watched as Nero stretched in my arms and looked up at him with great interest.

"He looks well, I'm glad."

Michael's voice and the look in his eyes were very gentle.

I smiled. "His injury has been quick to heal, and the truth is that he can already walk."

I said it to ease his mind, but, for some reason, Michael's face became stiff. He held his breath, looking as if he had swallowed something odd by accident. The hand he had stretched out to touch Nero stopped midair and withdrew.

"Michael?"

His strange behavior made me concerned, so I peered up at him, but he averted his face.

He kept his head down, and I felt confused.

Did I do something wrong?

"Princess, shall we begin?" asked Lady Irene.

"Oh, uh, yes."

I took my seat.

Since they were meeting for the first time, the boys went around making self-introductions. Even through that part, Michael never once looked in my direction.

I'm a little...no, I'm in a *lot* of shock.

I fought against the urge to look down, and addressed the main point. "Well then. Lady Irene, if you would be so kind, I would like to hear your thoughts regarding the medicine I handed over to you."

You have things you need to do first before you can even be sad, I sternly told myself.

Lady Irene spread the cartridge that had been placed on top of the mahogany table. The pill had been broken and powdered.

"When I tried to take a closer look at the refined material, I noticed it had a slight tinge of red. From the feel of the material, I believe it is bark."

Georg stared at the medicine fixedly, repeating her words back. "Bark, you say?"

"It is much too coarse to have originated from leaves or roots. You could make it into a paste by adding a binding agent to the clump of spices. The smell is weak, and the taste quite bitter."

Lady Irene opened a thick book she had brought.

"Bark-based medicine are not very common. What I am checking in our own kingdom is..."

She turned the book in our direction.

On the page she pointed to with her pale finger, there were various illustrations of trees with comments written on them. A tree which bloomed tiny yellow blossoms, a tree bearing big shiny leaves, and then, a tree with yellow bark on the inside. Lady Irene politely explained their uses one by one.

"However, each characteristic is different. Even if we comb through the trees and shrubs one by one, what we have in our hands is a pill that has already been processed, so any comparison would be difficult. The current situation

therefore leads me to say identification will prove a challenge. ”

Done with her general explanation, her eyebrows lowered and she gave a small sigh.

Once again, the smallest of clues raised our hopes, and unsurprisingly brought us low again. The room fell into pondering silence.

Theo raised his hand.

“Can’t we trace it with magic? Wizards borrow nature’s strength, so they should be proficient at finding the powers of their same attribute.”

“True. For example, if they are a water attribute wizard, they can locate the source of a river. If they are a wind attribute, they can sense the flow of currents in the atmosphere or read the weather. And if they are an earth attribute wizard, then they may be able to find the original environment or its species. However, as you and I both know, there is no earth attribute wizard in the palace.”

In the rural areas, it seems like there do exist wizards who make a living doing the work similar to a doctor. However, since they are not under the patronage of the kingdom, their strength can easily be guessed.

According to Lady Irene, their powers included having skilled hands when it came to raising plants, but they were just as normal as other people. They can harvest a day or two faster, for example, or make plants withstand withering. Stuff to that degree.

But even if they tried to do it, there was a big possibility it could end in failure.

“Aren’t there any other choices apart from painstakingly following every clue?” asked Georg.

It was overwhelming, but at this point, there was no other method. I’ve finished looking into the port entry logs, and know the ship originated from the Kingdom of Flamme. I traced it from the port town facing the western sea as far as the destination it had sailed for. The rest I’m leaving to Master Julius. New information might just come rolling in from there. We can’t give up. Let’s hope for the best.

For now, we dissolved the meeting, and everyone stood from their seats.

I was thanking Lady Irene for her time and making friendly conversation,

when someone spoke to me from behind.

“Umm, Miss Marie?”

“Yes?”

I turned to find Georg standing behind me with a nervous look on his face. The discussion is over, what is there to be nervous about? I wondered. When my head tilted to the side, his expression became even more stiff.

What’s wrong with you, Georg?

A seizure? Chronic spasms? If that’s the case, should I call the grandfatherly court physician for you?

“What is it?”

Looking away from me, Georg mumbled hesitantly. “Uhh, umm...” His appearance as he looked down, rosy-cheeked, was sweet like a young maiden’s. I thought his looks had become dignified, but he still had traces of his mother’s looks.

His femininity is so high—!

“If—if you don’t mind, would you kindly guide me to the greenhouse?”

“To the greenhouse?” I repeated.

I wasn’t mocking him. It was just a little surprising that Georg would show an interest in plants, but he impatiently opened his mouth and started to justify himself.

“Err, well, that is, I have nothing to be ashamed of! I’ve heard mention of the abundant number of rare medicinal plants cultivated here, and merely wanted to see them at least once!”

“Oh...kay?”

Somewhat overwhelmed, I took a step back.

Georg noticed me pulling back and cleared his throat, apologizing in a small voice. He shook his head in order to let me know not to mind him, blushing in embarrassment.

I was surprised by his force, but I assented.

To Georg, who was helping Master Julius, anything valuable was...didn’t it come

down to a natural response regarding procurable items that can become goods?

The greenhouse has a strict no entry policy when it comes to outsiders without authorized access, but it should be okay since it was Georg. When I looked to Lady Irene for her opinion, she nodded magnanimously. Permission granted, I turned to Georg.

“Very well. If you are fine with me—”

“Wait a minute!”

I was going to nod and smile, but before I could even do that, a pale hand blocked my view. The next moment, a body pushed itself between me and Georg. The hem of the black robe made from a fine fabric lightly flapped like an afterthought.

All I could see was the back of his head because his back was turned to me. But even though I couldn't see his face, I knew who he was from the peculiar color of his nearly-white silver hair.

“Lutz?”

“If he needs a guide, *we'll* do it.”

“Huh?”

How did this come about?

Why would the fiercely shy of strangers Lutz suddenly take it upon himself to offer to guide someone he had barely met? I didn't understand.

And why the need to even wedge himself between us?

It was perplexing, and one question rapidly followed another. Theo came to stand next to me. He peered into my face, a gentle smile on his face.

“Princess,” he said, “don't you have to return the cat to your chamber?”

He looked at Nero in my arms.

Nero must have been weary; he was sound asleep before I realized it. It certainly wouldn't be very kind to drag him with me here and there.

“You're right. Then, can I bother you two?”

“Yes.”

Lutz looked back at me with a smile. He nodded. "Of course. Leave it to us." I had a feeling Georg said something as well, but Lutz and Theo were blocking me, so I couldn't see him. The two of them are in their growing stage, and the difference in our heights only continued to widen. They formed a barrier between us.

Suddenly, a face popped out of Lutz's shadow, and I looked at Georg.

"Well then, Georg, do you find this arrangement agreeable?"

Georg's brows were knit together, and, after a long hesitation, he nodded. "Yes."

I switched my focus to Michael who was still sitting down.

"Michael, will you be going with him?"

He looked up with a start.

"Y-yes? What, what was that?"

It seems like he hadn't heard a thing.

"Georg will have Lutz and Theo guide him to the greenhouse, but what about you?" I explained patiently.

"I," he said hesitantly, chewing on his lip.

His wandering gaze, which seemed so indecisive, settled on Lady Irene, who was collecting the books she had set on top of the desk.

She noticed him and asked, "Something the matter?"

Michael spoke desperately, stumbling over his words. "Er, excuse me, Your Excellency... If you would be so kind as to, um, spare...a moment?"

I stared at him in shock. I hadn't expected him to say that, but all Lady Irene did was blink mildly. Behind the monocle, her jet black eyes gleamed with intelligence as she considered Michael.

His shoulders shook as she stared at him, but even though he was trembling, he did not look away.

"Very well."

She looked down and sighed.

*“Come,”* she said to him as she gathered the books in her arm and began to walk away. Belatedly returning to his senses, he followed Lady Irene as she left the room.

I mulled over it as I saw him off.

Did Michael want to consult her about his own powers? But if that really was the case, why did he have a sudden change of heart?

Until this moment, I thought he would continue to hide it.

*“What is the matter with Michael?”* asked Georg, confused.

I didn't know how to answer to him.

# Chapter 43: The Reincarnated Princess's Dialogue ①

I was staring at the words on the faded paper rather than reading them. I sighed.

Whatever Michael discussed with Lady Irene that day was unknown to me. I was curious whether or not he spoke to her on the topic his powers, but I couldn't straight out ask. I'd be in trouble if he turned the situation around and asked how I knew, and I didn't think I had the confidence to pass it off. Besides, ever since the meeting, I haven't run into him anywhere, so I didn't even have the chance to ask.

Any details about the Michael before his body was taken over by the Dark Lord was miniscule, even in the game. That was why I had absolutely no idea what he thought, or how he'll try to act.

“.....”

Another sigh slipped out. I was furious at myself for being so useless.

It was comparable to me using a strategy guide up until now, and knowing beforehand where the traps awaited me made it easy to avoid them as I lived my life. But this was where it diverged. Destroying flags and continuously avoiding a chaotic future has yielded a situation quite different from the game's. Knowledge pertaining only to the game was useless.

But even if I've lost my metaphorical compass, I must learn how to keep moving.

“Hey.”

“Ahhh—!!”

I jumped when a voice suddenly spoke to me. At the same time, a hand reached out from behind and grabbed the book lying open in my lap.

I twisted around with the intent of taking it back, only to freeze.

“If you have no intention of reading, *don't* bother.”

Light blue eyes pinned me down, scrutinizing me with displeasure. The tone of voice without a slice of warmth was cutting.

Shivering as sweat dripped down my back, I silently whispered to myself, You screwed up.

The man sat up from the largish couch. Still irritated, he closed the book with a rough move. I wanted to tell him not to handle such a historically valuable book with so poorly, but it wasn't something I could say when I was spacing out with that valuable book not a moment ago.

I got off the end of the couch I had been sitting on and stood on the floor. I took a deep breath, and tightened my stomach. I controlled my expression, straightened my posture, and bowed my head.

“I am sorry, father.”

Father looked at me, and the frown between his brows deepened.

“For what?” he asked sharply.

Though his young daughter made a laudable effort to apologize, the air around him did not soften in the slightest. I was disgusted with myself for spacing out even knowing he was that sort of person.

This was my fourth time visiting my father's chambers. There were no friendly exchanges, but the time spent only in silent book reading was peaceful, and perhaps a little listless. It was an excuse for an act of folly that served me no good.

“.....”

At a loss for words to respond, I chewed on my lip.

Father looked at me coldly, chin propped in a hand, the elbow resting on a raised knee.

“What do you apologize for? Let's hear it,” he asked once more.

“For...”

My voice shook from nervousness.

I scolded myself for almost looking down in shame, and tucked in my chin.

“Not having the desire to read, even though I had the book open.”

I answered honestly, like a fool.

I had a feeling I did the same thing the first time I came here. When he asked me if I couldn't read, and I gave him my idiotic reply that I would even if I couldn't.

I haven't made any progress.

But what else could I do? If one had neither the head nor the guts to use trickery, all that was left was defiance.

“Though presented with an opportunity to peruse through a precious, valuable book, I was preoccupied and halfhearted.”

With another muttered apology, I bowed my head again.

Father sighed with an annoyed look.

“If you honestly think apologizing will grant you pardon, you are gravely mistaken.”

His words were harsh, but his expression appeared somewhat mollified. The book he kept out of my reach he now handed over like he was forcing it on me. I was amazed he gave it back so easily, but I returned to my senses and tightly hugged the book close with both hands.

Father grabbed the wine bottle on the table and poured all that remained into his glass. I watched him gulp it down like he didn't even taste it, and he pointedly ordered me to sit.

There was enough space for one person at the end, so I sat on the side. I brought a hand to my fast beating heart and softly exhaled.

I tried to open the book, this time resolved to concentrate so that I wouldn't get kicked out. However, I noticed the stare pointed at me from the side, and my hand froze.

I wanted to ignore the look, but I didn't have the nerves needed for something like that. Timidly, I looked in that direction.

“What preoccupied you?”

“Er...”

“You had worries? Tell me.”

He said the words, but I didn't immediately understand. My eyes popped open, and I stared at my father.

I had a feeling he asked me to share my troubles, but...was I hearing things? It was just my imagination, wasn't it? No way that would ever happen, *right?*

“My troubles, uh...are not, important enough to trouble you for advice, father.”

“Who offered advice? I only said I'd hear it.”

“Er, yes.”

Right!!

Even though I was irritated, I was also relieved. That arrogance belonged to father, no doubt about it. Great. For a moment there, I thought I'd slipped into parallel universe.

Only, it may be good to have peace of mind, but what should I say? I couldn't afford to speak of Michael's powers. Wasn't there any safer topic?

After a short while, I said, “I was troubled with my own lack of ability to apply my skills.”

“Ability to apply your skills?”

“Yes, father. I am weak at handling the unexpected. I am only accustomed to approaching situations that are predictable to a certain degree with plan in mind, and my ability of adapting to the unforeseen is lacking.”

My father neither agreed nor disagreed. His stare pressured me to continue.

“I am full of shortcomings. I am weak at quick thinking, and I lack decisiveness. When situations beyond what I expect occur, I am just thrown into jumbled mess, and I can't do a thing. This will not do.”

For example, even if the future begins to progress in a completely different direction from the game, I can't afford to come to a stop and waver.

Not knowing was not an excuse. Not understanding did not make it justifiable.

My hands, resting on top of the book lying on my knees, clasped painfully. I watched as my nails bit into my skin.

“I wish to become capable of dealing with any of situation.”

After a moment of quiet, father said in a low voice, “I see.”

When my eyes swung around to him, I was struck speechless to find his handsome face closer than I expected it.

He scrutinized me from point-blank range, and sighed solemnly.

“So my daughter is a big fool.”

It took a few seconds before father’s words reached my brain. A throbbing vein popped up on my forehead, and my voice was low as I squeaked, “Excuse me?”

*What* did he just say?

After being half-forced to voice my worries, what did this *ass* just say?

A look of rage appeared on my face and I glared at him. Father watched and puzzledly inclined his head to the side.

His silk-fine platinum blonde hair swayed sleekly, casting a shadow on his pale skin. Even such a casual move seemed picturesque and that made my blood boil more.

Every little thing is beautiful with you!! I almost swore at him incomprehensibly.

“Father. Just now...what did you...?”

“I said, my daughter is a big fool.”

Father repeated everything slowly, as if he was talking to a young child. You’re very skilled at getting on someone’s nerves, aren’t you? You shit father.

“She wishes to be capable of dealing with anything, she said?” he spat, not hiding his disgust. “Who in the world does she think she is, this young girl alive a mere ten years?”

A princess?! I wanted to retort, among other things.

But in reality, I could only chew on my lips, my face flushed red with anger and embarrassment.

I was pissed off. Mad enough to spit nails, but I couldn't talk back.  
Because it was an unshakeable truth that I was a powerless and ignorant brat.

# Chapter 44: The Reincarnated Princess's Dialogue ②

“Was there ever a person who could perfectly deal with an unforeseen event? What you suggest is on par with becoming a god.”

He was telling me it was impossible.

“But, Father, you seem to have that ability. So does my brother,” I protested in a small voice.

I was remembering the wizard kidnapping.

I knew about the plot beforehand since it was the background story for a character in the game, but my father and brother were different from me. They shouldn't have had any sort of prior knowledge.

Nevertheless, even though I was cheating, they discovered the plot down at the same speed I did. The matter was safely handled, and war avoided in the end.

From my point of view, it was even rather miraculous.

I, too, wanted to sense the traps lying in wait for me and have the ability to avoid them.

“That is why you're foolish.”

I was instantly cut down by his words.

“Urgh.”

I clutched at my chest, and groaned a little.

That cut. That cut really deep.

He sighed with great disgust, stretched out one leg on the couch, and turned his body in my direction.

I unintentionally looked up, and when I did, my eyes met his. Surprisingly, neither his expression nor his voice contained the sharpness of his words.

Listen, he said in preface.

“Change that outlook of yours.”

I froze at the unexpected advice.

I had been prepared to be scolded or criticized for being a failure. What he threw at me instead was actually an instruction given in a mentoring tone of voice. It was impossible not to be bewildered.

“What do you mean?”

“Most things have something called a warning sign. You may not see them, but the important part is whether you can sense them or not.”

A warning sign, I repeated in a small voice. Father nodded. After looking like he was thinking something over, he pointed a finger at the book I was hugging.

“You leave that book you’re holding so dear on the table for an hour. Suppose, in that period of the time, the book was damaged, what do you believe to be the cause?”

I blinked repeatedly at the sudden parable. Though I was lost, I looked at the object he spoke of.

There was an empty bottle, a glass half-filled with wine, and a candlestick on the table.

I held my chin with a hand while I thought.

“If the candlestick falls, the book may catch fire and be destroyed. On the other hand, if the glass tips over, the wine may be the cause. Either one may be the culprit,” I answered after deep thought.

He laughed scornfully. “What an uninspired answer.”

Though I was closing my hands into fists in my mind, I responded with a calm voice. *“Is that so?”*

Father dismissed my efforts, and continued with a simple, Fine.

“Suppose the candlestick did fall over and the book was destroyed by flame. In that situation, was there really nothing you could have done?”

“No. I could have extinguished the fire, or taken the very thing itself out of the room.”

“Exactly. It is the same for the wine. Had you emptied the glass or put it away,

you could have very simply avoided it.”

As if he was giving a short demonstration, Father reached for the glass with a hand and drained the remainder.

I vaguely wondered why father would bring up this topic during the conversation, but came to understand why.

The story was simple, but easy to understand. Books are flammable, and they become ruined when soaked. Placing a flame or liquid next to something like that and taking your eyes off it was extremely dangerous. It didn't require hindsight, it was a predictable situation.

My father and brother were able to avoid a war not because of a miracle, and neither was it due a gift from the gods.

“If you're in possession information, measures can be prepared in advance. I wonder if I have it right,” I muttered.

I received no response, but I had a feeling the eyes watching me were slightly narrowed in humor.

Even if my answer wasn't perfect, it couldn't be completely off the mark, could it?

I tried to look back on Lutz's kidnapping in a positive light.

Lutz was a wizard in possession of rare powers in a world losing its magic. The probability that he'd be targeted by other kingdoms was high.

And Sckellz, which tried to kidnap him, was an enemy nation governed by a warmongering king.

Both of them certainly needed to be watched out for.

Here, I cocked my head to the side.

In that case, why Lutz was kidnapped in the game?

Both my father and brother were as distinguished as they were in the game. It was unlike that they could have missed the time or the details of how Lutz and Theo came to the palace.

Even though I was watching both the book and the candlestick, why did the book burn?

“Father...”

“What?”

“I tried to pay attention to both objects, yet the book still burned. What did I do wrong there?”

“You might well have bad eyesight.”

You ass, I silently cursed.

“I asked in earnestness.”

“And I, too, answered earnestly,” replied my expressionless father, matter-of-factly.

I exhaled, trying to let go of my surging irritation. In place of the breath, I filled my lungs with the cold air of the room.

With a measure of calm gained, I suddenly thought, What did he mean by “*bad eyesight*”?

I lacked the insight to fully grasp the situation in my own kingdom, let alone in neighboring states.

Of course, no living human could claim to be omniscient, my otherwise godlike father included. Of that I was sure.

If that’s the case, in the place of his eyes, he gains his information through people—the subordinates spread throughout the world to gather information. To sum it up, what he meant by having bad eyesight.

“Does it mean I made a poor choice in people?”

Come to think of it, when I was investigating Lutz’s kidnapping, didn’t I thinking the same thing?

That it was precisely because Sir Leonhard had come into his position as the commander so early that we got a head start?

In the game, the first reason they couldn’t prevent the situation was most likely because of the man holding the commander’s position. Their cause of defeat was because he failed to notice the abnormal change in the knight Niklas von Buelow, who was one of the criminal.

“Barely passable, I’d say?” said father as he placed the now empty glass on the table. “As a reward, I’ll give you a bird.”

“Huh?”

What was this guy talking about?

Unable to keep up with the sudden conversation switch, I gave my father a severe stare. I'm sure my thoughts must have been written across my face. However, he paid me no mind and continued.

“Don't need it?”

“I do not understand.”

“I thought it would come in handy. If you have any sense of self-preservation, you'll take it.”

“.....”

How very cryptic. Was he even interested in having a conversation? I swallowed back the sigh spilling out, and cast my eyes down. You're speaking to a king, who by nature is a proud man, I reasoned with myself. It won't do to antagonize him if you don't fully mean it. He'll only manipulate the situation to his advantage and cause you more grief.

“I'd leave it well alone if you were more incompetent.”

“Um?”

It was barely perceivable, but his near-monologue remark reached my ears and I couldn't act as if I hadn't heard.

“What do you mean?”

My voice shook.

Instead of answering my question, he threw his own question at me.

“Among the surrounding kingdoms, which one do you believe we should be most cautious of?”

I chewed my lip and glowered at him, but far from recoiling, he didn't even show a fragment of discomfiture. I repeatedly told my own shaken self to calm down and answered, “Laptah.”

There were four kingdoms bordering Nebel: Wind, Schnee, Grund, and Laptah.

As an allied nation with friendly relations, the Kingdom of Wind was an exception to the rest.

In the northwest was the Kingdom of Schnee. We were united during the war against the Kingdom of Scherz, and foreign relations have been positive ever since. Hypothetically speaking, even if relations became hostile and the alliance dissolved, we were protected by a range of steep mountains, so invasion was made difficult.

While we weren't for sure allied with the Kingdom of Grund, we had strong commercial ties and trade was prospering. Furthermore, Grund was a small kingdom less than half the size of Nebel, so it was very unlikely they would pick a fight.

As my game knowledge has already informed me, I was aware that Laptah was a cunning nation, but even if I didn't already have that information, it was the only kingdom left by process of elimination.

Laptah bordered us to the northeast, and a third of its land was frozen solid. It's no wonder they'd covet Nebel, a kingdom with vast fertile lands.

"What if that Laptah tried to approach Wind?"

"Huh?"

Wind, approached by Laptah?

It was my first time hearing this. My eyes rounded in surprise.

"I..."

I've never heard talk of this, I started to say, but I held my tongue.

The big question was not whether I'd heard of it or not. There were plenty of things my father knew of that I did not.

The important thing was, in the case that it was true, was it a future to be expected?

"I do not think it desirable situation."

Laptah viewed Nebel as an enemy nation. If by any chance, they were to join hands with Wind, we'd be flanked. From the northeast and the west, an invasion on two fronts would hopelessly divide our strength.

"But the Kingdom of Wind is allied to Nebel. I cannot believe they will so

simply betray us.”

“Alliances are not a permanent. In this world’s long history, there are precedents of alliances with no specified time limit being unilaterally discarded. Well, they stand to lose the confidence of their neighbors, though, so I could say it would be a last resort,” he answered pragmatically.

I gave little groan.

It was vexing, but he was quite right. Even in the war-filled world of my previous life, there were many examples of alliances being broken depending on the tide of the war.

Even if the likelihood was low, we should be wary.

“When I think of that one in a million chance, I have a desire to strengthen our ties with Wind. To do achieve that, the simplest solution would be marriage.”

“.....”

My face twitched before settling into a stony expression. Cold sweat ran down my back.

Whose and whose? I couldn’t say bring myself to ask something so stupid. The Kingdom of Wind had two princes, no princess. In other words, Chris and Johan were out of the picture. I was the only who remained.

The words *political marriage* filled my head and left so much impact as to make my vision swim.

So long as you were born into royalty, it was an inevitability you must be prepared for.

Yet I’ve continued to live with eyes averted.

If I accepted...then what about my feelings for Sir Leonhard?

“If you had been born a beauty without brains, I think I would have married you off to some harmless fellow or other. Putting your brainless daughter in another court is equivalent to political suicide. You are foolish, daughter, but you are not without brains.”

His words gave me another big shock.

Was it possible I could have married as I wished, if only I had lived quietly and kept to myself?

Sir Leonhard didn't fit the bill of a harmless man, but father had placed no importance on my marriage, so it hadn't been out of the question.

It looks like I've hung the noose around my own neck.

"You seem to object?"

"Yes..."

"Then become something I will be loathe to part with."

His expression shifted as he watched my eyes open wide.

It wasn't a smile, but I could tell he was enjoying himself. His sadistic heart was showing through, like a beast toying with a small animal. I was probably paranoid.

"The Crown Prince of Wind is thirteen years old. In two more years, he'll come of age. Until then, prove your worth to me," he said with great relish.

I cursed him inside my head, You shit father.

**Notes:** Wind = Vind

Because, yeah, I'm editing older chapters at glacial speed, so names are all over the place. I'll hopefully make everything standard one productive day.

# Chapter 45: The Reincarnated Princess's Temper

“Who are you calling a fool!”

I threw the pillow in my hands at the head of the bed as hard as I could. It did nothing to lessen my temper. When the pillow bounced back, I punched it with all my might.

“‘Prove your worth to me’? Get off your high horse!!”

One after another, blows landed on the poor pillow. Feathers scattered through a tear and went unnoticed.

The anger had gone to my head, and I couldn't even use venting as an excuse. What little reason remaining had flown out the window, and I would have run through the castle yelling if it had been viable choice.

Ahhhhhhhh! I'm so mad! Sooo mad! You shit fatherrr!!!

Clutching the pillow, I rolled around on my bed.

If witnessed, my eccentric behavior would have invited the presence of an exorcist rather than a physician, but nobody was watching anyway.

It was possible Klaus heard everything through the door, but yeah, yeah, whatever. I couldn't care less.

I sulked and threw a pity party.

I couldn't remember how I made it back to my room after leaving my father's rooms, the shock was that great.

I continued to space out even after I was left alone, but what finally reared its head was neither sadness nor despair but *rage*.

Face it. I've tried so hard, and I get an undesired marriage? What the hell! If I said it would've been better to quietly accept my fate, then wouldn't that be a complete denial of all my efforts until now?!

That's the definition of calculating.

To the very end, I was determined to change the future for my own sake, not

out of some pure desire to see everyone live happily.

But. But... I wasn't so self-centered I'd be happy to be the only one blessed. It would be good if a future where everyone—the ones important to me, and the people who surrounded them—can laugh came to be, and I worked in my own way toward that goal.

Who would've imagined that the outcome would be getting tied to a Wedding Route with a faceless prince from a neighboring kingdom?

“Drop dead, you shit father!”

I hit the pillow with all my strength behind the blow.

The moment my fist sank in, several feathers flew out from the seams. The fluttering feathers danced around me like a dream as they descended, and I watched while gasping for breath.

My rough breathing was the only sound inside the quiet room.

“Ahhh... Geez...”

With the moment of rage over, I was exhausted.

I threw myself back on the bed with a flop.

The impact of my body hitting the surface sent a feather into the air again, and it landed on my nose. I blew out a breath and closed my eyes.

“This is pointless.”

My low voice bounced back hollowly.

Along with the cooling of my head came a sense of emptiness.

Screaming and throwing a fit alone in your room, then falling into a bout of self-loathing? You're a mess.

What are you doing, Rosemarie?

Staying like this wasn't helping, but didn't want to do anything else today.

Maybe it was an effect of the anger, for I now had a dull ache around my temples.

I doubted sleep was possible, but I intended to get some as soon as the symptom abated.

That's when I felt a tiny touch on my forehead.

“.....?”

I slowly opened my heavy eyelids.

I tried to see what that small pressure on my head was but saw nothing.

Reluctantly, I attempted to get up.

Immediately, the dark shadow near my pillow meowed.

The black cat suddenly filled my vision as he peered into my eyes.

“Nero.”

My pet meowed again in response.

He'd been casually relaxing on the sofa during my frenzy, and transferred himself over when I wasn't paying attention.

Even though I was raving hysterically earlier, Nero showed no fear towards me as he looked down at me.

I had a feeling his marble-like blue eyes were asking, Are you done yet?

“Nero,” I said, sounding very pathetic.

I reached for him, wanting a hug. He dodged, his cry sounding like a veto.

I see. So you hate hugging?

I was saddened, but I could see why he wouldn't want to be squeezed by the girl who had been raging not too long ago. I decided to give up and watch him instead.

As if he sensed the instant I made my decision, Nero settled down above my head.

For a moment, I was hoping we could sleep cuddled together, but then he started doing something unexpected.

“Huh?? N-Nero?”

His put his paw on my forehead one more time.

Ignoring my bewilderment, he began to make himself at home on top of my head.

You're kidding, right?

I can't say you're full-grown, but I'll have you know you're actually quite heavy!

This time my head was literally feeling a great weight.

My cooling head became steaming hot. The vibrations from his purrs were directly transmitted to me.

I'm glad you seem so comfortable, but please don't fall asleep like that.

I must look pretty silly right now, I thought.

What are you doing, Rosemarie...? Seriously.

Looking at the canopy above with half-open eyes, I heaved a big sigh.

Reflecting on my actions again, that was all I could do.

I was supposed to be a character from an otome game, and yet, why couldn't I do anything right? I was a disgrace.

I've never heard of a princess burning with a love that cannot be throw a fit when she hears marriage of convenience talks. I think they usually cry?

I stealthily show up where Sir Leonhard might be and watch him from the shadows of pillars. If discovered, I boldly feigned ignorance.

Thinking of how I swung my pillow around and threw a tantrum, I cringed. Even I would cringe. I had a cat curled up on my head, for crying out loud!

I'll never be an otome game heroine.

And that was why I could only struggle in my own bumbling way.

“.....”

Both hands folded on top of my stomach, I took a deep breath. Eyes closed, I focused on my thoughts.

My father asked me to prove my worth.

In the two years I had until the crown prince comes of age, I must achieve some sort of result.

What sort, specifically? There was no clear answer. I needed to judge for myself, and moving was the first hurdle.

Our conversation was outrageous enough to make my head swim. Would you really give the young princess such a brutal task? You monster.

But, as luck would have it, I already had two objectives.

The first was the matter of taking preventive measures against the disease spreading in the future.

The settings have changed from the game's, and at present, there was high

potential for an epidemic in Wind rather than Nebel.

If we discovered a cure, we could produce it for Wind in exchange for great leverage.

The other matter was tracking down the stone where the Dark Lord was sealed, and placing it under strict safeguarding.

For Nebel, and the peace of the world, leaving the current situation the way it is, not knowing when the Dark Lord will revive again, was much too dangerous.

Since both had a record-high degree of difficulty to pull off, they should produce huge results.

In the end, it was just talk of the possibilities.

The person evaluating and observing wasn't someone easy to please. If I was unsuccessful, it would be the same as not doing anything. Results are everything, he would probably say with one brow arched.

"Can I do it?" I asked hopelessly.

The question went unheard and disappeared into the stillness of the night.

# Chapter 46: The Reincarnated Princess's Impatience

"...oyal Highness? Has something occurred?"

"I"

The carriage made a loud sound as it ran something over, like the wheel had hit a rock.

The giant jolt as a result returned me to my senses.

In front of me was Sir Leonhard, his face clouded over in concern. He must have worried about me, spaced out like I was.

"I, I'm fine," I stammered over my words.

As I slowly realized what was going on, my face began to burn up.

I'm terrible person. He was important, yet after I showed him my blank face, I couldn't believe I ignored him the entire time.

Feeling abashed and guilty, I rapidly apologized, but his expression did not clear up. Sir Leonhard stared at me, brows wrinkled and lips pursed.

An awkward silence fell in the carriage.

You wanted to talk with Sir Leonhard so you selfishly begged him to escort you to Master Julius's residence.

What the heck are you doing, Rosemarie?

Feeling ashamed, my eyes continued to drop, until a big hand stretched before them.

Inadvertently, I leaned back.

I wasn't thinking he'd hit me or anything like that. I was just surprised. Acting on reflex.

But without putting it into words, would he understand that? His outstretched hand stopped where it was. When I looked up and met his eyes, Sir Leonhard was wearing a troubled expression.

I did it again!!

I had no idea why Sir Leonhard was reaching for me. but that didn't change the fact that I had rejected him.

You're mistaken, I was just taken by surprise.  
I wanted to explain, but couldn't put it into words.

Sir Leonhard watched as I mumbled hesitantly, and he slowly asked,  
"Princess, can I touch you?"

Touch? What did he mean?  
My head moved stiffly as I nodded, stammering grandly all the while.

"Uh, um, ah, yes."

His hand brushed aside my bangs, and his palm gently came into contact with my forehead, as if he was trying not to frighten me. At the touch of his strong hand, all my consciousness flew away, and even my thoughts froze.

".....?!"

I held my breath. In comparison, there wasn't even a sign of perturbation in his composure.  
Though not for long, I finally had a glimpse of his handsome face, which had been so well hidden under the frown he'd been wearing.  
He breathed a sigh of relief and lifted his hand from my face.

"There's no fever."

His eyes softened, losing its severe edge.  
Getting the full blast of his gentle smile from point blank range put my brain in near-dangerous levels of discombobulation.

My face burned up even hotter than before.  
My brain stopped working, but my heart was going into overdrive.

"Eh, ahh, yes," I replied squeakily. Who answers with 'yes'?

"Please let me know if you're hurting anywhere."

"Yes."

"Or if you don't feel comfortable."

"Yes."

“So, is there anything troubling you?”

“Yes...oh!”

I was trying to contain my hammering heart, counting inside my head and nodding each time without thinking about it. It wasn't even a loaded question, but I fell for it—hook, line, and sinker—and a guilty look to go with it. A cautious glance at Sir Leonhard revealed all grins. It was of a different type from the ones previous, and I knew no excuse would save me.

“Bottling everything inside is a bad habit of yours. As your adviser it somewhat displeases me, but there may be something I can do to help if you share your troubles, no?”

Ahh, Sir Leonhard speaking casually is so attractive.

It was either escape from reality, or just me being true to my gut reactions. Despite my inappropriate thoughts, I gave a tiny nod.

But where should I begin?

Briefly, I turned my eyes on him and he slightly tipped his head to the side, as if he was encouraging me. The sight was like an arrow to the heart.

To calm myself, I slightly averted my eyes.

“I spoke to father recently,” I began.

His eyes opened wide. “You met with His Majesty the King?”

“Yes. Perhaps I should mention it was for the fourth time.”

“I can't tell if you're throwing caution to the wind, or if you're displaying decisiveness and the ability to take action in unusual settings,” he said, both shock and admiration in his sigh.

I couldn't accept his praise with a light heart.

Even though I'm afraid at the beginning, the lessons learned are quickly forgotten once the storm has passed. The type of fool whose mistakes comes back to bite her painfully.

“The first time I was so nervous I thought I'd throw up, but from the second visit onward I found myself somewhat settling in,” I mumbled under my breath. The words sounded like an excuse, and Sir Leonhard's expression because even

more doubtful.

He tried to look stern but failed and rubbed at his own jaw.

“I’m troubled. I don’t know whether I should be angry at your lack of wariness, or praise you for being so distinguished.”

“You should be angry...”

Or rather, I’ll run away if you praise me. I looked down.

A bitter smile floated on Sir Leonhard’s face as he appraised me. As if he had made a decision after reflecting, he continued without scolding me.

“And then what happened?”

“Actually...”

Head still lowered, I began to recount how I was given an opportunity to read books on the Dark Lord, but they were written in an ancient script so I couldn’t read it very well, and decided I’d need to visit any number of times.

How I got too comfortable with myself and let my mind wander, almost bringing father’s wrath on my head.

How he called me a fool right to my face.

How the flow of conversation changed, with me seemingly consulting father for advice.

And because I took the bait instead of ignoring it, which resulted in a heated exchange between us, I had somehow painted a target on myself.

Speaking of each instance in detail proved quite the form of self-torment. No one wants to speak of their own failings. My own was beyond repair. Incidentally, I haven’t made mention of the political marriage yet.

After I finished, another silence fell in the carriage.

It was awkward and I couldn’t stand it, so I summoned up my courage and stole a glance at Sir Leonhard. Brows furrowed and silent, his expression was solemn.

He looked like Auguste Rodin’s sculpture, *The Thinker*.

What should I do? Wasn’t this someone in complete shock?

# Chapter 47: The Reincarnated Princess's Plea

## ①

“Sir Leon?” I asked in a small voice.

No answer. Rather than say he ignored me, it was more accurate to describe him as deep in thought.

The tension fell off my shoulders, and I released a sliver of breath. It seems I've dodged this landmine, even if only for the smallest fraction of time. If there was no escaping a lecture, then I thought I'd rather take one from Sir Leonhard, but the idea of incurring his dislike and disappointment filled me with aversion.

With bated breath, I watched him intently, but he did not stir. His downcast eyes were fixed on an empty spot, and a lock of hair cast a shadow on his forehead as it swayed with the motion of the carriage. His long, rough fingers were propped against the strong line of his jaw.

This was hardly the appropriate time or place, but I couldn't help staring.

I'm usually so nervous I can't look at him straight, but in this one instance where he paid me no mind, I could safely look to my heart's content. From the faintest hint of a scar on his earlobe to the unexpected length of his eyelashes, I found myself eagerly taking note of every little detail.

*Definitely* not the time to do this.

Reason demanded I act with prudence, warring with my giddy emotions. Even though the two were in conflict, I couldn't take my eyes off him, and slowly his eyes met mine.

“Princess.”

“Y-yes?!” My voice squeaked as I answered with a start.

He stared.

“Princess?” he repeated, baffled. *Is something wrong?* was the unspoken question. I didn't know how to answer. I wasn't bold enough to tell him I had

been mesmerized by him.

“You don’t feel well after all.”

“No! I, um, I was just, well, thinking.”

*Staring at his face while he’s doing the thinking, you mean?* a voice mocked.

“In any case, what did you want to talk about, Sir Leon?”

Whether he knew I was covering up or not, Sir Leonhard followed my lead. He sighed, but nothing followed. It seemed to me like he was having difficulty getting it out. He laced the hands between his legs many times. After the indecisive pause, he began to speak.

“You said previously that you had no intention of relying on Prince Christof. Have your feelings changed?”

I blinked. The same thing had happened before when I told him I’d spoken to my father. I had a proper response then, surely.

I didn’t want to be used by my brother, and I hated the thought of him using me. That’s why I’ll never tell him.

Weren’t we done? Caught off guard, I couldn’t hide my surprise.

“Why do you mention this?” I asked evasively.

It wasn’t like him to revisit a closed topic, and my voice unintentionally turned accusing. His brows lowered slightly, as if he was troubled and stuck for words.

Watching him, anxiety filled my heart.

It hurt to think he didn’t believe in me.

“Is it because you don’t think I’m reliable?”

Pessimism dripped from every word.

“That’s not it,” he replied promptly. “When I think of how intelligent you are, it’s easy to predict that one day you will catch His Majesty’s attention, but it is still much too early for you.”

In other words, he was saying I’m inexperienced.

Unlike my brother, I’ve never engaged in politics, which means there hasn’t been chance for me to display my competency. Therefore, even if I showed

something of merit, he probably thought I'd have to go above and beyond.

"It is unwise to do anything by half measures. If His Majesty recognizes your brilliance and plans to nurture it, then there shouldn't be a problem. But if you are being judged for how useful you can be, then the situation is gravely different. When it comes to the best use for a princess of the realm—there's no pleasant way to say it—the first thing that comes to mind is marriage."

"Hyuh!" I inhaled sharply.

He just threw the bomb I've been avoiding in my lap. I couldn't bring myself to face it, so to now be confronted by it, all I could do was freeze. It only took him a moment to study my face and read the situation. His already dubious expression became even more so.

My head hung low. I said nothing, quiet with shame. His voice was husky with surprise and impatience.

"Princess, say it's not—"

My hand, which had been holding onto my skirt, squeezed tight.

"It won't happen immediately!"

Ahh, what are you saying, Rosemarie.

I was appalled at my outburst, but my mouth kept running on its own.

"He gave me two years until the Crown Prince of Wind comes of age!"

"Two years?" he murmured gravely.

I flinched. *That's it?* I seemed to hear. Was I being too defensive? Heat gathered in my nose and stung. I rebuked myself for wanting to cry, bit my lip and held it in.

"If I can prove my worth in that time, I..."

*Maybe able to marry the one I love,* I started to say, and stopped. I was getting ahead of myself.

Even if I produced the results my father wanted and he officially acknowledged me.

Even if I could freely choose who to marry.

The likelihood of being with Sir Leonhard was still close to null.

It struck me. Sir Leonhard never once batted an eye at all these talks of a political marriage for me. My chances of having my first love coming true had *always* been lower than my chances of being acknowledged by father.

Depressed, my head hung steadily lower. A silence filled the carriage.

Looking at the hand which had creased my skirt, I rubbed my nails with a finger and repeated the meaningless action absently. I only lifted my head when he stirred and found his serious gaze on me.

“Perhaps you should make an exception this time and rely on Prince Christof?”

“No!” I said before I knew it. I reiterated. “I’ll never ask him!”

All modest and cowardly desires to not be selfish or a nuisance had, rather conveniently, disappeared into thin air.

“I had a notion you were headstrong, but... Please, Your Highness. Your future is on the line here.”

That tone had come back. The one he used to coax an unreasonable princess. I shook my head willfully. Let him think I’m difficult.

“That’s why! That’s exactly why!”

My future hung on the line. Quite so!  
That’s why I can’t back down. You think I have the luxury? the look in my eyes said.

“There’s a risk, but it’s also a chance that won’t come twice!”

Everything began to come together when I put it into words. It felt like the puzzle I hadn’t been able to figure out was finally taking shape.

I flew into a rage due to my father’s arrogant attitude, but when I cooled off and thought about it, a princess essentially had no say in her own marriage. Having little room to refuse was still better than none, I realized.

I’ve finally found the silver lining in this challenge.

“Father expects me to go crying off to my brother. If I do that, he will

definitely forsaken me. 'This is all she's capable of,' he'll think as he turns his back on me."

His disappointment was a foregone conclusion.

Not that I cared. I might get annoyed, but I wouldn't shed a tear over what he thought.

However.

"Failing means that I will forever lose all privilege of marrying whomever I so choose."

I had nothing to base this on except intuition. I trusted it.

If I had been useless, he would've married me to some peer, father had said, and I had convinced myself the likelihood of Sir Leonhard being included among those candidates to be low but not out of the question.

Yes, it was. I knew better now.

He was a brave general famous even in other kingdoms. He had good looks, immense popularity, and profound wisdom.

Such a talented man would be highly sought after. Everyone would want to make a connection with him.

Even if *I* had no purpose, *he* did. Would father really let a worthless princess like me have such a capable man?

"I have to try this by myself," I muttered hoarsely. Tears blurred my vision.

"Princess," he said in a small, troubled voice.

His uneasy expression made him look younger than usual. If I told him I liked that sort of expression as well, I'm sure I'd only trouble him.

My entire face crunched up, ready to burst into tears.

I still didn't want to give up on him, even if I couldn't reach him.

"I have to do this alone, for I can't even tell the one I love my true feelings."

# Chapter 48: The Reincarnated Princess's Plea

## ②

Looking into Sir Leonhard's eyes, I bared my heart to him.

His sharp eyes widened with genuine shock as he found himself the object of my unwavering stare. I saw myself reflected in his obsidian eyes: shoulders rising with every breath, my face a feverish mess.

My head cooled quickly. As if ice water had been dumped on it. Huge regret came chasing along with the sense of accomplishment.

Did I really say those words to him with a face like that? Heavens, *no*. Wasn't that the same as proclaiming I love him?!

A whimper escaped me.

I can't mop up the words I've spilled. In fact, I hoped in vain he wouldn't notice, but one look at his expression was enough to wipe out that idea, too. I couldn't break eye contact with his full attention on me.

My heart struck an unsteady pace against my palm, which I realized belatedly, I had placed on my chest. My mouth had gone dry from the tension, and the sound as I swallowed seemed excessively loud.

Leonhard returned my scrutiny with despair in his eyes. All blood drained from my face as fear took hold of me. I was so frightened, I wanted to bolt.

My feelings for him have never been hidden. I think he found out, but let it pass as admiration. The puppy love a young girl has for an older man. An emotion too fleeting to call love, that will change to mere memory with the passing seasons.

This time I've outdone myself. I completely spilled the beans.

My feelings were not just a passing fancy. They were serious and troublesome, strong enough for me to put my future on the line.

And when he found out the depths of those emotions, it was clear as day what Sir Leonhard would do.

The young princess was trying to throw away her future for her first love, and the man she liked just happened to be himself?

He'd end it without a second thought. Being cruel to be kind. Already decided on his own that I don't need him.

"Princess Rosemarie," he said quietly.

It was the first time he had ever said my name. As much as that simple fact delighted me, I was unnerved and sure I wasn't wrong.

No.

No, stop.

Please.

I shook my head over and over. Like a petulant child. My disgraceful behavior filled me with shame, but nothing could make me back down.

Even being scoffed at and called off-puttingly obstinate would not change my mind.

"I—"

As he carefully tried to form his words to end it all, I heard the whisper of despair approach.

"Don't!" I yelled.

Standing from my seat—more like falling off—I clung to Sir Leonhard as he promptly bent forward to catch me. As he held me in both arms, I covered his lips with my hands.

There was no time to get bashful over the tactile feel of his lips as I pressed against them firmly. He was struck dumb at the contact, and clearly didn't know what to do as he looked at me. He couldn't just rip my hands off, and I stared up at him as I left my hands where they were.

"You can't say it! Don't!" I squeezed out.

How cunning, Rosemarie, begging him with tears in your eyes. I was making the most out of the dirty tricks available to a little girl. Kind Sir Leonhard would never shake off the hand of a child about to burst into tears.

I knew how I was acting, but still I couldn't back down.

"Please don't reject me yet." My voice trembled as I pleaded with him, but I made myself meet his eyes. "Don't give me an answer now."

Sir Leonhard looked at me in silence.

His hands came up to slowly pry away each finger stiff from dread.

Though his mouth was now free, he said nothing. He lifted me and gently placed me on my seat, and my tears escaped despite my best efforts to contain them. Kneeling on the carriage floor, Sir Leonhard reached a hand towards my downcast face and gently wiped them away.

"Please don't cry."

I lifted my head a little at the sound of his weary voice and saw the same turmoil in his face.

"I'm at a loss when you do."

At this kind gesture, even more tears fell. The dams broke, and giant drops slipped down my cheeks.

"Bear with me a little more." I begged through heaving sobs, shoulders shaking uncontrollably. "If you're going to turn me down, wait until I'm older. Please don't reject me because of my age. There's nothing I can do to change it."

I won't be able to give up on him over a reason like that.

"Unless..."

I cut myself off. He looked at me worriedly. Courage was needed to continue. I wanted to shut my eyes to the possibility, and force him to make a promise to me.

But I couldn't.

"Princess?"

Because I'll never be able to tie down the one I love and leave him with no way out. It wasn't about righteousness or morals.

I just didn't want to be hated by him.

"Unless you find someone you love."

A fresh wave of tears spilled the moment the words left my lips. Just imagining it was enough to bring crushing pain to my heart. I bit my lip to hold back the escaping sobs.

"Princess..."

He wiped the tears away from the corner of my eyes, his gaze surprisingly gentle.

I loved everything about him.

I didn't want to give away an inch.

The words he spoke to me and the expressions he showed me, I wanted to keep them all for myself.

You can't do that, Rosemarie. Nothing will come of it.

Stay with you out of pity, and what?

Even if you bind him to you, it will only hurt you both.

If he can't return your feelings, you have to let him go.

Struggle. Keep floundering as the inevitable is delayed. If it was all—regrettably—in vain, you can still have a place at his side supporting him, can't you?

"When that time comes, I will accept defeat gracefully," I blustered, pasting on a smile.

A dignified one, I hoped.

# Chapter 49: The Reincarnated Princess's Plea

## ③

The only source of sound came from the carriage wheels. It was otherwise quiet, but not overwhelmingly so.

Sir Leonhard's regard softened, as though humbled by the dazzling sun.

"How strong you are," he lamented.

I tilted my head to the side. I wasn't sure what he meant. The mere thought of being rejected by him had brought the waterworks to my eyes. What strength can he possibly speak of in a child like me?

He smiled warmly at my bewilderment, at ease, and I held my breath, spellbound. The last tears fell, and he wiped away the vestige.

Sir Leonhard rose off the floor and sank into his seat with a *fwump*. His moves lacking the usual polish of a knight. For some reason, my heart pounded at the contrast.

*I must be attracted to manly men*, I thought, my mind distractedly going off in the wrong direction.

Intertwined hands placed in the gap between his knees, Sir Leonhard leaned forward. The smile disappeared from his face as he fixed his eyes on me.

"Princess," he began with utmost formality.

I flinched. This was it. The moment he revealed his love for another or something.

As if he was trying to bring down my guard, his tone gentled.

"Will you listen to my story?"

"Your story?" I asked uncertainly.

He nodded. "Yes."

His eyebrows dipped down and his perfect lips stretched into a strained smile.

“In all honesty, I never intended to tell you this story. True, it might not be appropriate table conversation for a princess of the realm, but more than anything else, I did not want to lose dignity. You must be disappointed.”

There his smile turned rueful.

I wanted to tell him he was wrong, but coming from someone who hadn't even heard the story yet, it wouldn't have been believable. It would be even worse if he politely overlooked it, so I kept my mouth shut, and waited for him to continue.

“And yet I wish to be truthful with you.”

I froze, taken aback by the intensity and directness of his language. My heart might have stopped.

Heat slowly gathered in my face. The delight, bosom buddies with the crippling shyness, made me want to run off screaming my head off. My heart might have stopped? It was healthy and beating like a drum!

Sir Leonhard himself was unruffled. He looked at me strangely, as if he wasn't aware of any deeper meaning behind his words.

I felt silly, but I couldn't help breaking into a smile. He said he wanted to be truthful. Instead of dismissing it, and I wouldn't blame him if he did, he tried his best to diffuse the situation.

He was opening himself to me, how could I not be exhilarated?

“I'm honored, Sir Leon,” I said honestly. Then I cleaned up my expression. “Will you share your story with me?”

He nodded.

“As you must be aware, I still remain a bachelor this year, but I do not particularly believe it will always hold true.”

I stared at him, blinking several times. “Is that...so?”

I hadn't expected him to suddenly mention this. Sure, his status as a bachelor was no hard tragedy for me personally, but I did find it rather unusual.

Here was a handsome man with no visible deformities, who held an important office serving as the leader to the royal knights. He possessed great

character and devoted subordinates. As the “von” in his name indicated, he was a member of the aristocracy, and his blood came straight from the honorable lineage of Olsen.

No way in hell had a catch like him had been overlooked. None. In fact, there was a mountain of women lined up to marry him, yet he managed to stay a bachelor all these years. It wasn't clear why, but I thought there must have been a reason.

Perhaps the uncertainty of not knowing when death will come knocking in his line of work, or a desire to not create bonds with people who will mourn him held him back. Maybe he didn't want to raise the number of people he must protect.

“My behavior in my adolescence was far from exemplary.”

Smiling wryly, he awkwardly scratched at his cheek with a finger.

He beat around the bush, possibly out of consideration for my sensibilities, but without pulling any punches he's saying he fooled around.

A little girl who hasn't grown up would probably be shocked, but I can't say I was. I don't deny dreaming of him, but that hardly meant I glorified him. Ahh, he's so cool, the women probably couldn't leave him alone. My impressions were lukewarm.

The past was what it was. The one I liked was not his younger, mischievous self. It was the calm and composed man he had become after passing through that stage.

“Really?” I said blandly. His eyes flickered with surprise.

My response was probably not the proper one of a young maiden at threshold of puberty, who also happened to be in love. But I was past twenty on the inside. I was not so naive as to blindly defend him.

He watched me with interest, but returned to his story without comment. He probably thought I hadn't understood the brushed over portions. I preferred that as well.

“When I toned down, there was the fact that I had a fiancée. She was a proper and refined lady, too good for the likes of me.”

Actually, I take back what I said.

Even though we were discussing the past, it still hurt a lot.

It didn't register when he spoke about it indirectly, but intimately knowing the details about this woman he was supposed to have married was making me fret.

"She was demure, meek, and never once complained. Without flattering myself, I do believe she was in love with me."

As the image of a beautiful woman standing next to him became clearer and clearer, more and more pain stabbed at my heart. *I'm sure they looked perfect together*, I tortured myself.

"But I could not respond to her feelings," he continued, head slightly bowed.

"Huh?" I snapped back to my senses.

"She came to me in tears, saying it was too hard. That whenever she was with me, there was a big distance between us and it pained her."

I had no words.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in his expression, but he sounded like a man seeking repentance. How do I respond to that?

"Though my intentions were to cherish her, at that moment, I realized I've never truly loved someone from the bottom of my heart. Maybe I'm lacking something essential as a human being," he confessed indifferently. As if it was nothing. "I tried to love her. I liked her, but it never went deeper. Would it affect me at all if she had found another man to love and left? Imagining it did nothing to move my heart. In fact, I remember feeling the relief of being released from a heavy burden. I disgust myself," he spat out.

There was nothing I could say. All I could do was bite my lip.

"She was disappointed in me and decided to enter a convent. I did not stop her. In fact, I never had the right to do so."

"Sir Leon..."

"I received many marriage proposals afterward, but I refused them all. It would only end in tears for the next one."

*That is the end of my story,* he concluded.

Hew watched me with a calm expression as he finished. I looked away uncomfortably, not because I was unfeeling, but for lack of words. I saw resignation in his eyes.

“Have I disappointed you?”

I shook my head.

Perhaps he told me about his past to make me give up on him, so that I don't waste time nursing a love that won't be returned. So that I don't have to cry in the future.

Well, after I heard this story, I definitely thought my chances were even lower than before. How was I to succeed when neither his fiancée nor all of the other beautiful girls out there have?

Even so, asking me to give up was a different story. If I could so easily back off and say I quit, it wouldn't be this complicated.

So he can't bring himself to love others.

That wasn't a good enough excuse to stop loving him. My feelings were mine. The only one who can decide whether to end them or nurture them was me.

“Sir Leon, may I ask you one thing?”

“What is it?”

“Have I become your burden?” I asked quietly. That was all I wanted to confirm. Loving him was my choice, but was I causing him hardship, even though it was not my intent? No matter how determined I am, I'll still be disheartened if he tells me upfront I'm a bother.

It seemed my dread had been unwarranted.

Sir Leonhard denied it immediately. “Never!” His voice was raised, and he sounded surprised.

“If that's the case, I don't want to give up.”

His eyes opened wide. He seemed taken aback.

Well, of course he'd be surprised. He tells someone he can't fall in love, and she comes back saying she won't give up, I thought. As if it was someone else's

problem.

What a glutton for punishment. Was I perhaps drunk on love? Ahh, there was probably some misguided line of thought about being able to change him as well.

Either way, I was a lost cause.

It suddenly seemed funny to me. I giggled as I watched Sir Leonhard struggle for words.

“Please let me hold on to these feelings.”

Until you find the one for you.

Until I can place these feelings behind me.

Please don't let it end this way.

I put my honest wish into my words.

After a moment of stillness, he blew out a long breath. His eyes seemed to tear as he smiled.

“I am truly no match for you.”

# Chapter 50: The Reincarnated Princess's Negotiation

In the end, I canceled my plans with Master Julius and Georg. I couldn't go out with my eyes all red and puffy. One look and anyone could tell I had been crying. Sir Leonhard conjured a wet towel from somewhere, and I placed it over my eyes as I quietly returned to the palace.

That same night.

"What a surprise," said the man reclined on the luxurious sofa. The hand that had been turning the pages of the document stopped moving. His doll-like face was, contrary to his words, as expressionless as ever. After scrutinizing me from head to toe, his attention reverted to his documents. "I thought you would avoid my presence for a while. My expectations are off."

His eyes followed the words on the paper, a dry sound coming from the pages with each flip.

I'm working, he demonstrated, but I ignored it. I must *not* care.

As someone who spent her previous life in a country where emphasis on reading the situation is important, I'd like nothing more than to turn on my heels and say, *I'll come another day!* But that would be an idle practice in wasting time, of which what little remained was limited. I convinced myself it would only take a few minutes and straightened my back.

"I humbly request a favor, father."

The moment I said that, his finger stopped turning the pages.

"A request?" he said in a chilly voice.

Nothing in his expression was different, except for the instant change in his demeanor. It made my hair stand on end, and honestly, I was scared.

"You have a 'request' for me?"

*What does a little girl who has yet to show any results intend to ask for?* I sensed a fearsome voice say.

I'm not paranoid, but I felt like I was reading him quite on point.

I wanted to bolt. I wanted it, but it wasn't going to happen since would solve nothing, and I'm sorry, but I had no intention of do this all over again. I forced the cramped muscles in my face to smile.

"Yes, father."

I even nodded with a dash of cheek. He gave me a pointed stare, and I almost faltered but did not look away from his light blue eyes. After a little staring contest, he looked down and sighed. With a careless hand, he tossed aside the documents and they slid on the marble table. It took me a couple of seconds to realize that the finger he was pointing at the opposite end was telling me to sit. The champagne-colored sofa was extremely comfortable to sit on. I enjoyed how it wasn't too soft, unlike the one I had in my room. Immediately, I went to the heart of the question.

"Father, the other day you said you would give me a bird."

"Ahh, so I did."

"In exchange for its return, I would like to ask for a level of freedom to move about."

One of his eyebrows went up.

"Do you mean to say, you intend to use something you haven't even received yet as a bargaining chip?"

I hesitated.

Yeah, the bird hasn't flown into my hands yet, but I couldn't write him a rain check, so what choice did I have?

"Do you not have some regret, parting with it before you even see it?" he asked.

I nodded.

To be honest, receiving a bird was troublesome. An actual bird in my room was out of the question since I kept Nero with me. A metaphorical bird would even be too much for me to handle with my inexperienced hands. I couldn't imagine someone like myself in control of the birds that flew around the world acting as

father's eyes.

No matter how beautiful the feathers of the bird, no matter how excellent the spy, I didn't have it in me to put them to the test. Instead of being given to someone who couldn't appreciate its worth, it would be happier at father's side.

I told him my honest feelings. "I deem the bird is of use to you, father. I do not believe I am currently up to the task." His eyes widened slightly.

Chin rested on his hand, elbow propped on the armrest, he crossed his long legs. Even languid movements turned into an art form, but I felt nothing, though I did sit up straighter when he gave me an appraising look, as if he had misjudged me.

"I see," he said.

That's it? I wondered, dumbfounded. I was ready for him to mockingly ask if I had chickened out, so his response was rather anticlimactic.

"Are you not disappointed?" I asked him.

"Disappointment only happens when there's expectation."

"Is that so!" My hands clenched into fists and I held myself back.

"It was a joke," he deadpanned.

The matter-of-fact way he said it made my desire to kill skyrocket. It wasn't funny at all, I wanted to retort. I managed to refrain from responding, though it was a difficult battle.

"Even those at the top have times when they are undeserving of, and yet must be ready to manage, a great power. Recklessness and courage are not the same. There is no reason for someone who knows their limits and decides to take the long way around to be ridiculed."

What a complicated speech. Could I simply interpret it as him saying, "*Do what you like*"?

He chose the time limit, and now it was up to me to decide on the method and course of action needed to achieve my objective.

Are you raising me? Are you testing me? His thoughts were not known to me,

but I think I got the picture.

“We now return to the bird. Does it benefit me to grant you freedom to come and go at will?”

His words were as sharp as ever. Though I’ve become used to feeling like I’ve had my heart gouged out, he still terrified me.

How useless I am.

It would probably be wiser to rely on someone else rather than doing it myself. That, right there, was the “bird” I just let go of.

But would it really be better to do nothing, leaving it all to someone else? To depend on someone is completely different from letting them handle everything.

“Father, I am different from you. I cannot make a decision solely based on what is reported.”

I’m inexperienced. If I can’t observe something myself, I have a hard time believing in it. It takes time for me to get to the answer, even if I already know it will happen. Like that entire wizard abduction mess.

I can’t craftily make others do whatever I tell them while I sit pretty in the palace.

“Nothing will happen if I do not dirty my own hands. I think what I have been lacking all along was, probably, the resolve.”

Even if he didn’t tell me, the only path available to me had already been decided. There was a future I wanted to prevent, and I will spare no effort in doing so. Nevertheless, the mountain of a task in front of me was dizzying. Now that I’ve found the start of it, the steep path made my knees want to buckle in fear.

I won’t even think about asking someone to push me forward, but I’m sure a part of me wanted to. In the corner of my mind, I was crying for someone to help, just like the time I messed up and Lutz and Theo were taken. It wasn’t much, but a small part of me wanted to be irresponsible and take the easy way out.

The task father gave me couldn’t have possibly been done out of duty as a

parent. If I failed, it would be my end and he'd wash his hands of me. I won't pretend it's tough love, but I was grateful for one thing.

I thanked him for making clear to me a crafty side of myself I wasn't even aware of.

If he hadn't put the spark in me, I would have continued in my half-hearted manner. When I failed as a result, with many lives lost, would I still have the nerve to say I did all I could? While I wait fearfully for the destruction of the world, will I turn to the Priestess to save us all?

No, thank you.

"Can you take all responsibility for your decision, no matter the results?"

Expression controlled, I nodded. "Yes."

My honest hands and voice shook, but I hoped he missed them. I realized I had no idea what was going to happen from now on. I might get sick. I might die. A little girl who has lived a safe and sheltered life isn't ready for something like that. But if I want to be responsible for myself, I must learn to not burden someone else with the responsibility for my actions. Still better than the alternative.

"You have been full of nothing but the unexpected."

Father sighed once and made no effort to hide his surprise. Looking at him, I couldn't control my own wry smile.

"I decided to strive for my own happiness."

His voice, as he responded, was unexpectedly gentle.

"I see."

# Chapter 51: The Reincarnated Princess's Confrontation

Somehow, I managed to obtain father's word. All I wanted was to return, so I briefly made my farewell. I stepped into the halls and stood still, taking breaths to calm my nerves.

As soon as I stepped into the hall, I saw the two soldiers who guarded father's bedroom and my own guard, Klaus. It was supposed to only be those three. The one I never expected to see took a step in my direction, the hard sound of contact on the marble floors with geometric patterns echoed down the hall. I froze and almost retreated, but the mahogany door was at my back. I had nowhere to run.

"Rosemarie."

A monotone voice—one which seemed to be suppressing fury. I prepared myself for the worst and raised my hanging head.

Confronting me was a youthful woman with her lady-in-waiting in tow. She had snow white skin and bewitching red lips. A beautiful nose and faintly rosy cheeks. The arch of her brows showed her strong personality, and her blue eyes, the color of jewels, were fixed on me. The fabric of the dress she wore was dark green velvet of fine quality. A flower was embroidered on the front with gold and silver threads, and the cuffs were tastefully adorned with a moderate amount of lace. Her elegant dress and carefully arranged platinum blond hair gave this very beautiful woman a mature image appropriate for her age.

Why can't I ever go anywhere without encounters like these?

With a heart full of sighs and complaints, I put on a fake smile.

"How are you, madam?"

The moment I greeted mother, a deep frown minced into her brows. Whoa, how terrifying.

Her cold glare made me want to run for the hills, but I endured.

Mother opened her mouth, ready to lay into me, and stopped. She probably realized it wasn't a good location, because she called me into her room, which was right next to father's. What sort of torture was this?

This time I definitely wanted to run in the opposite direction, not looking to either side, but I resigned myself and obediently followed her.

I was being led to the executioner's chair...ahem, to her room. Extravagant furniture furnished it. The opulent interior, which heavily favored the use of stucco in its design, suited her. The ceiling was carved with fine details, and a huge chandelier made of beaten gold and adorned with precious stones hung from it—the candlelight, as it reflected off, was painful to the eyes. The black wood sofa with its curved legs and balled feet had red upholstery detailed with gold and silver designs. To complete the set, we had a table with curved legs and balled feet, which stood between my mother and I as she sat down. She scrutinized me from across the table.

My stomach pains came back as the silence lengthened. What was this, an intimidation tactic?

Her painted red lips finally parted after more than half a minute had passed.

“What were you doing in His Majesty's room, I wonder?”

*When even I seldom enter,* the end of her sentence implied. Since I was coming and going so often, she would have found out eventually. I knew the censure would come, but reality was still more scary than the imagined.

Beautiful but severe people are terribly intense, I thought distantly.

The royal couple kept separate bedrooms. It wouldn't raise any eyebrows if the kingdom practiced polygamy, but father kept neither concubines nor mistresses. Why would he sleep elsewhere? The answer was easy: because that's what he decided. I don't know the reason, but I surmised he probably preferred to sleep alone. To be honest, I'm not really interested so I never pried.

“I spoke with my lord father a little.”

I chose innocuous words, but the intensity of her gaze did not relent. I knew: entering father's room was already a crime to her.

"His Majesty is busy. You must not allow your selfish ways to inconvenience him."

I nodded obediently. "Yes, madam. My apologies."

Her cold expression did not grow any warmer.

"His Majesty is a man of great benevolence, but that is not an acceptable reason cause him bother. Do you presume forgiveness merely because you are a child? Discard your spoiled behavior."

"Yes...madam."

It took a moment come out, but I thought I managed to say it well.

I mean, who was she talking about?

Father, benevolent? Was something wrong with her eyes? Did she really think I was a lazy person who used her status as a child to get away with things?

No, father was not the type to make exceptions for another, regardless of their age or gender. Even mother should know this much.

She merely couldn't accept that the one who had been allowed to go near him was her daughter and not herself.

"If you have something to ask, consult me first. Do you understand?"

*Yes, madam.*

I couldn't say it.

Not when I had no intention of going to her for permission, and she was as good as telling me to stay away.

It has always been like this. She thought it was only natural for Johan and I to listen to whatever she said. She *assumed* it was reasonable for children to absolutely obey their parent, and never tried asking how we felt. She probably believed my reasons for going to father were trivial as well.

"Rosemarie?"

Her voice sharpened as she grew impatient. Her cat eyes narrowed.

I knew she was just about ready to explode. The cunning part of me knew

putting on a false front and pretending to obey would be the safest thing to do, but I was barely my own friend as my mouth started moving.

“My apologies, however, I cannot do that.”

“What—!”

Mother’s eyes flew open. She was speechless, but I could guess her thoughts: Good heavens, is she openly defying me?

Come to think of it, we haven’t seen each other at all recently. In mother’s heart, I’m sure I haven’t changed since I was five years old and confined to my room. Still the same expressionless, charmless, obedient child.

So that’s the extent of her interest in me, I thought, empty laughter welling up. To think, she hated us having any contact with our older brother that much, and yet she never even bothered to interfere.

Truly, nothing mattered to this woman except father.

I couldn’t hate such honest single-mindedness, but I could not imagine wanting to follow her example. My blind discovery left me feeling cold. I needed to be careful not to follow in her wake.

“Rosemarie... Do you understand what you are saying?”

Her hands were shaking, perhaps from too much anger. She clasped them tightly together.

I looked at her as I nodded. “Yes, madam.”

There was something I needed to do, and the deadline was steadily drawing closer. I didn’t have time to be stalled in a place like this. If she wanted to stand in my way, so be it. I could climb over her.

“I received permission from my lord father to enter his room. Even if you are my mother, you have no authority to overturn it.”

“You—!”

“If I am causing him trouble, my lord father will tell me himself. Until then, I do not plan to refrain. I am only doing what I need to.”

I knew I was picking a fight, but I had no intention of backing down after

coming this far.

I'll probably frequent father's room often over the next two years. If she stops me every single time, I won't get anything done.

"Rosemarie..."

Her voice sounded like it was rumbling from the ground up, but I already said my piece so I stood to escape.

# Chapter 52: The Reincarnated Princess's Dismay ①

My soul felt like it had been whittled away after the deadly combination of my interview with father and the intimidation tactics employed by mother. The next day, I was in the library looking for books on medicine when another bomb was tossed in my lap.

“Huh?”

I froze, mouth gaping half-open. The shock was so big I couldn't form a response. My armful of books were about to drop from my weakened grip, so I quickly adjusted them before they fell.

The beautiful woman standing still in front of me gave me a troubled smile as her eyes met mine. Is this a joke? I wondered, but the look on face told me it was a different story. She was never the type to joke maliciously anyway.

“Is that true?”

Lady Irene von Artmann, the intellectual beauty who served as head of the wizards, nodded as she observed my trembling form from behind her monocle.

“Yes, princess. It was a special case, and I regret not informing you earlier, but it is true. As of today, Michael von Diebold is a wizard apprentice.”

Her words sent another shock through me.

“Michael—”

Lady Irene regarded me mournfully as I struggled for words. But anything I said now after that pause would be misunderstood.

I wasn't surprised to find out Michael could wield magic. It turned out the way

I expected, so it was a matter of course to me. No, it shocked me that he chose to *reveal* it.

After we conferred with Lady Irene regarding the medicine, Michael spoke with her about something. He must have mentioned it then, but why?

He's lived his life concealing his powers. It made sense, considering the treatment of those who wielded magic in this kingdom, that there was a real fear of social rejection and persecution. He was so successful at hiding, I naturally assumed he would want to keep it up. It was obvious he would want to live a life of peace until he's exposed.

So why did he choose to come out now? I didn't know.

"Michael revealed the truth himself?"

"Indeed." She nodded. "A considerable feat."

I asked the questions most pressing to me. "Why now? When he kept it hidden all these years?"

Her face creased in delight for some reason, as if she was saw something pleasing.

"This is solely my opinion, however, perhaps he found himself touched by you."

"Ah? By *me*?"

"Yes. His power is..."

The following words left my eyes wide open.

After my conversation with Lady Irene, I dashed out of the library. My goal was the greenhouse.

The sun was in decline and the sunset shone through the glass dome roof. The greenhouse was quiet, with a sky gradually changing from indigo to orange as its backdrop.

Lutz and Theo weren't here since it wasn't time for them to water the plants,

but at end of one side I saw a slender figure.

He was stood looking up at the sky absentmindedly. He seemed a little melancholy to me, but his face in profile revealed none of his emotions. What was he feeling? Homesickness? Regret? Dread towards the future?

I observed him for a short while before approaching him, making sure my footsteps were audible.

“Michael.”

His shoulder shook, but the moment only lasted a second. He immediately regained his calm, and slowly turned to face me. Seeing Michael from the front, my eyes rounded. We just met the other day, and yet he’s changed so much.

The long bangs that had covered half his face was neatly brushed and swept behind, which revealed his commanding eyes and the fine shape of his nose. The shadows under his eyes have largely disappeared, removing the impression that he looked unhealthy.

He used to stoop, but he seemed taller now with a correct posture. His thin figure, which doesn’t seem to have filled out the same way it shot up, was clad in robe the same design as Lutz and Theo’s. Except the color was white, while the inside shirt was a dark grey color.

In RPG terms, it might be easier to picture if I said Lutz and Theo were black mages, while Michael was a white mage.

The setting sun cast shadows across his handsome face. He said nothing as he stared at me intently.

“I heard you became a wizard.”

His voice was quiet. “Yes.”

Was it just me, or did his smile seem a little troubled? No, it was probably my imagination. The look on my face right now must be hideous to the point it bothered him.

“Was it... Did I—”

Was it my fault? Did I force you into it? The questions died as my voice tapered off. I squeezed my skirt, creating wrinkles in it, standing upright. I was near to tears, and his dark blue eyes

narrowed gently as he regarded me.

“You’re mistaken,” he denied. “I came here of my own will. It had nothing to do with you.”

I couldn’t help sounding critical. “*Nothing* to do with me? Even though you’re the earth wizard I’ve been searching for?”

Michael did nothing wrong, yet I was disappointed for no reason and took my anger out on him. My selfishness was shameful and a disgrace. I wanted to disappear into nothing.

I had an inkling he wielded magic, but never thought about which attribute he possessed.

Unlike the fire-wielding Theo and the ice-wielding Lutz, Michael’s ability must not be of the offensive type since he managed to hide it so well. It seemed so obvious in hindsight.

In my ignorance, I was insensitive as I opened my mouth in front of him many times.

If we had an earth wizard, would they know the properties of the medicine? Or, we need the cooperation of an earth wizard in order to create a medicine that will save countless lives. That’s right. Over and over again, I did that to Michael, who was already being tormented pangs of conscience.

Saying I was only doing what was needed of a princess was mere boasting of my virtues. While I pompously declared I’d go down the path I preferred, I unknowingly blocked his.

Michael wished to lead a quiet life as a priest. I destroyed his choice.

His exhale chased after the long silence.

“Your Royal Highness.”

“Michael?”

“I repeat myself, but it had nothing to do with you. None of my actions up until now, and from now on, are related to you.”

He spoke detachedly. No stutter, no flush.

With calm eyes, as if he was someone else, he quietly pushed me away.

=====

Ever since Michael was introduced I've been wanting to share the meaning behind his name. The most complete answer I found through googling was from this reddit comment:

*Michael, one of the three named angels in the Scripture, is a male given Hebrew name which literally translates to: "Who (Mi) is like (Ka) God (el)?" A rhetorical question to which the answer is "no one," for humility is what defeats Satan, who pridefully desired honor like God's.*

I don't know if Bisu, the author, was aware of it when she chose the name Michael, but I find it highly ironic that the man destined to become the host of the Dark Lord has such a meaningful name. Not only that, even after the man is lost, the Dark Lord still takes on the profession of a priest. Intentional or coincidental, I'm impressed the name is so appropriate.

# Chapter 53: The Reincarnated Princess's Dismay ②

It was now a little over a month since Michael became an apprentice, and we've had almost no contact ever since that day.

I'm convinced he was avoiding me, but I was hard pressed to prove it. It was already difficult enough to come up with indirect ways to get close to him, and though it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the greenhouse had become the gathering spot for the wizards, he's never once shown his face around there. I was certain it would be the ideal place for an earth attribute wizard to nourish his skills, but he seemed to have his own spot to raise plants. I'm sure he wanted to assess his abilities and own growth, but he wouldn't be able to get accurate data if interfered by others.

Since I often met with his fellow wizards, I thought I'd have plenty of opportunities. I might have been a little too optimistic because I kept missing all of the right chances.

I couldn't meet him in his free time either and was left wondering where he had gone and what he was doing. The answer came from the most unexpected direction.

"You know what the raw ingredients for the medicine are?"

Astonishment stilled me for a moment.

I was visiting Master Julius's home. Georg, who sat on the opposite sofa, nodded when he heard my question. He picked up a bundle of papers on the walnut table and handed them over.

"But not the exact location yet."

Still not fully back to my senses, I poured over the information at hand. A tall tree with an upright trunk was drawn on it. The lower reaches had no foliage, leaves grew thickly at the top, and small flowers were blooming. The leaves and flowers' information were pointed out with arrows, and even characteristics were noted in detail.

More than being happy, I was confused beyond all else at the sudden progress.

Up until now, Georg and Master Julius have been frantically investigating, and of course, I've been doing my part from the very beginning by going through the palace's book collections for anything that might be related.

Despite our efforts, no clues were to be had.

"Why so suddenly?" I looked up. As I asked him, I gained an inkling of an idea.

"We owe it all to Michael's collaboration."

I *knew* it. Even though he confirmed my thoughts, the *why* left me unable to hide my confusion.

When it came down to it, an earth wizard like Michael was likely to have more information on plants.

The plant was now in a pill form and beyond recognition. I don't know how he managed to figure out its features, but it was probably through magic. As for his collaboration with Georg—well, Michael was kind in nature, it didn't take a genius. If he could save a great number of people, it would surely be his pleasure to lend a hand.

That I understood.

But if he was helping, why?

He must be avoiding me.

Even though Georg and Master Julius were the ones mainly doing the searching for the medicine, I was the one who started it. I won't say he had to talk to me first, but he should've at least dropped by to say hi. Since his move into the palace, he was technically closer to me. Wouldn't it be faster to approach me rather than calling on Master Julius's residence and volunteering his help?

As if he didn't notice my endless worrying, Georg spoke as he spread open the

map.

“We know the main raw ingredient is, but not the other ingredients or the production method. Which is why the next step will be pinpointing where the medicine was made. According to the information from Michael, it seems like this tree often grows in high altitudes.”

My worries haven't been eased at all, but for now I decided to focus on his words.

“By high altitudes, does that mean near the mountains?”

On top of the map, I pointed to the mountain range that acted as the national border for Nebel, Schnee, Wind, and Sckerz. Georg made a troubled face as he placed his hand on his chin.

“This medicine is for fever, so I have a hunch it more likely came from the south rather than the north.”

“Southern ranges...” After a moment of thinking, my finger moved from the north of Nebel down the map as I voiced my thoughts. “Certainly, there are the ones to the southwest of the Kingdom of Flamme.”

“Yes.” He nodded. “The sailor in possession of the medicine was also from a ship from Flamme. I thought it prudent we search there first.”

“That's true.”

I agreed with his explanation.

Hmm, Flamme, huh...

Of course, I've never been there.

I sorted through my knowledge of the kingdom while I looked at the map.

The Kingdom of Flamme.

Located to the southwest of Wind. To travel from Nebel to Flamme by land, you must cross the border between Wind and Sckellz.

It was a big kingdom, with the third most land on the continent, but a quarter to the southeast was barren desert. Being surrounded on three sides by sea meant the fishing and shipbuilding industries thrived.

The kingdom was different because it was a matriarchal society, and a princess

had the right to succeed.

For the present, I believe the queen consort who had lost her husband at a young age was acting as the interim ruler until the young princess and prince came of age. However, this is a rare case, and normally whoever marries the princess has the right to become king.

That was all I could remember. I knew no more beyond the general information you might glean in a history class.

This wasn't looking good. Not being able to communicate was problem on its own, but what about public order and the environment? For example, the weather, or the road conditions to the mountains?

My first priority was gathering information.

"I believe I have a lot of research to do before I leave for Flamme."

"Huh?" For some reason, his eyes rounded and his mouth gaped open.

Whatever made him so surprised?

"Is something the matter?" I asked, head falling to the side. His stare was making me uncomfortable. He pulled himself together, deep lines etched into his brows as he thought.

"Miss Ma—" Georg cleared his throat. "Your Royal Highness."

He was about to call me Marie, wasn't he? But he changed the address.

"Kindly allow us to handle this matter from now on."

"What?"

"Flamme is a land filled with unknown dangers. It is best if you do not go," he said quietly.

As I looked into his eyes, the strong determination I found there reminded of Michael. When I met him in the greenhouse, his eyes had the same look as they quietly pushed me away.

Ahh, it's the same, my heart whispered as it filled with *deja vu*. It wasn't only Michael from a month ago, here was another one.

My intuition told me I was being left out again, just like the time when the

wizards were kidnapped.

# Chapter 54: The Marquis's Son's Dilemma

✧ The chapter is in Georg zu Eicher's POV.

With a hand placed on the windowpane, my gaze went outward. A carriage became more distant as the landscape became dyed in the orange hues of the setting sun, and my finger itched, as if it wanted to chase after the shape that gradually became smaller and smaller. The cold glass fogged and the scenery blurred as heat transmitted onto its surface. Even when the carriage disappeared from sight, I remained standing by the window.

"Isn't that great?"

My shoulders jumped. Suddenly being spoken to from behind didn't startle me—the trembles came from having something I did not want seen witnessed. I must look pathetic.

Though I pushed her away, I watched from behind like a maiden as she left. I hadn't wanted anyone to see me in that state.

"What is?" I replied coldly.

Slowly, my hand dropped. I tried to be nonchalant, but the impression of my palm was a sore reminder of my embarrassment and was in no rush to disappear. I turned around and glared at Julius, my uncle. The pointed look I gave him brooked no arguments, but it had no effect and seemed like merely a breeze blowing over him. He jumped straight into the subject I didn't want him to.

"I'm talking about Miss Marie, of course."

My brows furrowed, momentarily at a loss for words. Expression stony, I brushed aside his question. "I'm afraid I don't understand what you speak of."

However, the sickly sweet grin did not wipe itself off my uncle's face. His head tilted to the side.

"Oh? I didn't think I'd need to carefully break down something so simple. I wonder if my nephew is a little slow on the uptake? Or is he behaving spoiled so

that I won't touch on an awkward topic?"

How handsome he looked as venom spewed from his smiling lips. I was quiet. My uncle looked kind, but he wasn't all kindness. When I tried to play dumb, he flat out told me stop acting like a brat.

Reluctantly, I said, "I gave her a report of our progress." I didn't feel like answering him, so I stubbornly feigned ignorance. Of course, my uncle was having none of that.

"That's strange. If it was just a report on our progress, why did Miss Marie look so sad?"

I didn't answer him.

"I'm positive some pig-headed fool somewhere was pushing his own agenda without even listening to her opinion."

Trying to keep my face free of twitching, I said, "You say that as if you were watching." On the surface, I smiled, but inwardly I called him an old fart.

"I wouldn't stoop so low as spying on you. But I don't need to see your face to know what you're trying to say."

The sarcastic smile he had on his face this entire time had become wry. I looked at him, slightly guilty, as if a mistake I was hiding had been revealed.

"I told her I didn't want her to be involved in the site investigation."

I don't believe I made the wrong decision. We shouldn't be sending a princess like Miss Marie to a place filled with who knows what sort of danger. The only ones who should be on the move was us. All she should do was stay in the palace where it was safe and wait for our reports.

Yes, even though I believed that...

The look of surprise on her face was scorched in my mind and wouldn't disappear.

After I asked her to leave the investigation to us, her face darkened and crumpled in sorrow.

I never wanted to make her look like that, so how did it go so wrong?

“I see,” he said in a low voice.

My face burst into flames. Though he was hardly criticizing me, the reason I was moved to such terrible shame was probably because I felt guilt. The next words that came out of my mouth sounded like an excuse.

“I think it’s only obvious we can’t take Her Royal Highness to dangerous places.”

“I’m not saying your opinion is wrong.”

“But, you’re not saying it’s correct either, are you?” I retorted immediately.

“That hardly earns belligerence, my boy,” came my uncle’s quick reply. He rolled his eyes at me. “Well, I suppose we see things differently here.”

“I take it that means?” I glared pointedly, but he didn’t even notice.

“Exactly what it sounds like. Besides, wasn’t it rather hasty of you to decide that Flamme is a dangerous place?”

“I beg to differ. At present, Flamme is governed by a queen, and her interim rule has been unstable. Do you find anything wrong with calling that dangerous?”

“The current situation is stable.”

“For now, yes, but we don’t know about the future.”

“If we follow that theory, she’ll never be able to go anywhere.” He sighed. “Nowhere on this earth is safe. No one knows when and where anything may happen. Who’s to say an enemy won’t force their way through this estate right as we’re having this conversation? I wouldn’t put it past a meteorite falling through the sky to crush us either.”

“A trick argument.”

“You’re right. They’re fallacies. However, if we throw them all together, what you’re saying is no different. What you’re doing is a far-cry from being protective—you don’t even want to let her walk outside. I’m sure you wanted to protect Miss Marie,” he continued coolly, “but let me make it clear: you do this for your own self-satisfaction. Locking up someone you care for is no more than a plan to give peace of mind for yourself.”

“I’ve never had those intentions!” I denied immediately. “A princess’s position is very different from ours. If there’s even the slightest chance she may be placed in danger, she should not go. Moreover, even if Miss Marie does nothing, isn’t it fine if ultimately the medicine falls into her hands? The end is more important than the means.”

“Georg,” he began reprovingly.

“I have no intention of repeating myself.” I threw the words over my shoulder as I briskly walked past my uncle. I didn’t want to let him shake my resolve any further. “If this is all you have to say, I’ll have to excuse myself.”

“Your first love, do you really think she’ll be happy to be locked in a cage?”

I didn’t answer as I closed the doors with my hands behind my back. His words echoed in my head as I ran away.