

佐伯さん Illustrator
カスカベアキラ

転生した次こそ
のでいば
幸せ人生を掴んで
なみせましよう2

侯爵令嬢リズとジルの仲♥が一步進展...!?

従者なのに色気で
主人に迫っちゃ
駄目だと思うのです...!

1200万
PV突破
大人気
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愛されチートな異世界転生ストーリー第2弾

Tensei Shitanode Tsugi Koso wa Shiawasena Jinsei wo Tsukande Misemashou

(I Reincarnated, so the Next Thing to do is Lead a
Happy Life)

Vol.2

by Saeki-san

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Arc 5: 10 Years Old

Chapter 40 – My Younger Brother is a Cute Kid

"Wait, One-cha*"

"Yes, I'm waiting for you"

Several months ago, my age reached double digits.

I surprisingly shot up from the age of seven, and my height is gradually drawing closer to that of a matured adult. Though my figure still isn't quite womanly, it has become a bit rounder. That's fine, I still have prospects.

A child was running, chasing after my footsteps which have now grown larger. With a diligent expression that accentuated his innocence, he did his best to catch up to me.

..... The child was Ruby, my younger brother who was five years younger than me. This year, he'll be five.

His hair was red, just like Father's, and his big round eyes* were of the same color. As Ruby was my younger brother, he strongly inherited Father's blood. He was so cute with his childish features.

"One-cha, One-cha"

Setting out for the garden, I waited for Ruby in the foyer as he did his best to run to me. I watched him attentively and felt lukewarm every time his soft, unruly hair swung while he was running.

Ruby didn't have a healthy body, so I barely saw him three years ago. Since Ruby was always in his room, there was no chance of us meeting as I was either usually in the garden, the magic institution, or in my room.

By the time his condition had stabilized to the point where he was finally allowed to freely go outside of his room, he was just past the age of three. Since then, his inherent curiosity led to him going around to various places and doing all sorts of things, destroying his physical condition It looks like Mother had a hard time as well.

It appears that after he came into contact with me, Ruby quickly recognized me as his older sister and — once again — used his sweet voice to call out "One~e~cha". Why was this child so cute! This was a natural weapon against airheads Like, how adorable was this child when he's calling out to me with his lisp



"Caught you, One-cha!"

Ruby rushed up and hugged me with a bright smile. For enduring his arduous endeavor, I stroked his head gently, saying "there, there" as I smiled. No, he's seriously too cute. As my brother, he's seriously too cute. He was cute for being

truly innocent unlike his hopeless older sister.

After I smoothed his unruly hair by stroking it, Ruby looked drowsy. With his eyes narrowed, he shyly giggled He's hopelessly cute. Even though I've been thinking of nothing except his cuteness, he's just too cute.

"Looks like I've been caught. Now then, shall we head off to the garden?"

"Yeth!*"

I cheerfully surrendered myself to Ruby. I thought of tightly hugging him, but I endured it. He's cute Urk! Because I've been taught that having a buracon* wasn't good, I held myself back despite me wanting to touch him.

I slapped my loosened cheeks. While leading the curious little Ruby by the hand, we headed out to the garden.

Waiting in the garden was Gilles, watering the plants with sorcery.

This year, Gilles turned eighteen. Gilles was secretly worrying about something. Since then, he hadn't gained much height.. It didn't feel like there was a difference in him being a head and a half taller than me. It's also probably because I grew a bit taller, so it made the fact that he was a head taller than me less noticeable.

In exchange, he became extremely good-looking and instead of being stylish, his clean look suited him. Of course, there was no mistaking that he was attractive. This was the kind of beauty that other ojou-samas would be charmed by Yup.

"Liz-sama, Ruby-sama, will you be going over to have a look at the garden?"

"Yes. Ruby wants to see it. We won't be going out so please be at ease"

If we went out, we would certainly be scolded by Mother. Even if he threw a tantrum, I absolutely couldn't bring him outside. It was because there was the possibility of being kidnapped or injured. Right now, he's very frail. Having experienced it myself in the past, I understood that it was dangerous outside.

Furthermore, compared to me, Ruby had never practiced sorcery. Getting his body into shape was the priority. If he was kidnapped, he wouldn't be able to oppose them. Compared to him, I would be considered abnormal since I was able to use magic leisurely when I was about his age.

"One-cha"

"What is it?"

"Why does it only rain over here?"

Seeing how it was only lightly raining over the private vegetable corner, Ruby tilted his head in confusion. Because it usually rained everywhere, this, I think, was an unusual sight for Ruby. I mean, the rain was falling on a precise location.

"This is rain brought about by sorcery"

"Can One-cha do it too?"

"I can do it, more or less"

Giving too much water wouldn't be good so I didn't evoke anything. However, in the first place, watering the garden was my job. I took turns with Gilles to manage it, but the matter of selectively breeding them was wilfully done by me.

Right now, I used a simple sorcery in an empty spot to produce water for Ruby to see. Ruby's large pupils that resembled rubies glistened and lit up. If you didn't know how it worked and were shown this, you would have thought that it was a miracle. It was simple because magic exists. Most human beings could perform this sorcery.

"Amazing, One-cha! I want to do it too!"

"Ruby too? We haven't obtained permission from Father and Mother, but if we don't say anything"

"You can't, Ruby-sama"

As expected, before I was able to give my consent based off of my own discretion, a clear voice shot down the possibility on the spot. Although the owner of the voice still sounded childish, Maria had appeared in the garden before I was aware of it.

With the usual charm of her bushy cat ears and tail, she had similarly short hair like Ruby. Maria, who should be the same age as me, had a somewhat dangerous appeal. The cause was mainly her ears and her tail.

Three years had passed and having become accustomed to her maid duties, Maria was now no longer mine and instead was Ruby's servant. She was also the maid of the estate.

Well, the reason she was attending to Ruby was because he was taken in by her ears and tail. I laughed a bit that, as siblings, we had similar preferences. That sleek fur just feels so fluffy that you want to fluff it.

"Madam and Master has instructed that Ruby-sama is not to be allowed to use sorcery"

"..... There you have it. Ruby, let's give up on sorcery, okay? When you're a bit older—"

"Yaa~!* I want to do it too!"

Shaking his head, Ruby clung onto me Crap, with his upward glance and teary eyes, my determination faltered. However, no means no. If I was able to, I would have allowed it.

Ruby's body was weak and the magic power in his body seemed to be a little unstable. If he overexerted himself right now, it would harm his health I had a hunch that because I was very healthy and possessed an abundance of magical power, conversely, Ruby became a weak existence. When I consider that I had probably taken a portion of Ruby's health away from him, I felt guilty.

"I'm sorry, Ruby. I can't go against the orders of Father and Mother. When you're just a bit older and they've given their permission, let's do it together, okay?"

"..... Will you really teach me?"

"When Ruby's older, we'll do it together. Until then, can you be patient for a little while more?"

I peered into his large eyes that were swollen with tears while smiling sweetly and laughed. Using my thumb, I wiped the tears that were about to spill at any moment against my stomach and, after that, I pressed my lips against his soft cheeks.

Upon kissing Ruby's plump, springy, smooth cheeks, Ruby also laughed weakly before returning a kiss with his lips against my own cheeks. I'm glad he raised his voice but didn't cry. Or rather, Ruby's so cute, what am I supposed to do? Onee-chan wants to love you forever, Ruby.

"..... If, One-cha says so, I'll be patient"

"That's good, Ruby. In exchange, look here's a present from Onee-chan"

From my pocket, I took out a small flower seed that we were going to plant later and placed it on his tiny palm.

"Plant this in the garden and let's raise it together, kay? Even if we don't use magic, as long as it's this, it'll grow"

"Really?"

"Yup. We'll grow it together and then, let's show it to Mother"

I slyly used sorcery to quickly grow it although, normally, it was something I would patiently wait for. I wouldn't have been able to actually pull it off if I didn't have the aptitude for 'Green Thumb', so I'm relieved that I was able to use it It would truly be a relief if I was able to use it like that previous time.

I took Ruby to a vacant space in the garden. Then, I took the scoop that I left nearby to create a hole and planted the seed. Ruby must also be bored with being cooped up, so being able to go out and play in the garden would be a good experience for him.

"Ruby, we'll have to water it every day. If we do, then the flower will bloom"

"Yes!"

At Ruby's cherubic smile and nod, I comfortably smiled as well and used my soil-free hand to stroke his head.

Maria and Gilles smiled warmly as they were observing us. Somehow every day was very peaceful and happy, and I felt it.

Translator's Note:

1. どんぐり眼 – Donguri Manako – Big, round eyes
2. "おねーちゃ、まっ てえ" – Ruby says One-cha. ARGH SO CUTE! Lisp. His lisp!!!
Sorry, folks! I deliberately did not translate this because it was hard to use thith (actual lisp word for sis) or thither without it detracting from the cuteness. Cuteness over practicality.
3. "あい！" – Another cute Ruby moment. It's just kid speak for HAI which

Chapter 41 – The Circumstances of Cecil-kun's Household

"So, because my younger brother is just too adorable, what should I do?"

"Like I'd know!"

Cut off by that exaggerated "do whatever you want" expression on his face, I whined and puffed up my cheeks a little, showing off my dissatisfaction.

I had gone over to visit Cecil-kun and when I started talking about my adorable, adorable little brother, he seemed bothered by it. Even though he's so adorable As far as others are concerned, it must get tiresome to hear people boasting about their relatives. Well, I'm the same as well, going so far as being uninterested if it was others so it couldn't be helped.....

But Cecil-kun's super frank expression wasn't good. Don't you think it would be better to just give at least an insincere smile? Well, Cecil-kun rarely laughed in the first place so hoping for a smile was impossible.

"Cecil-kun, you haven't met Ruby yet, that's why your words are blunt. But after you've seen him, you'll probably think he's cute"

"I don't consider men, among other things, to be cute"

"You'll understand after you've seen him. If it suits you, wouldn't it be a good idea if you drop by for a visit? Right, Gilles?"

"That's right"

"Your servant over there isn't even smiling. Those are definitely not his true feelings"

Gilles, my chaperone, immediately affixed a smile that didn't go unnoticed by Cecil-kun. Cecil-kun's cheeks immediately began to twitch.

Why does Gilles hate him so much? It's not like Cecil-kun was going to lay waste to our house. Since a while back, Gilles seemed to foster a hatred for Cecil-kun, or rather, it feels like he was cautious of him.

Cecil-kun himself seemed to have trouble dealing with Gilles. That was probably Gilles's fault.

However, even though it was pointed out to him, he wouldn't let go of his blank smile. Although his lips were smiling, his eyes told another story. They may be formed in an arc, but there was nothing happy about them.

"..... Gilles, you shouldn't make such a face to Cecil-kun"

"I'm sorry. No matter how hard I try, my face just ends up this way"

"I don't intend to take any more abuse from this fellow. I don't intend to take **any** from you"

Being drawn to Cecil-kun's feelings, Gilles snapped and blinked his eyes. He unexpectedly looked at Cecil-kun. When his expression changed to one that wasn't convinced, Cecil-kun — feeling extremely bothered — brushed up his silver hair and let out a sigh.

Cecil-kun was a really beautiful person. However, because of the stern expression in his eyes he always had an unapproachable air about him. Even now, that feeling didn't change; however, there was another disgusting looking hue to it.

"..... If you're that worried, wouldn't it be better to just attach a collar and put her in a cage?"

"You, don't say such disturbing things"

I had already been confined to my home till I was seven. Please give me a break, I don't want to be locked up again. At the very least stay with me together at all times.

..... Nothing had changed much. Although we were apart when I slept, in the bathroom, or taking a bath, Gilles was always by my side. It was not like we were physically in range of each other, but we were mostly in the same room together. Well, there were moments when we were apart, but that was within the estate.

"In the first place, I don't see her in that light. That's impossible"

"I have a feeling you've just said something rude"

"I'll say it once again, I don't intend to take any more abuse from you and, much less, unthinkably snatch away your precious ojou-sama. Even if you're being cautious, there's no meaning to it"

Cecil-kun shrugged his shoulders and let out a huge sigh, sending Gilles a meaningful glance. I don't quite understand what's going on, but Gilles sent a scrutinizing gaze at Cecil-kun.

Following their exchange, both of them stared at each other in silence for a while until Gilles broke it off by letting out a long sigh. Those emerald eyes no longer held the strong animosity as they did earlier.

"..... Let's leave that matter aside"

"Please do"

Somehow worn out, Cecil-kun nodded his head. Although Gilles's expression seemed mixed, his flagrant rejection towards Cecil-kun vanished.

..... Gilles treated me fairly well, but was..... there a different meaning to why he was cautious of Cecil-kun? Well, it was not like I want to become best friends with Cecil-kun though.

"So, what about my younger brother?"

"Are you still going on about it!?"

"But~~ If Cecil-kun comes over for a visit, Ruby would be happy too. Since his body is weak, he can't go out"

Won't you come over to play~~

And when I gave him a fleeting sidelong glance, Cecil-kun moved away as his face stiffened. Was that a little too forceful?

But it was true that I wanted him to drop by. I've heard that Cecil-kun had been confined in the Magic Institution and had always been there. Living separately on his own and also with him being ostracized by his own parents, I was reminded of Cecil-kun's self-depreciative smile.

..... I wanted him to understand my younger brother's cuteness, but I also wanted him to know the warmth of a family.

"..... Ah, won't it be resolved if Cecil-kun gets adopted by us?"

"Oi! I don't know how you came to that conclusion in your head, but stop it. Stop stirring things up"

This time, I understood it clearly from his annoyed face. Given that he had bluntly refused, was it no good? I lowered my eyes. By the way, I didn't receive Gilles's positive smiling face and got a warped face instead. Why *is* he giving such a negative aura?

"Gilles, I only thought that it would be good if Cecil-kun becomes my older brother"

"..... Why are you thinking of such things?"

"Because Cecil-kun looks lonely?"

"HUH?"

"I mean, Cecil-kun, won't you be alone if I'm not around? Won't you be lonely?"

Although his attitude had become a lot gentler than what it was before, it didn't appear like he came into contact with Caldina-san and the others on his own. Even if I behaved irritatingly, I'm still keeping him company.

I think being alone is lonely and sad. I don't know what Cecil-kun himself thinks of it, but, I don't think it's a good thing to get used to being alone. It was because he didn't have anyone to depend on.

"..... It's not like I'll be lonely, you're also persistently coming over here after all"

"You didn't have to make it sound like it was troublesome"

"Besides That guy won't allow my adoption"

That guy?

And looking at how puzzled I was, Cecil-kun — with an unpleasant expression — began to slowly open his mouth and clicked his tongue. His dejected figure, that appeared to be colored with a dark expression, looked distinctly at me who was by his side.

Those suffering eyes looked behind me for a moment before slightly turning away. It just so happens that in that instant, I followed his gaze and turned around. When I looked behind me, I shivered and felt a pain at the back of my neck where slight traces of sorcery could be found.

In my sight was a figure that was slightly older than when I saw him in my childhood — Abbot Georg.

With cold disdain, the Abbot glanced at me, Cecil-kun, and then Gilles in that order. Afterwards, he threw a glance at Cecil-kun as though he was a pebble on the roadside, a worthless object.

Cecil-kun bit his lips and hung his head. Enduring the heavy psychological pressure, he appeared bitter.

The amount of time Abbot Georg observed us didn't even amount to ten seconds. Abruptly, he dropped his line of sight and, as though he had lost interest, left. It was then when the figure of the Abbot had vanished that I was finally able to breathe again.

We've only met once, but compared to the gaze he looked at me with back then, the hostility emitted by his eyes was more intense. And for some reason, it was also directed at Cecil-kun. For Cecil-kun, that look carried a different meaning.

"..... Damn. Why does that guy have to be here"

Dishevelling his fine silver hair, Cecil-kun muttered annoyingly.

"..... Are you acquainted with Abbot Georg?"

"Hah, we're not acquaintances because, to that guy, I'm an unacceptable existence"

Without knowing why Cecil-kun was spitting out such harsh words, I didn't know what else to do and looked towards Gilles..... And that was when I noticed the stiff expression on Gilles's face.

Even now, his disgusted eyes stared at the area where the Abbot had been. Then, turning towards Gilles, Cecil-kun gave him a jeering look.

"If it's you, you should understand as the former member of the Sévéne

household"

"..... Mm"

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

"Oh, don't you know? I'm Cecil Steinbert I'm that damn old geezer's grandson"

I blinked at the truth that was suddenly revealed to me and examined Cecil-kun with a stare.

..... Cecil-kun was Abbot Georg's grandson. In other words, he was the grandson of Duke Steinbert.

"You're a child from a reasonably good parentage....."

"We once had royal blood in our bodies. That said, aren't you the same as well?"

"We are of a lower rank than a duke's Well actually, now that you mentioned it, what's your relation to Gilles?"

"Your father's probably worried about you so he didn't inform you, but the Sévéne house serves the Steinbert household In other words, they're like puppets"

"So you're saying that poorly attempted assassination was planned by your household Is that what it is?"

"Indeed"

Towards that seemingly and extremely complicated answer that Cecil-kun gave, I looked at Gilles not knowing what to do. Gilles had a gloomy expression.

"..... My apologies. This is why I do not hold any good will towards this boy. I feel that he will probably bring harm to Liz-sama"

"On the contrary, Welf knows that I've been ostracized by that household, but then again, I had spurred you. If things went well, we would become close and he might be able to obtain information from me"

"..... I feel troubled because this is all too shocking"

What is with all this unknown information warfare and the exchanges

between the relationship of nobles? It was not like Father also had me stay together with Cecil-kun in his room so that I would stir up a fight with him. No, I was the one who had wilfully done so myself.

Seeing how speechless I was at how everything was connected, Cecil-kun vigorously clicked his tongue in disdain.

"About the assassination, I only knew about it much later so we have no hand in it. That's as much as I can affirm"

"That doesn't really worry me at all But if Cecil-kun also picked up that same attitude as your grandfather's—"

"I don't acknowledge their existence, so just leave it be. Just because my magic powers went out of control and I'm weird, I was treated like an unwanted human being. Hence why I was put into the custody of the Magic Institution"

Was this the reason why he was alone? Even if he was a member of a duke's household, he was an unacknowledged child. That was why the people around him didn't get too close to him and Cecil-kun, himself, rejected them.

"..... But you can already use sorcery normally, right Cecil-kun?"

"I guess, but I'm concealing it. However, with me associating with you, my father may think I am of value to him"

"Please don't try to kill me, Cecil-kun"

"Who's going to! Is there even a guy who would go so far as to kill a person that became his companion?"

That immediate denial made me warmly smile. It sounds like Cecil-kun has greatly softened up to me. I believe he recognized me as a friend.

Gilles being Gilles looked at Cecil-kun suspiciously, but that look had softened just a little. Perhaps the look that the Abbot gave earlier became a factor that increased the credibility of Cecil-kun's statement. At a glance, you could tell that both of them didn't like each other, both Cecil-kun and Abbot Georg.

Nevertheless, I'm in quite a dangerous position. The Abbot's faction (?) regards me as a nuisance. What should I do if danger comes again?

With a sigh, I went over to Gilles's side and tightly clung onto his arm. When

push comes to shove, I'll repel them together with Gilles. Yup, that's what I'll do.

Chapter 42 – Good Will and Confusion

When it comes to my impression of His Highness, I do like him, but the difficulties that come with him are in a totally different category.

It was not as if I disliked him. I think he's an excellent, hard-working kid. By the time His Highness had turned thirteen, he had become far calmer when compared to the old days and had also become aware of his responsibilities as a member of royalty.

I've said this time and time again, but I don't dislike him and find him likeable. Just not, as the opposite sex.

Well, in other words, I feel extremely troubled whenever he makes advances on me.

"Liz, you're looking cute as always today. The color of that dress really compliments your eyes"

His smile was just like the princes from those fairy tales, except he was from royalty — a bonafide prince. After hesitantly contemplating for a while, I innocuously thank him with a smile on my lips.

Currently, I'm at the castle where a tea party, or rather, a party was currently being held. Well, in pretext, it was a tea party even though it was probably much closer to a prospective partner gathering for the youngsters. The men and women that were gathered here were generally between the ages of thirteen to sixteen.

The youngest here was probably me, at ten years old. It truly begs the question as to why I was called to this social gathering.

Since it was hard to decline once I had been invited, with a somewhat heavy heart, I attended only for this to happen.

His Highness had paid his compliments to the crimson red dress that I had worn today. This would probably not be taken well by the others who hadn't been complimented.

Your Highness, if possible, could you also speak to the other ladies? They're glaring at me with extreme hostility.

Look! That ojou-sama over there is really cute, the ojou-sama with the soft, wavy hair. Doesn't she look as pretty as a doll? Although it's scary as her eyes aren't smiling.

"Your Highness, is it alright to not greet the other ladies?"

"I've already done so"

Is that so? Have you been thorough, or were you saying that just so I wouldn't pay them any heed?

"A rose would suit you well today, Liz. I'll have one brought from the garden later."

"No. Thank you for your kind words, but I'm unworthy of the roses that bloom in the castle's gardens"

"Then, would this rose here suffice? "

My reserved feelings had no effect whatsoever. His Highness shot me a dazzling smile. Then, from his uniform, he took the rose that he had been wearing on his breast pocket as decoration and placed it gently in the ribbon that my hair was bundled with.

It wasn't a flower and instead was an object that was made from glass that had a faint trace of magic in it. Was sorcery applied to it to prevent it from breaking easily? But that isn't the problem! We're dealing with an evidently expensive-looking jewel, what do you mean by passing it to me?

"You shouldn't have, Your Highness"

"In any case, that was arbitrarily put on me by my attendants, and after it's been worn once, it will rarely be seen again"

"That's a waste"

"Is that not so? Therefore, rather than me wearing it, it would be of much better use if Liz had it as it suits you"

Huh? He wheedled out of it. No, I should have tried to refuse.

What should I do? While I was silent because of the expensive gift, His Highness gently smiled while scooping up a bunch of my hair. Inherited from my mother, he softly stroked my light coloured hair and dropped a kiss that merely touched the surface of it.



Kyaaa!

came the shrieks. He understood what it meant, but His Highness smiled without a care, silencing the crowd.

If it were just the two of us, I would have pushed him away and took the chance to escape. However, others were watching us right now. Because I knew he did it fully aware that I could not reject him in this situation, it was all the more in bad taste.

"..... Thank you. Your Highness, isn't it about time that you speak to the other women? They seem bored so you should let go of me soon"

"..... Do you dislike conversing with me?"

I swallowed my irritation and took a step back from His Highness who had inclined his head, seeming slightly sad That's unfair of you, Your Highness. To use that expression. In spite of knowing how weak I am to that pressure.

Since he carried it out while knowing that he shouldn't have, I tightly gritted my teeth, outwardly projecting a smile while shaking my head.

"Never to that extent. However, it's better if Your Highness avoids showing favouritism to a single individual in this sort of place"

"If that's the case, I hope you come over to my room next time. If we're there, we can speak without any interruptions"

"That would be a problem, though. Your Highness is already thirteen years old, it would not do to bring a lady into your room"

"Father said it would be fine if I made up the facts"

OI, YOUR MAJESTY!

..... The tone I had used just now wasn't very good, but what are you telling him, Your Majesty? In the first place, it's a known fact that I'm still a child. The things that I can do are limited. At best, a kiss. If it was any more than that, I would never let you bind me with it, and I would never allow it to begin in the first place.

"Your Highness, you jest too much. Also, since you are the guest of honour, please speak to the other ladies. This is a formal occasion"

"..... You're saying the same things as my attendants are"

While pouting a little, His Highness displayed a childish countenance. If you think about it, His Highness was still roughly the age of a student entering middle school. He hasn't fully matured yet.

..... Well, I feel sorry for him because the peers were bound by their etiquette and friendships. You wanted me here as the exception, didn't you?

"..... Please set up another place to speak to me next time. Then, I'll receive you as usual"

Not today, alright?

I added with a slightly roguish smile, and His Highness broke into a smile. It was hopeless, I'm also too soft with him. Even though I should be declining and putting a stop to it, I caved in when he wore that lonely expression.

I'm afraid if this keeps up, he'll cling onto me until I give into an engagement. Compared to his poor sweet obsession, I knew it would be better if I refused him to some degree. However

His Highness seemingly recovered and smiled at me in a somewhat good mood before heading over to the other ladies. I would appreciate it if he had done that at the very beginning, but I could say for certain that it couldn't be helped as it was just like His Highness to find no merit in the tea party itself.

I didn't dislike His Highness.

However, I don't know how I should receive his upfront kindness because I don't know whether I could respond to it.

It was because he delivered his courtesies so clearly, so I knew that it was done not out of conceit, but love. Even so, what should I do?

Because I'm half-hearted, I postpone giving him an answer.

"..... Oh dear"

Unfamiliar with feelings like these in my past life, I was troubled by how to deal with it. I am happy and confused.

If I find someone that I like soon, I'm sure the answer will quickly come to me.
I imagined that for a while and let out a sigh.

Chapter 43 – Father's Father

Currently, I'm wrapping my head around several problems.

The first was the matter with His Highness.

Right now, there's nothing I'm able to do about this matter. And as for declining him... I'm unsure of my true feelings. He has shown so much good will towards me that it was inevitable that I would be moved a little by his kindness.

It isn't so much an attraction towards him, but I do like him. However, as I said, I'm not very good at dealing with him.

The other was the matter with Abbot Georg.

On this matter as well, there was nothing I could do. It was possible that the other side intends to alienate me, but I don't know what exactly they intend to do to me. I also had to leave this to chance.

And, there was one other matter.

This one is developing into a bigger problem now.

"Pleased to meet you"

An elderly man was looking down at me with a stern look which made my face reflexively twitch. Towards this man, I took the initiative and gave a polite bow.

Beside me, Father had a blank smile upon his stiff face. His face, too, was twitching. At any moment now, it seemed as if he would smack his lips. For Father, whose smile was extremely stiff, it truly felt like he had nothing except animosity for the man in front of him.

.....

My own Father is capable of hating someone to this extent, huh,

I lamented in my mind.

By the way, the person in front of me was Father's father. In other words, he's

equivalent to being my grandfather. If you observe closely, you would find that his red pupils and looks were similar to Father's. Except his stern look.

Father was always gentle, or rather, he always smiled like he was a good-natured older brother. Only today did he show a hostile appearance. It was because of Grandfather's sudden appearance that put him on high alert.

"What business do you have here, oyaji? Didn't you promise to stay out of my territory?"

It was something that I would usually never hear, a cold voice that seemed as if his heart had been frozen to the core. Even if I knew that it was directed at Grandfather, it still gave me chills while standing beside him.

This was a matter that I had previously heard of, but it seems Father and Grandfather were on awfully bad terms with each other. However, it was not at a level where they were at loggerheads and couldn't cooperate with one another. It just seemed that there was no room for compromise between them.

Grandfather, as often is the case, was a chauvinist who also adopted a doctrine of aristocratic supremacy. In contrast, Father, a feminist, stressed the importance of a person's abilities. I don't know how he could possibly be the son of Grandfather.

"The validity of the duel should be in effect until either of us dies. How dare you appear carelessly before my eyes."

Father was a little bit frightening as he spewed out these words with clenched fists. However, Father's expression softened and he brushed the top of my head.

Yup, even though Grandfather was still alive and full of vigor, Father was made the head of the family because of the duel.

At the time, when Father was going to marry Mother who was of inferior birth, he was no different from a commoner when he dueled Grandfather with the stakes of surrendering his marriage and gaining the position of head of the family.

Having won the duel, Father became the head of the family and made Grandfather retire from the grounds of the estate. I don't really know much

about it, but it seems that my grandmother had passed away before I was born.

"Is it wrong for me to come and visit my grandchildren?"

"Why should I let you meet them, oyaji, when you treat your own son so rudely?"

"Isn't that because you struck back at your own father and made a fool out of me? If it's my grandchildren, then there's still time for me to raise them up to be obedient"

"You're the one that needs to be obediently taught some manners. By ignoring their will, you are forcing your worthless education upon— no, attempting to brainwash them. I have no obligations to let them meet a man like you"

That's already too late since I'm already before Grandfather's very eyes. Well, it seems like he's completely ignoring my existence so I'm fine with it.

Since I have established my ego and sense of values a long time ago, I won't waver no matter what Grandfather preaches to me now. However, there was a possibility that Grandfather would have an influence on young Ruby.

Whether it was the doctrine of aristocratic supremacy or the chauvinistic mindset, I don't wish for Ruby to be swayed by such worthless customs and thoughts. Therefore, it would be wise to not let him meet Grandfather.

As for the point about coming over to visit your grandchildren... I sympathize that you're unable to meet them, but if you're here with ulterior motives, then I'll obstruct them. I won't let you destroy my world.

"..... Liz, go to where Ruby is"

"Yes, Father"

When I enthusiastically nodded, even if it was only to go to where Ruby was, Grandfather blinked his red eyes and rudely looked over to my direction. From a glance that was accompanied with an unpleasant gaze and sneer, he examined my face and body.

"She looks exactly like that lowly woman. Seeing **that** is unpleasant"

"..... Oyaji, if you're going to keep insulting Selen and Liz, I will force you to

leave"

"Father, please don't make a fuss. And Before speaking ill of Mother, how about

you

kindly turn around and look at your own speech and conduct? Although, if it's coming from me, I find you very disagreeable"

"Wha—"

"Well then, Father, I'm going to go play with Ruby"

Having nothing better to do except declare it before I escape, with raised eyebrows, I ran off pretending not to see Grandfather, who was about to yell at any time, and Father, who had a big happy smile on his face.

I considered staying silent, but it came out unconsciously. I mustn't, I mustn't. However, I couldn't contain it when he disrespected Mother. If it was just me, I could endure it, but I won't forgive him for insulting Mother.

And so, thinking that I needed to tell Mother and Ruby not to go outside, I dashed into the hallway as I heard angry voices coming from behind me.

"Oh Father-in-law had?"

Mother was in her room reading to Ruby when I came in to tell her about the circumstances. Her brows slanted as she let out a perplexed sigh. It didn't seem like Mother hated Grandfather, but she was still bewildered by his sudden visit.

To be frank, even if Mother was being abused by Grandfather with that sort of disturbing attitude right in front of me, I should not hate him. It's because I am me that I have come to hate it. I don't want someone who has become a relative to say such nasty things.

"Mother, what do you think of Grandfather?"

"IOh well, I think he's a stubborn person"

"With his stiff mindset, he was also very controlling towards Father. At least, that's what it looks to me"

"Well, your father was disowned by that person How should I put this,

when your father became the head of the family, their positions were reversed. They were very close to completely severing all ties between them"

I'm happy she spoke of it for my sake, but Mother, who pleasantly laughed, was unexpectedly a determined person. No wonder Father was captivated by her.

"Hmm, I guess it's fine since no harm can come to you while you're in this territory"

"Grandfather is already here though"

"I see, that is troubling"

Hmm~ I lowered my eyebrows and hit my lips with my forefinger. Never would a child have thought to this extent that their own parent would be this unthinkably cute.

This is my personal opinion, but I think anyone would be happy to receive such a beautiful person as their daughter-in-law. After all, she's a beauty, can use sorcery, and can even do the chores when the maid isn't around — a gentle and frugal person.

It would be difficult to find someone who was more qualified than her. I can't understand Grandfather's thoughts.

"Ojii-sama?"

"It's Father's father"

It was the first time he had heard of him so Ruby, who had been listening to the story, tilted his head to the side with a curious expression. Speaking of how sweet he is I wanted to hug him from the back just now, but he was blankly looking back at me and that was sort of cute.

"What ish he like?"

"Errrrr..... Uh huh, well He seems like a person who can't yield very much"

"..... One-cha, your face looks like it's in pain"

Ruby anxiously looked at me. It seemed that he noticed that my eyebrows had furrowed together more than usual.

Because Ruby had a weak constitution, he rarely came into contact with people outside so, compared to children of his age, he still spoke and behaved childishly.

He had difficulty expressing himself but he was by no means slow. He was able to discern and see through a person's subtle feelings. I don't know if he did it instinctively, but he was usually spot on.

"One-cha hates him?"

"..... He's a type that I'll never be able to understand and—"

"Then I hate him too!"

Even before Ruby had met him, we had joined hands together in regards to disliking Grandfather.

While Ruby and I nonchalantly conversed with Mother, Father was having a heated exchange at the entrance. About an hour after I went over to the room, Gilles opened the door while looking completely exhausted.

"Seriously, what is wrong with that person?"

"Thank you for your hard work. How is Father doing?"

"He's still quarrelling at the front door"

"I see"

I did not expect him to return home obediently. For me, I wished that he left before it becomes a problem for the whole family.

Most likely, in the heat of the moment, Father used force and Gilles had to step in to mediate things, hence the exhaustion. It was impossible to cut in between those two, wasn't it?

Well, you tried your best to do the job.

Let's reward the tired Gilles for his service later

How should I go about rewarding him? Letting him put his head on my lap? My thighs aren't yet plump though.

Going back to the main subject, have they not settled it yet? Ruby has already entered an antagonistic mode towards Grandfather. I didn't instruct him to, but it looks like Ruby himself decided that Grandfather was unpleasant.

I may be contradicting myself, but I want Ruby to see Grandfather with his own eyes and judge it for himself. However, it is true that I don't want them to meet each other. This is troubling, isn't it?

"I could mediate, but there is a high chance that Father-in-law had said something that caused Welf to flip"

"Yeah. He even went so far as to call me of low birth Ah, Gilles, stop! It's fine, you don't have to be angry"

Gilles's chilly gaze had begun burning with rage so I rushed to keep it under control. No, you really don't have to get this mad. It was an insult that was directed at Mother. That was why I was merely irritated by it.

If he had spoken ill of me, then I wouldn't go so far as to cutting it off and abandoning it. It's laughable when it comes from someone that I'm not even acquainted with.

The angry Gilles was also frightening, so I soothed him and took the opportunity to hug him. It was because I missed Gilles as well as for him to regain himself. When it comes to Gilles, he will never act like Grandfather.

"It's not something I mind too much, okay?"

"Look, Gilles. Liz also said she's fine so calm yourself"

"..... Yes"

"Gillesh, that's unfair~ I want to be close to One-cha too"

With Ruby also coming over to hug me from behind, I was sandwiched between Gilles and Ruby. Although, since Gilles didn't embrace me in return, perhaps it was a bit different?

Being closely intimate with the two people who treasured me made me happy. With this, as long as that disturbing element known as my grandfather disappears, I'll be even happier.

"Well aren't you guys close, fufu. Won't you let me do it too?"

"Do you want to do it as well?"

"Of course"

Come? And as Mother held her arms wide, I quietly separated from Gilles and timidly hugged her. She felt soft and warm. She smelled so good that I was spellbound.

I didn't want to cause any trouble for her, so I refrained from behaving like a spoiled child. However, this confirms it, things like mothers are calming. My mental state has already regressed, and my body had just turned ten yet I couldn't help but enjoy the bliss when I'm being fawned upon. I really have become a child.

"It's because Liz was never a spoiled child in the past, and because of that, she's behaving like one now"

"..... That's because Gilles spoils me a lot"

"Oh my, oh my"

Mother gently smiled, sending a meaningful glance at Gilles. Seeming slightly embarrassed, he responded with an awkward smile.

Having thoroughly enjoyed her well-rounded bosom, I removed my face. Gilles winced as Mother subtly looked towards him puzzled. It's not like I wanted to be pampered because I was spoiled.

"..... Selen"

"Dear"

Thinking in my heart, *I wonder what's wrong?*

, I cocked my head in contemplation, noticing a moment later than Mother that Father had appeared in the room. Observing how exhausted he was, I left with Ruby who was still clinging onto me.

My imagination seemed to be right on the money. Father brushed his dishevelled hair and tightly hugged Mother.

"..... My old man will be staying over for five days. Be patient"

"Oh my, did you give in? You did wonderful"

"..... Truthfully, I didn't want to let him in"

Having sorely missed Mother, Father embraced her and kissed her cheeks.

He was similar to me in this area. The part where we would hug someone when we were worn out. And I was watching them, hidden in a blind spot with Ruby.

Towards Father, who was completely exhausted, Mother stroked his hair with a calming smile. With a tender touch, she placed a kiss upon his cheeks as well.

"..... Selen, I don't have any regrets taking you to be my wife"

"Fufu, I know. You love me the most"

His red eyes that had a tinge of love were fixated solely on Mother. Their eyes were locked onto each other, eyes that were wet and overflowing with seduction. Just by looking at the allure of those cheeks that were flushed red, one could tell that his moist lips were gently opened.

Ah!

Ruby shouldn't be watching this! With that conclusion, I proceeded to block Ruby's sight. Not fully understanding what had happened, Ruby raised his voice and asked, "What's wrong, One-cha?" to which I replied in a tiny voice, *Shh*, through the gaps of my teeth.

It would be bad if we disturbed them. Gee, they're seriously a youthful, harmonious couple. Yup!

Still, I felt that I shouldn't be watching this and so, taking Ruby, we quietly left the room. Gilles felt a bit awkward as well; his eyes stopped at the area around his feet. We had left the room together, but he wasn't able to hide his cheeks that were faintly red.

..... If you think about it carefully, Gilles was already eighteen years old, yet he didn't seem accustomed to it. Maybe it was because he had always been by my side that he didn't have any time to set aside for a lover.

"..... Those two, will their relationship truly be alright?"

"Well, that pair of lovebirds are even famous outside. It'll be nice if, in the future, I could also be part of a harmonious couple like them"

Well, it was extremely unlikely for me to find a partner before that, and when I smiled bitterly, "I'm going to marry One-cha" said Ruby with a smile.

As he was still a child, it was not something that I put too much thought into. For the time being, since he was so adorable, I thanked him and gave him a kiss upon his cheeks.

For some reason, Gilles has a complicated expression on his face. Oh well, as it didn't seem to be a problem, I ignored it. Seriously, my younger brother is so adorable. Mou~

Chapter 44 – Grandfather and Granddaughter

Since Grandfather will be staying with us, Father strictly ordered us to not get involved with him.

It was just like Father to worry that Grandfather was up to no good. Father really hates Grandfather, doesn't he? Well, I understood from a single glance that Grandfather didn't get along with Father so I guess you could say that it was justified.

Since he had given the command as the head of the family with a serious face, I couldn't go against it nor did I want to. I decided to be obedient and didn't try to get close to Grandfather. To begin with, I was certain that Grandfather didn't have a favorable impression of me, seeing as how he insulted when we first met.

"..... It's better to not get too close, but there is a limit to how much one can avoid him, like what Ruby's doing"

Haa~

I grumbled and sighed while combing Ruby's hair as he used my lap as a pillow.

In some ways it was pitiable, but this was because I had carried out a decisive tactic to prevent Ruby from meeting Grandfather. However, there was a problem.

The problem being that Ruby obediently stayed in his room all the time.

Ruby was still in his playful phase. Previously, he had eagerly walked around the premises. Now, all the time he would have spent outside was being spent cooped up in his room. And the increase of activities in the garden only strengthened his desire to follow me to his favourite area. I could only pacify him for now, but I'm at my limit. Even I wanted to go to the garden.

Ruby, who was napping peacefully, displayed an innocent face in his sleep. When I traced his cheeks with the tip of my fingers, he mumbled with

uneasiness and furrowed his brows. It was so adorable that I just couldn't help but smile.

If Grandfather firmly promises to not do needless things, then I'll let them meet. Ah, wait! Considering the situation when Father and Grandfather severed all forms of contact, I feel like I shouldn't let them meet after all.

"Liz-sama, are you feeling alright?"

"I'm fine as long as he doesn't meet Ruby. I don't mind even if he shouts and curses me"

"..... Even if he is the former head of the family, I won't forgive him if he abuses Liz-sama"

"Well, I did say those things to Grandfather, so I'm not surprised if he hates me after that"

I am not bothered by whether or not he dislikes me. In any case, I was beyond his scope of interest. Because I was irritated by his insults towards Mother, I said those things to Grandfather. However, the words were said haphazardly.

Grandfather seems cold-hearted to me. I mean, it's been ten years since I was born and not once had I met Grandfather, so I don't really know. Furthermore, he holds Mother in contempt. It's understandable even if he doesn't like me, I treat people that I don't like as strangers after all. Does that mean I'm heartless?

Gilles, who has been my escort for a while, also disapprove of him. Although I don't particularly feel like he'll do me any real harm. If anything were to occur, then Father and Gilles would tell him off before I could lose my temper.

..... Either way, at the end of the day, aren't I just being spoiled?

"If anything were to happen, I have you Gilles. We'll manage somehow"

Gilles was like family to me. When I said that, he showed a wry smile on his face.

However, Gilles was an indispensable person to me, so much so that I've become very reliant on him. As a person who treasures and looks only at me, he's very special to me.

..... On one hand, I wish for him to quickly find a lover, and on the other, I don't want us to be separated. I'm self-conscious of how dependent I've become.

"Then, I must meet those demands"

Towards my bitter smile, Gilles's satisfaction seemed to radiate from his face. He turned towards me with a bright smile and combed my hair.

People around me have said that my appearance is quite similar to Mother's. According to Father, I am just like Mother when she was a little girl. Of course, I have a bit of Father in me, but it seems that Mother's side was predominant.

Father expects my appearance to become more similar to Mother's when I hit puberty. Mother's cuteness and her baby face gives off the feeling of a beautiful attendant whereas the expression of my eyes seem to differ slightly from hers.

Well, leaving that matter aside, I'm currently at the stage where I resemble Mother. It's not to the point where we were like two peas in a pod, but the similarity was still shocking.

Hence, for Grandfather who hates Mother, when he saw his granddaughter's appearance, he frowned.

"..... What's wrong with your brother?"

Even if I holed myself in my room whenever I could, I would encounter him when I headed out.

"I heard you. What will you do when you find out?"

"What's wrong with looking at my grandchild's face?"

"Your grandchild is in front of you, though?"

I tried very hard to show him a good impression by expressing a cheerful and gentle look as best as I could.

Oh well! I had a feeling that it was a bit too late for that. As a result of him being unable to stomach it, a grimace formed on Grandfather's harsh expression, signalling his displeasure.

"I don't want you"

"Is that so? How regrettable"

I put on a regretful expression for appearance's sake for the time being. It was not particularly because we were blood-related; after all, I hadn't been affected by anything he had said till now, and I still didn't care about it. It was not like Grandfather was essential to me, I only perceived him as Father's genetic provider.

It seems that he understood from how unnaturally low my eyebrows were; Grandfather looked annoyed.

"You really are just like that woman. Your words sound sad yet you don't feel concerned at all"

"If you're conscious that you've hurt others with your conduct, then shouldn't you go about changing it? Although it surely must be difficult to pass the time in this house"

I'm certain that the person himself feels it when the entire family in the household doesn't welcome him. In the first place, it was to the point where he was close to disowning Father, so in a sense, it was not that surprising. Especially since Father and the butler that previously served Father, Joseph, were greatly antagonistic towards him.

"I don't mind even if you hate me. However, don't you think you should at least try to put in some effort to like me even a tiny bit?"

"But in doing so, wouldn't I be acknowledging you?"

"No. I don't care if you acknowledge me or not. As far as I'm concerned, you're a stranger to me, Grandfather. You feel the same way too. However, it will never change the fact that I'm still the older sister of Ruby, whom you seek"

"..... You are an unlikable lass"

"Yes, I'm aware of that. I will not forgive anyone who intends to ruin my world. Even if it's Father's father"

I affirmed it with a smile.

"If you come into contact with Ruby and indoctrinate him with half-truths and try to brainwash him, I will do whatever it takes to drive you out of this house"

"Do you even have such authority?"

"I'll beg Father in tears or use force. I have many means and I won't be the one choosing which"

I'm still a child so even if I fought fairly against an adult, my chances of winning would be slim. In that case, it was obvious for me to use whatever means necessary to ensure my safety.

"If you just want to see your cute grandson, Ruby, then please tell that to Father. If you have a guilty conscience and aren't scheming, I'm sure he'll allow it"

Since he doesn't seem to feel any attachment towards me, I'm just going to be indifferent about it. However, Grandfather was only obsessed with Ruby. A son who would inherit the legacy was precious, wasn't he? Unlike me, who would only be useful as a tool in a political marriage.

If he wanted to be affectionate towards Ruby as his grandfather, then I couldn't deny him. I have no intention to carry out needless conversations like Father that would possibly drive him out. Everything would depend on Grandfather's intentions.

It didn't matter whether you were somebody important or proud, nothing would change even if they told me. I just want to reduce the elements of danger and unease.

As a smile floated across my lips, my eyes narrowed when Grandfather slightly grimaced and let out a sigh.

"I'll admit only one thing, you're just like that woman and Welf"

"I'm honored to receive your praise"

Grinning, I laughed with a childish allure as Grandfather turned his back on me with a face as though he was pondering over something.

..... It's not good that he doesn't like me as well, but even so, I don't want him to do any unnecessary things to Ruby. It would be good if he loved him as his grandson. Then, I'm sure Father would probably not go as far as to refuse him. Why didn't I purposely tell that to Grandfather?

Chapter 45 – The Result of Grandfather’s Disgust

There’s a saying that goes ‘the older one gets, the harder it becomes to change one’s habits’. After all, one’s actions, pride and ego are all built up by the action one takes over the years.

A nice way of putting it is that the elderly are strong-willed, but that just means they’re pigheaded.

I kept my lips sealed and forced a smile as Grandfather kept talking with a haughty attitude next to Father. Although it would be great if Father won by snapping back at him, Grandfather seemed much more accomplished in that sense.

Moreover, as they’ve been on bad terms from the start, Father lost all trust the instant Grandfather said he just wanted to meet his grandson. Well, Grandfather didn’t say it explicitly, but his attitude said it all.

"Why are you going so far as to refuse my request?"

"Look at your own actions. What kind of education did you give me, old man? As you could likely teach Ruby such matters, it would only be natural for me to prevent it"

Hmm, he was right, but I don’t feel like butting into the conversation for now. The servants gossiped that Grandfather was pitiable in a way for being rejected like this — getting told that he wouldn’t be allowed to even meet his grandson. However, they had no sympathy for a man who would ignore his granddaughter and treat her crudely.

"..... One-cha?"

A calm, harmonious voice called out from behind me as I let out a sigh at the never-ending bickering.

... *Damn!*

As I thought that, Grandfather turned around to look towards me, no, to the

person behind me. His red eyes, just like Father's, faintly gleamed with hope. It was the first time that he was seeing his grandson and the sharp look he previously held in his eyes softened slightly as he looked in my direction.

Well, I knew it was going to happen sooner or later. Ruby was at the age where it was impossible for him to sit still.

"Father, I think it'll be best if you stand aside and let him meet Ruby. It'll be good for your mental health, both of you"

Ah well, nothing could be done, so I might as well lend Grandfather a helping hand.

It's true that he came all the way from a distant territory, hoping to see his grandson's face. Now, now, I don't care even if he makes light of me as much as he does, Gilles will look after me.

It's better, in my opinion, if they met under our watchful gaze rather than if he sneakily attempted something. After all, Father could just tear him apart or drive him away.

In response to my words, Grandfather looked at me wide-eyed. I hope he does not misunderstand, I am not, nor do I intend to be, on his side. It's just that after contemplating Ruby's well being, I decided it was still better if they conversed whilst under our supervision.

"Wouldn't it be fine, Father, since you can stop him if he tries to do anything strange?"

"..... Hmm, I guess"

"Besides, you fully intend to toss him out as soon as his stay is over, right? If so, shouldn't we at least leave him with one good memory?"

"Well, whether it will be a good memory is entirely up to Ruby though", I muttered under my breath and caught Ruby in my arms as he rushed over.

I hugged Ruby and spun him around. He looked at me, confused, and then relaxed as I patted his head. Ruby was just like me; he loved it when his hair was touched, so he had a soft and tender smile on his face.

"Ruby, beside Father is Grandfather. Come say hello"

"..... Ojii-sama?"

Surprised, Ruby turned towards Grandfather, who was beside Father, and stared at him with his red eyes. Meeting the grandson that he had always wanted to meet, Grandfather had a slightly stiff expression as he gave an awkward smile.

With a squeeze, the small hands that clutched my clothes tightened their grip.

"..... Yaa~"*

By the time I realized, "Oh! This is his refusal pattern!", Ruby had shaken his head disapprovingly and hid himself behind me.

..... Grandfather was shocked. Which reminds me, Ruby mentioned that he hated him when he saw the expression I had previously. Sorry, Grandfather. I apologize for that. I was the one who planted this seed of prejudice towards you.

"Ruby, perhaps Grandfather will be more amiable with you"

"YAA~! I don't like people who are spiteful towards one-cha"

"Ruby!"

Why, onee-chan is delighted that you grew up to be such a good boy!

"... Look. He's already outed you since you were cold to Liz. This is what happens when you are hostile without realizing the implications it will bring"

"Father, please stop putting salt on the wound"

"Yo— You know it's inevitable, that girl is—"

"That's enough! Ruby and Liz are both Selen's children"

Eventually, Father could not hold it in any longer. His eyebrows raised as he glared at Grandfather. His red eyes were filled with anger.

Father is scary when he's angry. After these past years, I got to know that part of Father very well.

"In the first place, what's with barging in on us all of a sudden? Liz and Selen are of low birth? Fuck you! Don't you find faults in the woman I chose and my daughter. Stop spouting complaints about my lovable daughter and my capable

wife. After all, my Liz is cute, smart, and loves her brother to the point that I don't even want to show her off to you, old man. Despite that, because she's a woman, you scorned her and made abusive remarks which shows you are unaware of Liz's adorableness. Old man, you wouldn't understand how cute Liz was when she used to follow me when she was younger"

"Fa-Father, please stop! It's embarrassing"

Even as he was angry, he quickly began dotting over me to which I shook my head disapprovingly, feeling extremely itchy.

Hold on! Why are you suddenly boasting about your daughter? You even managed to somewhat draw out a dumbfounded look from Grandfather. I bet in Grandfather's mind, he can't draw parallels at all between your description of me and the person that I actually am, of which I too disagree with Father's portrayal of me.

My face turned red as I was unable to endure the feelings of embarrassment, and Ruby looked at me worriedly. His small, warm hands touched all over my cheeks to console me as I hugged Ruby tightly whilst groaning.

"Tousama* is also bullying One-cha"

"R-Rather than bullying, this ... It's just a new method of harassment"

Why do I have to go through such an embarrassing ordeal

Ruby is my only ally

, and when I hugged him tighter, Ruby grinned delightedly. This was worlds apart from the attitude he had with Grandfather; Ruby was very intimate with me. I'm sure that this must be quite a shock for Grandfather.

"Tousama, you can't bully One-cha!"

"I-I didn't intend to bully her..."

"It's harassment when you're fanning my shame, though....."

"It's a fact that you're cute"

That is obviously due to your belief that your children are the most adorable beings in existence. Because of that, no matter how you try to explain it to

Grandfather, who hates me, it would be pointless as he wouldn't understand.

Somehow, it was as though Father had depleted all of Grandfather's spirit; he looked slightly dispirited, and his face was clouded with grave solemnity. He had received a devastating blow from Ruby's refusal and conversely, by how different Ruby treated me.

It wasn't the meeting he had been eagerly longing for. If he didn't change his attitude towards me, Ruby wouldn't even allow Grandfather to come near him. And so, he is currently considering things. However.....

"..... Ruby, do you dislike being friends with me?"

"YAA~!"

Oh well, Grandfather sank that ship.

"If you want to get closer to Ruby, you'll have to get pass Liz, old man"

"No, I think he has already firmly shut that door with his own hands"

Naturally, Grandfather wanted to forge a connection to Ruby and cut ties with me. I became increasingly sympathetic towards him because Grandfather had been so full of himself, assuming that Ruby would also hold the same feelings. Since Ruby dislikes him, nothing could be done as long as Grandfather doesn't compromise.

"Ruby Won't you at least speak with your Grandfather for a bit?"

"Don't wanna~! I hate bullies, One-cha!"

"Ruby, you're breaking his heart Grandfather, it's regrettable, but Ruby greatly dislikes it"

"Why are you taking the old man's side, Liz?"

"I hoped that if he was able to speak to Ruby right now, he would be satisfied and leave without delay, so—"

"Liz, your motives are horrible"

Dispirited from Ruby's sharp words, "So it's because of me?", Grandfather asked and inclined his head.

Well, that's because I wanted you to quickly go home. Ruby dislikes you, and

although I no longer find it necessary to keep guard against you, he regards you as a person who berates me and hates you for it..... I'm happy that Ruby truly adores me.

"Grandfather, why don't you give up for now and return home? Ruby might readily approach you if your attitude has changed by the time you come over next time"

"HUH!? I will not—"

"Unless your hatred for me disappears, please accept the fact that Ruby hates you too"

It seems that mentioning Ruby dealt the finishing blow as Grandfather kept his mouth shut when I indicated to him while showing him a sweet smile that I hadn't before. The words that contained the meaning, "*Please withdraw from this place for the time being*".

I smiled at grandfather as I tried to pacify Ruby who was on high alert. Completely depressed, grandfather's shoulder drooped down. He turned his back on us, the energy he had earlier had vanished into thin air. To a larger extent, he was probably enduring Ruby's rejection. Seeing him acting that way, I couldn't help but see him as a pitiable, timid man.

The next day, Grandfather returned to his territory. Rather, it was Father who drove him out.

As he left, he kept looking at Ruby regretfully, but Ruby turned his face away, hurting him considerably. Though he was firm with me, it was strange that he was weak when it came to Ruby.

Well, if he comes over again next time, I wish his attitude towards me would soften just a little.

Thus, Grandfather, who was an annoyance to our family, was quickly sent packing. If possible, please come back again when you're a little bit more mature.

Translator's note:

1. The yaa here means no.

2. Tousama = Father

Chapter 46 – The Start of Their Romance

Grandfather's departure meant that one problem was reasonably resolved, but there were still other matters that required attention. There was the aforementioned matter with His Highness and the abbot.

Even if I set aside the matter with the abbot for the time being, the issue with His Highness was still looming over my head at the moment.

I've said it many times already, I do not dislike His Highness. I just don't see him in a romantic light.

His Highness is a man that I will serve in the future, a friend. I have no feelings for him as one might have towards the opposite sex. Even if my heart beats quickly, it won't last for long.

If I had someone I desired, I would decline him right away. It's precisely because I didn't that I'm troubling over it.

"You'll never give in to His Highness, will you, Liz?"

"It's not like you actually dislike him, right?", Mother said as she inclined her head while combing my hair. I smiled bitterly as I looked at her and nodded my head.

Not particularly

, I thought. Speaking based off of human nature, he is someone desirable. Well, he does overdo his display of courtesy a wee bit much and is also aware that I have a hard time dealing with him.

I'm somewhat weak to pressure, but when he overdoes it, it's sort of unpleasant. I don't hate assertive people, it's simply bothersome once the situation involves love. Perhaps I should say it would be best if it was well-tempered?

"I regard His Highness as an important friend and nothing more"

"My, my! If His Highness heard that, he would weep"

"..... It's difficult for me to have feelings of love"

It's impossible for me to fall in love with His Highness, who is now semi-matured, when he was much cuter back when he was younger. I suppose he is quite a catch, but I have no feelings for him.

When we first met, he was childish. Extremely so. As a result, I can't overwrite my first impression of him. Even if he has matured to an extent, I can't regard him as anything but a child. Therefore, I'm unable to accept his feelings for me.

His Highness is physically older than me, but I personally prefer men who are much older. Not to the extent of chasing after old men, but I'm fine if they're a dandy too.

"..... Mother, why did you fall in love with Father?"

"Me?"

Not expecting the conversation would steer towards her, Mother raised her voice in surprise. "Hmm, well...", Mother, sporting a pensive look on her face with an index finger against her red lips, looked like she was still brimming with youthfulness.

Just once, I would like to hear about it. How was Mother attracted to Father? How did she come to like him?

Father and Mother had always been on good terms with each other; they've been close even before I was born. Even now, my parents are intimate with each other. If they're careless, she'll likely give birth to another child from their dalliance.

What did Mother like about Father?

"Let's see, it'll probably be a long story"

"That's fine. If you can, please speak about your ardent love for Father moderately. You're always full of it"

"Mou~ I wasn't going to say such things even if I thought of them"

Though it was slightly my fault for telling her off, Mother didn't take it to heart and seemed amused.

"Hmm, how about I start by telling you how we first fell in love? I did not come from a good lineage; it was honestly the lowest rank"

"That was why Grandfather made a huge fuss, right?"

"Fufu, that's right. Isn't it odd that a person like me can have a relationship with Welf who hails from a Marquis household?"

In noble society, one fundamentally does not associate with other others outside of their own rank or above them. Even though there were cases of people from the upper ranks drawing close to those beneath them, they usually wanted nothing to do with them, with the exception of their retainers. It goes without saying, they thoroughly looked down upon those from the lower ranks. There are exceptions amongst them, though.

Well, that sort of mindset came about when the nation was first founded. This type of mindset would be more prevalent if it was a Marquis household that has a history. On top of it all, Grandfather was the head of the family back then. It was certainly a disgusting lineage.

"You see, when I was slightly older than you, Liz, I started working at the Magic Institution. Unlike my family, I had a superfluous amount of magic. Well, it was the reason I was driven out anyway"

"..... Driven out?"

"I believe you understand. If you stand out a little, it's unbelievably easy to be off-putting to others"

I bit my lips as Mother gave a slightly forlorn smile.

Because I also had such an experience, I vaguely understood the situation that Mother had been placed in. If you were excellent, you would be admired, but on the other hand, it would also breed jealousy. Mother faced that from her family, didn't she?

"Well, I was a poor noble, and as the youngest in the family, I would be a nuisance either way. I'm glad though, because it was due to being driven out that I met Welf"

"You met Father at the Magic Institution, didn't you?"

"Yup. Even in the Magic Institution, I was subtly alienated because of my rank. However, Welf treated me as his equal. I entered the institution because of my abilities, so there was no distinction between us"

"That's just like Father"

"Fufu, did you know that he was cold to me in the beginning? Or perhaps I should say, he was touchy because of his family problems"

Father was at odds with Grandfather when he met Mother. Well, even though he was brought up by a horrible role model, he was completely different from him and was also right in the midst of his rebellious phase.

It's hard to imagine it now, but Father used to be cold and blunt. Why, he was just like Cecil!

This might be why Father was concerned about Cecil-kun. He could see his former self in him.

"And then one day, Welf had a huge quarrel with his father. Because of that, Welf suffered serious injuries. Fufu, your grandfather was very immature too, getting worked up by a child"

"That's no laughing matter, Mother"

"You are right, though. Anyway, the reason for their fight was because of me. When we worked, we were always together one way or another, and just as he began to open up to me in his own way, your grandfather said, "Are you associating yourself with this person of low-birth?""

"That's easy for him to say, isn't it?"

"So Welf got angry when your grandfather started going off about the people he was associating with. He was a teenager back then, and your grandfather was also at his prime, so he was seriously injured from the fight. Since I was there, I forcibly stopped your grandfather, and while crying, I healed Welf, who was wounded"

She said just now that she had stopped him by force, but wasn't that an opponent that Father lost to?

.... It's that, isn't it? She gained an upper hand on Grandfather who had

exhausted himself. I dare say he didn't expect to be downright shut down. Scary, my opinions of Mother being the strongest have been elevated to another level.

..... This must also be the cause for why Grandfather hates Mother.

"As you can imagine, his back was covered with gaping wounds. It took an entire night for me to heal it with healing magic, but I somehow healed it. You might say that I was still inexperienced back then; he was wounded so badly that there are still faint scars on his back"

"..... I didn't know"

"Well, it's on his back and they are faint To stick up for me, Welf sustained such wounds. If he hadn't, he would not have to bear those wounds. That entire night, I kept crying and apologizing. It was because of me. And then, Welf said, 'It's impossible for me to not get angry when the woman I love is being insulted right in front of me. It's natural to protect the one I love after all'"

"..... Father said that?"

"Fufu, he was probably showing off, but I fell in love with that Welf"

Absorbed, Mother blushed like a dreamy maiden yearning for him. It was an expression that you wouldn't expect from a mother of two kids — youthful, beautiful, and happily content.

Mother seemed very happy right now. She gave birth to me and Ruby and remains intimate with Father. A world filled with happiness and tranquility. In the centre of it all was Mother with her charming smile.

..... *How nice*, I honestly thought to myself.

Undoubtedly, Mother was somehow able to encounter her destined partner. I don't really believe in fate, but I'm sure Father and Mother were destined to be together. That was all it took for the both of them to pass the days in happiness.

"..... Will such a person appear for me too?"

A person who will protect me, and someone that I can protect too. Someone who will become upset for my sake.

"I'm sure he will. No, he probably already has Right, Welf and Gilles?"

Mother gently caressed my cheeks while directing her gaze behind my back, revealing a mischievous smile. Just as I suspected, when I turned around, Father and Gilles were there.

How long have they been listening? I mean, Father looks quite embarrassed and Gilles's face was slightly red as well. I didn't notice, but given how awkward they looked, they must have heard the story from the start.

"Selen, you didn't have to tell Liz so much about my pathetic affairs"

"Oh my! You were not pathetic when you were injured defending me. Or do you regret protecting me?"

"Certainly not"

Softly smiling, Mother let go of my hand. Leaving me be, she walked away and shifted towards Father. I thought it would be inappropriate if I disturbed them.

Gilles, having heard of how fondly Mother spoke of their romance, subtly looked awkward. I left the room, taking him with me. After all, those who disturb the love of others will be kicked by a horse*.

"Do you prefer a man like Welf-sama, Liz-sama?"

After keeping silent while walking beside me for some time, Gilles started up a conversation.

"Well, I do love Father, but in terms of preference..... Mmm"

"Then, what sort of guy do you like?"

"Is it necessary for me to say it?"

"Very much so"

"Y-You're very pushy today, Gilles..... What type I like, huh?"

There's nothing I can do when I hear him say such things. It was just like Gilles. Although he looked like he was only being slightly attentive, I dare say he looked unusually serious as though he was trying to pry something out of me.

For a moment, my imagination jumped to an impossible conclusion, but

there's no way it's 'that', so I dismissed it from my mind. I am a child and I'm only ten years old. Gilles has also stated that he has no interest in little girls.

"..... Well, the main points would be that he must be faithful and affectionate with me Of course, he should be someone I can rely on"

"That you can rely on..... ? "

"Ah, but it won't be one-sided. Rather, I wish for him to rely on me too. It'll be nice to have someone who I can lean on to support one another. And also, someone who can be frank with me when I'm in the wrong"

It's not like I want to act spoiled towards those that I don't approve of, but on the other hand, I also tend to behave spoiled towards those that I trust. It would be nice to have someone who can accept me for who I am. I want to love and be loved; I want to rely on others and be relied upon. It would be nice to have a companion that is supportive, someone that can develop a mutual understanding.

"Lastly, it'll be nice if he can best Father..... Father seems to strongly object any mention of marriage"

"..... That.....was more than I had imagined"

"If necessary, I'll fight or flee the country. That is why I do not like people who're captivated by my social standing. I would like a person who loves me even if I do not have wealth or fame"

"Is this selfish of me?", I looked up at Gilles. He shook his head and stopped in his tracks. Caught up in the moment, I also stopped and found myself next to him. Suddenly, Gilles propped his hand against my cheeks while smiling tenderly.

It was a very passionate look that was filled with affection.

"If you do not find such a person, I will take you away"

His gentle, moist emerald eyes held only me in its reflections. Only, he wasn't gazing at me directly with dimmed eyes.

My back trembled. What I felt wasn't hatred, it was something unexplainable. Looking into his crystal clear eyes nearly made me forget to breathe.

It was obviously an expression and look that he shouldn't have towards a child.

That can't be

, an alarm rang in my head. I felt that this situation was drifting away from the reality that I held in my heart.

..... No, that can't be it. This was surely nothing more than excessive reverence.

"..... If that's the case, my future will be secure either way"

My heart was beating so fast that it hurts. I wondered if Gilles could feel my heightened heart rate through my cheeks.

I pretended to seem calm as I didn't want him to notice that I was disturbed. I just wished that Gilles couldn't notice my burning cheeks.

"Therefore, it's alright even if you marry late, Liz-sama"

"..... I'll make an effort so that doesn't happen"

Leaving it at that, I turned away from Gilles and walked away.

It might have been short, but I held my hand against my flat chest anyway. It was impossible — even for me — to consider that my heart was beating faster earlier..... No, this was all because of Gilles's suggestive actions. I was just surprised, that's all.

Gilles isn't into little girls. Even if he loves me, it's only with a deep affection of reverence. There's no way his intentions would be filled with lust. After all, we've been together for a long time, and his attitude towards me has hardly changed.

Telling myself that it wasn't so, I held onto that sense of reality, driving away those excessive thoughts as I shook my head and held my cheeks.

My fever had yet to cool down.

TLC Note:

1. Those who disturb the love of others will be kicked by a horse – Japanese saying.

Chapter 47 – This is all Gilles’s Fault

"Do you have a fever, One-cha?"

"..... Huh?"

Ruby asked, noticing the small and muffled noise that had escaped from my throat.

Worried, Ruby stared intently at me and stretched out his hand. “Are you alright?” He asked as he leaned over and felt my cheeks, rubbing them all over with his tiny hands. As I gradually closed my eyes from the permeating chill, Ruby anxiously cried “One-cha” once more.

..... Ruby misunderstood, my face was just red from embarrassment because I was troubled over Gilles’s behavior yesterday.

Whenever I recalled the scene, my body would grow hot again. This is hopeless, it is all due to Gilles’s suggestive behavior.

That

yesterday was surely just a form of lip service.

I mean, I’m still a child and it’s not like I have a bombastic body that men are into; it’s an underdeveloped body. If I was a guy, I wouldn’t choose a child who wasn’t charming like me, I would choose an older woman with more sex appeal. A bewitching woman, someone like Elsa-san. Gilles isn’t a lolicon.

..... Urgh, no, I don’t want to think about it. I get a headache and feel dizzy when I ruminate over it. Anyways, no. Just no. Gilles attends to me with the reverence and affection a servant has for their master. Yup, if it isn’t so, it would be — in many ways — troublesome.

"One-cha, your face is red~ You have a fever~"

"I-I’m fine, it’ll cool down once I’ve washed my face"

Not good, my face feels hot and I can’t think straight. Let’s just calm down for now. If I’m flustered, Ruby will continue to worry, and if I meet Gilles, I’ll

definitely be a mess. I'm avoiding him right now, but I'm highly likely to bump into him before noon. Before that happens, I have got to calm down.

Before heading into the bathroom, I stroked Ruby's head and soothed him seeing as how he seemed worried with his drooping eyebrows. It's Gilles's fault that I'm walking sluggishly. It's also his fault that I kind of have a headache from worrying about such things.

Haa~

My sigh spilled out after how awfully feverish I was feeling. Considering the mental state I was in, my feeling this way was simply inevitable.

Worried when she saw me walking unsteadily with my hand against the wall, Maria began to call upon the other maids and butlers to assist me. Still, I had no intentions of explaining the situation to her, so I politely turned her down and walked on by myself.

..... By and by, my fever should settle down, yet why is my face so hot?

"..... Liz-sama?"

Quickly settle down

! I slapped my cheeks as the voice of the culprit came soaring from behind me. I bet my back was probably shaking magnificently.

Calm down! Gilles had no ulterior motives yesterday. It was just lip service, lip service.

"I heard from Maria that you're not feeling too well....."

His voice steadily drew closer. By the time I realized it, he was already near me. The fact that I didn't turn away from him had quite a bit to do with my pride.

I chewed on my lips while desperately rousing my foggy brain. I can't let him know that I'm overwhelmed or let it show on my face.

"Liz-sama Liz-sama?"

A single look was all it took for me to stagger back, losing all strength in my

legs. Oh why, why am I so pathetic?

"..... Liz-sama, pardon me"

"..... Eh"

Staggering, he supported my body that had lurched forward and embraced it. As I stiffened, Gilles gently placed the palm of his hand over my eyes, covering them.

Confused that my vision went black, I was about to raise a question..... when I felt faint traces of magic emitting from his palm.

My mind was immediately teetering between consciousness and unconsciousness. Having been put under this spell before, I yielded to it and embraced the drowsiness.

"It seems you have the flu"

Gilles readily declared it when I came to.

"It must have been because you've tired yourself out from the recent matters involving the previous master. Weren't you feeling sick since this morning?"

Well, my physical condition was poor, but that was because I was troubled by the odd things you said. Did my condition worsen because I was troubled? Or did my thoughts clutter from worry because my condition was bad?

Whichever it was, it's fine. It's a fact that I was worried about the matter with Gilles.

There was none of yesterday's suggestiveness from the person himself; he gave me a concerned look and placed his hand on my forehead. Using magic, a slight chill spread across his palm. I closed my eyes from the chilliness and made a sound in my throat.

..... I thought so, the honeyed words yesterday were just my imagination. Look, Gilles is the same as always, attending to me like he normally does.

There was no need for me to be flustered by it or be in a daze.

"At any rate, please get a good rest today"

"..... Ye~s"

If I had understood that sooner, I wouldn't have been perplexed by his actions beforehand to which whilst feeling the sensation left by his hand, I responded with a dull answer. Yup, Gilles has no interest in little girls. What happened yesterday was simply reverence.

"However, I have a feeling I've caused you to misunderstand something"

As I was feeling relieved, Gilles softly grumbled while lightly fiddling with the ring that hung from a chain around his neck — our matching magic tools.

..... Hmm? Wasn't this a magic tool for communication?

"Liz-sama, you're not in top shape, are you?"

"Ye—Yes?"

"Your guard is down and your thoughts are leaking out"

Huh?

As I gasped, Gilles brought his face closer to mine. He stuck his forehead against mine to measure my fever. Since I was lying down, others would see his posture as one where he was kissing me .

Approached at a close range, Gilles's charming smile was different from usual. His lips that formed an arc shape were gentle but weirdly beautiful to the point that I instinctively forgot to breathe.

Medicine

, he laughed during which his breath traced against my skin because he was too close to me. If anything, I couldn't see that seemingly androgynous beauty as anything but a man at close range.

"..... You still have a fever. Get a good rest"

Weak to his allure, Gilles took my breath away. He switched over to a gentle smile and leisurely traced my cheek with his finger. His emerald eyes filled with affection warmly gazed at me .

"Good night, sweet dreams"

Gilles whispered in a sweet tender voice, a voice I'm sure others had never

heard from him before, and quietly pulled away from my forehead.

The moment I exhaled after being overstimulated, unable to respond to the intimacy, I felt Gilles's lips on the tip of my nose.

Chuu.

It was a soft feeling that lasted for just a moment, but I felt Gilles's lips.

"..... Gi-Gi- Gillesh, what are you doing!?"

"Is it be better on your cheeks? If you don't go to sleep quickly, I'll do it on your cheeks"

"I'll sleep right now!"

And when I abruptly lifted the sheets covering my body up to my face and turned away, Gilles made a pleased and stifled sound from his throat before moving off of me.

Once again, good night

, he called out in a gentle tone, but I ignored him with all my might because of that nose seizing event. Gilles made his usual faint stifled laugh and left the room.

.....It's *that*

, Gilles meant it as an act of deep affection. Look, even I kiss Ruby and Father on the cheeks. That, earlier, was just an extension of it. If I don't regard it as such, I will feel like my head is going to explode again.

..... Gilles doesn't carry feelings like that. I mean, I'm ten, Gilles is eighteen! There's an eight year gap. As far as Gilles is concerned, I'm just a shorty. He can't possibly have sentimental feelings for me.

"..... It's all your fault"

It's absolutely Gilles's fault that my fever rose again and I can't fall back to sleep. If my fever doesn't go down when tomorrow comes, I'll blame it on Gilles. If I hadn't deliberated Gilles's superfluous actions, I wouldn't be so impatient and depressed, and my heart wouldn't be beating this fast. Gilles's suggestive behavior was at fault.

Gilles, you idiot!

"Good morning, are you feeling better?"

The next day, it was simply disappointing when I met Gilles. He was smiling at me like usual, his usual manner of smiling gently. It made me look foolish for putting my guard up so soon. It wasn't an alluring or provocative smile, it was just the usual, familiar smile.

"..... My fever has gone down so I feel better now"

"Is that so? That's a relief"

And whose fault was it that I had a fever?

The words nearly flew out of my mouth, but I managed to put a lid on it. It's not good to vent out my anger. Besides, it'll be like I'd dug my own grave.

I am trying to stay calm as much as possible while dealing with it, but whenever he draws a little closer, my heart starts beating oddly fast. His face from yesterday and the day before flickered in my mind. Why did you show such an expression to a child?

"Please be mindful of everything next time. Your physical condition, and me"

"..... Eh?"

"Since you purposely decided to act dumb, Liz-sama, you were tempting me to do it"

Gilles stroked the ring that hung on his chain, a faint coquettish smile surfaced his pale lips as he gently caressed my cheek with his other hand. Having seen that I had retreated a step back, he laughed amusingly with narrowed eyes.

..... Right now, I'm in control of myself, so he shouldn't be able to divulge the voice in my heart. Even yesterday, I had unfastened the ring after that so he shouldn't have known.

"Oh well, I don't mind you acting like that for now"

I don't know what he was going on about, but for some strange reason, there

was an unusual feeling running down my spine. I trembled. What can this be? It's like the feeling of nervousness from being ensnared by the enemy, but it's not like Gilles is the enemy, yet.....

Feeling something indescribable from the image of Gilles smiling gently, I was unable to detach my stiff body from him.

Chapter 48 – As a Master & Servant

..... It's been about a month since I felt that awkward feeling towards Gilles. Since then, Gilles has interacted with me like how he normally would, and with none of that suspicious behavior either. Gently, calmly, and sincerely serving me.

I must have misunderstood it. If I didn't think like that, I couldn't stay calm. I'm sure I got it wrong. Gilles can't possibly be in love with an underaged child.

"Gilles"

Rarely do I hesitate to touch Gilles. I wondered if it was alright for me to cling onto him tightly like I usually do or beg him to stroke my head until he agreed.

When I drew closer to him, he greeted me with a soft, calm smile. His smile was the same as before, but that was enough to dispel the stiffness in my body as I lined up beside him.

It was the same unchanging smile, only his height has changed when I stand beside him. I thought the height difference between us would diminish as I grew older, yet Gilles who had grown taller felt like an illusion.

Even the hand that gently caressed me, the voice that called out my name, has changed.

"How may I be of assistance to you, Liz-sama?"

"It's nothing in particular, but"

"Yes?"

Gilles asked with a calm expression without pressing any further.

"..... Gilles, why do you remain by my side?"

Casually, I referred to the matter that had been troubling me.

Why does Gilles remain by my side? Even if he says I'm wilful, he doesn't dislike me. Rather, he pampers and protects me. If I remember correctly, he had

declared that he would serve me back then, but I didn't think he would go to this extent to serve me faithfully.

Wouldn't people normally hate having to pledge their loyalty to a girl eight years younger than them? Gilles is formerly a noble so he shouldn't be accustomed to serving anyone. No wait, Cecil-kun did mention that the Sévéne house serves them But let's be honest, my house and Cecil-kun's aren't on very good terms with each other. All the more reason for me to believe that he's serving me reluctantly.

"..... Can't you comprehend that it's because I wish to?"

"I would like to hear a precise reason"

"I see How about, it's because you saved my life?"

Gilles reciprocated with the most likely answer.

..... Well, I expected that the most. Without blaming him for the attempted assassination, I had silenced him further by holding him back with my own hands before it happened. In a way, I had saved his life.

..... I had expected it was due to a sense of obligation that he remained by my side, and it was a little, how should I put it depressing, like no way! That was just how egotistical I was.

So if the debt is paid off, would Gilles leave me?

"Liz-sama, what I had said earlier was my initial reason. Now, it's different"

When he noticed how slightly disheartened I was, he gave a soft, wry smile and gently brushed my hair. As he did, Gilles took the opportunity to comb it, untying my hair and letting it flow freely.

..... I had a hunch that this was one of Gilles' means of currying favor with me. Certainly, I enjoy this the most.

"Whilst attending to you, I came to regard it as my purpose; I want to remain by your side. Ignoring the debt that I owe you, I wish to serve you, Liz-sama"

"..... Why?"

"Even if you ask me why If I may speak boldly, it's because I find you

fascinating?"

"Shall I get Mother to cure your eyes?"

"Then, let me rephrase myself. It's because Liz-sama is extremely dangerous"

Flatly declaring it, I was hit by those irritating words.

Why did rephrasing the word 'fascinating' became 'dangerous'? No, it's the truth though. Compared to 'fascinating', which can be a compliment, 'dangerous' was the correct term.

"It's because you're not very self-aware which, in many ways, makes you dangerous, Liz-sama. It makes me yearn to protect you"

"..... Am I that dangerous?"

"Of course. You were kidnapped and almost killed, zeroed in by a pervert and dueled with him,

and

you got into a dispute with the son of that hostile Steinbert family and ***again*** came out covered in wounds"

"**Sorry!**"

When he said that, it hurt deeply. I couldn't deny any of it, those were certainly dangerous incidents I was involved in. B–But the kidnapping had nothing to do with me, the duel was a matter of course, and to begin with, I was not aware of Cecil-kun's parentage and the fact was

I

caused his sorcery to run wild.

Urgh

. I lightly groaned while my shoulders began to sag. When I looked up at Gilles, he chuckled and seemed to be laughing enjoyably. It's not like it was anything shocking and worth scolding him for, but his expression was mixed.

"Well, even that isn't the precise reason why I'm by your side. Considering I am a mercenary"

"You are?"

"Yes. I've always been a selfish man. Much more than you can imagine, Liz-sama"

..... I felt Gilles thought too lowly of himself. Gilles is kind and values his master..... Though the question is whether I am a good master. However, if Gilles were to say that he'll resign, I would cry from overwhelming shock, or rather I would certainly cry.

"In any case, it is my personal intention to remain by Liz-sama's side and my desire to protect you. Am I not allowed to do so?"

"..... You won't leave me?"

"I don't understand why you would think I'll leave, I'll always remain by your side"

"..... Even if I were to get married?"

Gilles didn't give me an immediate reply as his eyebrows lowered at that. I brushed his confused head gently and said, "there, there".

I felt unquestionably dissatisfied being treated like a child, but I'm okay with it now. On the contrary, I felt nervous when Gilles treated me like a woman and perplexed. Therefore, I'm glad that I'm a child right now, I can act like a spoilt kid and touch Gilles without hesitation.

"..... Even if you were to be married, I will remain by your side"

As I did as I liked with my palm, Gilles slowly spoke the words. I had a feeling his eyebrows drooped just a little more.

When I blinked my eyes, he was back to his usual smile, so I thought it was just my imagination..... Though somehow, Gilles's smile seemed sad.

"As long as you desire, forever"

Gilles smoothly combed my hair, displaying a gentle, soothing smile as I kept silent.

Arc 6: 12 Years Old

Chapter 49 – My Birthday and An Advise

"On this auspicious day, congratulations on your birthday, Lizbeth-jou"

"Thank you"

Towards the countless numbers of troublesome greetings, I went out and received them with my brightest smile and the most humble expression I could muster.

Technically, because of my overprotective servant and Father, I hardly had any social presence, but nevertheless, I still have to socialize at times. After all, as a noble, it was important to form ties with various parties and I was no exception.

Twelve is also the age when I have to come out into society. Therefore, a birthday party was organised, though I wouldn't go as far as to call it an official debut.

Many nobles had zeroed in on me when I was at His Highness's birthday party and many of the guests tonight were those who yearned for an easy life by marrying me and becoming a marquis. To be frank, they were annoying.

It seems that the calm smile I showed, that was becoming of my age, was to the liking of the noble boy who had come to greet me. Our ages weren't particularly different Although it could be said that he almost appeared to be an adult, there wasn't much of an age gap in reality. He was probably the same age as His Highness.

I was fairly positive he was the son of a count. I believe Lord Huernia brought him along?

He came towards me with a smile. Come now, I know that's a calculative smile. I have one too.

"Lizbeth-jou, you turn twelve today, don't you? You seem very calm for your

age."

"Do I? Thank for your compliment. My father would have a word with me if I hadn't yet learnt that much."

The reason probably lies in my habit of sneaking out. With Gilles to accompany me, I would head out to the Magic Institution or discretely travel to the castle town. And then, I would buy sweets and enjoy myself..... Er, I mean, I was learning about social matters. I wasn't playing around, really I wasn't.

I do obediently read and admire the flowers at home like a young lady would but if Gilles were to see my wrongdoing, I would run.

When I lightly laughed while taking care to maintain my elegance, the count's son thought it was a joke and laughed, seemingly pleased. Sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not as ladylike as you imagine me to be.

Although the count's son displayed a refreshing smile that matched mine, his eyes were gazing at me as though he was searching for something.

Of course, I didn't find his gaze pleasant. After all, I knew where his focus was. Mainly my face and around my breasts.

My face..... well, I'm aware that my features are genetically inherited from both my parents, and to begin with, children are mostly cute. It's a child's compensation.

..... I wish he wouldn't look at my chest so much though. It's very uncomfortable.

Thanks to the tightly fastened corset that squeezed together as much of my flesh as it possibly could, my breasts seemed well-developed for a twelve year old. It subtly made it seem like I had cleavage.

My dress, a pretty décolleté design, was lovely, but I felt it was still too early for me to wear it. No, forget about that! I want to quickly remove this corset!

As I couldn't quite say "Don't stare at it" in front of a guest, I could only show an elegant smile while sighing in my heart. We really didn't need to host a

birthday party. I mean, Gilles isn't here.

The servant that was always by my side was just not attending to me today. He was at a slight distance, watching over me. Even though he was smiling, he gazed intensely at the count's son. Since only I would get the meaning of it, well I wonder if that's okay?

"Speaking of which, I heard that you're close with His Highness, Julis?"

"His Highness is..... That's right. If I may be so bold, I am graced with the privilege of being intimate with him"

When my eyes and lips formed a faint courteous smile, the people around us became slightly noisy. I'm sure they must have been listening closely. They seemed surprised when I affirmed my relationship with His Highness.

"I am unworthy of such a magnificent friend"

As it seemed like my earlier words would cause an outrageous misunderstanding, I smiled and continued my speech. There are limits to being overly familiar as a friend with the son of the man who rules our country, but His Majesty, the king, and His Highness, the prince, both had said they were fine with it. So please excuse me.

At my humble but firm assertion, the public was reassured. Both genders sighed because there were many women who wished, if circumstances permitted, to marry His Highness. In this country, polygamy was permitted.

On the other hand, it seems the men were relieved that I was still available. Well, from their point of view, I was a profitable object mainly because I am the daughter of the marquis that serves as His Majesty's confidant. However, I wouldn't say it to their faces that I would never yield to people who held such expectations.

"In that case, Lizbeth-jou, if I may—"

"Liz, so you were here"

A familiar voice interrupted the count's son.

That was unbelievably nice timing, I almost blurted out loud.

"Ah, Cecil-kun! You came"

"Wasn't it you who invited me?"

Cecil-kun, who had just arrived, responded bluntly.

Tucked into his formal attire, Cecil-kun looked considerably mature. In particular, his hairstyle. Combed to the back with a portion of his bangs sticking out, it made him feel more grownup than usual.

Cecil-kun, too, was admiring my appearance..... Yeah, right. His face stiffened and this time, he turned to look at the count's son. The count's son once again looked at me with a pursuing gaze, and once again, Gilles' eyes slipped.

Because it happened in an instant, I couldn't tell what both of them had planned, but it seemed like they had come to an agreement through eye contact. Gilles's smile became seemingly cold and Cecil-kun seemed rather troubled.

"There is something I'd like to speak to you about. My apologies, Gustaf-dono. I'll be borrowing her for a bit"

"Ye, yes"

Even for a moment, he had no reason to oppose the words of Cecil-kun who was the son of a Duke.

The count's son must have been quite surprised though, judging by how he responded. After all, it was well known that my house and Cecil-kun's were not on good terms with each other. So he was alarmed that we were close.

Cecil-kun's request was favourable, or rather, it was what I was hoping for. I'm grateful that Cecil-kun had sensed the mood.

"You are too defenseless"

Those were the first words he said to me after he brought me to the terrace.

"You should have been able to handle it properly"

"I was just about to take care of it"

"Then you should have refused him quickly. Because of you, Gilles glared at me"

"Ah, I knew you were spurred on by Gilles!"

"If I wasn't, did you think I would have purposely done this?"

Well, Cecil-kun never liked to stand out and he wasn't very eager to address me, the guest of honor, either. The fact that he even showed up today was surprising. I thought he wasn't going to come at all.

I wonder if it was because Gilles couldn't intervene directly that he had asked for Cecil-kun's assistance? It was just like Cecil-kun to find it a real nuisance.

However, I had a feeling that there was something fishy about the way Cecil-kun and Gilles were conspiring right now. To be exact, it seemed like Gilles was treating Cecil-kun nicely. Normally, he treated him the other way around even if that was based on his original opinion of him.

"Gilles is too overprotective, isn't he....."

"The person who'd have been finished if he hadn't been overprotective would have been you"

"Really? Hah~ But I'm grateful that you saved me today. I was uncomfortable with how he looked at me"

As it wasn't necessary for me to keep up appearances in front of Cecil-kun, I shrugged my shoulders and spoke my mind freely. Removed from the hustle and bustle of the saloon, there was only the calm atmosphere of the night that filled the vicinity of the terrace. That was why I could pour out my true feelings.

It doesn't show on my face, but I dislike people ogling my body. I am undoubtedly paying for the consequences today, but even so, if I dislike it, I dislike it.

If they were looking at me as a love interest, I wouldn't be bothered by it and would just leave them be. However, it's inexcusable if the gazes were filled with desire. It's not like I'm fastidious, I have my reasons. Even so, I find it unpleasant when a part of my body is being stared at by people who don't get it.

"..... Didn't that also happen because you're dressed like that?"

"It's not like I chose to wear this. Though, I don't mind if you choose to stare at it though, Cecil-kun"

"You've got a problem"

"Do I?"

I didn't mean that Cecil-kun was the type to look me up and down instead, he's the kind that would look away. Though I did look all grown up, Cecil-kun was the innocent sort.

Instead, when I glanced at him, I felt slightly ashamed of myself. In the first place, we knew each other when I was flat-chested and we've even hugged.

"Then, why are you clinging onto me? I can more or less understand if you have feelings for me"

"Stop! If he finds out, your servant is going to have a word with me after this!"

".....I was just kidding. Isn't it great that you don't have to listen to what Gilles has to say after this?"

I felt Gilles was quite relentless with Cecil-kun, or more precisely, with everyone else. Essentially, he shouldn't have acted that way.

..... I'm grateful that he was worried for me, but he shouldn't have intimidated Cecil-kun. I'll have to have a word with Gilles about this afterwards without fail.

Cecil-kun looked at me and sighed.

"..... Frankly speaking, you should've notice it by now. Naturally, he has no intentions of letting you pull away from him"

"..... Huh?"

"This may sound strange coming from me, but his attitude as a servant is inappropriate. He's excessively mingling his personal feelings with work. Welf is also at fault for not saying anything about it"

Well, my behaviour is also at fault too

, Cecil-kun added with a slightly worn out expression.

Gilles was..... acting inappropriate as a servant? For mixing his personal feelings with work? Was that bad?

"..... Because you don't see what's so wrong with it, it's better that you hear it from me. That guy is too obsessed with you, and it is beyond the role of a

servant"

"..... Gilles is ?"

"I'm saying this as your friend. Until you're an adult, such behavior should not be permitted"

His words were blunt but the tone of his voice wasn't cold. Instead, it was filled with sympathy.

..... When I become an adult, Gilles can't freely touch me. It's excusable right now because I'm still a child.

With the master-servant relationship that me and Gilles have, it is peculiar that we touch each other intimately. I realized that when he voiced it out.

"..... Look, I don't mean to reprimand you. I'm just giving you advice"

"..... Mm"

"Hey, don't cry. Dear God, it's like I'm the bad guy..... All of this is Gilles's fault. You definitely have to tell him to draw the line"

Cecil-kun stroked, or rather, disturbed my neatly arranged hair. I thought it was horrible of him to treat me, the star of the party, in such a manner, but even so, I felt comforted by it.

I laughed a little at Cecil-kun's clumsy method to console me and gazed in the direction of the saloon. Even without me, the saloon seemed lively and cheerful.

"..... If it's fine that I'm not even around, I wish I could escape to a place that no one knows of"

"Oi, you're the main star of the party!"

"I'm kidding. Besides, I haven't heard you congratulate me yet"

"Right, that's my bad. Happy birthday, Liz"

Cecil-kun brushed his hair back and replied with an unusually gentle expression on his face.

Even though he appeared to be curt and unsociable, Cecil-kun's really just a good-natured person. At least, to the extent where he was worried for me?

.....

Also, would it be better if I changed the way I treat Gilles

? And whilst I thought of that, both Cecil-kun and I returned to the saloon.
That reminds me, His Highness isn't here.

Chapter 50 – Consultation

After that, Cecil-kun left me and went off to say something to Gilles. I don't know what was said, but he definitely said something notable to him. It was probably the same thing he said to me.

I don't know if that was the cause of it, but Gilles started being slightly more reserved around me. It wasn't as though he was avoiding me, but for a while, he was hesitant to touch me.

It's not that he was wrong. As a master and servant, this was the appropriate approach.

"But it's also a fact that I didn't disagree with it!"

I asserted disgruntledly by slapping the table hard. Caldina-san gave a pleasant laugh as she rescued her cup and saucer from my wrath.

On top of the table was a cup for my own personal use, but its contents had spilled out due to my slap. The black tea was not at fault. I was just going through a rough time so I didn't care for it.

"Well, Liz-chan, I understand your sentiments, but he was a noble"

As Caldina-san took a sip from her black tea, I kept silent.

..... I am fully aware of that. Rather, I've always found it a bit peculiar. Comforted whenever he spoils me, I kept coming back and continued to rely on him all this time even though I shouldn't.

But honestly, I still want to be spoiled by him, and I want him to remain by my side.

"I know you really like Gilles-kun; however, it's important for you to know by now what is right and wrong"

"..... Be that as it may, is it wrong for Gilles to love me?"

"If you think about it logically"

Not finding the taste of the tea palatable, Caldina-san gave a matured response as she was adding sugar to it. Instead of treating it like it was someone else's problem, it felt like she was giving me a clear explanation.

By the way, Gilles isn't here. I insisted that we were having a girly talk and dismissed him. He probably won't be at Cecil-kun's place, right?

..... It's not like I'm seeking an ally, but unlike Caldina-san, I'm unable to come to a resolution. More like, it's impossible for me.

Gilles has been by my side since I was a kid, having shared my joy and sadness. He occasionally scolds me, but also pampers and protects me.

Perhaps I'm at fault, but I feel that I'm reliant on him. The result of being so close to him is that I've come to depend on him.

Seeing my downcast face, Caldina-san placed the cup on the table and stuck out her elbows on the table. Claspng her hands together with her chin resting against them, her expression was of astonishment, as though she was looking at me wondering, "How pathetic".

"In a way, you're cruel, Liz-chan"

"..... Cruel?"

"Gilles is Gilles, and you are you"

Caldina-san lamented while looking me straight in the eyes. As Caldina-san was the type of person who poked at the crux of the matter by making a mess out of it, I was slightly afraid of her.

"Liz-chan, do you like Gilles-kun?"

"Well, I do like him but..."

"If it's not as a love interest, then there's a huge difference. On the contrary, I pity him"

After which, Caldina-san added "Well, if you do see him as a love interest, then it's even more imperative that you distance yourself from him. You're a noble afterall" and shrugged her shoulders. I couldn't help but ponder over Caldina-san's words in my heart.

..... Am I in love with Gilles?

I'm not sure about that? He is important to me and I do find him attractive. When he's by my side, I feel relief.

I'm not sure if that means I like him as a love interest, though. The feeling I have for him is different from His Highness. I can't really put a name to it. It's like a sense of security, trust, and other feelings mixed in.

"..... I don't know. I'm not sure"

"I'm not reproaching you at all~ Just logically speaking, I think it's better if you maintain your distance when you're outside. There are loose men out there that have prostitutes and mistresses even if they are an aristocrat. Moreso, those that fool around secretly with commoners"

"It wouldn't be good if it was discovered"

, Caldina-san bluntly concluded. Her face was slightly stiff, but I'm sure she was — in her own way — making an effort to get me to understand.

Whether I was or wasn't in love with him, I couldn't tell..... I wonder what Gilles thinks of me. If I judge him solely by his actions, then there's a chance that he's quite in love with me.

"Oh, that reminds me, Liz-chan. It'll be better if you don't pop by the castle for a while"

"Eh?"

As I was deliberating hard on this, Caldina-san suddenly remembered something and voiced that out. I looked up at her, trying to surmise something from her eyes, but she showed an emotionless smile as she stared back at me.

"I'm saying this for your own good, Liz-chan. You can call it advice from an elder"

"..... I can't come over?"

"Mm~ It's not that you can't, but for your sake, you shouldn't. It's better if you remain at home"

She refused me with eyes filled with worry. Even if it was just slightly, her

smile warped to one filled with concern.

"Well, Cecil-kun said the same thing too..... But there's nothing he can do"

Confused, I looked at her when she dropped the words, "Good grief", but She didn't respond after that. All she did was stare back at me with eyes that seemed to say it was pointless.

"Anyway, just quietly stay at home for a while, okay?"

"Gilles....."

When I exited the room after being silently coerced into confining myself by the tone of her voice, I saw Gilles standing there in the distance.

My slight insecurities must have shown on my face as Gilles came over, examining me with worry. His gaze was one filled with concern for his master. There was nothing else beyond that sentiment that I could see.

..... Does Gilles love me? Even if that was true, I'm not sure how I should best approach it. I don't want to be apart from him, but I'll be baffled if he lays bare his heart to me.

"Did Caldina-san say something?"

"No..... It's just me being a child and..."

Being scolded for not conducting myself as a young lady from a Marquis household and being taught a lesson made me feel just a bit overwhelmed. At times like this, being a noble is tiresome..... I also have my social position to be aware of.

Thoughts of my actions for simply wanting to remain by his side will be pardonable as a child was blown apart by the hard facts thrust upon me. It's sad.

"I don't want to grow up"

"..... There are some people who feel that way, but when the time comes, they'll get over it"

"I know"

This is why, I feel so insecure.

Chapter 51 – Omen

"Liz, you absolutely must not leave the house"

One day, whilst I was still quietly fretting away, Father suddenly told me that.

Once again, I was given a curfew. Nowadays, I was quite free to go wherever I wanted..... Well, with Gilles of course, but the point was that I could go out.

For a split second, I wondered if I had done something wrong and had to control my fears. There was a serious expression on Father's face, so I knew right away that it wasn't done for a perfunctory reason. Even Caldina-san had said it when I visited the castle.

"..... Can you give me one good reason why?"

"Because there's danger"

If I were to ask who would be in danger, he would most likely say me. Well, I once was in danger of being assassinated, so he's not going to let it happen again. Which reminds me, I absolutely will never come to a resolution with Abbot Georg and the likes.

.... Still, it's too early to jump to a conclusion before I have all the facts. If that was the case, Father would have blocked the news from me like always or made him incapable of doing anything to me to begin with.

"Gilles, take care of Liz whilst I'm gone"

"Certainly"

It wasn't the expression of a father but that of the head of the family. Seeing through the stern and dignified look on Father's face, Gilles respectfully bowed to him.

In that still calmness, the air was filled with tension coming from both men.

Father had entrusted me to Gilles. I knew very well that he trusted Gilles, even if there was a time when Gilles tried to kill me. It was obvious to everyone that Gilles would never do such a thing to me like that ever again.

With a very grave expression, Father gazed at me and Gilles. He brushed the top of my head, seemingly reluctant to part with me before exiting the room.

..... What's wrong, Father? What aren't you telling me?

"..... Gilles, do you know what Father is up to?"

"He's only left for work"

"..... That is most definitely not his usual work"

That was not a carefree expression he had on. If I had to phrase it better, it was a determined look. He wouldn't be this worked up if it was his usual work.

What was Father thinking about and what was he up to?

Even as I clung onto Gilles and asked him, Gilles still wouldn't give me an answer. Did Father put a gag on him? Or was he not allowed to divulge confidential matters? I reckon it has to do with both.

"..... Are you not going to tell me no matter what?"

"My sincerest apologies"

"..... In that case, I'll leave it be"

Nothing would happen even if I complained to Gilles. He would just keep his mouth shut even more. I bet Father doesn't want me to get too worked up by it. That decision was made so that I wouldn't get involved.

You might say that I'm wilful, and that worries both Father and Gilles. I'm guessing he really is busy. Therefore, this was set in place so that I wouldn't cause trouble for the both of them.

"..... Gilles, you'll be by my side, won't you?"

"Yes. I will protect you and won't leave you for even a single moment"

"That's worrying though, if you're going to be there all the time"

Right now, I get that I'm in some kind of danger. Father..... what are you anticipating? Does it have something to do with me?

Three days had passed since Father left the house. Father had yet to return home.

Even though that often happens with him, why am I feeling so nervous? Is it because he could be in some sort of danger?

"Liz-sama, you have a visitor"

"..... I do?"

"It's Cecil-sama"

Gilles brought a boy over as I obediently stayed in my room.

I stared in amazement at the sight of my friend who would never pay me a visit willingly no matter how much I begged of him. However, it was not a social call judging by his appearance.

"What's the matter? You look so worn out"

"It's not like I chose to look this haggard"

There were cuts on the cloth of the Magic Institution robe Cecil-kun was wearing. Traces of it being torn up by something sharp were visible here and there. I had a feeling that this was the aftermath of an attack from his exhausted state.

In comparison, Cecil-kun wasn't wounded. Rather Cecil-kun seemed slightly reassured after seeing that I wasn't injured. Was Cecil-kun worried about me too? I had a hunch that perhaps this somehow involves me even though only I have been left in the dark.

"..... I'm glad that you're safe. This must mean you haven't gone outside. That's a good decision"

"..... Is something going on outside?"

"Haven't you heard about it from Welf or that guy?"

Whilst he smoothed out his dishevelled hair, Cecil-kun shifted his eyes to Gilles as he waited by the side. Up till this very moment, Gilles, who had led Cecil-kun over, had been maintaining an expressionless look towards Cecil-kun. However, as though he was indicating to Cecil-kun not to tell me any more beyond this, he shook his head.

Gilles would never let it slip from his lips. However, there was nothing to

restrain Cecil-kun from speaking, so I began to press him about the situation.

"..... Cecil-kun, what's going on outside?"

"Liz-sama!"

"Looks you haven't heard. Perhaps he was forbidden to talk about it with you. Doesn't he consider that you won't be at ease if everyone keeps their mouth shut?"

Cecil-kun countered Gilles's silence with a chilly voice.

Personally, I am in complete agreement with Cecil-kun, but I understand their fears, and it's not in Cecil-kun's place to spill the story to me.

I might be overstepping my boundaries, but if I may be permitted, I wish to hear nothing, except about Father's circumstances. Although I'm concerned about my own situation, I'm more worried about Father.

"..... Liz, how old will His Highness Julis be this year?"

"..... If I'm not mistaken, he is fifteen this year No, he'll be fifteen this year?"

I noticed something unusual after Cecil-kun uttered it. That's weird since it's him, I would have thought His Highness would have summoned me to his birthday party using whatever means possible. However, he hadn't summoned me at all.

That's why I completely forgot about it..... There's only a month's gap between our birthdays. If I extended an invitation to His Highness to my birthday, he was bound to show up for it in the past.

Nevertheless, it was odd that he didn't get in touch with me even if he wasn't coming. To begin with, it also wasn't unusual to throw a grandiose debutante, as fifteen was the age of adulthood. It's strange, I wasn't aware of it at all. I had invited His Highness to my birthday too, but he never showed up. Something's awfully wrong.

"Right now, His Highness Julis is in danger of an assassination"

"What! Assassination.....!?"

"That's the reason he hasn't held his birthday celebration or coming of age ceremony yet. Though the official stance is that he was in poor health, since it's been a month already, they decided to hold his coming of age ceremony right now. However....."

"..... He was attacked?"

I was unable to utter a single word when Cecil-kun confirmed it gravely with the word, "Correct."

..... I wasn't aware that such a thing had happened. Was it the right call, not informing me?

"The reason you were kept at home is most likely because you're being targeted too"

"..... Me?"

"You seem to be close friends with His Highness. They could hold you hostage or kill you if you're a hindrance. The scope this has expanded to makes this no longer just an assassination, but a rebellion"

"Is that why Father....."

Was it because he's been settling the uproar from the assassination, and suppressing the rebellion that he didn't return home?

Father's allegiance is to His Majesty. He is His Majesty's friend, and also the Magic Institution's No. 2.

Therefore, it's no surprise that he's in charge of rounding them up. Rather, it's reasonable that the duty would fall to him. An uprising..... That means it's only natural that lives would be at stake.

"—Is Father alright!?"

"He's in good health! To begin with, he was the one who told me to run off to you. He even told me to use a purposefully concealed passage to get outside. Also, His Majesty the King, His Highness, and the Queen are safe too"

I placed my hand on my chest, feeling a little bit relieved that Cecil-kun conveyed that Father was safe. If Father had died, I.....

While I felt glad as he mentioned that both His Highness, and His and Her Majesties were safe..... There were all sorts of questions and anxieties that rose from it.

Why are they rebelling?

"..... Who is rebelling?"

"..... Is it alright for me to say it?"

He was not checking with me but Gilles. Gilles had a gloomy expression. He chewed on his lips..... But eventually, he slowly moved and nodded his head.

Having verified with him, Cecil-kun turned to look me directly in the eye. His golden eyes seemed to dart apologetically.

"..... Spearheading the rebellion is both my old man and Gilles's former house"

Grip

I heard the sound of his hands clenching tightly.

"Although I'm saying that, this has caused our household to split in halves, with my grandfather leading the anti-monarchy faction, and my father with his "don't rock the boat" faction. My father had immediately gone up to the king saying, 'That is my old man's decision. He's not fit to be the head of the family' and directly appealed to take over as the head, publicly labelling his old man as a traitor. However even if Father sides with the State, it's not even reflected in his eyes and it's a bother for all of us as we're getting dragged into it"

As far as Cecil-kun was concerned, it was his family that enforced the rebellion. I'm sure it must have been difficult for him to endure the extreme pressure and gazes from everyone. In addition, Cecil-kun maintains an aloof attitude even at the Magic Institution. Since no one knows what's on his mind, people must have also assumed that Cecil-kun may be a member of the rebel army.

"The Sévéne's are Grandfather's yes-men. Additionally, those who can't stand the king have participated as well."

"..... How many?"

"Those that have been oppressed. However, even if this is messed up, it's the head of the Magic Institution that's leading it, so it's been giving Welf troubles as well"

Although Cecil-kun was very unhappy, he hurriedly patted my shoulder when he noticed my stiff expression.

"I can't say for sure that everything will be alright, but your father is strong. He won't fall to my rotten grandfather so easily"

"Yeah....."

To comfort me, Cecil-kun patted me on the back. At times like these, Cecil-kun was kind..... He was trying to cheer me up.

Gilles, who had remained silent, came to my side too and held my hand. He crouched down and looked at me. With that usual tender smile upon his face, he whispered "Let's believe in Welf-sama."

Father, Gilles, and Cecil-kun..... All of them were worried for me. I was the only one living peacefully. If Cecil-kun wasn't here, I probably wouldn't have known that there was a rebellion.

Only I..... didn't know about it. Not a single thing. Even if I had been informed, there was nothing I could do. I know I'll end up being a hindrance..... But even so, it's frustrating that there's nothing I can do.

All I can do is pray that they'll return safely.

Worried, both the boys rubbed my back as I chewed on my lips. I'm not crying..... I am simply anxious and frustrated.

Please..... be safe. Father, Your Highness.

Chapter 52 – A sneak attack under the cover of the night

And so, an unusual event occurred the night I took Cecil-kun in.

Under the pretext as my 'guest', I sheltered Cecil-kun in my house. In actuality, it was to protect him. Well, we did loan him the guest room. Oh, Ruby was also incredibly overwhelmed and got emotionally attached to Cecil-kun. Cecil-kun's perplexed look was so adorable that I took note of it.

It was then that the unusual event happened. A figure that I was clearly acquainted with visited me after I had tucked myself in and fallen asleep.

As I was still in the light sleep phase, I woke up when I felt someone touch and then shake me. I didn't fall asleep easily that night because I was worried about Father.

"..... Nngh"

The soft texture of the bed that should have been on my back vanished. In its place, I felt two solid

things

holding my back. It felt as though someone's hands were holding me. Feeling that sensation, I opened my heavy eyelids absentmindedly.

In my room, the only light I had came from a lamp on the side table. Even so, it was sufficient to light up the dark surroundings around my bed. I left it on when I slept, so it was slightly dazzling when I woke up.

I rubbed my eyelids with the back of my palm, and when I tried to ascertain what the feeling behind my back was..... I realized that there was a sharp metal placed at the nape of my neck. I had experienced this before, but I had believed that this would never happen again.

"Don't make a noise. If you do, I'll kill you"

And so, as I feared, that very predictable line reached my ears.

Instantly, I understood that something that was to be expected occurred. Perhaps it was because I was thinking about Father's situation before I slept.

As for what, it was the likelihood that I would be taken as a hostage.

Based on what I heard from Cecil-kun, the rebel army was at a disadvantage. No matter how much the head of the Magic Institution instigated, there weren't many that participated in the rebellion. Obviously, no one who harbored any dissatisfaction towards the current situation would partake in such schemes.

The way I see it, for His Majesty to be called a benevolent king isn't out of place as he was upfront about his political measures and absorbed in the reformation of the country. The castle attendants were also well treated. The political measures that were set in stone were in consideration of the commoners.

Even if there were issues with other countries, he didn't stop treating them amicably, and there were hardly any countries he was ostensibly hostile towards. Our country was truly a peaceful country.

Those who harbored animosity towards His Majesty were the people amongst the nobles, the privileged upper class who strongly discriminated against others. They were the ones that monopolized resources when war broke out and sought to profit from it. If they were victorious, they would obtain everything and their business would boom. But to the extent of consuming their own country?

Honestly, if they wanted a war, they could just go about it single-handedly.

As I stayed silent without kicking up a fuss, the man who came to abduct me bound my wrists. Well, there was a knife by my neck, so it would be a

pain in the neck

to resist. If my carotid artery was sliced, I wouldn't be able to easily heal it.

I casually looked up at the man and felt that I had seen his face somewhere before..... Immediately, I felt shivers up my spine.....

He had a bandana covering his mouth, but I had previously seen him before.

In fact, it was a face that I thought I would never have to see again. Though it was supposedly hidden, I saw his lips curl into a smug smile.

"It's been a while, Lizbeth-jou"

"..... So you're participating in the rebellion as well"

The expression on the once-defeated son of Earl Emmenthal slackened. Although he didn't respond, his change in expression alone was enough to confirm it.

Of course, he had his reasons for joining the rebel army. After the duel with me, his household fell into ruin.

The duel was partly to blame. However, it was due to his recklessness in spending money in the first place.

From this, he lost a duel — as the heir of the family — to a little girl, and furthermore, with the sudden scandal of his collusion with the kidnapping organization..... Well, it was the start of the road to ruin. I dare say he deserved half of it, but it was pointless to even say that to him. It would just stir him into a frenzy.

"How did you manage to sneak into my room? There were guards"

"There's a shortage of them, and besides, I have an associate outside"

Father, who had left to quell the rebellion, had taken a number of patrol units with him. Those men were extremely talented people, proficient in both swordsmanship and magic.

But that had dire consequences.

"..... My apologies, but I'll be taking you as my hostage. As long as you don't resist, I won't take your life. Though..... there are other lives that I can take"

I felt a terrible chill. No! That's sickening. I could imagine what would happen if I leave, making me feel all the more disgusted.

Although he claimed that I was a hostage, it didn't necessarily mean I had to be taken in unharmed. Even if I was in a poor state, it would still be acceptable. However, if I'm taken by this man, he would rid me of my arms and limbs.

As I trembled in disgust from the places where he was touching me, the earl's son lowered the bandana covering his mouth and slithered his tongue up the nape of my neck. His sticky saliva, his hot stuffy breath, his tongue swiping against my skin — all of it was revolting.

Instinctively, I was against it. It was not that I was feeling apathetic or that I loathed him, what I was most disgusted and uncomfortable with was the feeling of my skin being traced. If he didn't have a knife in his hand, I would have frozen him with all of my sorcery, but it would be dangerous if I put up a fight right now, so I didn't do anything.

No! This is gross! Save me, Father, Gil!

"Haha Like I thought, without your magic, you're just an ordinary girl"

Was he was holding a grudge against me, or was he was simply obsessed with me? Most likely it was both.

The earl's son had a satisfied smirk on his face as my body trembled continuously. He carried me over his shoulder and placed his foot on the opened window sill.

My room was on the second floor, so the height wouldn't be a problem for him if he used wind sorcery to cushion the jump. This looked like it was his entry point when he intruded. There were two people outside, almost indistinguishable in the dark.

Currently, he didn't have a knife at the base of my neck, so if I was going to resist, it had to be now.

"..... Hey, don't resist. Unless you want something to happen to your brother"

"Wh-"

"I grabbed him earlier. Look!"

Looking closely, on the shoulder of the man hidden under the covers of the night was a small child with flaming red hair.

It wasn't just me alone, they took Ruby too..... certainly as another hostage. It wouldn't be effective towards Father if they didn't make this move.

"..... Don't do anything to Ruby"

"I'll think about it if you come with us obediently"

With a broad grin mixed with a sense of superiority and lust for conquest, the earl's son spoke as he fondled my butt. He was a repulsive man, but I couldn't afford to resist him. If I went against him, then Ruby would...

"— Liz-sama!"

"Oops, looks like the troublemaker has arrived!"

With my eyes tightly closed, a familiar voice reached my ears. Nonetheless, the impatience packed to the hilt of his voice was laid bare; just hearing it was enough to induce my tears.

Still bound on his shoulder, I tried as much as possible to twist my body to look around. Gilles was standing in front of the exit while breathing heavily and glaring at the earl's son. He was in his night robes, but there were cuts and burn marks on the fabric. They must have attacked him to try and detain him. His rough breathing must have been the result of the ambush.

"Release Liz-sama"

"I can't do that. Uh-oh! If you strike me with sorcery, I'll use her as a shield. Is that how you want to play this out?"

As he held onto me over his shoulders with one hand, the earl's son thrust his knife to the nape of my neck. Gilles' expression froze. Only his eyes narrowed with a murderous impulse gleaming from within.

"I also have her brother outside. Do you understand what will happen if you interfere?"

..... "That's underhanded", I muttered under my breath.

If you say such things, Gilles would definitely not be able to interfere. He loathes it when I'm injured. If my life was at risk, he would try to avoid that from happening.

Ah, you see! Just blood trickling out was enough to make him bite his lips. Hatred was dwelling in his eyes as he scowled at the earl's son. I knew nothing could be done, so it was not Gilles' fault, and yet.....

"..... Now then, since you understand what will happen if you interfere, you

will let me go. I'll be taking your precious ojou-sama along with me"

Putting on airs, the earl's son's lips curled into a vulgar smile.

Gilles became expressionless. That look on his face was something beyond fury. If the earl's son didn't have a hostage, Gilles would have torn this man apart. I had forgotten to remove my ring before I went to bed, so I felt Gilles' dark emotions being transmitted through it.

Confident that he wouldn't lay a hand on him, the corners of the earl's son's lips lifted as he snorted. After which, he jumped out of the window with me in his arms.

Personally, his wind sorcery wasn't accurately executed, but it was fine since it was only from the second floor. Although the earl's son's posture was broken as he landed, he rushed over to his associate.

Sleeping... no, unconscious over his associate's shoulder was Ruby. The anger deep inside me flared; my magical powers welled up as well, but I frantically suppressed them..... Now wasn't the time. My chances of winning had yet to be determined.

'..... Gilles, I'll be waiting for you. I'll hold on as best as I can'

Pulled into the enveloping darkness, I placed my thoughts into the ring.

Chapter 53 – Resisting and Strategizing in My Own Way

Author's Note: Please be aware that there are questionable sexual descriptions included in this chapter.

Although I may be a hostage, frankly, there was a possibility that I may have been brought along to be the earl's son's plaything. Seriously, please don't let me be turned into a prostitute!

In a sense, it was as I feared. I was taken by the earl's son and thrown into one of the rooms in the Magic Institution. Perhaps the rebel army was crowded around here.

As my hands were tied behind my back, I landed on my shoulders when he tossed me onto a bed. I couldn't resist his rough treatment, and as they were now during a rebellion, it wasn't necessary for him to handle me with care.

A perverted smile formed on the earl's son's lips at the groan I let slip due to the momentum and the firmness of the mattress I was thrown onto. My disgust rose to the surface, my body shaking from his nauseating smile.

"Now then, it's time to indulge"

This fucking lolicon, I cursed.

I won't fall into despair, not as long as I stay strong. Until an opportunity arises or help comes, I won't complain. I'll bear with whatever he does to me.

"... I have several questions though."

"Hmm? Such as?"

The earl's son was in a very good mood, with our roles as the strong and the weak being reversed today. I might be able to buy some time... Given that I had informed Gilles of my location through the ring, it was worth the effort if help arrives.

But as this was their base, there was also a risk. I had feelings of guilt for

guiding Gilles to a perilous place like this.

"Where is Ruby?"

Nonetheless, that was really all I wanted to know. Separated from him, I wondered where Ruby was. Was he alright? That boy was still a child, so there's nothing he could do. I ought to have protected him.

"

By this time, your brother should have been brought to the Abbot's location. He'll serve as a deterrence to the assault there

"

"

...Then shouldn't you have brought me over there too?

"

I nearly clicked my tongue, but I held it in. Even if they were confining him somewhere, it wouldn't be so easy to retrieve him if he'd been brought under the supervision of the person with the highest war potential.

I thought of having Gilles rescue Ruby first and for me to escape later, but that strategy had been ruined. If this was the case, my next course of action and countermeasures would have to be revised.

"Before I do, I'll be taking your virginity"

The earl's son's smile revealed his sadistic spirit as I took care not to expose my thoughts. His gaze that seemed to be eyeing me all over was enough to make me feel uncomfortable; it was as though his greasy hands were caressing my entire body.

The bed creaked when he got on top of me.

Putting up a slight resistance, I kicked with my legs as my body sunk into the mattress. The evasive move was trivial; I still couldn't escape him. I knew that the earl's son's lust to conquer me was stirred.

Ching

The ornaments that hung on the chain around my neck made a sound when

they chafed against each other. A ring that was part of a set with Gilles', and beside it, a small silver disk..... I'm not sure if it'll do any good if I use them though.

Correction, that's if I were able to go over to Ruby's side and arrive uninjured under Abbot Georg's supervision. Right now, my wits and strength won't be of any help to me.

His hands, driven by his sexual intent, traced my loins and groped my developing breasts. I had been kidnapped in my sleepwear, therefore I was only clad in a thin negligee. My body's sense of self-protection was of no use in front of this man.

Although my body stiffened from the repugnance and discomfort welling in me, I forced it down and stared at the earl's son head-on. Honestly, I felt scared and revolted, but I got over it.

"

Don't touch me. I'll execute my plan if you keep this up

"

"Heh, so what? You're going to resist me?"

"If you defile my body, I'll commit suicide"

When I raised my eyes to stare directly at him, the earl's son's eyes turned round although his lips curled up happily. He was certain that he was still in absolute control of the situation.

"

You were originally told to bring me over to Abbot Georg, weren't you? With those instructions, you judged that you had time to carry this out with me.

"

"

Not like it matters. You're a hostage. So long as your life is not forfeit, everything's rosy.

"

"

You need to keep the hostage alive, don't you? In the event that I commit suicide, you'll be responsible.

"

"

Are you threatening me? However, you're not actually going to do it. Those are nothing but empty words to shake me.

"

"That may be so. Then, what if I do this?"

The present me was powerless, but that didn't mean I couldn't retaliate...

I aimed with my freed legs, using as much force as possible as I kicked him in '*that*' area.

It was impossible to describe that horrible feeling. The earl's son couldn't even utter a single word in response.

As the earl's son leaned forward, fainting from agony, I promptly struck at the earl's son's body with all my might and tumbled off the bed. I landed on the floor on my back, but I didn't mind it the slightest. I then proceeded to cut the cloth that bound my hands together with wind sorcery.

These next few minutes would be a race against time and fate. How much could I take away from this advantageous situation? Arguably, it was a good thing that the earl's son lost consciousness, but he wouldn't remain in that state for long.

I grabbed the knife on the table beside the bed and made shallow cuts into the chest on my negligee. While I was at it, I made a few slits in my skirt.

After that, I prepared for the worst and cut into my lower arm with the knife.

The feeling of a sharp blade cutting into my skin was very painful. My blood started to flow, trickling out continuously. Whether it was the fact that it was my first time brandishing a lethal weapon to injure the flesh of a person or that it was my own body that I was cutting into, I couldn't laugh at all.

In order to pretend that I had been cut, I adjusted the angle of my knife before making several incisions. It was painful, but if it was just to this degree, I would be able to heal it afterward without leaving any scars, so I tolerated it.

If this would help me overcome those painful memories, I would gladly choose to be wounded.

My upper arms, thighs, collar area, and after that, without damaging the carotid artery, the nape of my neck. I quickly etched a red line over easily visible locations.

I endured the tears that welled up from the excruciating pain, dropped the knife dripping with blood on the floorboards beside the bed, and shifted to a more visible location. The preparations were done. Everything else from here on will depend on luck.

"What was that scream earlier!"

As soon as I had finished setting up the scene, the door burst open and a man and a woman came rushing into the room. Obviously, they were people from the rebel army.

Having estimated when they would break into the room, I started running towards the entrance. Their reactions were fast and moved closer to grab ahold of my shoulders to stop me.

I slipped away from their grasp by a hair's breadth and, between the two of them, clung onto the female magician with all my strength.

"Eh? Wai—"

The female magician raised her voice as she was baffled beyond her expectations. The man beside her was astounded as well.

Pretending that I hadn't noticed their reactions, I clung to the woman's body as mine trembled continuously. Large drops of tears from the pain coupled with my fearful voice spilled out.

"Uhuk, hu I, I was so scared, Onee-sa....."

With choked sobs stuck in my throat, I held tightly to the woman. My eyes

overflowed with tears whilst my body couldn't stop shivering.

Actually, I was frightened, repulsed, and disgusted. Just remembering what happened had me actually well up in tears.

Seeing my body shaking, the woman discerned that something had happened and examined my state. She took a fleeting glance and continued to hug me, giving a sidelong look to the man. When the man saw it, he too understood the encounter I had and, turned with a sharp glare towards the bed where the earl's son had fainted in agony.

The fact that the earl's son was holding onto his crotch was sufficient for him to guess what had gone down. There was a bit of compassion in his eyes.

"

Earl, why did you bring the hostage here? You're supposed to bring this girl before the Abbot. Moreover, she's wounded.....!

"

Even if he had cleared out everyone before, the people in the vicinity should have an inkling of what had just transpired, judging by how he raised his voice at the earl's son. Interlaced was his feelings of guilt at the sense of the abnormal circumstances that played out before him.

This was what I had gambled upon, although I wasn't sure if it would pay off. It was heading in a direction much better than what I had anticipated.

Although it was an uprising, it didn't mean that all the members were bad people. The people participating were those that disagreed with their situation. Not all of them were people who were fond of committing inhuman acts.

Among them were those that loathed wounding others more than necessary.

I was waiting for those people. I knew that there would be people barging in. My gamble was on whom. A woman coming along was a pleasant miscalculation.

"— Ugh, he..... assaulted me..... I refused so... "

"

— I didn't do it! She injured herself with the knife!

"

The earl's son grimaced in anger and pain as he raised his voice. When he did, I acted scared and squeezed tighter against the woman.

Now then, between a scantily-clad, frightened, and crying child versus a kidnapper that was once suspected to be a lolicon in the eyes of the public, whom would they believe? Well, the answer was clear, wasn't it.....

The female magician sympathized with me. As I sniffled, her eyes glared at the earl's son. To begin with, it didn't seem like she trusted him

"

He told me to keep quiet if I didn't want... Ruby to be killed ...

"

That wasn't a lie. It was just a broader interpretation of what he had said.

A girl who can't do anything as her brother was taken hostage — giving off such an impression was deliberate. After all, everyone knew my aptitude for magic after the uproar from the duel. Both of them would never have thought that I didn't struggle or do something about it.

"It's alright, he won't lay a hand on you anymore"

A frail, powerless girl frightened because of an attempted rape by the earl's son.

I had succeeded in planting that image. Both of them shared the same sentiments. It was likely against their conscience for a child to be wounded to begin with. I'm thankful that it was these two that responded.

The woman whispered, "It's going to be fine" soothingly as she gently rubbed my back. I continued clinging to her while shedding tears. The insides of my nose were numbingly hot.

The crying was just a bit of an act I put on, but honestly... I was scared. These were real tears of relief that I had protected my chastity.

..... Now then, this was where the main act began. I can't just wait and hope

to be saved, I would also have to rely on doing my very best.