THE LAZY SWORDMASTER

BOOK 02

Green Car

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

The Lazy Swordmaster

(나태한 소드마스터)

by

Green Car

(초록차)

Synopsis

I finally managed to kill the demon lord. Can't I rest a bit now? Just leave me alone. Let me rest.

A hero from a modern world is reincarnated in a new world. He just wants to lead a peaceful new life, but his troubles begin when his family begin choosing their new successor.

Meanwhile, new enemies are rising from the shadows...

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Chapter 101 - I'll Come Back (2)

“Now, Nainiae! You can’t leave before you try at least a bite of each of these food! I can’t let you go!”

“This one, try this one first, Nainiae!”

“Nainiae! This is the dish I do best! How does it taste? Is it all right? I think today’s dish turned out especially well.”

“Hey, if Nainiae knew how much it costs for the ingredients, should would be shocked.”

Riley, who casually came to the front of the kitchen, peeked a smile without realizing after hearing the loud noises coming from inside.

“... Unlike what I expected...”

Riley was not thinking the surprise party was going to be this big. With his arms crossed, Riley leaned on the corridor’s wall.

“They are giving her a grand party.”

Actually, it had not been long since Nainiae started to stay in Iphalleta mansion.

It was accurate to say her time here was short.

Despite that, having heard that Nainiae was leaving, many of the servants in the mansion were responding with grand gestures. All these meant that Nainiae was a great person.

'Ms. Nainiae's color is white.'

Basilisks could see people through the colors of people's aura.

Riley thought about what Nara, the last of Basilisks, said. Next to Riley,

"... Looks like we will be heading out the next day morning."

Andal came next to Riley and also leaned on the wall.

"Well, it looks like Nainiae is happy, so I don't want to go get in their way... It's not like her condition will worsen in just a few hours either."

Just like Riley, Andal was also leaning against the wall with his arms crossed. Smiling leisurely, Andal said the above. Having heard what Andal said, Riley, with a little weary eyes, asked Andal,

"What's with you all of sudden? Only a moment ago, you were anxious and said you want her to come with you soon."

"I have a big heart. I only wish for my pupil's happiness."

“Oh my, really?”

Andal was already putting on the role of the teacher. Finding it to be ludicrous, Riley clicked his tongue and then turned his gaze toward Nainiae who looked happy in the kitchen.

“It’s delicious, isn’t it? How is it, Nainiae? It’s good, right?”

“Yes… It’s so delicious.”

“Ugh? Nainiae, are you crying again?”

“Did you use too much of spicy sauce?”

“No, Ms. Willa! I even tasted it myself to check it.”

“No, that’s not why. I’m just so happy… and it is so delicious, so that’s why…”

All this time, Nainiae’s heart was burdened with the thought of wanting to die. Now, she have laid it down and shouted out her true wish, that she desperately wanted to live.

Riley watched Nainiae being truly happy while being surrounded by the people. Riley was able to confirm that Nainiae was definitely walking on a different path from his own from his past life.

‘… It’s good now.’

Riley, without realizing, had a satisfied smile on his face.

Riley suddenly thought about a possibility.

‘How would I have looked if I could smile like that in my past?’

Riley thought that.

“Riley.”

“Um?”

“… No, it’s nothing.”

Andal, who was vacantly staring at Riley, called Riley, smiled and shook his head.

“What is it all of sudden? You are acting like a human being?”

“How should I put it, I’m slowly starting to understand the existence called human beings? I just thought that.”

“You crazy runt…”

Andal was boasting about himself. Riley, finding it to be foolish, stared at him with a look. He heard steps coming closer from the kitchen, so Riley turned his head.

“… Young Master, Young Master!”

It was Nainiae.

“What?”

Perhaps she used her right eye. As soon as she got out of the kitchen, she found Riley leaning on the corridor’s wall. She had gleaming eyes, turned her head to the side and asked,

“Young Master, does this… look good on me?”

As she waited for Riley's response, Nainiae showed him the ribbon on the back of her head and explained that it was a gift from Sera.

“… Not bad?”

Riley was not able to tell what changed, so he avoided her gaze and roughly answered.

“Really? Then, what about this one?”

Not just the ribbon that Sera gave her, but Nainiae was wearing various gifts that other servants gave her. She was showing Riley all of them as she asked if they looked good on her again.

“Well, it looks pretty good.”

“How about this one?”

“Not bad.”

“Then, then, how about this one?”

Looking at Nainiae, who was asking the same question over and over, Riley wiggled his eyebrows. Before she could ask the same question again, Riley complimented her by saying,

“Ah, they all look good on you, so that’s enough.”

“… Okay.”

Before she realized, Riley’s voice was elevated. Having realized this late, Nainiae knew now that she was just scolded. However… she had a blissful smile on her face.

*

It was early morning before the sunrise.

At the entrance of the mansion, Andal was waiting outside.

“You packed everything you need, right?”

“Yes.”

“Take care… No, you have to get well, okay?”

“Yes.”

“You have to come back, all right? You promised, got it?”

“… Yes.”

Nainiae hugged with all servants. Before leaving the mansion, she went to stand in front of Riley and Iris.

“Well then…”

Next to them were Ian and Sera who were serving them.

To Ian and Sera, Nainiae bid farewell with her gaze. With a bright voice, she said,

“… I’ll get going now.”

And her eyes met with Iris.

“Nainiae, will you be able to contact us?”

“… About that…”

Having heard the question, Nainiae casually glanced at Andal, who was waiting outside, and responded, all disappointed,

“I think that might be difficult.”

Having heard her response, Iris also had a disappointed look on her face.

“In that case, something like… that mask?”

“A mask?”

Perhaps she was worried. Iris thought about the mask that was broken last time and asked about it. Nainiae slowly shook her head.

“No, it’s all right. It’s all right now.”

Looking right at Iris’ eyes, Nainiae answered with pride. Iris still

looked disappointed. Having noticed this, Nainiae slowly approached her.

“Lady Iris.”

With her arms open wide, Nainiae walked toward Iris. Iris also opened her arms and tightly hugged Nainiae.

“…”

“…”

Along with the hug, the two fell to silence.

Nainiae spoke first.

“I’m sorry.”

Nainiae was sorry for not looking at Iris’ eyes when she woke up at the bed yesterday. Also, Nainiae was thankful to Iris for waking her up by holding her hand when she was having a nightmare, giving Nainiae a gift before she went to Rainfield, and many other things that Iris have given her. Her apology contained her gratitude.

“… It’s all right. You are a family.”

Having heard Nainiae's apology, Iris, who was holding her tight, brushed Nainaie's head and continued in gentle voice,

"I think of you like my daughter. I'll always be waiting for your return."

Nainiae, who was happy to be held in Iris' bosoms, nodded and said,

"... Lady Iris, I also think of you like my mother."

Nainiae, who sincerely thought so from her heart, released herself from Iris' hug, took steps back, smiled big and said,

"So, you don't need to have that look on your face."

The beautiful smile on Nainiae's face showed how much she have grown in just a day.

"... Young Master."

Now, Nainiae stood before Riley. The pain was starting to come again. Nainiae was trying to open and close her hands. At that moment,

"All right."

Riley lifted his hand, placed the palm on top of Nainiae's head, and said,

"Have you found the answer?"

Although it was just Riley's hand on her head, the pain, which was about to peek its head out, disappeared like a ghost.

"..."

Because of Riley's hand on her head, because of Riley's question, Nainiae pulled her chin and was blushing. Eventually, she faced Riley's gaze and said with pride,

"Not yet."

Although she didn't find the answer yet, the expression on her face looked like she accomplished a lot.

"So, this time, I'm going to go and try to find the answer on my own."

"Well then, see you later."

Riley said leisurely as he retrieved his hand from Nainaie's head. Nainiae took steps back as she said goodbyes to everyone at the mansion who were looking at her.

“… I’ll come back.”

She felt light in her heart.

She was smiling.

Like that, she made promise to everyone that she will come back. Nainiae joined Andal who was waiting outside.

“Oh? You are here?”

“Yes.”

Instead of the maid dress, Nainiae was now wearing a regular dress. Perhaps she was feeling awkward about it. She walked toward Andal as she fiddled with the tip of the skirt. Nainiae asked,

“So, where are we going now?”

‘Is it going to be the bar at the Iffa town? The cave underneath? Or another place?’

She didn’t know where they were going, but Nainiae had her heart prepared.

It was so she could return to the people she loved.

“You…”

Before Andal cast teleport, Nainiae prepared the carriage so that the people at the mansion would not find it suspicious. Nainiae heard Andal’s voice and turned her head toward him to look. He said,

“… from today and on, you are my pupil.”

“…?”

With his arms crossed, he was watching Nainiae preparing the carriage. Nainaie’s face had a question mark floating up after she heard the word ‘pupil’ from Andal.

“Pardon?”

‘Pupil? I thought I was going with him to be treated for my illness? That wasn’t it?’

Nainiae, with confused look, asked back.

Andal twisted the tip of his lips and said,

“Say it after me. Teache… No, call me Master.”

Andal looked like he was really looking forward to this like a

child for some reason. Having noticed this, Nainiae vacantly opened her mouth.

“…”

“I said follow after me. Call me Master.”

The look on Andal’s face was about to turn violent. Although Nainiae was not sure what it was for, she decided to go along with it. She carefully mumbled,

“M… Master?”

“Um! Good! It’s got a great ring too it! Hahaha!”

It seemed that Andal remembered what Riley thought him wrong on purpose. Toward Nainiae, Andal flipped the middle finger and started to laugh in joy, not realizing that it was an insult.

“Ah, hahaha…”

Nainaie smiled awkwardly. She started to drive the carriage as she looked back.

“…”

The scenery of the mansion was gradually getting further.

She was already starting to miss it. She steadily gazed on the scenery. With a blank look on her face, she mumbled what she said to the people earlier.

“… I’ll come back.”

She mumbled as she remembered that one day, she will return to them.

Sera, who was like her real sister…

Ian, who was like her grandfather…

Iris, who was like her mother…

And… Riley…

She thought about the day in the future when she will be reunited with them again.

“One day, again.”

Inside the moving carriage, Andal used the teleportation magic. The carriage, which started its way from the mansion… was engulfed in light and disappeared without a trace.

*

It was at the border between Solia and Ansyrium.

“So, from today and on, we are at a cease-fire?”

“Yes, that’s right. Further collision between forces may cause Rainfield to intervene, so... Even though they love making a huge mass, they will be a little careful.”

On a field that smelled like dirt, inside a tent, men each wearing armors with different insignias were gathered there. They were in middle of a meeting.

They were all nobilities who had their names widely known from their exploits in war or swordsmanship.

“Anyway, even though we are entering the cease-fire, we should not let our guard down.”

“Of course, Prince.”

There was someone besides the nobilities.

There was also Prince Daniel of Solia.

“Anyway, this is quite an irony.”

Carefully looking at the map on the desk, Prince Daniel mumbled,

“To see Ansyrium attack our border first…”

“I’m surprised too. I can’t help but to think that someone must have had a hand in it.”

“The fact that our border is being attacked is a problem on itself, but the bigger problem is ‘that mercenary’ who participated in the last battle.”

That mercenary…

It was the mercenary who was said to be accumulating exploits rivaling that of the mercenary hero.

“To think that he will interfere in this war… It we didn’t have Count Stein, we probably would have lost the last battle.”

It was a brief conflict. It didn’t even last a month.

“The rumors. His monstrous strength was true.”

The mercenary entered the battle since the middle of the conflict. Standing on Ansyrium’s side, the mercenary appeared by himself in middle of the battlefield. Literally, he displayed his monstrous

strength and disappeared only after he flipped the flow of the battle at an instant.

The fact that Solia almost lost this battle because of that mercenary was… It was still making the nobilities of Solia to feel the chill.

“He’s just a mercenary that acts for money… If we had Astroa…”

“…”

One of the nobilities mentioned the name of a criminal. Prince Daniel narrowed his eyes and glared at that nobleman as if he was daring him to speak the name again.

“M… My apologies, Prince. That was a mistake.”

The nobleman immediately apologized. However, Daniel didn’t change the look in his eyes. He corrected the nobleman and said,

“… You shouldn’t look down on mercenaries. Everyone gathered here take this opportunity to keep that in mind.”

Daniel coldly advised everyone. He asked the secretary who was on standby behind him.

“How’s Stein?”

"…"

The secretary, who had a desperate look on the face, barely answered the question.

"He doesn't appear to be… No… He is not in a good condition."

The secretary corrected the sentence in the middle and said that Stein was definitely not in a good condition. Daniel, as if he was trying to tell the secretary to say it clearly, turned his head and glared at the secretary.

"What do you mean?"

"That is… In order to reattach the 'right arm that was thrown off' back to the original form, we need to retrieve the arm, but because that mercenary's monstrous strength was so incredible… We thoroughly searched the area, but we couldn't find the Count's arm."

"So?"

"I don't think… we will be able to reattach it."

"…"

Udududuk.

Daniel ground his teeth and ordered the secretary.

“That mercenary…”

Prince Daniel’s eyes filled with murderous intent.

All noblemen on the table held their breath.

“… Send out a royal decree against the Kabal Mercenary group. Tell them Solia will bestow a medal of honor for the one that will bring that mercenary’s head.”

Chapter 102 - It's About Time

Late summer passed and early autumn came.

A few days after Nainiae left, the people in the mansion calmed down a bit. Lloyd, who was walking on the corridor by himself, had a serious look on his face.

‘Get a grip, Lloyd. That lass is going to die anyway.’

A few days ago…

Lloyd’s older brother, just watched Nainiae coughing blood on the corridor. The look on Ryan’s face couldn’t be crueler. Lloyd was thinking about that moment.

‘Was that right?’

That day, Lloyd thought he should save the maid. Lloyd was agonizing over if he was really wrong that day.

‘If our father was here… Our father would have definitely…’

Lloyd’s father…

Count Stein Fin Iphelleta.

Lloyd was certain that the Count would have thought the same as Lloyd.

Iphelleta house was that kind of house.

Lloyd was certain that saving Nainiae was the right answer.

‘In that case, is it all right to think my big brother is wrong?’

That day, Ryan slapped Lloyd’s face and told him to just watch and let the girl die. Thinking about Ryan’s voice, Lloyd’s face crumpled.

‘No. My big brother always makes the right choices… He could not be wrong. His choice must have been the right one.’

Lloyd grew up always chasing after his big brother’s footsteps.

To Lloyd, Ryan was always right, and Ryan was always cool, magnificent.

From a perspective, to Lloyd, Ryan was more of a father to him than Stein, Lloyd’s real father. Thinking about Ryan, Lloyd bit his lips as he thought that his own conclusion was correct.

‘It’s for the sake of our mother.’

It was for his mother, who was chased out of the mansion while being falsely accused of wrong doings. Lloyd thought about his mother, but then he suddenly stopped walking.

“Falsely accused of…”

‘Falsely accused?’

Lloyd was not able to finish the sentence.

He was well aware of what transpired during last spring.

“…”

Back then, he believed there must have been some misunderstanding. However… looking back at it now, he couldn’t help but to have a question mark float up.

“No, no, Lloyd! Don’t think about it!”

He was getting a headache. It was pulsating. He shook his head hard and got rid of the useless thoughts. He started to walk again.

Ryan said they should just watch and let a dying girl be.

His mother tried to make Iris eat poisoned soup.

Lloyd believed that those were not wrongdoings.

He believed that they all must had reasons.

“My brother did it for the successorship. My mother did it for us. That must be why… That must be…”

Saying them through the mouth was making Lloyd feel like the reasons were even more ridiculous. Lloyd had a displeased look on his face. He slowly turned his head and looked out the window.

‘… Riley.’

He could see the garden through the window.

Riley, the third born son of Iphelleta house, looked sleepy. He was all stretched out on the chair as he sat with guests. Lloyd’s eyes lowered all of sudden.

*

Cool breeze was blowing at the garden.

There was an Archbishop that came to visit Riley. With the man sitting in front of him, Riley kept on yawning, big enough to wonder if he was going to tear his mouth from opening it too wide. It was not certain if Riley was listening to what the man was saying at all.

“… So?”

“Ah, yes… So, now that it is fall, I’m recommending that you come to visit Solia for vacation often.”

“To Solia?”

Until recently, Rebethra had been saying things indirectly. Now, he was directly asking Riley to come to Solia.

“Because of that dragon?”

With sleepy eyes, Riley, uninterested, asked about the dragon in the prophecy.

“Pardon?”

“It looks like it. Are you asking me to come to Solia because of the dragon that Priestess mentioned?”

“Ah, no! That’s not why! No way. Ha ha!”

Again, Rebethra brought numerous expensive gifts. He handed the boxes toward Riley and smiled like a good man as he continued.

“Still, it is true that the Priestess wants to see you. Please come for a vacation and see her just once. To her, you are the only one that could be considered a friend of opposite gender.”

Rebethra said it with bitterness.

He was saying the words with a look on his face as if he was guilty about something. Riley realized the man was obviously acting. Riley pressed his back on the chair and wiggled his brows.

‘This guy’s acting is top notch. Andal would have totally fell for it.’

Andal…

He was the existence that everyone in Solia’s Holy Temple, including Rebethra, was fearing because of the Priestess’ prophecy.

Riley was not certain if the dragon in the prophecy really was Andal. Regardless, Riley was certain Rebethra was trying to get Riley to come to Solia because of the prophecy.

“… Ha ha. This is interesting.”

Riley, who had been just staring at Rebethra, started to laugh.

“… What is?’

“It’s just… I think it is so funny that the Priestess said she wants to see me.”

‘I threatened her like that last time, yet she wants to see me?’

Riley was certain that Rebethra was lying, and that was funny to him. However, that was not the only reason why Riley was laughing.

‘A dragon…’

The existence that the people of Solia Holy Temple were fearing was most certainly indulging in the master-and-pupil play right about now somewhere in an unknown mountain.

‘He even handed over the pub management to the guardian spirit. Andal sure has it easy. It must be convenient to be a dragon.’

Riley was smiling as if it meant something. Not knowing the reason behind the smile, Rebethra scratched his head and carefully said,

“I’m telling you the truth.”

“All right. I got it.”

Riley looked at the tea cup on the table, which was getting colder. He thought about the maid that left the mansion.

‘That rascal. I wonder what she is up to right about now?’

Riley wondered how it would be if Nainiae was here. He wondered if she would have used magic in secret and kept the tea warm. While Riley was thinking about it, he heard steps from the back. It sounded urgent. Riley turned his head around.

“… Young Master!”

The familiar voice contained urgency just like the sound of footsteps.

“Sera?”

Having found the maid in panic, Riley tilted his head side to side and asked.

“Young Master, something terrible happened!”

“Terrible?”

Although there was Rebethra, a guest, present in the garden with Riley, she was acting like this. It meant something big did happen.

“That is… T… The Count!”

*

It was at Stein's office.

Riley sat in front of Stein as he wiggled his eyebrows, wondering what this was about.

"Count... by any chance... have you found the arm that was thrown off?"

Rebethra, who happened to be there today as a guest, looked at Stein's shoulder. It looked rather empty without an arm.

"..."

Stein shooked his head in silence as the answer. Rebethra, with a sad, disappointed look on his face, continued and said,

"It will be difficult without an arm."

"You are saying it will be impossible, right?"

"I'm sorry."

"It's all right. I already heard about it, so I was expecting that answer."

Stein told Rebethra that he doesn't have to look at the shoulder anymore as a way to tell him to take his leave. Now, facing his three sons, Stein said,

"This is what happened."

He couldn't use his arm anymore.

Stein Fin Iphelleta, the father of the three, said that. Having heard the words, each of the sons' faces changed differently.

"Who dared and did this to our father's arm..."

Ryan, the first son, crumpled his face in fury.

"Father, are you... really all right?"

Lloyd, the second son, worried with a look of disbelief on his face.

"..."

Riley, the third son, was in silence. He looked relatively calm.

"Who did it?"

Ryan, facing his father, asked who it was that did it. Stein, using

his remaining arm, brought out a rolled up paper and placed it on top of the desk.

"In the battlefield, I ran into a mercenary."

Stein talked about the mercenary drawn on the paper. Immediately, Ryan's gaze turned toward Riley.

"Are you talking about a mercenary?"

One of Riley's servants was a former mercenary. Also, the guests in the mansion now, Nara's group, were mercenaries. This was the reason.

"Enough. Do you think I came back to see my sons bickering at each other?"

"But, father… This is a sensitive issue…"

"Ryan."

With a hand gesture, Stein glared at Ryan. He called Ryan's name to suggest he should quit it.

Ryan, looking like he was giving in, lowered his head.

"… Yes."

“By any chance, do you know a mercenary who is famous for… his monstrous strength?”

Having heard the question, Riley’s eyebrows got bent out of shape.

It was because Riley knew one.

He didn’t just know one. He ran into one.

Riley was certain… that during the way back from the Rainfield…

“No, I am not sure.”

“Me neither…”

“…”

Ryan and Lloyd said they don’t know. Riley, who was in middle of organizing his thoughts, just kept his silence and looked at Stein in the eyes.

“I ran into a man named Kabal of the Kabal Mercenary group.”

Riley remembered the name. His eyebrows twitched once more.

“He is quite skilled, but I cannot say that he was skilled enough to make me lose my arm.”

Lloyd, with a confused look, opened his mouth to ask,

“Then, how did it happen?”

Stein was a swordsman who represented Solia.

‘How did my father lose his arm? How could Iphelleta’s sword be broken?’

“Strength.”

Stein answered bluntly.

“Strength…?”

“His monstrous strength was somehow abnormal. While exchanging blows with weapons, he was so strong that he caused harsh whirlwind where I could barely keep my eyes open.”

Stein explained that with each clash of weapons, there was whirlwind, and even though Stein poured mana into his attacks, each strike made his fingers, palms, arms, shoulders, and even his legs numb.

“If it was a simple one-to-one situation, I might have been able to handle it somehow, but… it was a battlefield, so it wasn’t just me in there.”

Stein explained that Kabal’s attacks were putting not just Stein, but his comrades in danger as well, and he lost his arm while trying to save them.

“… Kuk.”

Stein said that it is considered an honor since he lost his arm in the battlefield. Ryan and Lloyd, unable to face their father, dropped their heads.

‘So, if I summarize the situation, is it like this?’

Riley, who lowered his head along with his brothers, narrowed his eyes.

He figured he should ask Ian or Nara again, but… Riley was certain that the one responsible for Stein’s arm was the mercenary that Riley ran into on the way back from the Rainfield.

‘In that case, should I tell him?’

Riley was hesitant to tell Stein. In the end, he decided to set it aside for later. Riley tightened his fist and opened it.

‘… This doesn’t feel right.’

Riley decided to not tell his father about it for a reason. It was because of what Kabal said in front of Riley.

‘Right. I heard that an old friend is going to stop by at Rainfield, so I’m on my way there after finishing a job.’

On the way back from Rainfield… During that day when Riley ran into a mercenary named Kabal, who was carefully staring at Iphelleta’s insignia…

Riley thought about how Kabal said he was heading to Rainfield to see ‘an old friend.’ Riley slowly moved his gaze.

‘I came here because just happened to have a business at Rainfield, but I heard that you are here on a vacation. Please don’t misunderstand me.’

Riley looked at Rebethra, who was standing behind. Riley thought about what Rebethra said in Rainfield.

‘… So, there is something.’

They had similarities.

Riley was tying them together because of their similarities.

‘There is something.’

Moreover, there were two similarities. First one was that they both had businesses at Rainfield. The other was…

‘Are purple auras common? I’m not sure? It’s not common. So far, I have only met four of them. There was a homeless at a nameless town, the old fart we met in Rainfield who is an Archibishop, that bastard Kabal who we just saw, and… the dark mage that you put an end to last time.’

It was the ‘people with purple auras’ that Nara mentioned.

Chapter 103 - It's About Time (2)

‘Ugh…’

Riley got the puzzles together and made a conjecture.

There were two people with purple aura who were in the Rainfield around the same time.

Riley narrowed his eyes and glared at Rebethra. Before his gaze met Rebethra’s eyes, Riley lowered his eyes and organized the rest of his thoughts.

‘Fuck.’

Riley wanted to live comfortably, not like his past life, leisurely.

This was the reason why Riley didn’t make any moves on small things. However, this situation was a little different.

Last spring, Iris ate poisoned soup and coughed blood. Just like that moment… someone close to Riley was harmed. This was the reason.

‘Fool. I won’t lose them like in my past life… I was determined to that end, yet…’

Riley, who had his head lowered, was cringing.

It was because he believed that this was his fault.

‘I never expected that this would happen to my father. If I have known, I could have asked Andal to keep an eye on the man.’

Stein Fin Iphalleta…

That name was famous, and it wasn’t famous for no reason.

So, Riley never worried about his father because he believed Stein was a sword who would not break easily against anyone. Now, Riley was faulting himself for letting his guard down.

‘What should I do?’

Riley spun his eyes to look at Rebethra again. Riley looked relatively calm, but inside, he was not in a very good mood.

‘… Should I make a move?’

Rebethra was an Archbishop, the highest ranking official in Solia Holy Temple. Still, that was not going to be enough to make Riley just stand idle and suck on his thumb in fear.

‘At the moment, I can’t definitely show that this bastard and that mercenary are connected. If I do anything to the Archbishop, would I be risking butterfly effect from turning the Holy Temple

upside down?’

Despite that, carefully… Riley thought about it for the second and the third time so it won’t go wrong easily. To Riley, who was in middle of such thoughts, Stein’s voice could be heard.

“So, I think it is about time…”

Having heard the voice, Riley slightly raised his head and met Stein’s eyes.

“…”

There were complicated emotions mixed in Stein’s eyes.

Looking at his eyes, Riley felt like he knew what Stein was going to say.

“… I’m going to name the successor.”

*

“I have never thought he would return with an arm missing.”

Stein retired to the bedroom after telling his sons that they can leave now. Following after Riley who was walking toward the garden, Ian mumbled with bitter voice.

“About this man named Kabal who have thrown off the Count’s arm… I have only heard stories about this mercenary. I have never seen his face in person.”

Ian was about to tell Riley that someone like Nara would know that mercenary well. However, Riley casually turned his head around, so Ian stopped talking.

“… I met him.”

“Pardon?”

“That bastard named Kabal. I met him.”

“Y… You met him?!”

“Quiet…”

Riley blocked Ian’s mouth to tell him to be quiet. With a serious look on his face, Riley continued.

“I ran in to him on the way back from the Rainfield. Don’t tell others about this.”

Ian slowly nodded, and Riley finally lifted his hand away from Ian’s mouth.

“Still, Young Master… Just how?”

“It was a coincidence… probably.”

Riley answered in an unclear way.

It was because Riley was not sure if that was coincidence or planned.

“In that case, what are you going to do now?”

Ian immediately moved on to the next question before getting an answer.

“Count also talked about the successorship, didn’t he?”

Riley nodded and answered,

“He did.”

“Looks like a decision will need to be made.”

Riley could go after Kabal.

Riley could focus on the successorship competition instead.

He had to choose between the two.

‘Both Young Master and Lady Iris were never interested in the successorship, so… perhaps the answer is already out?’

Ian realized Riley looked a little sharper than usual after seeing his father’s arm missing. Ian fiddled with his sword’s handle and had a longing look on his face.

‘To think I already miss that child. Oh my…’

For the time being, Ian gave Nainiae his most trusted sword. Since then, Ian had been carrying a new sword on his waist, but he was not quite getting used to the handle.

“Well, for now…”

With Riley starting to talk again, Ian quickly hid the look on his face and waited for Riley to continue.

“I should focus on the successorship.”

“… Pardon?”

Having heard what Riley just said, Ian asked again as if he didn’t quite hear that correctly.

‘Perhaps I really am old now?’

While Ian was worrying about that, Riley repeated the same answer.

“I said I should focus on the successorship.”

Ian, with a look of disbelief, asked again.

“J… Just now… What did you… say?”

“Ian, finally, your ears…”

Riley showed saddened look toward Ian, and Ian shook his head big to say that he was not getting hard of hearing. Ian quickly grabbed both of Riley’s hands and raised them.

“Young Master, you made a wise choice.”

Without realizing, Ian tightened the grab as he intensely stared at Riley’s face as if he was going to burn a hole through Riley with the gaze. Ian’s eyes started to tear up.

“Revenge never ends well. Of course, I am not saying I completely forgive Kabal. What I’m saying is…”

Ian started to mumble on his own. Riley just watched him for a moment. As if he was finding Ian to be ridiculous, Riley started to flinch his eyebrows.

“Ian?”

Riley clearly said Ian’s name, but it seemed Ian didn’t hear Riley. Ian just had tears on his eyes.

“Count, Lady Iris, Nainiae… Hukhuhu… Our Young Master, Young Master is finally…”

Whenever Ian teared up from being indulged in his emotions, Ian always mumbled Stein or Iris’ name. Today, he was mentioning even Nainiae’s name. As if Riley had enough, he unhanded his hands from Ian’s grasp and lightly knocked Ian on the forehead.

“Ian, don’t go counting the chickens before they hatch.”

Along with a blunt sound, Ian pulled his head back. With his forehead reddened, Ian asked,

“What do you mean by counting chickens?”

Riley, without thinking, used what he used to say a lot in his past life. He slowly avoided his gaze and corrected himself.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself.”

Riley had three big reasons for choosing the successorship competition instead of going after the mercenary named Kabal.

‘At the moment, I have no way of knowing where he is.’

Even if Riley knew where Kabal was, it was going to be difficult for Riley to give a suitable reason to the people in the mansion as to why Riley was going to the place where that mercenary was. This was the first reason.

‘If Nainiae was here, it would be so much easier.’

If Nainiae was here, Riley could find where that mercenary named Kabal or Kabab or whatever was instantly. However… Nainiae was not here at the moment because she left with Andal so she could be cured of her illness and also get trained.

‘I have never thought I would be missing someone…’

Riley thought about Nainiae. However, he realized this was not the time to be thinking about wishing she was here. With a bitter look on his face, Riley shook his head.

‘At the moment, putting an end to the Archbishop with purple aura who might be connected to this is too risky. There is the Holy Temple behind him… It would be difficult to use the same method as how the Tess Merchant group was dealt with. I don’t have the stuff for it either.’

If the Archbishop and Kabal had nothing to do with each other, Riley had to consider the worst case scenario that could unfold from it. This was his second reason for choosing the successorship competition.

'If it is difficult to do anything to him, making a trap would be best.'

That was the third reason.

This was the biggest reason why Riley choose successorship instead of going after the mercenary who tore and thrown off his father's arm.

"... Ian."

"Yes, Young Master."

Riley, who had been thinking very hard with a sharp look on his face, suddenly turned to look at Ian. This made Ian flinch in surprise as he responded.

"Nara, that rascal, he is still in the guest room, right?"

"Are you talking about Nara?"

Having heard Riley's question, Ian thought about what Nara said

while answering that Nara was in the room.

“Yes, he said today will be his last day here. Starting tomorrow, he will be looking around quality locations in Solia for Garf… So, he said he will be looking for a place to bury his father’s remains.”

Having heard Ian’s explanation, Riley nodded. He started to walk toward the guest room as he mumbled,

“I introduced him to the person he admire. It would be all right if I asked him to do a simple quest for me, right?”

Having heard Riley, Ian tilted his head side to side.

“Did you say… a quest?”

*

It was during the late evening. At darkened garden entrance, Riley waved his hand toward Rebethra who was getting on his carriage.

“Well then, have a safe trip back.”

Along with Ian, Riley came all the way to the entrance to see off Rebethra.

“Haha. You didn’t have to come all this way… Well then, I’ll be seeing you in the Right Solia next time.”

Rebethra smiled like a good man and got on the carriage. He asked Riley that he really should come to Right Solia. After asking that favor, Rebethra’s carriage started to move.

“…”

Riley stood there vacantly for a moment and watched the back of the carriage that was going back to Solia. Riley lowered his hand and mumbled.

“… A trap… You know how to set one, right?”

It looked like Riley was talking to himself.

With a cold look on his face, Riley was looking at Rebethra’s carriage. Riley casually moved his eyes and looked at bushes in front of the mansion.

“If you don’t know how to set one, then just bite on to him and don’t let go. If there is anything suspicious, send Isen or Rorona.”

As if the bushes were responding to Riley’s voice, the bushes started to make cracking sound.

“… Yes. I clearly understood.”

It was night. Because of the darkness settling in, nothing could be seen in the bushes. There was something that was shaped like a human, and it had snake like eyes wide open in response to Riley's voice.

"As you asked..."

In the bushes, the snake eyes slowly became smaller.

To be precise, the eyes became further away from the mansion.

"A trap... Would that child be able to do it?"

The snake eyes were at a far distance from the view now. Ian, who was standing behind Riley, asked carefully.

"Ian, it is not like I have special eyes like Basilisks, but I do have eyes for people."

Riley mumbled slowly.

Because it was dark, Ian couldn't see Riley's face very well, but he could tell that the look on Riley's face was more serious than ever.

'In times like these, I wonder just how old Young Master really is.'

The glow in Riley's eyes was no different from the look on a veteran's face who survived various battlefields.

Even Ian was getting the chill.

Ian could not believe that such eyes belonged to a boy who was not even in his 20s, so Ian just kept silence.

"..."

'That's right. In the past life, there was something like this.'

Riley sent a skilled mercenary after Rebethra's trail. However, Riley was not quite relaxing his face.

It was because he experienced something similar in his past life. Riley was thinking about what happened back then.

'Back then, to avenge a comrade, did I choose to abandon a city that was in danger?'

The third reason why Riley was not going after Kabal personally and instead choose to focus on successorship...

'It's different this time.'

The story of a father, who lost an arm to a mercenary, telling his three sons about successorship competition sounded too similar to one of tragedies that Riley experienced in his past life.

‘I won’t let it have the same outcome.’

In the darkness, Riley closed and opened his hand. Once again, he thought about things that happened in past life and narrowed his eyes.

‘I’ll never let it happen.’

Riley, who was reincarnated with the memories of his past life intact, was determined.

‘I won’t live like my past life.’

Instead of working hard and being in center of people’s attention, he wanted to live comfortably. Instead of losing people who were precious to him, he wanted to live while protecting them.

He was never going to…

He was never going to live his life like his past life.

[The actual phrase used was “don’t go drinking Kimchi juice first,” as in drinking it while expecting a lavish dinner to come when it may or may not happen. It means the same as counting the chickens before they hatch. One thing to note about Korean

culture is that nobody actually drinks Kimchi juice before a big meal or think it would be a good idea.]

Chapter 104 - Successor Competition

‘I have one assignment for all of you.’

This was what Stein told his three sons two days ago.

He had never gave his sons any assignments directly like this before, so this was practically their first assignment.

‘Most of the nobilities are away from their places due to the invasion by the Ansyrium. I’m sure you all know about this well. My assignment for you is to go to estates or villages that became unstable due to their absences.’

One of the rules of the Iphelleta was being impartial.

Although Ryan and Lloyd’s mother was kicked out of the mansion, Stein added that the competition for the successorship will be carried out fairly.

“This might be good for us. Riley had been acting suspicious lately.”

Ryan mumbled with a serious face. Recently, Riley received a medal of honor from the Solia Castle. Also, with Nainiae entering the scene, Ryan was concerned he might be behind in the competition.

“It would be best if that lass died, but that runt claiming to be a Doctor from Rainfield took her, so…”

Ryan clicked his tongue as he mentioned Nainiae, the Six Circles mage that Riley brought in.

“It would be good for us if she came back as a corpse.”

Although the competition was supposed to be fair, having or not having Nainiae in the scene could be a significant problem that may decide who would become the successor.

“Anyway, I have exploits of my own that I have accomplished so far… Father wouldn’t decide the successor based on just this assignment.”

Ryan, who had been fiddling with his chin, compared his own exploits to Riley’s. Ryan looked at Lloyd and asked,

“Lloyd, what are you thinking so hard about?”

“… Pardon?”

Having heard the voice, Lloyd woke up from his useless thoughts. With somehow vacant look on his face, Lloyd answered.

“Ah, it’s nothing. It’s just…”

“You don’t need to worry so much. Father’s assignment is the kind that I’m already well versed in.”

Based on the vacant look on Lloyd’s face, Ryan thought his younger brother must be concerned about the competition. Ryan smiled and told Lloyd that he didn’t need to worry.

“Ha, haha! That’s right, right?”

In fact, the assignment that Stein gave to the sons was the kind that Ryan had been actively working on a lot before Riley received the medal of honor.

“Still, I can’t let my guard down. There must be a reason why father said he will conduct the competition ‘fairly.’”

Ryan supported his head with his hand and thought about the old butler who was looking after Riley.

“Ian will be a big obstacle.”

Ian was the former Mercenary Hero.

Now, he was Riley’s butler.

Ian was certainly going to be a big advantage to Riley in this assignment.

That was because Ian was definitely more experienced in this kind of work than Ryan.

“I… see.”

Ryan was organizing his plan in his head. Having heard Lloyd’s downed voice, Ryan looked at Lloyd and asked,

“Lloyd, is there something else you are worried about?”

“…”

“Lloyd?”

“Ah, yes?”

“You are not acting like your usual self. You are slow in responses. Tell me. What are you worried about?”

Lloyd was avoiding eye contact and had been fiddling with his fingers. Having heard his brother’s concerned voice, Lloyd carefully said,

“That is… It’s about our mother.”

Lloyd looked vacant somehow. He said while looking like that. Lloyd continued.

“Big Brother. If you win the successorship, then really… will you be bringing our mother back?”

“…?”

Having heard the question, Ryan vacantly blinked.

“Why are you asking about something so obvious? Seasons may have changed, but I still remember her face clearly… Do you think I would abandon our mother?”

“…”

“Haha. You were worried about that. I have forgotten that you are a devoted son to our mother.”

Ryan smiled refreshingly, patted Lloyd on the head, and said he didn’t need to worry.

“Big Brother, really…”

“That’s right! Trust me.”

Ryan patted Lloyd’s head to say Lloyd can trust him. Feeling his patting, Lloyd slowly lowered his gaze and fell to thoughts with a blank look on his face.

*

It was middle of autumn.

Riley headed out from the mansion. Just like how Nara was, he lie down on the top of the carriage and looked up the autumn sky.

“We are currently headed to a small village with less than 100 people living there. Just think of it as a village half the size of Iffa Village.”

“Hm.”

“The village is called Alieve. It’s surrounded by big forests... I heard there had been suspicious orc activities nearby. We are going there to stop those orcs.”

“Um.”

“Young Master, are you listening?”

Ian, who was driving the carriage, broke cold sweat and asked. Riley, as if he was listening, said in stretched out voice,

“Yes, I was listening.”

“What is the name of the village?”

“…”

Riley paused for a moment. Riley responded with a voice to act as much as possible to look like he was not fazed by it.

“… Olive.”

“…”

“It’s Olive, right?”

“No. It is Alieve… Alieve Village.”

Ian quickly corrected Riley. At a loss for words, Riley lie down vacantly.

As if he thought it was an honest mistake, he whistled and said,

“It’s just a few letters off.”

“Ugh.”

Ian sighed big enough to make the ground sink. While he was driving the carriage through the forest, he reached for a bag tied to the driver’s seat.

“Young Master. I think it would be good to eat lunch soon.”

“Already?”

“We will be arriving at the Alieve Village soon. We may not have the time to eat lunch when we get there.”

“Ugh.”

Riley was going to say ‘let’s just take it easy.’ However, Riley saw that Ian lowered his shoulder all the way down, so he spared the words as if he could not help it.

“Here. Take this.”

Ian brought out a sandwich from the bag and tossed it toward Riley sitting on the top of the carriage.

“Here.”

‘If Nainiae was here, getting the sandwich would have been easier with her dimensional storage on the leather bracelet…’

Riley snatched the sandwich from the air as he thought that.

“Did you catch it?”

Because Ian was driving, he couldn’t look back, so he asked.

“Yes, I definitely got it.”

Riley responded while cringing.

It was because the paper wrap on the sandwich was wet. It seemed the sauce inside the sandwich leaked.

‘It cannot be helped.’

He carefully opened the wrap and bit the sandwich. Feeling the taste inside his mouth, Riley cringed.

“Hey, Ian.”

“Yes, Young Master.”

Ian was driving the carriage with one hand and held a sandwich on the other hand.

“Was this seasoned correctly?”

“Pardon?”

Ian casually turned his head to look at Riley sitting on the top of the carriage. Ian nodded and said,

“It’s the same as how I usually make for you?”

“…”

Ian took another bite out of the sandwich and shrugged his shoulders as if there was no problem. Riley, who was keeping silence with an uncomfortable look on his face, said,

“… It does not taste good.”

“…”

Riley complained that the sandwich that he ate on the way back from the Rainfield, the ones that Nainiae made, were better. As if he was saying he had enough… Riley wrapped the sandwich after eating just two bites.

“… Young Master.”

“Um?”

“Ah, nothing… It’s nothing.”

From the top of the carriage, Riley looked down toward the

driver's seat. He could see Ian's shoulder was shaking a little. Riley realized he made a mistake. He cringed and said,

"Hey, Ian. I was just kidding. Your specialty is meat, isn't that right?"

"..."

"I'll wait for a meal you cook with meat, okay? Hey?"

They said an old man's heart was like reeds.

Riley felt that this old saying was very true.

It seemed Ian was pissed. Having noticed this, Riley, with an awkward look on his face, looked at the front.

'Ah, is that the place?'

It felt like the number of trees rapidly passing by the carriages was gradually declining. All of sudden, the view to the front of the carriage widened significantly.

"Ian, is that the place?"

Ian, with a pissed look on his face, looked to the front. Having heard Riley's question, Ian nodded with his lips pouting all the way

out.

“Yes, that’s the Alieve Village.”

It seemed Ian was seriously pissed. He was driving the carriage faster. The scenery of the village in the distance got close to Riley all of sudden, and before even five minutes passed, they arrived at the entrance of the village.

“… Now, we are here.”

“Ian, don’t be angry anymore. Everyone have different tastes, you know? When we go back to the mansion, let’s ask Sera. I bet she will say your sandwich taste better.”

Riley was certain that consoling this old man was going to be harder than consoling a child. So, Riley used his triumph card called Sera and patted Ian on the shoulder.

“S… Sera?”

Riley apologized to Sera inside. He smiled big and said,

“That’s right! I bet she will say yours taste better if we asked.”

The look on Ian’s face started to relax.

“Hm. Kuhum.”

No longer appearing to be angry, Ian did some fake coughs. It was at that moment.

“Uh, excuse me. By any chance…”

A middle aged man, who they have never seen before, carefully approached them.

“Ah, we are from Iphelleta House. We heard that Alieve Village needs help, so… There should have been a messenger to tell you about our arrival?”

Ian explained why he came to the village with Riley. The man was tearing up as if he thought he was saved. The man lowered his head.

“Ah! You are from the Iphelleta House! Finally… Thank you. Thank you!”

The man repeatively expressed gratitude to Riley and Ian. As if he realized he didn’t explain himself yet, the man awkwardly scratched his back and introduced himself.

“I’m Malto, the Alieve Village’s leader. Thank you again for coming.”

The man quickly grabbed on to Ian and Riley's hands to express his gratitude by shaking their hands. Malto said he will guide them to his home and started to walk.

"By the way."

Riley was following Malto to the village. Riley casually looked around the surrounding and asked,

"I've heard that there are less than 100 people living here, is that right?"

"Yes, to be exact, there are 97... No, Finya gave birth to her son two days ago, so there probably are 98 people now."

Riley was counting the number of houses and people that he could see. It seemed this was not making sense to Riley. He tilted his head side to side.

"There doesn't seem to be enough people here, is there?"

Riley added,

"I've heard that there are suspicious orc activities nearby. It seems like they didn't invade here yet, but... the number of people here is a little..."

On the way back to Malto's home, Riley saw a little over ten

people.

“No, not a little, but there are too few people. Don’t you think?”

The village was in danger because of orcs. However, it was a little weird that only so few people were coming out to see outsiders entering the village.

“Even if they are all hiding in fear…”

This place was not a city.

It was a small village with less than 100 people living in.

Riley widened his senses and checked the population. Riley tilted his head as if this still didn’t make sense to him.

The village’s leader said there were 98 people here, but when Riley checked it himself, it was not matching with the number.

“There are about thirty people missing.”

It wasn’t just a few people. The difference was around thirty people.

It meant there was a problem.

“…”

Having heard Riley’s mumbling, the village’s leader stopped walking and turned his head around.

“You… know very well.”

“He is from Iphelleta.”

Ian shrugged and answered for Riley. The village’s leader bit his lips. He looked desperate. Malto said,

“Yes, as you said… there are about thirty people that have gone missing.”

“Gone missing?”

Malto nodded and started to walk again.

“It started around nine days ago. Initially, when I realized there were two or three people missing, I thought it was just because of the atmosphere, but number of children going missing started to increase.”

Malto explained the village was concerned because of people disappearing without a trace. Riley wiggled his eyebrows.

“… Children?”

Malto nodded with a desperate look on his face.

“Yes, all thirty children of Alieve Village are… currently missing.”

Chapter 105 - Successor Competition (2)

“They have gone missing? What do you mean?”

“It’s exactly as what you just said. Since nine days ago, children of Alieve Village started to disappear. Now, all children are missing. We thoroughly searched the village and the forest nearby, yet… we couldn’t find them.”

Having heard Malto’s answer, Riley bent his eyebrows. He turned his head and started to look at the path that they just walked on and the village once again.

Ian also had a deadly look on his face after hearing Malto’s explanation. Ian too was thoroughly examining the village’s every corner.

“They are really gone.”

Ian slowly mumbled. Riley, who checked it once again, looked at Malto and asked about the missing children.

“How old are the missing children?”

“Pardon? Ah, about that… Children who are five years or older and eighteen years or younger are gone.”

“Regardless of gender, all children?”

“Yes, that’s right, but why do you ask?”

Having heard what Malto said, Riley crumpled his face as if he knew it. Riley mumbled quietly,

“… As I thought…”

“Have you figured something out?”

“…”

Having heard Ian’s question, Riley kept silence for a moment. He slowly shook his head and said,

“No, not exactly, but…”

Riley cringed and said ‘as I thought’ because Riley realized that what was happening in the Alieve Village was very similar to what he experienced in his past life.

‘This is pretty serious. When father gave me the assignment to save a village, I thought it couldn’t be, but now…’

As if Riley was not liking the situation that felt similar to what he experienced in his past life, Riley opened and closed his hand as he asked Malto,

“Five years or older... That means babies who are less than five years old are safe, right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Malto nodded and gave an additional explanation about what the village’s men were up to.

“So, half of the village’s men are outside the village to be prepared against orcs that might invade at any time. The other half are standing guard on their own homes to protect the children under five years old.”

Having heard what Malto said, Ian turned his head again and examined the village’s scenery. His gaze met with a man through a window, and Ian narrowed his eyes as if he now understood what they were doing.

“It looks like everyone is on edges."

“That’s right. They couldn’t sleep at all through the night.”

“This means it is a total mystery as to when exactly the children disappeared.”

“The situation is not very good.”

Riley roughly scratched the back of his head.

‘This is trouble.’

Riley was taking it easy because it looked like his father was going to send Riley to a suitable, easy place for him. However, this was like getting struck by a lightning on a sunny day. Now, Riley had to be concerned with not just orcs, but also missing children.

‘In my past life, I chose to abandon the city. The city that I didn’t choose to protect was destroyed, and only the fallen city’s children came back in bizarre forms and indiscriminately slaughtered people.’

Riley took lessons from what he experienced in his past life. As he organized his thoughts, as if he determined he didn’t have enough information, he turned to the village’s leader and said,

“By any chance, can you show me something like the entire village’s map? It would be even better if it was something that shows the forest area outside the village as well.”

“Yes. I happen to have one hanging at my home.”

Ian realized the look on Riley’s face couldn’t be more serious. Without saying any words, Ian just followed Riley.

*

Riley liked children.

Actually, instead of saying he liked them, it was probably more accurate to say that he was feeling sorry and guilty toward them.

‘Mister… Mister… Who are you?’

‘Fool… Cholok… Take a look at the sword I’m holding.’

‘Holy… Sword? Then, are you a brave warrior?’

‘… That’s right.’

Riley felt that way toward children because in his past life, because of the choice that he made, the fallen city’s countless children became murderous monsters against their will and shed tears of blood.

‘Hehe. That… is good… Mister… Then you came to… kill us?’

‘… That’s right.’

In his past life, in response to the question, Riley said ‘that’s right’ in cold voice. Riley was thinking about himself from that moment.

‘Yes…’

‘Fool. Why… Cholok… Why are you happy?’

‘I should be happy… Mister… You said you will stop us, so…’

‘Is that so? I guess that is right. You should be happy.’

Being swept up in the ploy by the devil, the children ended up having their hands completely tainted with the blood of people. The children, who were sliced off by Riley’s Holy Sword… Riley looked at them with emotionless eyes.

‘Mister… I have a favor to ask. Can I ask you just one favor?’

‘I am sorry, but I don’t take requests from monsters…’

‘We are not monsters.’

‘Mister, we are not monsters. Really.’

‘Huk… Mommy… I want to see mommy.’

‘…’

The children were crying, telling Riley that they wanted to see their mothers.

Watching the children, at that moment, for the first time, Riley thought that perhaps the real monster was not the children who were transformed but himself.

‘We are like this now because of you.’

‘…’

Some cities told Riley that things would not have turned out badly if he was not there. Some cities told him that things would not have turned out badly if he was there.

‘So, I’ll ask you for one favor.’

In his past life, Riley was cursed and hated regardless of the choice he made. Riley was at his limit at that time. In tears, the favor that the children asked of him was just one thing.

‘Comfortably, without pain, kill us like that.’

‘Mister, it hurts so much. We are suffering so much.’

‘Mister, hurry.’

Having heard their request, Riley…

“… Young Master?”

“Uh?”

Riley was thinking about his past, but having heard Ian’s voice, Riley responded vacantly.

“Are you sleepy? You have a blank look on your face all of sudden.”

“No, that’s not it. I was just thinking about something from the past for a bit…”

Riley woke up from the useless thoughts. As if it was nothing, he shook his head and took a step forward.

“This job, I’m going to handle it in a flash and go to sleep.”

“Young Master, you look a little different today.”

Ian, who was following Riley walking in front of him, said Riley looked a little different today. Having heard that, Riley stopped walking.

“Really, how so?”

“When I told you that you may need to slay some orcs, it didn’t

faze you at all. You looked like you were going on a walk in a park. But now that you heard about the missing children... you are taking it very seriously."

During the day of fighting against Astroa to bring him down for once and for all...

Riley chose to ask kindly to the kid who Nainiae had with her during the battle. Riley chose that instead of just blocking the kid's mouth by force because of what happened in Riley's past life.

"... I'm not sure?"

Riley still remembered clearly about the city that he abandoned and the children who were turned in to monsters and had to be slayed by the Holy Sword.

"Maybe it is just the atmosphere?"

Riley was more concerned about the missing children than the scheming orcs hiding in the forest nearby because of this reason.

It was to avoid repeating the same mistake from the past life.

"No."

Ian calmly shook his head and said,

“I am certain that it isn’t because of the atmosphere.”

“… Well, that’s not important right now.”

Ian was being sincere in his response, but Riley tried hard to ignore it. Riley started to walk again.

“Time is gold. Even at this moment, the children…”

“See? As I thought, you are worried about the children.”

Riley mumbled without thinking. As if he was thinking he made a mistake, Riley corrected himself.

“… The time for my nap is getting shorter.”

“Yes, that is true.”

Ian figured he shouldn’t question Riley about this anymore. He smiled gently and brought out the next question to change the topic.

“Well then, what are you going to do? We examined the map, but we didn’t find any evidence that would lead us to finding the children… The orcs that must be at beyond the forest look suspicious too.”

Riley arrived at the barn and got to the luggage storage on the carriage. Riley asked Ian,

“What do you think I’ll be doing? Isn’t it obvious?”

Riley picked up a few swords from the carriage’s luggage storage. He showed the swords to Ian and wiggled his eyebrows.

“I said time is gold, didn’t I?”

*

Hiding in the forest nearby, there were men surveilling the orcs’ activities. Riley brought all of these men back to the village and went to the forest with Ian. Riley was walking as he opened and closed his hand.

‘Thirty children have gone missing, yet they disappeared without any trace. It is highly unlikely that orcs are responsible for this. They don’t have the talent for kidnapping children that way.’

Riley have read about orcs before in the mansion’s library. He decided to be mindful of a few possibilities and pulled his chin.

‘No. There could be an extraordinary orc among them. I can’t discount the possibility of that special one being responsible for it, can I? If orcs took the children, this would be the most plausible explanation. If the children were not taken by the orcs…’

Riley, who was thinking about several possibilities, suddenly cringed.

“Tsk.”

If Riley have chosen to save the city in his past life, he might at least have a feel for what to do at this moment... Riley was having a hard time getting a feel for the situation.

‘It is such a bother, but it looks like the answer won’t come out even if I rolled my brain some more.’

According to Malto, the children started to disappear since nine days ago, but they didn’t disappear all at once. They disappeared over the course of a few days.

If all of the remaining children disappeared yesterday, that meant the children are probably within Riley’s reach.

In other words...

‘... It’s a fight against time?’

Eradicate the orcs at an instant and immediately search for the children...

That was the best course of action.

If the children were found while slaying the orcs, that was going to be the best case scenario.

"..."

Without further delay, Riley moved his hand toward his waist and drew his sword in a slow motion.

"... I'm going to end this in a flash."

Riley mumbled.

It was to prevent things from becoming more bothersome.

It was to prevent further delay.

First, Riley was going to handle the beastly smell emanating from the beyond the forest. After that, he was going to find the children right away.

"Excuse me, Young Master."

Ian was walking with Riley toward the forest where orcs were said to be located. Ian stopped for a moment and asked,

"Are you really going to be all right?"

Ian was asking if he was worried. Having noticed this, Riley, who was steadily leading the way, turned his head around and looked at Ian.

“What?”

Once against a goblin…

Once against the Erengium’s Young Master…

Ian got to witness Riley’s abilities only twice so far.

“I’m talking about wielding a sword. I have seen you in action last time against the goblin and during what happened at the Solia Castle, but…”

Ian was not worried like how he was when Riley was stepping toward the front of the goblin last time. However… It seemed Ian was still worried. Ian carefully said,

“Still, I’m a little worried. You have never properly held a sword until now, have you? Orcs are different from goblins. Without any preparation, entering their main colony through the front door like this is a little…”

Having heard Ian’s mumbling, Riley, with an annoyed look on his face, responded,

“You had been telling me I should wield a sword, so what now?”

Riley was not wrong. Ian nodded and mumbled as if he was just wrongly accused.

“That is true, but doing it like this suddenly is a little…”

“If something happens, stay close and protect me if you would like.”

Riley, who was looking back toward Ian, started to walk again as if he couldn’t afford to delay this anymore. Riley said,

“It’s not like you are going to just stand there with a blank look on your face and watch, right? You need to do your part too. The situation here isn’t ‘just eradicate the orcs.’ This is a part of the assignment.’

As Riley said, they needed to not only eradicate the orcs beyond the forest, but also find the children who have gone missing from the Alieve Village.

“You are not just going to watch, are you?”

As if that was poking Ian at the conscious, Ian flinched. As if he couldn’t help it, Ian drew the sword from his waist and came over the forest’s boundary.

“Ugh, it cannot… be helped. Now that it has come to this, I’ll guard you as much as possible and fight… Um?”

Ian came over the boundary and stood along the side with Riley. He casually moved his eyes to look at Riley’s waist and then had a confused look on his face.

‘The swords… why did he bring six?’

On the belt that Riley took from the carriage and wore, there were total of six thin grand swords neatly placed.

[TL: Cholok is the sound effect for coughing]

Chapter 106 - Successor Competition (3)

“Phew…”

Riley sighed big.

It was because Ian was staring at him from the side.

Fortunately… Ian’s gaze was not about expecting something from Riley. It was a gaze of concern.

‘Be calm.’

It was barely noticeable, but Riley’s hands were shaking. He tried closing and opening his hands to calm his hands and then closed his eyes.

It was because the situation was different from how he swung swords while being on the vacation at Rainfield.

Ian was right next to Riley.

Riley was concerned Ian may never look at him the same after Riley demonstrated his swordsmanship. Riley narrowly opened his eyes and moved his left hand toward his waist.

‘It’s bothersome. Don’t bother with thinking about all sorts of things. Ian is different. Unlike the past life, he is on my side.’

What Riley gained after all the hardships he endured in the past life…

After his death, what he received as a reward after being reincarnated…

Iris and Ian could be considered as such.

‘That’s right. I didn’t think I could hide this forever, so… Let’s just trust Ian.’

Perhaps he didn’t want to think about it anymore. Riley decided to just trust Ian. His left and right hands each held a sword. Riley fiddled with the fingers as he took a deep breath again.

“Ian, we are going, all right?”

“Pardon?”

Ian was comparing Riley’s two-swords stance with Sera’s stance. Ian vacantly asked back, but…

“Ah? Y… Young Master! Wait…”

He tumbled and raised his hand.

It seemed Riley was going to practice what he said about the time being gold. Riley was already charging forward with the swords lowered.

‘… I’m going to finish this in a flash.’

Ian unconsciously thought about what Riley said earlier. Ian tumbled and followed after Riley.

‘He is fast?’

It would have been befitting to call it an explosive speed.

It appeared that Riley instantly sent mana to his legs.

Instead of running, it looked like Riley was making huge leaps every time.

Ian, who was following Riley, was impressed.

‘This kind of movement is… not in the textbooks?’

The way Riley was charging forward…

The way Riley had his swords lowered toward the back…

Ian have never seen such moves before. However, interestingly,

Ian couldn’t find anything to fault on them.

<Ian, it’s a bother, so move quickly so this doesn’t get dragged on.>

“…?!”

To Ian, who was following behind Riley and was impressed by Riley’s stance, seemed shocked to hear the voice directly in his head. Ian opened his eyes big.

‘Telepathic communication?!’

It was one of techniques used to send messages to another using mana.

It was a technique that only those who were skilled in mana could use. Of all people, Riley was using it, and Ian was surprised. While Ian was thinking that, the sight of an orc’s head being cut off and floating up was caught in Ian’s eyes.

“Huk?”

“Huuk!”

As they heard before coming to the colony, as soon as they went over the forest’s boundary, they could immediately see the orc’s main colony. Now… a black haired boy charged in there and was

dancing.

“Huuk? It’s a surprise attack…”

At the colony’s entrance, with a black haired boy making an entrance, an orc was going to tell others that the colony was under attack. However, along with a sharp sound piercing through the wind, its head was thrown off to the sky.

“The enemy is com…”

The other orc could not finish the sentence before its head was lifted to the sky. The head fell to the ground.

‘Seven, eight.’

Holding the swords in his ten fingers, Riley spun the swords in circular motion and turned his body in reverse, swinging his sword like a windmill.

‘… thirteen.’

Since Riley charged in, quite literally in a flash, Riley handled thirteen orcs. He narrowed his eyes and moved his gaze.

‘There are about… 160 orcs in this colony? With the ones just killed accounted for, the remaining ones are…’

While cutting down the orcs, Riley widened his senses and counted the number of existences within the range. He found another orc shouting to warn other orcs, so Riley swung his arm again.

“Supris… Kuk!”

A sword that Riley threw pierced right into the orc’s neck.

‘150… The number is low.’

Riley used mana to look around the surrounding. He calmly cut off the next orc’s head and rolled his brain.

‘Didn’t they say there are about 200 of them?’

Ian arrived at the colony around the time Riley already silently disposed of fifteen orcs. Ian stared at Riley with a look of disbelief.

“Ian, about the estimated number of orcs… isn’t it about 200?”

Riley’s memory about this was fuzzy, so he asked Ian. Ian, who vacantly looked at the orcs’ corpses, said that was the case.

“Yes… The number we heard at the mansion and what Malto said to us were both around 200, but… why do you ask?”

Riley walked over to pull out the sword that left his hand because he threw it and got stuck on an orc's neck. Riley said,

"A few of them are missing."

"Pardon?"

"I think we will have to change the plan."

Riley had to make a quick decision.

Without hesitation, Riley promptly made a decision. Charging forward, Riley said to Ian,

"Ian, you move a little more."

"Young Master? Just what..."

Without any explanation, Riley flashed to east to west. Ian was not sure if he was dreaming or not. To Ian's back, an unpleasant 'Huuuk' breathing sound through the nose could be heard.

"...?"

"Human! It's a human!"

"Corpses, there are corpses! Our comrades were slaughtered!"

With a group of orcs approaching from the back, Ian, who was about half focused, fixed his grip on the sword and narrowed his eyes.

‘Where’s Young Master?’

Before having a big one against the orcs, Ian casually turned his gaze to look at the direction that Riley charged toward. Ian confirmed that Riley was gone without any trace. Breaking cold sweats, Ian opened his mouth wide.

“Huur…”

“It’s a human. It killed our comrades!”

“It’s a surprise attack!”

“Houk… Revenge, take revenge!”

Ignoring Ian’s sigh, the orcs ground their teeth because of death of their comrades. The orcs, with their axes aimed to the front, only glared at Ian.

*

Instead of describing it by calling it swinging the swords, it was more becoming to call it a violent dance.

Of the six swords that Riley brought, now only three of them remained.

‘Tsk. The swords are not able to withstand the bit of intensity. They melted or got bent, geez.’

Three of them left Riley’s hands because they couldn’t withstand Riley’s strength. They broke, got bent or melted away.

‘With this, that’s now 90.’

The edge of the sword on his right hand was broken. Now, Riley held two swords of different lengths, but it looked like this was not going to be a problem for him on fighting orcs.

’91.’

The sword on his right hand was broken in half, so it was shorter than the sword on his left hand. Riley threw the sword on the right hand and pierced an orc’s neck. He looked around the area and narrowed his eyes.

‘Ian is probably fighting the rest.’

Riley narrowed his eyes and looked around here and there. He checked empty colony and corpses on the ground and furrowed his brows.

‘The children are not here.’

Even when he was swinging his sword, Riley had been diligently checking this. Having counted the number of swords remaining, Riley tightly closed his eyes.

Even if it was just a little further and a little wider, he was trying to increase the range of his senses, hoping to find where the children might be.

‘Is it this direction?’

Cleanly cut weapons, orcs’ corpses, empty tents, and other miscellaneous objects that orcs have been using… Stepping over those things, Riley dashed and left the destroyed colony.

‘In this direction, I feel about 96… no… 97?’

The place that Riley stepped in was a forest that was pretty far from the colony. It was a forest that was in opposite side of the one that Riley came through from the Alieve Village.

‘Um?’

Riley, who had been charging toward the location where he sensed presence, noticed something unusual. He flinched his eyebrows as he charged forward.

‘The number is decreasing?’

It was because the number of presences was decreasing noticeably fast.

97…

96…

90…

35…

It was decreasing in blink of an eye. Having noticed this Riley ground his teeth as he sent mana to his legs.

‘Don’t be late.’

Tap.

Riley had been running as if he was almost flying. His right foot kicked the ground while being completely filled with mana.

Boom!

The dirt ground formed a crater as if it was dug with a shovel and created whirlwind around the area.

"... Is that place?"

With increased speed, Riley arrived at the location where he felt the presences. He dragged his two feet on the dirt ground to stop.

"A cave?"

What he saw was a fairly large looking cave's entrance, located at the edge of the forest, below the cliff.

'The number of presences is... 30...'

It was an exact match to the number of children from the village who have gone missing.

'It can't be... Just like the past life... will the same situation repeat where the children are beyond help and I need to end their lives with my own hands?'

"Um?"

Riley decided that he will not believe it before seeing it with his own eyes. With is face crumpled, he started to walk to the front. However, he discovered something and tilted his head side to side.

“…?”

He found something strange at the front of the entrance.

“What is this?”

Perhaps it was best described by saying the scenery in front of Riley was exuding strange sensation… Things painted in black were pasted all over the cave’s entrance, generating strange smoke.

“Is it mud?”

Riley approached the stuff. Feeling the stench from the objects, Riley cringed.

‘No. It is not mud… this is…’

The black things were corpses.

It could be said they were parts of the corpses.

The pieces of muscles were saturated in black and reeking stench.

They were pieces of orcs that were torn apart.

“… Poison?”

Even now, some of the black pieces were flinching.

It was because of the poison.

It was highly concentrated poison that was enough to make even Riley to cringe.

Riley mumbled with his face crumpled,

“Who…”

Riley widened his senses and detected a presence that was slowly moving away from the place. Riley narrowed his eyes.

‘Is that him?’

He was probably the one who was responsible for making the orcs into poisoned pieces.

Considering the situation, Riley assessed that must be the case. He thought about if he should pursue the man, but soon he shook his head.

Riley could feel the presence of 30 inside the cave.

Confirming them, which he thought to be the village’s children,

came first.

‘I hope they are all right… Um?’

What happened in his past life came to his mind. Riley closed and opened his hands and was about to carefully enter the cave, but he found something carved on the ground at the entrance. It read,

[To the people of the Alieve Village who came to rescue the children.]

It was a writing.

Next to the writing, there was a sharp rock, saturated in black, that was rolling around.

It looked like someone used the rock as a pencil to write it on the ground. The writing was quite strange.

[I am sorry. With my abilities, this was the only way for me to save the children who were kidnapped by the orcs. I desperately controlled it so the children inside the cave would not be harmed. However… children with weak immunity may have been poisoned, so please quickly take them to the Holy Temple and cure them.]

Riley was reading the writing, but then he furrowed his eyebrows, thinking what this other thing was about.

“What is this now?”

The writing didn’t end there.

Is seemed this other writing was not for the people who would come from the village. It seemed to be for the ones who would be coming out of the cave. The second part was written from the opposite direction of the one that Riley just read.

It seemed it was written out of concern for the ones who would be coming out of the cave. The writing read,

[Children, by any chance, if you can escape the cave before the adults from the village can come to rescue you… Go straight to the village and tell the adults right away after seeing this writing. Tell them that you might have contracted an illness, and ask them to take you to the Holy Temple to be cured. Although I only met you for a short while, the warmth and kindness that you showed me while I was at the Alieve Village… I’ll cherish them as I leave this place. Thank you.

Your friend who cannot breathe,

Epidemic.]

It seemed to be telling Riley that the children inside the cave were safe.

Chapter 107 - Clock Spring

Riley brought the missing children safely back to the village. He made up a reasonable story to explain that the children need to be taken to the Holy Temple immediately.

"I... I see. In that case, I'm counting on you."

Having heard Malto's response, along with the children, Riley started to walk toward the prepared carriage. Ian, who was still next to Malto, explained the rest on Riley's behalf.

"We disposed of all orcs, so you probably don't have to worry anymore."

"Yes... But, did just 'two of you' really handle that many orcs? Honestly, I cannot believe it."

Having heard the question, Ian thought about Riley's movements and the number of orcs that Riley slayed. Ian was about to say 'no, most of them were disposed of by the Young Master alone.' However, he closed his mouth.

'That is, Riley wanted it.'

It was because the request that Iris made during the last spring felt like it was ringing in his ears.

What Riley did not want...

What Iris wanted...

Having thought about the two things, Ian put back what he was about to talk about. Instead, he said,

“Yes, that’s right. We handled them by ourselves, just the two of us.”

“Huh...”

“Well then, we are going to make haste and go to the Holy Temple now.”

“Ah, yes! Yes!”

Inside, Ian asked ‘Lady Iris, this much is probably all right, right?’ With Malto to his back, Ian started to walk toward the carriage with thirty children.

“Let’s get going.”

Ian looked up at Riley sitting on the driver’s seat and tilted his head side to side.

“Why are you not on the carriage?”

“Look at the back.”

Riley used his thumb to point behind over his shoulder. Ian looked at the direction. As if he realized the reason, he didn’t ask anymore and just sat on the driver’s seat.

“Look at this carriage. It’s really amazing.”

“I think that big brother earlier must be a high nobility.”

“Children, don’t be a nuisance. Stay still.”

“Big sis, you try touching this too! It feels really interesting!”

“This sofa is so soft.”

The carriage probably was not designed for this kind of occasion. However, there were thirty children inside the carriage and chatting about the soft sofa or the wall papers with patterns.

“Surprisingly, all of them got in there.”

“It looks a little tight in there, but it doesn’t look like anyone is complaining.”

Perhaps it was because they were raised in a small town with

rough environment. It seemed they were so impressed that they got to ride on a carriage that they may never get to ride on in their entire life. Although it looked tight in there, the children didn't complain. They waited for the carriage to start heading toward the Holy Temple.

"Well then, we are going to get going, all right?"

Ian, who grabbed on to the leash, looked back toward the children and asked. The children, who were on the sofa or the floor, responded in excitement.

"Yes!!"

"Let's go!"

The carriage wasn't a carriage for a count's house for nothing. Although the carriage started to move, the large space was not rattling at all. The children, with their eyes wide, started to talk to each other.

"It... it's moving!"

"It's so amazing. It's not rattling at all."

Riley focused on the voices of the children on the back, but it was only for a moment. Thinking he can relax now, Riley sighed and supported his chin with his hand.

“… I’m ruined.”

“Ruined?”

Ian, who was carefully driving the carriage, asked what he meant by that.

“I worked too diligently today.”

The look on Riley’s face said all this was such a bother. His face was full of it. He sighed again and said,

“I’m going to sleep for the next two days.”

Riley complained like that, and he sounded serious. Ian, who was looking at Riley from the side, smiled lightly and looked to the front.

“… Young Master.”

“What.”

Riley, who was observing the sceneries passing by, responded in uninterested voice.

“It’s about your swordsmanship. I always wanted to ask you

once. What you showed us during the spring is strange, and what you showed today when you were slaying the orcs are also strange... Let alone training, you never once held a sword, so just when did you master all that?”

When did you master swordsmanship like that?

Judging from the content of the question, it seemed Ian concluded Riley learned it by studying it alone.

The movements were definitely not in Iphalleta’s textbook, and even Stein didn’t show movements like that. It was not strange for Ian to think like that.

“I just roughly... had been imagining them in my head. That’s all.”

‘Imagining in my head? Those swordplays? Those movements?’

Riley realized what he just said could be mistaken for something else very easily. Although he was the one who said them, even Riley thought perhaps he shouldn’t have. However, Riley at least maintained the uninterested look on his face.

“In that case, how did you do that with the mana? A while ago... you even sent telepathic message.”

Having heard the question, Riley became stiff for a moment. Soon, as if it was nothing, Riley asked back,

“Telepathic message? What’s that?”

Riley decided to act like he didn’t know about mana. Riley already planned to say ‘Ian, maybe you are getting hard of hearing?’

“… Haha.”

“…?”

Ian laughed, casually turned his head and looked at Riley. Riley furrowed his brows as if he was trying to ask ‘what did I do?’

“Young Master.”

“What, why.”

Ian seemed proud somehow. He had that look on his face. Ian looked to the front again. With a voice with mixed emotions, Ian said,

“I think I was not wrong.”

Having heard Ian’s voice, Riley didn’t respond. He just kept silence and looked at the direction that Ian was looking at and casually smiled.

"..."

All the way to the Holy Temple, Ian didn't ask about that anymore.

*

Inside a cave that was large enough to make people drop their jaws in awe, there was a dark haired girl standing alone.

"..."

The girl had this huge space for herself. With her eyes gently closed, she moved her lips, and a few dozen dark flames started to exude light around her.

<It must be great being Nainiae. She is just a human, yet she is even being taught by the master.>

In the empty cave, only the girl could be seen. However, there was another voice that could be heard, the kind that was definitely different from the girl's voice.

"No, Not really."

The girl extinguished the flames and said that was not the case.

“Ms. Heliona, you are the one who is amazing.”

<Me?>

The girl complimented toward the empty space. The voice, which appeared to be jealous of Nainiae, changed the tone instantly and said as if she was embarrassed.

<Come on, Nainiae, why are you saying stuff like that again? You are embarrassing me!>

“Nainiae.”

“…?”

The girl, Nainiae, was having a conversation with the voice that could be heard from the empty air. Feeling a presence behind her, she slowly turned her head and looked at the man who was walking toward her.

“Ah, master.”

The man was a good looking young man with flame like red hair.

“You…”

It seemed the man was not feeling awkward about being called a master. He continued to walk toward her. He asked her straight,

“You went to Rainfield with Riley during the summer, right?”

“Pardon? Ofcourse we did. You sent us there yourself, didn’t you?”

Nainiae tilted her head side to side, wondering why he was asking such a question, and asked back. A suppressed laughter could be heard from the empty space.

<Master. Did that happen because you have been in the form of a human? What was that called? The illness where a human starts to lose memories after getting old... Ah! Dementia! Do you have dementia?>

Having heard the voice, the red haired young man turned his gaze toward the direction where the voice came from. He threatened by saying,

“Unless you want to be unsummoned, it would be best for you to keep your mouth locked tightly, Heliona.”

<... Yes.>

“Spirits always have the problem with their mouths... So, you definitely went there, right?”

Andal looked at Nainiae again and asked the same question. As a replacement for a verbal response, Nainiae nodded to tell him that she had.

“By any chance, did Riley cause an accident in Rainfield?”

“An accident?”

Having heard the question, Nainiae tilted her head side to side again, looked to the cave’s ceiling and had a look on her face as if she didn’t know very well.

“I’m not sure?”

“Ugh…”

She looked like she was trying to hide something. Andal was sure that Nainiae was sparing the words because of his friend. Andal sighed and explained why he asked.

“My kinfolks are going to gather. It has been a while since we have, but I have heard that the place of gathering is Rainfield.”

“… I see.”

“But…”

Andal narrowed his eyes as if that was not the end of it. With seriousness, Andal asked,

“I heard a suspicious energy was felt in Rainfield?”

“Really? By any chance, are they talking about the Young Master…”

Having heard Andal’s words, Nainiae flinched and mumbled with a concerned look on her face. Andal shook his head and said,

“No. It is not that rascal Riley. My kinfolks are already well aware of his existence. They just don’t mind him because he is sitting around on his butt.”

“…”

“You know something, don’t you?”

Judging from the look on Nainiae’s face, Andal knew something was up. He turned around immediately and made a gesture with his hand toward Nainiae to come along.

“Follow me. We are going to Rainfield.”

“M… Me too?”

“It’s a gathering among my kinfolks, and it has been a very long time. While there, I’m going to discuss the matter about the Rainfield and also tell them what I have been up to.”

Nainiae tumbled and followed behind Andal. A whisper could be heard in Nainiae’s ears.

<I think he is going there just to show off his pupil.>

“Heliona.”

<Hup? Yes, master!>

“You follow me too.”

<... I... Won’t it be better for me to just stay here and watch the lair?>

“Follow me.”

<Yes.>

*

After the carriage with the Alieve village’s children on board arrived at the next village, Ian took the children to the Holy

Temple. With a relieved face that said he just resolved a big case, Ian returned to the carriage.

"Young Master, I took the children to the Holy Temple. The priest said the illness is at the early stage, so there is no need to worry so much, but because there are thirty children, it will take a while..."

As he returned to the carriage, Ian explained what he have heard from the temple. However, having noticed that Riley was snoring while lying on the top of the carriage, Ian stopped explaining and sighed.

'That's all right. He worked pretty hard today, so...'

Ian thought that Riley moved a lot today unlike his usual self. Ian gave up on waking up Riley and sat on the carriage's stairs.

'... I'm going to end this in a flash.'

Ian was thinking about how Riley swung his sword without any fear despite facing over a hundred orcs.

"Kuhup, Young Master!!"

It was a mystery how Ian managed to hold it in until now. Looking at Riley, who was lying on the top of the carriage and snoring, Ian started to tear up.

Even at that moment, the magnificence and bravery that Riley showed was being re-broadcasted in Ian's head.

"I... I am...!"

Ian wiped off the tears using his sleeve.

He could hear a long cry.

It was a bird.

A predator type bird with wide wings waving in the air was circling above Ian's head.

"... Um?"

Ian was sniffling while being soaked in emotions. Having heard the bird above him, he turned his head up wide and looked at the bird.

"A messenger?"

Ian noticed a letter tied to the bird that was circling in the air. He narrowed his eyes and raised his right arm.

"There."

The bird carefully landed on his arm. Ian noticed that the bird was a messenger that mercenaries used often. He carefully untied the letter on the bird's leg.

[To Young Master Riley]

Judging from what was written on the top of the letter, it seemed the message was for Riley.

'Did Nara send this?'

There was a messenger bird that mercenaries used often.

The letter was addressed to Riley.

Based on those, Ian concluded that it must be Nara, who was heading to Solia, was the one who sent this. To read it in Riley's stead, he carefully opened the letter.

[Young Master. It's that bastard.]

After going over the first line on the letter, Ian furrowed his eyebrows, confused.

'That bastard?'

Ian continued on to the next line.

[The dark mage from the Rainfield was revived.]

Dark mage?

What dark mage?

Having read the content and wondering what this was about, Ian didn’t just flinch his eyebrows. At that same moment, his facial muscles started to flinch.

Chapter 108 - Clock Spring (2)

“What is this?”

With the letter on his grip, Ian looked at the letters that said ‘dark mage’ several times. Ian turned his head while shaking his hand.

“… Y… Young Master!”

Despite his loud calling, Riley was sleeping with his mouth wide open. He just kept on enjoying sweet afternoon nap.

“Young Master, Young Master! Please wake up!”

Because Riley didn’t wake up from Ian calling for him, Ian quickly jumped to the top of the carriage and woke up Riley by shaking his shoulder.

“Young Master!”

“Uuu, um… What is it? Are they done already?”

Riley felt like it hasn’t even been 30 minutes since he started to sleep. He cringed big, got up and started to rub his eyes.

“If they finished treating the children, we just need to get going, so why did you wake me?”

Riley had his cringed face toward Ian. With the look on his face, Riley was trying to say it was such a bother. However, Riley saw the look on Ian's face. Ian looked as violent as an orc. Riley straightened his cringed face and gulped.

"Young Master."

Ian brought his face very close to Riley. It was getting uncomfortable. Riley unconsciously pulled back and stuttered,

"Y... yeah?"

"What is this?"

Ian, with his eyes wide open, showed the paper to Riley. It was a thin piece of paper with a few lines of words written.

The paper said, 'Young Master, it is that bastard. The dark mage from the Rainfield was revived.'

"... What about it?"

"This...!"

Having read the letter, Riley had uninterested look on his face. He tilted his head side to side and asked. Ian was going to shout something loudly, but he shut his mouth like a child with honey on

his mouth.

"... Ugh."

Ian sighed big enough to sink the ground, and that somehow made Riley concerned. Riley got a hold of the paper that Ian put forward and read the content once again.

[Young Master, it is that bastard. The dark mage from the Rainfield was revived.]

The Solia Holy Temple's Archbishop.

One of the men with purple aura.

Riley was suspicious of Rebethra, so he had Nara to dig his background, and now, this letter came flying in. This meant...

'The bait was bitten?'

It meant Rebethra bit the bait that Riley tossed just in case.

'This complicates things a little since some other guy bit it instead of Kabal.'

The dark mage from the Rainfield was also one of the people with purple aura that Nara mentioned.

Riley thought about Rebethra, Kabal and the dark mage.

Rebethra was the Archbishop from Solia.

Kabal was a famous mercenary from Ansyrium.

The dark mage was recently active in Rainfield.

While thinking about them, Riley saw Ian's face in front of him and flinched.

"What, why are you like that?"

"Young Master, are you trying to hide it again?"

Ian, with annoyed look on his face, was glaring at Riley as if he was going to burn a hole through the face with his gaze.

"... Hide what?"

"You don't need to ask me what this old man is talking about. You know well what I'm asking about, don't you?"

"..."

It seemed Riley was at a loss for words because of Ian's gaze and tone. Riley just had his mouth open with a vacant look on his face. Ian raised his hand and suddenly grabbed on to Riley's shoulder.

"Young Master!"

"You are going to make my ear fall off."

Ian's loud voice was enough to make other people passing by to glance at them.

"Ugh."

Concerned about it leading to more bothersome things, Riley was going to handle this quietly by himself. However, with his butler persistently biting on to the topic and not letting go, Riley slowly rolled his eyes.

'I think this might cause me more exhaustion if I don't tell him.'

Ian was holding Riley's shoulder tightly, and his eyes were in flames. They said he won't let go of this hand unless Riley explained what this was about. Watching Ian like this, Riley thought about an advice that Iris gave him a long time ago.

'Riley, there is no such thing as a secret that you can hide forever.'

They said a mother's advice is always right. She was not wrong.

In fact, in the process of the successorship competition, Riley gave Ian a glimpse of his swordsmanship skill.

"Ian, this is really nothing special, but..."

Riley mumbled as if he was finding all this to be icky. Ian had a violent look on his face. As if he was trying to say Riley should still tell him, Ian brought his face closer to Riley's.

"I'll listen!"

"This will take a long time to explain."

"We need to wait a long time anyway for the children to get treated and come out of the Holy Temple."

"..."

"Please tell me!"

"... Ugh."

This time, Riley sighed like Ian from earlier.

*

Tsuuuwaaaa.

It was autumn, but it was still raining in Rainfield. In an abandoned building with a pretty good atmosphere, there were several existences gathered there. It was unbelievable that they were all in the same place.

“How many hundreds of years has it been since the last meeting?”

“The last one was over a thousand years ago.”

“Really? I was sleeping, so I didn’t know.”

There was a blindingly bright silver colored elf, a shiny gold colored orc, a vibrant green colored tree, and an ocean blue colored mermaid.

Four different kinds with each very different characteristics were gathered there and having a conversation.

“Where’s Andal?”

“He is not here yet. He said he is bringing a pupil and asked us to wait.”

“A pupil? What’s a pupil?”

“You know that thing that humans do. Things like education.”

“Ah, that?”

“That guy really is an oddball. An oddball.”

“I asked him to bring the pupil. Ah, I think he is here.”

An elf was flaunting her silver hair. The beautiful elf turned her head and mumbled. The space that she stared at started to distort.

“Uu. I just can’t get used to Rainfield. This humid air... It is the worst.”

The distorted space had a burst of light, and Andal and Nainiae made appearances.

“Wow, this is a surprise? Everyone is really here?”

Nainiae stood next to Andal, confused. Andal patted Nainiae on the back hard and walked to the table where the four existences were sitting together.

The silver haired elf said,

“No, one of us is not here.”

“One is missing? Ah, you are right? How come?”

“It was impossible to get in contact. Even the lair was empty. Maybe it is because of an amusement tour.”

“Even so, shouldn’t it be possible to contact each other? So busy to the point of not being able to reply to calls?”

“Perhaps.”

The elf answered Andal’s questions. She looked at Nainiae who was standing there all confused. The elf made a gesture with her hand to tell Nainiae she should sit anywhere comfortable.

“…”

Having noticed the gesture, she lowered her head and carefully sat at a corner. The ones gathered at the table started to have a conversation with Nainiae as the main topic.

“Hum, so that’s her, right?”

“Andal took her to be pu… pu what again?”

“A pupil.”

“So, the human who Andal took to raise as his pupil is her?”

“I would like to have her fight a duel against my guardian spirit.”

“Don’t bother. She appears to be a female and look all weak and fragile. Have you forgotten? Humans are weak? If you kill her, Andal is going to be furious.”

They each said a line to discuss about Nainiae. Andal slowly walked to the table and sat. He butt into the conversation as if he was not going to let it continue like this.

“Don’t make me laugh. The orc that you took in is not going to be able to lay a hand on even the tip of Nainiae’s toes. There won’t be need for a long fight. It will end in 30 seconds.”

“30 seconds? Puhahaha! Andal, it seems like the thousand years made you become more boastful!”

“Huhu, you think I’m just full of empty air? Should I boast some more? It will take at least five high elves.”

With his arms crossed, Andal mischievously smiled and said with confidence. A tree, a human with tree trunk skins to be exact, shook the head and clicked the tongue.

“Tsk. Tsk.”

“Now, now. Everyone, that’s enough. We are gathered here for a different reason.”

The silver haird elf calmed everyone by saying there is a more important matter than Nainiae. She promptly went into the main point.

“I asked all of you to gather here in Rainfield because, as I explained briefly earlier, I felt a strange energy in this place.”

“Strange energy?”

“Just what’s all this ruckus about?”

“It was a few days ago.”

The elf in front of the table started to explain.

“This suspicious energy that I felt in Rainfield is... similar to mana, but it was completely different from mana.”

“Completely different from mana?”

“I am not sure how to describe it. Compared to mana, it somehow felt sticky and unpleasant.”

Nainiae was sitting at a bit of distance from the table and

observed the beings having conversations. Feeling the energy emanating from them, Nainiae gulped.

‘Are they all dragons like the master?’

Starting with the silver haired elf who was sitting in the main seat, golden skinned orc, a tree man with tree-bark skin, a mermaid with fishtail, and red haired Andal... The energy felt from each of them were all extraordinary. Nainiae could be certain of this.

‘They are dragons, right?’

<That’s right. Everyone gathered here are all great beings. At the moment, they are on amusement tours, so they all have their appearances changed.>

To resolve Nainiae’s curiosity, a whispering voice could be heard in Nainiae’s ears.

It was Heliona, the spirit who lived with her in Andal’s lair.

“There were total of three humans who possessed that energy. They were here in Rainfield. If I didn’t borrow the power of the spirit and watched the visual from the past, I would not have come to believe it.”

Having understood this far, the dragons nodded and started to ask questions.

“You didn’t make us assemble just for that, right? It is not like three humans roaming around in a group is all that unusual.”

The dragon who currently assumed the form of a tree man asked carefully. The silver haired elf nodded and continued,

“Those beings with sticky energy showed movements that threatened the balance.”

Nainiae, who had been tuning in to the conversation, furrowed her brows.

‘Threaten the balance?’

The silver haired elf sighed, and continued on to finish what she couldn’t earlier.

“In other words… they are interfering with the fate.”

“What?”

Having heard her words, everyone, including Andal, crumpled their faces.

“Now, tell us, human child.”

The silver haired elf turned to look at Nainiae who was sitting on the corner.

“Pardon?”

“Through the spirit, I saw what happened there in the past. I know you were there at the Rainfield. About what happened there that day… I would like you to tell us.”

“…”

Now, even other dragons turned their gazes to look at Nainiae.

“If you don’t want to, I could tell the story… if you are okay with that.”

Having heard the elf, Nainiae hesitated for a moment. She got up from her seat and carefully started to talk.

“So, I ran into a dark mage in Rainfield.”

She explained that, according to Riley who ran into the dark mage several times, the dark mage’s ability was different from magic which used mana. It was like a separate ability that didn’t need mana.

Considering what they know so far, it seemed certain that this was the ‘sticky energy’ that was mentioned earlier.

“Like me, he used black colored magic, and... Separate from magic, he had the ability to raise the corpses and control them.”

After her words, the silver haired elf nodded as if she was trying to say that Nainiae was telling the truth. The elf added to say there was more.

“Making a dead body to move at will is something that we dragons can do. It is just a puppet play. The problem is... the soul.”

“... Soul?”

“Your name is... Nainiae, is it? How would you feel if you saw someone who died, and completely became dust on top of that... yet is standing right in front of you and very much alive?”

“Pardon?”

Nainiae vacantly asked. The silver haired high elf lifted her finger and pointed at Nainiae’s white eye.

“That eye can locate the existence that the person you are facing is thinking about, right?”

Although she didn’t know how it worked, Nainiae had that eye from the Magic Tower’s experiment. Nainiae carefully nodded.

“How about a human who already died?”

“…?”

“I’ll ask in a different way. About the human that I’m thinking about right now, by any chance, can you locate where he is?”

“…?!”

Having heard the elf’s question, Nainiae vacantly stared at her fair eyes. Nainiae suddenly opened her eyes big and turned her head.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

“…”

Nainiae had her eyes wide open as if she was shocked. There were two reasons for this.

“How could…”

First, the dark mage who was incinerated in Rainfield was found alive in Solia. The second thing was…

‘That man… How did he?’

The grand mage Astroa, the one who died in Solia last spring, was very much alive and moving around.

Chapter 109 - Clock Spring (3)

Perhaps it only took about 30 minutes. Perhaps it took as long as one hour.

"... and that's all of it."

Ian didn't interrupt Riley from explaining what transpired in Rainfield, not even once. When Riley finished explaining, Ian fiddled with his chin and maintained silence for a moment.

"Well, you are free to believe it or not believe it."

Riley quickly laid down on the top of the carriage as if he had no more things to say. At that moment, Ian shook his head and finally opened his mouth.

"No."

An infamous dark mage with hefty bounty was roaming around controlling corpses, that dark mage appeared in the Rainfield's library, the dark mage tried to scheme using Rainfield's clouds, and Riley stopped that dark mage.

The stories that Riley explained in detail about Rainfield were the kind that were difficult for people to believe.

"... I believe you."

Despite that, Ian said he believed Riley in such a clear and confident voice. It was to the point of making Riley concerned. Riley casually moved his eyes and looked at the butler.

“Really?”

Riley had his hands together to lock the fingers and placed them below his head. Riley looked at Ian in the eyes and closed his eyes as if he was trying to say that it was fine then.

“Well then, okay.”

Watching Riley closing his eyes, Ian, who had been maintaining a serious look on his face until now, flinched his eyebrows and brought his hand toward Riley’s shoulder.

“Young Master. Should you be going to sleep like that right now? You need to make a decision!”

Although Riley showed himself swinging sword in front of Ian, and although Riley just told Ian unbelievable stories, this old butler was, surprisingly, not acting any differently from before.

“Why, what now again?”

Riley was actually expecting this inside. As if he was giving in, Riley opened his eyes and asked back. Ian said with a serious face,

“If you will be okay with it, we can go to Solia right after taking the children back to Alieve village.”

“Solia?”

“Yes. If what Nara said in the letter is true… We should go to Solia immediately and…”

With his fist tightened, Ian mumbled that they should beat that dark mage runt to death immediately. Watching this, Riley asked with a curious look.

“I’m in middle of the successorship competition still, aren’t I? Is it going to be all right to get out of it so carelessly?”

Riley thought Ian might hesitate. However, without a silver of hesitation, Ian asked back like this,

“There is something else that is more important, isn’t there?”

For a very long time, Ian had been wishing for the Young Master he served to become the official successor of the Iphalleta house.

However, that man was saying without any hesitation that Riley should give up on it and they should head to some other place.

Something else that is more important…

Instead of looking after one's practical interest, the old butler was certain that stopping the dark mage who once lead the people of the Rainfield to the brink of death was more important.

'A Mercenary Hero, huh...'

Riley looked at Ian in the eyes again and thought about what Nara said before.

'I can say this with certainty... That bastard Kabal... No matter how famous he becomes using his monstrous strength, he can never obtain the title of the Mercenary Hero like Mr. Ian. Kabal can never come close to the mindset that Mr. Ian has. That's why.'

People had to come first before everything else.

That was all that Ian was trying to say.

"Hm..."

Having heard Ian's question about there being something else more important, Riley supported his chin on his hand and thought hard about it for a moment.

This news came by when Riley had Nara's group to tail Rebethra who appeared to be related to Kabal the mercenary who thrown off Riley's father's arm because Riley wanted to catch Kabal.

Now, the dark mage from Rainfield reappeared.

This was not the news that Riley hoped for. However, it was an icky news for Riley to just glance over.

‘Is going there the right choice?’

Riley resolved the case in Alieve Village where a kidnapping incident similar to what happened in Riley’s past life had occurred. He was planning on resting leisurely and go back to the mansion, but now, he fell to a deep thought with a vacant look on his face.

“… Young Master, about that…”

While Riley was in a deep thought, Ian, who was standing next to Riley, pointed to the right side with his finger as if he found something.

“Um?”

Riley turned his head toward the direction that Ian pointed and noticed another Iphalleta house’s carriage entering the village. Just like Ian, Riley wiggled his brows.

‘What is this now again?’

Riley stared at the carriage with a dumbfounded look on his face.

“Ah, as I heard, you were here.”

The butler that drove the carriage here was the one who served Lloyd, the second son of the Iphalleta house.

“… Are we here now?”

“Yes, Young Master Lloyd.”

Soon, Lloyd’s voice could be heard from inside the carriage. Riley, wondering what this was about, raised his upper body from lying down position.

“Big brother?”

Kiiiiic.

The carriage’s door opened, and Lloyd revealed himself from the inside. Wondering what this was about, Riley jumped down from the carriage.

“What brings you here?”

“…”

Riley tilted his head side to side and asked. Ian, in silence, stood

behind Riley and glared at Lloyd.

They were in middle of the successor competition. The fact that Lloyd, the one who had ill feelings toward Riley and Iris, came to see Riley at this time did not seem like a good sign. This was the reason why.

“Ian, I know what you are thinking, but... That is not why I’m here, so I would appreciate it if you did not glare at me with that look on your eyes.”

Ian had been looking at Lloyd carefully and noticed that the parts below his eyes were turned completely dark somehow. Having noticed this, Ian lowered his head as if he decided to yield.

“I just...”

Lloyd now looked at Riley. Lloyd was going to say something, but after seeing Riley was tilting his head side to side, Lloyd just sighed big.

“I just have something I want to ask. That’s why I came.”

He came although the successor competition was in full swing.

He probably had things he was working on, yet he came here while leaving all those be.

Finding it to be unbelievable, Ian was going to ask. However, Riley reached out to Ian with his right hand and stopped him.

“Yes. If it is something I can answer.”

Having heard Riley’s answer, Lloyd casually looked around the area and then said carefully,

“It does not feel right to talk about it here. Can we go somewhere else?”

Because Riley and Ian had the Alieve Village’s children here at the Holy Temple for treatment, they were not in a situation where they could just leave the spot. Riley casually turned to look at Ian.

“Ian.”

“Yes, Young Master.”

“When the children’s treatments are complete, take them to the Alieve Village and come back. I’ll be having a chat with my big brother here.”

Having heard Riley’s order, Ian started to open and close his mouth like a fish in panic.

“B… But… Young Master…”

“I think this conversation is not going to end quickly, so get going.”

“Young Master.”

“Could you ease up on your worries? You saw that earlier, right? You said you trust me, didn’t you?”

Despite the order, perhaps Ian was concerned about leaving Riley by himself. Ian was not able to leave his side so easily. Having heard what Riley said, Ian finally closed the mouth that he had open.

“…”

Lloyd watched the two having a conversation that seemed to have underlying meanings. Lloyd started to walk first as he asked if this will be really all right. Riley followed suit and gestured to Ian.

“Get going.”

*

“So, what is it that you wanted to ask me that you had to come to see me when we are in middle of the successorship competition?”

Lloyd even had his own butler to be away from the conversation.

Lloyd and Riley sat in a hotel with teas on top of a table. Riley fiddled with his fingers.

“Big brother?”

“Ah, right… I’m sorry. I think I’m sleep deprived.”

Lloyd was sitting there with a blank look on his face. It seemed he really was sleep deprived. The parts below his eyes were completely dark. Lloyd rubbed that darkened part and responded late.

“I want to ask you about… my Big brother.”

“Big brother?”

They were talking about Ryan, the eldest son of the Iphalleta house.

There was only one person in the world that Lloyd would have addressed as his Big brother.

“Are you talking about Big brother Ryan?”

Riley carefully mumbled the name, and Lloyd carefully nodded.

“That’s right. I have something I want to ask you about my Big

brother.”

Riley closed his mouth as if he was trying to say Lloyd should continue. It seemed Lloyd was parched. He took a sip from the tea on the table and started to explain.

“I have been thinking about this a little bit by myself, but no matter how I think about it, I couldn’t be sure. It was too much of a sensitive issue to ask to servants, and I couldn’t ask our father either, so…”

Lloyd couldn’t sound more serious. Riley thought this was still not the time to say anything in response, so he kept silent.

“I think my big brother had changed recently.”

“Big brother had changed?”

“Recently… No, perhaps he had been like that since a long time ago, but I feel that something had gone wrong with the big brother.”

This was not really surprising to Riley.

“Do you remember when your maid was coughing blood on the corridor recently?”

“Yes, I still remember.”

“How my big brother reacted back then… I wonder if his behavior was becoming of our Iphalleta family’s image.”

Lloyd thought about how his big brother told him they should just watch a dying person be when they saw Nainiae coughing blood as if she was about to die. Thinking about it made Lloyd cringe.

“About my mother too… Perhaps it is not right to say this to you, but I have a bit of suspicion toward my big brother because of the fact that he was not ashamed of our mother about that day.”

After that, Lloyd’s story unfolded in great detail. However, to summarize, it was as followed.

It seemed Ryan was completely heartless, devoid of blood or tears.

Lloyd did not think Ryan’s personality was becoming of Iphalleta’s image.

So…

Somehow, Lloyd was strongly feeling that Ryan should not become Iphalleta’s successor.

“So, what do you think?”

“What do you mean by that question?”

“About our big brother becoming the successor.”

Before long, Lloyd already emptied the tea, and now he was glaring at Riley as if he was going to burn a hole through him with the gaze.

“I know you don’t like how I have been acting. You didn’t like me for years. I understand that hearing this from me out of the blue must sound very suspicious. However, I would like you to also know that I am… telling you this after having thought about it and deliberated on it for a very long time.”

Not quite at the age of the adulthood yet, Lloyd still had a bit of the look of a boy. The lower parts of his eyes were dark, and it must be because he had been agonizing over this countless times before telling this to Riley.

After agonizing over and then some…

It seemed Lloyd barely managed to decide what would be the right thing to do.

“I had been following my big brother’s back all this time, so I don’t have much. So, instead of me, I would like you to stop him.”

“Big brother, just what are you talking about all of sudden?”

Riley asked back, and Lloyd continued with a boundlessly serious face.

“… Please, you do it.”

‘Do it? Do what?’

“You have the medal of honor from the Solia, and you even have a High Circle mage who is loyal to you, don’t you? Of course, she is away from the mansion so she could be cured of her illness, but…”

Riley started to put Lloyd’s puzzle pieces together. Having realized what Lloyd was trying to say, Riley furrowed his brows.

“I’ll support you. Only then you will be able to beat big brother.”

“…?”

“Please, you become the successor.”

“Big brother, just wait…”

“Succeeding the line after our father, I would like you to become the successor of Iphalleta.”

In the hotel room with just Riley and Lloyd, a pretty long moment of silence came by.

“…”

Could it be because of the silence? In the quiet room, the ticking sound seemed like it was getting louder.

Inside the clock, the clock’s second hand and…

Inside the clock, the clock spring was…

Slowly, it was moving slowly.

Chapter 110 - To Solia Again

“Riley?”

Having heard Lloyd’s proposition, Riley, who had been vacantly keeping silence, behind handedly woke up from his thoughts and said,

“Ah, yes.”

“The answer to the proposition I just made… I don’t need to hear it, right?”

Lloyd looked at Riley with tired eyes.

Honestly, the word ‘pitiful’ fit them well.

Riley stared at his second oldest brother vacantly. His tea still had a few sip left. Riley quenched his neck with it and carefully said,

“Big brother.”

His voice was cautious. However, Lloyd looked like he knew what Riley was going to say. Lloyd’s face looked relaxed as if he was relieved a little.

“Yes.”

“Honestly, I am not liking your proposition.”

“I see… Um, what did you say?”

Lloyd was nodding as if he was trying to say he knew it. Having realized late what Riley actually said, Lloyd opened his eyes big and asked back.

“W… Why?”

Lloyd panicked. Watching him, Riley smiled awkwardly and scratched the back of his head. Riley said,

“I’m not declining it to get ill feelings from you. I have many reasons, but if I am to tell you the things that are coming to my mind first…”

Riley thought about it for a moment and said,

“First, I’m sure you know well what I am called in this family.”

Lazy-Sword.

That was Riley’s title.

Unlike Ryan with the title of Strong-Sword and Lloyd with Swift-

Sword, Riley's title of Lazy-Sword was most certainly not only shabby, but even a shameful title.

"If I went after the successorship with a title like that, I think our ancestors would be ashamed."

Having heard Riley's answer, Lloyd was going to say 'you are doing the competition right now, aren't you?' However, he was blocked by Riley continuing to talk.

"Even if I became the successor by some luck, I don't have the confidence to lead the family well. Honestly, it is such a bother too..."

He could not hear the rest very well, but... Watching Riley smiling awkwardly while scratching his cheek, Lloyd shook his tired face and talked back.

"No, you can do it. If I... If I back you up!"

"Big brother..."

"..."

Having heard Riley's cut and dry voice, Lloyd's lips petrified like stone.

"We are Iphalleta House."

As Lloyd said earlier about his concern for Ryan, the bearer of the title had to shoulder the responsibility that was most definitely not light.

In this house, before the swordsmanship, the character of the successor was far more important. For instance, like Ian.

“I understand that you are genuinely concerned about big brother Ryan. However, I don’t feel like I’m up for it.”

Riley said all sorts of things in great length. However, to summarize it in a sentence, it was a definite no.

“You knew well since several years ago that I have no ambition about being the heir, didn’t you? Although Lady Oruli… who is not at the mansion at the moment, did not think that was the case.”

Lloyd, with his deep-set, hollow eyes, watched Riley’s face vacantly as he slowly got up from the seat.

‘Why?’

At this moment, all Lloyd could remember were how he clicked his tongue or laughed and made fun of Riley as he watched Riley just lying down on the garden.

“R… Riley! Wait!”

Following his little brother, Lloyd got up in a hurry. He quickly lowered his head and reached his hand to Riley who was about to leave the room.

“Wait…”

“… Ah, you are here?”

Riley opened the door and got out, and Ian was there waiting for him. Riley pleasantly greeted Ian and started to walk. Now, there was just Lloyd in the room.

“…”

Of the advices that were passed down in the Iphalleta House, there was one that said,

‘If you are going to draw the sword, then you have to be determined for it.’

It was an advice about actions.

Perhaps it was perfect for Lloyd at the moment.

He could not excuse and say he was still young or he didn’t know things would turn out the way it did.

“… Kuk.”

It was not like Riley declined because of that particular reason. However, at this very moment… Lloyd was thinking his proposition was declined because he made fun of Riley in the past.

‘If I apologize… if I apologize for things I have done back then?’

Lloyd started at the door that Riley left through. Lloyd bit his lips and shook his head.

“… Just what did you talk about in there?”

Meanwhile… Ian asked questions as soon as Riley came out of the room. Riley waved his hand around to refuse making comments. He just walked through the stairs that lead to the entrance of the hotel.

“What about the children?”

Before answering, Riley thought he should check what happened to the children from Alieve Village. Ian said,

“Ah, yes. According to the Holy Temple, the children were in the early stage of the illness, but because they came to the Holy Temple quickly, they said the children have nothing to worry about any more. But… the priests said they have never seen this

kind of disease before, so they were worried.”

Riley was about to get out of the hotel after coming all the way down the stairs. Ian, standing right besides Riley, gave Riley something. Riley tilted his head side to side.

“And... These...”

“...?”

Riley got a hold of what Ian was holding. They were fruits with vibrant color. Wondering what these were, Riley floated a question mark on his face.

“The Alieve Village’s children gave these. Unfortunately, they didn’t give me any. They insisted on giving them to the good looking big brother only.”

Riley flinched after hearing the rest of what Ian said. As if Riley was trying to tell Ian to not joke about things, Riley tapped Ian on the shoulder and looked at the fruits.

“Good looking? I thought they were innocent and untainted because they live in the country side, but well... I guess they would do well in the social life.”

Although he said that like a complaint, he carefully placed the fruits on his side pocket so they would not get squashed. Riley casually turned his head.

‘Well then… how should I go about this?’

Riley turned his head toward the hotel, to Lloyd who must be still inside the hotel to be exact. He started to walk again and got on the carriage that was parked in front of the hotel.

“… Let’s go.”

“Excuse me, Young Master… So, where are we going?”

Riley picked up a fruit from the pocket and tossed it into his mouth. He said,

“To Solia.”

*

Solia happened to be not so far from the village that they were currently at. Riley and Ian were able to arrive at Solia just before the sunset.

“… Um.”

Just before going through the gate to Solia, Riley casually turned his head and looked back at the path they just went through. He narrowed his eyes and looked at the other direction.

‘Is he following me?’

Although Riley clearly refused the proposition when he was at the village, Ian could feel Lloyd still following. Riley had a mysterious smile on his face.

“…”

“Young Master?”

“Ah, I’m sorry.”

Although they arrived at the destination, Riley was still not coming down from the carriage. Ian tilted his head side to side. Having noticed this, Riley finally got down from the carriage.

“Now that we are at Solia, getting together with Nara’s group would be the first order of the business, but since it is late…”

Riley confirmed that Ian went to the stables and handed the carriage over. Riley walked toward the Main Plaza and said,

“Let’s fill the stomach first.”

Watching Riley leisurely walking, Ian wondered if they should be doing this right now. He looked around the area and followed after Riley.

“Young Master. Judging from the content of the letter, it seems this is urgent... Instead of dinner, don’t you think getting together with Nara’s group first would be best?”

Riley didn’t bother to answer Ian’s question. He just kept on walking and stepped into the Main Plaza. Only then he said,

“Ian, for now, calm down a bit.”

Riley calmed Ian with a relaxed voice and looked around the scenery.

The Main Plaza was not as busy as it was during the swordsmanship tournament. However, the place was still booming with street vendors and people walking through.

“Making the move right away is also good, but if you want to avoid making things more bothersome because of the storm coming in the aftermath, making the preparation comes first.”

As Nara said, if they ran into the dark mage again in Solia, he was not sure if a collision could be avoided.

That was not all.

If they ran into Rebethra, the one who Riley had Nara to tail, there was a high probability of the situation getting even more

convoluted.

“Officially, I am currently in the successor competition, right? That bastard Rebethra, who seemed to be related to this incident, must think so too.”

Riley wondered around the street vendors. As if he found the store he wanted, he started to walk toward it. Riley explained why he came to the Main Plaza first.

“We have a need to move with stealth.”

If it was not for this, Riley would be somewhere else in middle of successor competition. He was here in Solia to smack someone on the back of the head. The street vendor that Riley walked to was a mask store.

‘Should I get the same one from the last time?’

Riley thought about how Nainiae was happy to fiddle with the mask that he wore last summer. To get a grip from the thought, Riley shook his head lightly.

‘Why am I thinking about her out of the blue.’

Riley picked the same mask with his finger and said,

“Two of these.”

“You made a great choice.”

It was not certain if the store owner was remembering that the customer who came by last summer was here to buy the same masks. He just rubbed his hands, got the money and gave the masks.

“Here, take this mask.”

“…?”

Ian got a hold of the mask that Riley gave. He realized it was similar to what Nainiae had, so he tilted his head side to side for a moment.

“What are you doing? Put it away.”

“Ah, yes.”

Having heard what Riley said, Ian, who was vacantly staring at the mask, awkwardly put it away in his chest pocket.

“Now, now that we have the masks for moving around, it is about time…”

For the entire day, Riley only ate the fruits that the children from Alieve Village gave and tasteless sandwich that Ian made. Because

of this, his stomach was making the noise. He went straight to the place that sold fried chicken and brown sugar beer.

“Should I fill my stoma…”

“… Young Master, wait!”

Riley was not able to finish his sentence. His sleeve was grabbed by Ian’s hand, putting a stop to Riley’s walk.

“Ah, what? Why?”

All sorts of foods on the Main Plaza’s various street vendors were exuding delicious smell. It was making Riley’s mouth to water. After being stopped by Ian, he crumpled his face and expressed his frustration.

“There, please take a look over there.”

Ian whispered and pointed to the left with his gaze. Riley’s gaze turned to the direction.

‘Um?’

What came in to the view of Riley and Ian was a group that were busy marching toward the Lower Solia through the Main Plaza.

They all wore robes of different colors. Each held books or staffs. They were most definitely from the people from the Right Solia's Magic Tower.

'That is?'

Of the mages walking through the Main Plaza, there was one that Riley knew.

It was the young man that became the head of the Tower after Astroa's death. It was Peruda.

"That's Peruda, right?"

"It is him."

Ian whispered to ask, and Riley answered as he nodded.

"The look on his face feels like something is up."

Somehow, Peruda did not look confident, which was the same look he had before. However, this time, for some reason, he was even breaking cold sweats. All who were watching him had worried look on their faces.

"Shall we follow them?"

“…”

Having heard the question, Riley casually turned his head to look at foods being roasted on the street vendor. He worked up the appetite as if he was having a hard time to pass them up.

“Young Master, I am terribly sorry to say this, but… my instinct as an old man… is saying we should follow them.”

Ian was a veteran who had been in battlefields for a very long time. His mercenary instinct was telling him that it would be best to follow Peruda now.

Having heard Ian suggesting that they should quietly follow Peruda, Riley sighed big enough to make the ground sink in the end.

“Ugh, Ian.”

“Yes.”

“Can I just… go by myself?”

“Young Master!”

Chapter 111 - To Solia Again (2)

Having heard Ian yelling, Riley gave up on the street vendor's foods as if he was yielding. He blocked his ears and looked at the direction that Peruda was walking toward.

'Wait a minute. That direction is?'

Peruda and others from the Magic Tower were headed to the number one place that nobody should set foot on, towards Lower Solia.

"He is headed to Lower Solia?"

"Judging from the direction he is walking toward, I think he must be."

Ian said it with a serious face. Riley sighed again and started to walk first.

"We are going to just watch from the back, all right?"

Riley thought that running into Rebethra would not be good, and running into Peruda from Magic Tower would not be good either. Riley mumbled while trying to stay unnoticed. Ian nodded.

"Yes."

Peruda was tumbling through his walk. As Riley and Ian anticipated, Peruda and the others from the Magic Tower were headed to the pathway that lead to Lower Solia.

“We are from the Magic Tower. Please step aside. Excuse me. We will be passing through for a moment. Please open the path.”

As if there was an urgent matter, through the Main Plaza’s incredibly hectic crowds, Peruda had been pushing people in order to walk forward. It seemed he concluded he could not allow any further delay. He bit his lips and put forth his hand.

“Everyone. I am sorry. I have to get through.”

From his raised hand, green vines that looked thin like strings came out and made their ways through gaps between people.

“What is this?”

The green vines got through the gaps around people’s waists or arm pits. When Peruda made another hand gesture, they slowly moved to the side.

“Uh? Uuuh?”

“What is this?”

Pushed by the green vines that made their ways around people,

the people that tightly filled the Main Plaza were pushed aside to left and right.

“I am sorry. We will pass through.”

A pathway where a person could barely go through was made. Peruda started to walk through the path in a hurry as he apologized to the people.

“Uh? That man is?”

Peruda and the others from the Magic Tower ran through the pathway in a single pile. The people who were pushed aside started to mumble with their eyes wide.

“That’s Peruda, isn’t it?”

“That newbie Head of the Magic Tower?”

“Where? Where?”

“Huk. It really is him.”

Instead of getting past people, Riley had been following Peruda by going from roof to roof. As if he was surprised, Riley wiggled his eyebrows as he looked at the situation from above.

"... That is?"

As for Ian, as if running on the roof felt awkward, Ian uncomfortably stood behind Riley. Wiping off the sweat on his forehead, Ian responded to the question that Riley had.

"That is a plant type magic. I have seen it just once before, so I know about it."

"Plant type?"

"Yes. From what I know, only those who were born with that as the innate type can use it... I didn't know Peruda had that innate type."

"Hm."

Riley brushed his chin as if he was thinking he just learned something. He jumped to another building's roof, and Ian, surprised, tumbled and followed suit by throwing his body to the next roof.

"E... Excuse me, Young Master... This is something only assassins would do..."

"Ian, please. It is not like we are going to become assassins by doing this. Anyway, if we went down, it will be just more bothersome because we will bump into people. We might lose sight of Peruda?"

“Ugh!”

“Now that the path is open, they are definitely moving fast. We need to stay close. Follow me.”

Having noticed Peruda and others were running at a faster pace, Riley made another leap and threw himself to the next roof.

“Ian? You said we should follow him.”

“I… I understand, Young Master.”

Perhaps Ian suddenly felt motion sickness. He felt dizzy looking at the ground far below. He gritted his teeth and followed Riley.

“Excuse me. Please move out of the way.”

Leading the people of the Magic Tower, Peruda arrived at the entrance that connected the Main Plaza to the Lower Solia. He then had the people gathered there to move out of the way.

“Is it starting from here?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

The entrance leading to the Lower Solia had stairs.

It lead to the basement. The place beyond the stairs was dark. The place was hard to see, and horrible stench was coming from below.

Sewer, trash, homeless, excrement, and dead bodies that are not mentioned with ease... All sorts of dirty things of Solia were gathered there. It was obvious why it reeked.

“Starting from here, huh.”

Peruda had the people from the Magic Tower to stand beside him left and right in a row, blocking the entrance. Standing in the middle, he narrowed his eyes and glared down the stairway.

“... Kuuuuuaaaaak!”

While he was staring down the dark area below the stairs, a scream could be heard from beyond the darkness.

“W... What was that just now?”

“A beast?”

“Illen, move people back.”

There were people behind the men from the Magic Tower who were watching. Peruda ordered his men to have the people move

back further. He had the uncertain look on his face as usual and pulled his chin.

‘As expected. They say the occasion makes the man.’

Riley was hiding on the roof. Riley peeked a smile after seeing Peruda exuding an atmosphere that was pretty different from when Riley met him in person.

“Kuuua. Huuuuuaaaak!!”

As Riley thought about the old saying and also thought hard about the successorship, a suspicious scream could be heard again.

The scream was coming from down below the stairs where Peruda was glaring at.

“Kuk?!”

A horrid stench could be felt from below. Peruda, who was glaring toward beyond the darkness, cringed.

“... Huuuuaaaak!”

Along with the stench, something jumped out from beyond the darkness.

It was a person.

The problem was that...

“W... What in the world? What is that?”

“Uuup?!”

The entire body was full of stab wounds. It looked like a rag. The body was also missing two legs. The body was using the arms to support itself to crawl up the stairs.

“Move them back. Back further.”

Peruda waved his left arm and spread a few petals of flower. It was rare, but it was ‘flower scent’ magic that mages with plant innate type used relatively often.

It was used for smelly rooms or dishes that got prepared without eliminating odors. However... It could be also used in a situation like this.

“To the back. Please, everyone. Move to the back.”

The flower petals that Peruda spread was successful in subduing the stench from the Lower Solia to some extent. However... It seemed that was not the problem here.

‘That is not a human being?’

Peruda looked at the person who was crawling up the stairs without legs. In disbelief, Peruda furrowed his brows.

“S… Smell of corpses!”

“…?”

“That person is a corpse, a corpse!!”

Of the people who were watching from the back, someone yelled that. Peruda rapidly turned his head and had his gaze met with a homeless. Still in disbelief, Peruda stared at the existence that was crawling up the stairs.

“A corpse?”

Peruda looked at its eyes. They were pitch black as if the eyes were spread with ink. Peruda opened his mouth vacantly in disbelief.

“… Hu…. Uuuuu. Kuuuuaaaak!!”

One of the people from the Magic Tower made a light above his hand and was about to lean it toward the front. However, having heard the scream, he panicked.

“M… Mr. Peruda! There’s another one!”

Unlike the first one, which didn’t have legs and was crawling, this one was a corpse with the legs intact.

“Tsk!”

It was unknown as to how, but it was missing an arm. Just like the one that was crawling, this one had pitch-black eyes and was charging while drooling. It was certain these things should not be left to roam free.

‘As I thought…’

The dark eyed corpses were charging in order to cut and bite living beings. Looking at the corpses, Riley was narrowing his eyes like Peruda.

“Y… Young Master… T… That?”

Ian panicked after seeing animated corpses. Standing behind Riley, Ian had his jaw dropped.

“Kuuuaaak!”

“Kiiiiaaaaaaak!”

"..."

Before long, the corpses climbed the stairs all the way up. They charged in to bite Peruda. Peruda, who was cringing, raised his right arm toward the front.

"Ku.. Ah... Ug."

Unlike the last time, the vines were definitely thick. Peruda poured out vines from his sleeves and tightly tied up the corpse that charged at him. This time, Peruda raised his right leg.

"Uu. Ku..."

When Peruda slammed the floor loudly with his foot, making a 'bam!' sound, the floor around the tied up corpse started to twitch as if moles were passing through the ground. Plant vines surged out of the floor and started to tangle up.

"..."

Peruda's vines successfully stopped the two corpses. He then waved his arms across each other.

'This cannot be helped.'

Peruda concluded that these two corpses could not be all of them in Lower Solia. As if this could not be helped, Peruda mumbled.

"... I'll seal this place."

When Peruda waved his arms, the walls and the ceiling of entrance to Lower Solia started to twitch like earlier.

*

It was at the Lower Solia.

Near a sewer where excrements were flowing, three men were meeting in secret and having a conversation.

"Um... Good! This body is?"

Of the three men, two of them were old men. One of the old men was looking around his own body and was having the tip of his mouth tilt up in satisfaction.

"How ungrateful. Now I became similar age as you, but still."

With a shady look on his face, the old man looked at the other old man in priest getup. The old man shook his head as if he was fine with it and said,

"Left Hand, it would do you good this time to not lose your body so easily. The Right Leg was furious for a really long time. So stop running around."

“Yes. Yes. I understand. I can’t be ungrateful and die for the third time. That’s right.”

Noticing the two old men continuing their conversation, the young man, who was standing next to them and watching, carefully asked the two,

“You will keep the promise, right?”

The young man was a homeless.

The filthy getup that he wore showed that he was a veteran who had been living in the Lower Solia for a pretty long time.

“…”

The young man’s eyes were burning in flames.

Passion?

Determination?

Love?

It was none of the above.

His eyes were not burning from such a warm emotion.

Looking at young man's eyes, the two old man responded.

"Ah, of course."

"We don't do ungrateful things."

The homeless young man was burning his eyes in full flames in the darkness. The old men turned to look at the young man and added with smiles as if they were trying to tell him he had nothing to worry about.

"Look forward to it, Hamil."

"Um! This is a great body. It is a really great body. With this much, it is enough to get you your revenge."

Hamil.

It was the name of a homeless young man. It could not be said that he was old. However, he had been living in Lower Solia since birth.

"You better not betray me. If you do... I will tell everyone your true identity, Archbishop."

With a deadly look on his eyes, Hamil looked at the old man in priest getup and threatened him. The old man nodded as if he understood and then said,

“Ah, ah. I understand.”

When the old man in priest getup nodded, the other old man put up a shady smile and put forth his hand toward the sewer next to him.

“Just wait, all right? That Young Master that killed your lover, and that ungrateful lass that betrayed your expectation and ran off… All of them…”

As if it was responding to the old man’s hand, a completely black, rotten hand twitched inside the sewer’s dirty water. A corpse with pitch-black eyes struggled its way out of the dirty water.

“As your proxy…”

The old man who raised the dead.

The old man who was exuding pitch-black aura…

“I, The Great One’s Left Hand, Hurial will exact revenge for you.”

It was the Grand Mage of the Magic Tower who died in Lower Solia last spring from having his chest pierced. It was Astroa.

Chapter 112 - Dark Layer

At the entrance ofLower Solia, there were green vines coming out of the walls and ceilings that tightly tangled up to block the path.

“I’ll make the announcement again later, but please... Everyone, please tell others as soon as possible what I’m about to tell you, and please tell them exactly as I explain.”

Peruda used his plant magic to completely seal off the entrance to the pathway that led to the Lower Solia. He turned around to look at the people who were watching what was going on. Peruda continued.

“I’ll be temporarily forbidding access to the Lower Solia. This is not an advice to say it is recommended not to go there. I am forbidding anyone from setting foot in the Lower Solia.”

Perhaps everyone was too shocked by the corpse that just charged at Peruda. People who were gathered at the Main Plaza and watching what was happening at the entrance to the Lower Solia could not dare to talk back.

“The five of you who are standing to my left...”

Peruda turned to look at the entrance that he sealed off. He raised his left hand, and the five people from the Magic Tower who were standing to Peruda’s left responded to his call.

“Yes, Mr. Peruda.”

“I’ll leave it to you to retrieve the corpses that are restrained. They are tied up, but they are still resisting, so please be extremely cautious when you transport them.”

“Yes.”

There were two lumps that were completely wrapped in vines like how burned victims were wrapped in bandages. The five people nodded as they looked at the lumps of vines and immediately carried out the order.

“The five of you who are standing to my right… Please head to the Solia Castle immediately. I think we should report what has happened here to the castle.”

“I understand. What about you, Mr. Peruda?”

“I’ll look around the vicinity and seal off other entrances that leads to Lower Solia.”

The five people who were standing to Peruda’s right side nodded and headed off to Solia Castle.

‘… These are surprisingly appropriate responses.’

Riley, who was watching the situation from the roof, was

impressed by Peruda's quick responses to the situation. With an impressed look on his face, Riley moved his gaze toward the corpses that were restrained in vines.

'Plant magic, huh…'

Peruda looked very different from the naïve man that Riley met before. Peruda looked very dependable. Riley, who mumbled 'not bad,' found a familiar face among the people.

'Ah, he happens to be here.'

It seemed he was here by himself, away from the others. Nara was observing the situation from the Main Plaza alone. Having found Nara, Riley nodded as if he thought it was good that he found Nara at this moment. Riley started to move his legs.

"Ian, it's about time we moved down. Nara happens to be nearby as well, so let's join him and listen to his story. Also, it happens my stomach's skin is about to stick to my back from lack of food, so let's do that while we eat something."

"…"

"Ian?"

As if he became a stone statue, Ian stood there on the roof vacantly and stared at the corpses that were restrained by vines. Ian vacantly had his mouth open and was not able to say anything

back in response to Riley.

“Ian!”

“… Yes? Ah, yes!”

“What were you thinking so hard about? With a blank look on your face?”

Riley went down from the roof first. Having watched it, Ian shook his head hard to get rid of useless thoughts. Ian followed suit and said,

“No. It’s nothing. My apologies. It is just…”

Ian slowly turned his head and looked at the entrance to Lower Solia again. Ian added,

“I just… I just thought it was a little disgusting… I just thought that, so…”

*

It was at the Solia Temple.

Rebethra managed to come back only after it became late evening. Having felt his presence, Priesia, who was praying in

front of the Goddess statue, opened one of her closed eyes slowly and said,

"... You are late."

Having heard the priestess talking to him, Rebethra, who was walking carefully to avoid having his steps heard, responded apologetically.

"Oh my... I hope I didn't interfere with your praying?"

Priesia closed the eye again and restarted her prayer. She skipped responding to his question and tossed him another question.

"It seems you are going out often?"

"Haha. It seems so."

Rebethra smiled awkwardly and responded as if he was ashamed. He didn't say why he was going out so often. He just started to walk toward his room.

"..."

With Rebethra gone, Priesia was now alone in the area with the Goddess statue. She started to move her lips as she prayed.

‘Goddess Irenetsa, what should I do?’

Priesia felt she was daring to ask too much, but she thought that the divine message that she received from the Goddess was lacking in detail.

There was a message that said she should be weary of Rebethra, the Archbishop of the Holy Temple. There was a message that said there will be a dragon that will come to Solia soon, and the entire Solia could be placed in danger. There were only two messages.

‘Let alone stopping him from doing suspicious behaviors, I don’t even have any means of finding out what he is up to. I… What could I do?’

Rebethra was a problem, but the divine message about the dragon that was about to wreak havoc in Solia was also a problem.

‘Just what could I do…’

It had been a while since the divine message about the dragon. That meant it would not be odd if a dragon appeared right now and was flying in the Solia’s sky right now as the message foretold.

‘Only if that Young Master was more cooperative…’

Priesia thought about the ‘person who will stop the dragon,’ the one mentioned in the divine message. She cringed, but shook her head to turn her face back to normal and then opened her eyes.

“…?”

She was going to stare at the Goddess statue after the prayer and ask for advice again. However, she blinked her eyes with a question mark floated up on her face.

<… My child.>

‘Ah.’

There was a blindingly beautiful woman who only Priesia could see, the one who was invisible to others in the temple such as priests or holy knights, was looking down at her while floating in front of the Goddess statue.

“…”

Priesia knew that the woman, who had similar appearance as herself, was the Goddess Irenetsa. Priesia lowered her head in silence.

<If you are lost, I think it would be good for you to look for a butterfly. That butterfly will be able to help you.>

Having heard the voice, Priesia lowered her head further. The Goddess smiled lightly with ‘huhu’ sound and added,

<Follow the child of black butterfly.>

"..."

After that, the voice could not be heard.

Priesia had her head lowered and waited like that for 10 minutes. She carefully and slowly lifted her head and looked up the Goddess statue.

The beautiful woman was gone without a trace.

"A black... butterfly?"

Priesia vacantly mumbled the hint that the Goddess gave her. Priesia straightened her knees and got up, but she was not able to leave the place for a long time.

"..."

She was not the only one. Archbishop, who was hiding behind a pillar and was watching Priesia in secret, was also not able to leave the place.

*

Of the three who sat in a hotel at the Left Solia, Nara asked with a

concerned voice to Ian, who appeared to be not in a good condition,

“Mr. Ian, are you all right? Your face is not looking good.”

“…”

‘Is he thinking hard about something?’

Ian had a serious look on his face. As if he was not able to hear Nara’s question, he was not able to respond.

“He said he is afraid of heights. He said he does not like high places.”

Having noticed Ian was deep in thoughts, Riley figured it would be best to leave him be, so he gave out a rough answer and looked at Nara.

“… Okay.”

Nara saw that Ian’s face was not pale or blue, so he thought that it was not a look of someone who was choke full of fear from heights. However… Nara realized Riley was trying to say it would be best to stop prying on it, so Nara nodded and answered.

“Anyway, you saw it already, those animated corpses…”

Having heard Nara, Riley nodded and poked a food on the table using a fork. He responded,

“It was the same as the ones we saw in the Rainfield? The fact that they were moving on their own without mana.”

Nara nodded once again.

“They have pitch-black eyes, they do not stop even if parts of their bodies are cut off, and they react to living people or animals… They are indeed the same ones as what we saw in Rainfield.”

Riley was chewing on the food he picked up with the fork. Having heard Nara, Riley asked,

“What about Rebethra? How far did you find out?”

Nara sighed big to express frustration and shook his head.

“Other than the corpses, I haven’t found out anything else in particular.”

“Hm…”

Riley was somewhat expecting that result. He nodded as if he understood.

It was because it had not been very long since Nara had been tailing Rebethra after arriving at Solia.

“Still... I have confirmed that the Archbishop does the temple business during the morning, sets foot in the Lower Solia during late afternoon, and comes back around the evening.”

“To Lower Solia?”

“Yes. As for how many times... About two to three times a week.”

“It sounds like he is related to that.”

Nara nodded.

“What about that bastard’s face?”

Riley asked if Nara saw the dark mage’s face. Nara shook his head again as if he was ashamed.

“No. I looked around Lower Solia with Isen to find that bastard, but... The pathways were so complicated there, so we could not find him. That place didn’t even have things like maps.”

Nara scratched his head hard as if he had a headache. Ian, who had been keeping silent all this time, said,

“Lower Solia has sewers, waste disposals and slums tangled up in a mess. Pathways there are so complicated that even the people who had been living there for a long time get confused sometimes.”

Riley moved his eyes and looked at Ian. Ian, with a disappointed look on his face about not being able to locate the dark mage, continued.

“Hm. If Sera accompanied you, perhaps it would have been a little easier. That child probably knows the way around the Lower Solia pretty well.”

Riley turned to look at Nara again. To summarize everything, he asked Nara,

“You said you did not see that bastard’s face, right?”

“That’s right.”

“That means we cannot be sure if... that runt from the Rainfield came back to life here or if there is another runt with the same power as him.”

Riley mumbled about the two possibilities as he split the food on top of the dish into two even portions.

“Huh... Now that I think about it, there is a possibility that there is another runt with the same power as that dark mage instead.”

Nara, who have not thought about that, now had a serious look on his face.

It was because that meant... there could be a third or fourth human being with the same power as that runt.

“... Well, it is fine.”

Riley said leisurely. He poked at each portion of the food, brought both of them into his mouth and then said,

“You guys give up on tailing Rebethra from now.”

Riley said as he pointed at Nara with his fork. Nara tilted his head side to side.

“Pardon?”

“I am not saying your mission is complete.”

Riley was about to put in another piece of food in his mouth, but instead, he swung his fork around and said,

“I am saying you should change the target of your tailing.”

“Target...”

“… Change the target?”

A familiar voice could be heard from the back. Having heard the voice, Nara slowly turned his head and pleasantly greeted a comrade who just arrived at the hotel.

“Ah, Rorona.”

“I just switched with Isen. The Archbishop is currently inside the Holy Temple.”

Rorona came to an empty seat and sat down. She bowed to Riley and Ian and asked about what Riley said just now.

“By the way, you want us to change the target… What do you mean by that?”

As if he didn’t see Rorona at all, Riley, who was fully focused on food, moved his fork toward cabbage and answered,

“You guys came this far, so it is a bother, but…”

Riley cut the cabbage with the fork and said,

“I’ll tail that bastard myself.”

“You will?”

“What about us then?”

“Follow my tail.”

“Pardon?”

Nara could not understand what Riley was talking about. He asked with a confused look. Riley added,

“There is someone who had been tailing me. From today and on, I would like you guys to mind this one.”

Chapter 113 - Dark Layer (2)

“Huh?”

The group from the Magic Tower who went to the Main Plaza with Peruda brought the corpses back to the Magic Tower. What they faced when they returned to the tower at the first floor was a mountain of corpses.

“H… How could this be?”

One of the group mumbled after seeing the Magic Tower’s first floor in a complete disarray. An answer could be heard.

“… Ahah, please pardon me for the intrusion.”

The floor was full of blood, and there were their comrades lying there. The group, who were looking at the scene, turned their heads toward the direction of the voice.

“Y… You are?”

“Having considered the situation, I figured I should stop by here, so…”

In the direction, there was an old man with long grown white beard sitting on the chair and looking at the group.

“H… How could you be here?”

“Please calm down.”

In disbelief, the group panicked. The old man responded, saying there is no need to be surprised, raised his right hand.

“You will understand it soon.”

The old man made a snapping noise with his right hand by flicking it, and the corpses that were lying all around the floor started to twitch.

“Gu…. Uuuuurrrrr…”

The corpses started to come back to life.

Some had burns, and some had frost bites. They all had unique characteristics. However, they all had one thing in common, which was… that they all had pitch-black eyes.

“W… What in the world…”

The corpses were just like the ones they saw at the Lower Solia.

The group anticipated how the corpses would behave. They carelessly tossed the restrained corpses from the Lower Solia to the

side and slowly started to take steps back.

‘R… Run… We must run. We need to tell Mr. Peruda about this…’

When one of the group started to take steps back, as if the rest felt they should too, they started to do the same while being choked in fear.

It was because, regardless of the fact that they were mages of the great Magic Tower, they could not possibly win against the old man who was sitting on the sofa.

“Ahah, that won’t be allowed.”

The old man sitting on the sofa looked at the five men who were trying to run. This time, he casually raised his left hand.

With just that hand movement, just like what Peruda demonstrated, the floor around the group started to twitch, and disgusting tentacles poured out.

“Kuk?!”

A tentacle tied the group’s legs. In panic, they ground their teeth and glared at the old man in front of them. The old man, with belittling laughter, said,

“That’s for beautifully wrapping my gifts. It would be ungrateful

of me to not pay you back for that, so... This is your reward."

The old man was looking at the tightly restrained corpses that were tossed carelessly to the floor. He then started to close five fingers on his hand that he raised.

"Kiiiaaaaaak!"

"U... Uuua? Uuuuuaaaa!"

The group started to scream.

It was because, in response to the old man's hand gesture, there were thorns growing in the vines that tied their legs.

"Um... It seems the color that I used to have before was lost after I switched the body."

Looking at the color of vines and the thorns piercing the group's legs, the old man clicked his tongue as if he was disappointed. At that moment,

"Well, it does not matter."

"... Guuuurrrrr."

The corpses that twitched and got up earlier opened their mouth

wide and looked at the group who had their legs tied.

“Ah, ahah…”

The group felt like they definitely knew now what it was like to be frozen in fear. Tears started to form around their eyes.

“It is time for meals.”

When the old man mumbled, the corpses started to limp their way toward the group.

Of the corpses, it seemed one of them had been starving for quite a while. One of them was charging at them while dragging on the robe.

All of the corpses were the group’s comrades in the Magic Tower. Earlier today, the group had been smiling and chatting with them.

“Uuuaaa, uuuuuaaaaa!”

Thinking they could not just die like this, the group from the Magic Tower, who were shaking in fear, raised their hands to their front.

Whoooosh….

Along with spell incantations, lumps of flames were formed in front of their hands. They aimed the flames at the corpses that used to be their friends.

“Ah! You cannot do that.”

As if the old man could not allow their frantic last-ditch efforts, purple colored ring like things started to form in tight array on the old man’s right hand, and they started to turn like a clock spring.

“Magic… Cancel…”

The five men from the Magic Tower, who were about to launch the flames, mumbled in tears.

“Ah, ahah…”

“Astro…!”

“Guuuurrrr!”

As if he had lost his mind from the fear, one of the group was about to shout out the name of the old man sitting on the sofa. However, his neck was bitten off by the corpse that charged at them first.

“Kuuuuaaaak!”

Crunch.

Crunch.

Munch Munch...

Along with the scream, there were rapid sounds of flesh being bitten off.

“Uuuurrrr, auuuuk...”

The group’s eyes, after the group was caught and bitten off by people who now became corpses to attack them, were slowly losing light.

“... How ungrateful.”

There were sounds of blood splatter from flesh being bitten off. That gruesome scene was happening in front of him. Despite all that, the old man just mumbled leisurely.

“Being quiet during the meal is the right mannerism.”

From the back, the old man leisurely watched the corpses eating their meals. He finally got up and continued,

“As always, the ones being eaten should fully focus on being

silent.”

The old man…

Astroa had a shady smile on his face.

*

It was during a late morning.

On the hotel’s bed, Riley opened his disheveled eyes. He found that Ian’s bed was empty. Riley covered his face with his palm as if he thought this was such a headache.

“Ugh, Ian, please…”

Riley put the blanket aside and got down from his bed. He looked and saw Ian’s bed was neatly organized. Riley looked around and said,

“Where did you go?”

Ever since Ian faced the animated corpses on the Lower Solia, Riley thought something was odd about Ian. Riley scratched his head.

‘By any chance, he is not out there causing a havoc trying to

handle this on his own, right?'

Riley thought about the worst case scenario that he could possibly imagine at the moment. He mumbled that it could not be. Riley was about to leave the hotel, but...

"Um?"

"Ah, Young Master."

He ran in to Ian who was standing in front of the door.

"Ian?"

Unlike Riley, who was about to leave the room, it seemed Ian was about to enter the room. Ian, who was standing in front of the door, tilted his head side to side as if he was wondering why Riley looked confused.

"Are you going to head out?"

It seemed Ian just came back from washing himself. Instead of the butler suit that he always wore, he was in light clothing. There were some water on his face that he didn't manage to wipe off. Having looked at Ian, Riley mumbled he worried for nothing. Riley asked,

"Ian, you..."

“Young Master.”

Riley was going to have a conversation with Ian about what happened yesterday. However, having noticed the serious look on Ians face, Riley stopped what he was going to ask.

“… There is something I want to tell you.”

Ian added that he had been agonizing about this all morning while taking a walk. Ian sighed big.

“Is it a long story?”

“I’ll summarize it.”

Ian changed to his butler suit, prepared a tea that Riley might like at the hotel’s first floor, and brought it to him. Ian started to tell the story.

“It’s about the corpses we saw at the Lower Solia yesterday. I have seen them. To be precise, not the corpses… I have seen those pitch-black eyes.”

The pitch-black eyes were the one thing that was common among all animated corpses. The entire eye was dark without any white. Ian was saying he saw them before.

“About 15… No. 16 years ago, I think… What happened that day is something I still regret about. It is something I remember very clearly as much as I regret it.”

He was talking about when he was still young, before he obtained the title of the Mercenary Hero.

There was a woman in a small town who had been accused of being a witch.

There were strange rumors about her, saying she worshipped bizarre gods and worked up appetite to kill and eat the children whenever she saw the them…

“I met her when I was just a newbie. She also had pitch-black eyes like those corpses… There were no white on her eyes. Her eyes were completely dark.”

Ian said he followed her because perhaps he should not let her be just in case the rumors were true. Ian said he was going to stop her if she did something suspicious like the rumors, and he wanted to be acknowledged for the exploit.

“Witch… Actually, calling her witch was a ridiculous thing to do because… She wielded a sword.”

“A sword?”

“Yes. That woman with pitch-black eyes was… my master who

have taught me swordsmanship when I was still lost in my ways.”

Ian said he asked his pitch-black eyed master one day.

He asked why her eyes were filled with pitch-black color when she had the appearance of a human being and swung a sword like a human being.

“She said it was a blessing.”

“... Blessing?”

Riley asked with a confused look on his face. Ian nodded and said she really did say that.

“Appearance wise, it looked more like a curse than a blessing. So I asked that ‘it look like a curse of some kind.’ When I asked...”

Ian said the woman’s response was...

“She said she actually think that too.”

“And then?”

Ian nodded and continued.

“Yes. Her pitch-black eyes were... not something she obtained

because she wanted to.”

It seemed Ian was about to tell the most important part. With a serious look on his face, Ian lowered his voice.

“About what I told you about my master and what I am about to tell you... They are something nobody in this world knows, even Count Stein.”

“...”

“Young Master. Can you keep this secret?”

Ian asked with a petrified face. Riley was not able to answer. He just kept silence.

“Young Master.”

Ian called Riley again. Riley, who was agonizing about something for a moment, put up an unusually sincere and serious face and looked at his butler.

“Yes.”

“...”

“Tell me.”

This was the first time for Ian to see Riley looking like this. Ian vacantly had his mouth open. Ian told the story with a serious face.

“Right now... Underneath the world that we live, there is another world that people don’t know about.”

*

It was at the Iphalleta mansion’s garden.

It had been a while since Iris stepped on to the grass. Standing on the grass, Iris vacantly stared up at the apple tree that her son had been using instead of sofa or a bed.

“The apples formed pretty late this year.”

Sera, who had been standing next to Iris and looking up the apple tree with her, responded to Iris’ comment.

“I know.”

Sera was thinking about a girl who was crying in front of the apple tree before she left the mansion last summer.

‘The apples will form soon... and I want to pick them all for you, Young Master. I want to live. Can I live?’

Sera remembered the girl who was desperately pleading that she did not want to die as she looked up the apple tree. Sera bit her lips for no reason.

'The apples are ripe now. I wonder where she is and what she is up to? Is she doing all right?'

It was because Sera was worried about Nainiae.

"..."

"Are you thinking about Nainiae?"

Sera was in tears. Having noticed this, Iris smiled gently and asked carefully.

"Pardon? Ah..."

"You must miss her a lot?"

As if she was found out, Sera blushed her cheeks. Without her ribbon, Sera's hair was flowing down to the side. Sera fiddled with her hair and complained,

"I... It's just that I need to get my ribbon back from her, that's all. That's all."

With her face all red, Sera was splashing spit as she talked. As if she was giving in, Iris waved her hand and made suppressed laughing noise.

“All right. All right.”

Sera could not say anything back at Iris for laughing. To change the topic, Sera asked about something else.

“Young Master must be doing well, right?”

“It is Riley. We just need to think that he is going to have a good rest in leisurely manner like how he had when he went to Rainfield.”

“Hm…”

It seemed Sera was more worried about Ian who went with Riley. There was sudden gust of wind, and Sera cringed one of her eyes.

“… It is cool.”

By the autumn wind blowing, instead of cringing, Iris gently closed her eyes and fully embraced the cool breeze.

“It seems so.”

Sera’s hair was blowing in the wind, so she pressed it down with her right hand. Sera suddenly looked confused.

‘Huh?’

Flowing through the wind…

Sera could smell a familiar scent. This was why.

Sera, who had sharper senses, could tell.

This sent was definitely…

“…?”

To the direction the wind was blowing from…

To where the scent that Sera longed for was coming from…

Sera vacantly turned her head toward the direction of the entrance of the mansion. Sera’s lips was shaking, and her mouth slowly opened wider.

Chapter 114 - Dark Layer (3)

It was closer to the lunch time than morning.

Riley finished talking to Ian and then came out of the hotel. What Riley saw outside was... smokes going up in the distance towards Right Solia.

“What is that?”

The scenery of Right Solia viewed from Left Solia looked suspicious. Riley furrowed his brows and looked around to check the situation.

Other people in Solia who appeared to have been just passing by were all stopped as well. They were looking at the direction of Right Solia where the smokes were coming up. They had anxious looks on their faces.

“Excuse me. What happened?”

Ian tapped on the shoulder of one of the people who were looking at Right Solia. In Riley’s stead, Ian asked him what this was about.

“The Magic Tower is...”

It seemed the man was worried. He had anxious look on his face. By Ian’s question, the man vacantly mumbled,

“The Magic Tower collapsed.”

“… Pardon?”

The man mumbled in a low voice, so Ian didn’t quite hear that. Ian asked again, and the man explained again.

“The Magic Tower, the Magic Tower collapsed. At its top, there were what appeared to be lights flashing… All of sudden, the tower leaned to the side and just like that…”

Having heard the man’s explanation, Riley, who was looking at Right Solia, directed his gaze toward where the Magic Tower was.

Having examined the view again, Riley noticed that the Magic Tower, which used to be eye-catching because its top peaked out above everything else, was now gone.

‘What is this?’

Looking at the collapsed tower, Riley crumpled his face, wondering what was going on. Riley thought about Peruda, the current head of the Magic Tower who said he was going to seal entrances to the Lower Solia.

‘Just what did he do to make the tower collapse?’

Even if the dark mage from the Rainfield was revived, it was probably impossible for him to collapse the tower by himself.

The building's wall was made of marble stones that were sturdier than ordinary things, which contributed to the building's stability. Moreover, inside the wall, there was a special protective spell that only the head of the Magic Tower could disengage.

These were certain facts that Riley have heard from Peruda when he went to see the Magic Tower last time.

"The bigger problem is the direction which the tower collapsed."

The man continued with concerned look on his face.

"The direction is... toward the Holy Temple."

"The Holy Temple?"

The man raised his finger and pointed it to where the smokes were coming up. Ian and Riley directed their gazes to the direction.

"The direction which the tower leaned and collapsed is toward the Holy Temple. In other words, the smoke is..."

Not just the Magic Tower, but the Holy Temple was destroyed as well.

Riley realized what the man was trying to say. Riley had a mysterious and complicated look on his face.

It was because Rebethra, the one he was going to tail today, was a part of the Holy Temple.

‘Just what’s going on?’

Confused, Riley looked at towards Right Solia and narrowed his eyes. The man who was standing next to them gathered his hands and started to pray as if he could not let things be.

“I am worried. At this time, the Priestess must have been praying there… Ahah… I hope the Goddess Irenetsa helped her.”

It seemed he was a believer. The man started to pray to the Goddess of the Holy Temple. Riley looked at the man, and as if he thought he could not let things be, he promptly started to walk.

“Let’s move.”

Ian followed behind Riley. Looking at Riley’s back, Ian asked what he was going to do.

“Young Master, what are you going to do?”

Ian had a reason to ask. Their original plan was to go straight to the Lower Solia after leaving the hotel.

"..."

Having heard Ian's question, Riley postponed answering. Riley walked and rolled his brain.

There were two choices.

First one was going to the Lower Solia and finding out about the corpses. The second choice was going to Right Solia which was now a complete mess.

"What is your intuition telling you?"

It was a hard decision to make, so Riley decided to trust a mercenary's intuition.

"I think we should..."

Initially, before all this, Ian proposed that they should go check out the Lower Solia where corpses were instead of going to Right Solia where Rebethra must be at. Ian now took a moment of pause. He said,

"... go to Right Solia."

Having heard Ian, Riley kept on walking without saying anything. He went to a corner with no traffic and brought his hand

to his inner chest pocket.

“Well then, we’ll go there.”

Riley put on the mask that he purchased two days ago and quickly moved in Right Solia’s direction. Ian also put on the mask and followed him.

*

Complete chaos…

The situation in Right Solia could be summarized in those words perfectly.

The Magic Tower was the tallest building there. With it collapsed to the side, not just the Holy Temple, but several dozens of buildings were destroyed with it.

“There was a huge destruction like this here, but we didn’t hear anything.”

From the collapse, there were injured people, crying child who lost the parents, and wreckage of the buildings here and there… Riley looked around the mess and mumbled about the ridiculousness. Ian said,

“Have you forgotten? Right Solia has sound-proof device

installed. We probably could not hear the sound when we were at Left Solia because... of that."

Having heard Ian's explanation, Riley looked at Right Solia's entrance, the top of the stairs to be precise where the floating spherical marbles were. Riley clicked his tongue as if he was convinced.

Riley was looking around the situation again. He then furrowed his brows as if he noticed something strange. Riley mumbled,

"Are the guards from the castle coming late because of that too?"

It was because he felt that there were far too few guards around the place.

"Now that you mentioned it, that really is. Even with the sound-proofing, when something this big happened, they must have seen it... I don't see that many of the forces from the castle."

It seemed Ian was thinking the same as Riley. He started to count the number of guards who were helping the injured and crying children.

"... Kiiiiiaaaaak!!"

It was when the two were observing the situation in Right Solia. Not too far from where they were, a scream in fear could be heard.

‘It’s near!’

Having heard the scream, Ian opened his eyes big. Ian and Riley exchanged gazes in the split second and ran toward the direction of the scream.

“S… Save me…”

‘Oh god, here too?’

In a single breath, Ian ran to where the scream came from. Having arrived at the scene, Ian discovered a woman who was about to get attacked by a corpse. Ian gritted his teeth.

“Guuuurrrr!”

Fortunately, Ian was able to get there next to the woman before it was too late. He drew the sword from his waist and swung his arm.

“Hup!”

Ian’s sword exuded blue light from carrying mana. His swing created a long after image and sharp echo.

“Gu… Uuu.”

The corpse lost its head. The corpse seemed like it was hardening, but it was only for a moment. It seemed cutting off its head was not enough to stop it. The corpse started to move again.

“Guuurrrr!”

When the fallen head on the ground screamed, the headless body charged toward Ian as if it was responding to the head.

“W… Watch out!”

The woman seemed to have suffered a leg injury. She was sitting there crunched down. Having noticed the dead body moving, she mumbled. Ian lowered his body as if he knew and then swung his sword.

Blue light left many after images as it drew long tail. The corpse that was charging at Ian stopped once again.

“…”

Two of its arms, which were cut vertically, fell and made thump noises.

Its waist, which was cut horizontally, fell and made a thump noise.

The corpse’s body was cut for the second time, and the body

parts fell to the floor. The woman was watching this. It seemed she could not stomach what she just saw. She quickly covered her mouth.

“Uuup!”

“You have no time to sit here and throw up.”

As if he was trying to say not to watch anymore, Ian stood between the woman and the corpse so she could not see the corpse. Ian extended his hand toward the woman and continued,

“Unless the body is incinerated or cleansed with holy power... this bastard will move again.”

Woman looked at Ian who was wearing a mask and shriveled. Having heard what Ian just said, she panicked and asked,

“I... It will move again?”

“Please get up for now. I’ll support you, so please get out of this place as quickly as you can.”

The woman thought Ian was suspicious because of the mask. However, she changed her mind. She grabbed hold of the hand of the man that just saved her life and got up.

“T... Thank you. Thank you.”

Ian was helping the woman get up. Ian casually turned his head and looked at where Riley was standing just now.

It was only for a brief moment, but the Young Master who Ian served was gone somewhere. He was gone from Ian's sight.

'Young Master...'

Ian figured out why Riley left the scene. Ian left the woman in the hands of the guards and looked around. It was to check if there was anyone else who was in danger like the woman earlier.

"....!"

Soon...

In the distance, Ian found an injured person crushed under rubbles and an existence that was approaching. Ian opened his eyes big and rushed out.

"Don't you dare!"

The existence in rags was approaching the person crushed under rubbles. Ian only saw the back, and he assumed it was a corpse. Ian was about to swing his sword and prevent loss of life. In Ian's ears, a voice could be heard.

“… Are you all right?”

‘A human?!’

It was a human’s voice.

“Back, back! Look at your back!”

The injured man under rubbles noticed Ian and shouted to warn the person under the rag. The person in rag getup slowly turned the head.

“Pardon?”

Ian, who jumped up into the air, was going to swing his sword as he landed. However, having heard the voice of a girl that somehow sounded familiar, he narrowly stopped the sword in time.

“… Ah.”

The girl under the rag, who turned to look at Ian, casually glanced at the sword aimed at her neck. She vacantly opened her mouth.

“Excuse me…”

Looking at the sword aimed at her neck, the girl broke cold

sweat. She smiled awkwardly and asked politely,

“Could you please… withdraw your sword?”

“… Y… You are?”

Ian saw who it was under the rag. Finding it to be unbelievable, Ian furrowed his brows. The injured man under the rubbles asked in a hurry without a care of his own well being,

“A… Are you all right, Priestess?!”

“P… Priestess?”

“Quiet… I am sorry. I’ll introduce myself later. He seems to be seriously injured, so…”

The girl under the rag brought a finger toward her lips and said ‘quiet.’ Priestess Priesia put forth her hand toward the man who was crushed under the rubble.

“P… Priestess. You should get away. That masked man… He looks suspicious somehow.”

“…”

Having heard that, Ian burst into anger inside. He got a vein

bulging on his forehead as he put forth his hand.

“Hup!”

Ian put his fingers below the rubbles that were crushing the man and then gritted his teeth.

“Uh? Uhuh?”

The rubbles looked heavy enough that it seemed having a dozen strong men was not going to be enough to lift it. However, it started to get lifted slowly. The man who was under the rubbles opened his eyes big and looked at Ian.

“T… This… How could this be?”

“Come out.”

“Ah, ah, yes…”

By Priesia’s holy power, his legs, which were turned to pulp from being crushed earlier, were restored enough that he could walk. The man tumbled and got the legs out. The man lowered his head and said,

“T… Thank you.”

“You can walk, right? Please go to the guards.”

“W… What about you, Priestess?”

“I still have things to do.”

It seemed she was being chased by someone. Priesia held down the rag further to hide her face. She casually turned her head and looked at Ian who was wearing a mask.

“I think it will be similar to what he was going to do.”

“I… I see.”

“Also… To the guards… Please do not tell them that you saw me. Can you promise me that?”

“…?”

Ian looked at Priesia and tilted his head side to side, confused. Priesia continued,

“I beg of you.”

Priesia was respectfully requesting them to keep this a secret. It was making Ian’s head complicated.

‘Why is that?’

When the Magic Tower collapsed, the Holy Temple was collapsed as well. There had to be many people who were worried about her safety, but she was trying to keep her identity secret. Ian could not think of a reason for this… no matter how hard he thought about it.

Chapter 115 - Dark Layer (4)

“Well then.”

Priesia, who had been hiding her identity by covering herself in a rag, slowly turned her head and looked at Ian.

“May I ask who you are?”

Ian, who had his face hidden because of the mask, had his eyes met with Priesia. Ian gulped.

There was no way to describe Priesia’s face other than that she was truly beautiful, literally like an angel.

Just facing her alone was enough to stop his train of thought for a moment. Ian just stood there with a vacant look on his face for a moment. He tightened his fist to barely wake up from his useless thoughts.

“I am sorry, but I’m afraid I cannot tell you.”

Ian shook his head and said he could not tell her. Priesia stared at the mask on Ian’s face for a moment and slowly nodded.

“I understand. People have their reasons.”

While Priesia mumbled, Ian looked around to check the corpses.

Ian tossed a question.

"Priestess, why are you here?"

The Magic Tower collapsed, and the tower collapsed on top of the Holy Temple and destroyed it.

There weren't just a few people who were worried about her at the moment. It was a relief to know that she was safe, but on the other hand, it was strange.

She was hiding her face by wearing a rag. She also just told the man she saved that he should not tell others that he saw her. Ian thought about the two questions, but they were complete mysteries no matter how he thought about it.

"You should be telling others that you are completely fine and alive like this, but instead... You are trying to hide your identity. Why? People of Solia are worried."

Ian asked in worried tone. Priesia looked at the Right Solia in complete disarray, bit her lips, and mumbled an answer that had no relevance to the question.

"I won't ask who you are anymore. You must have a reason why you are wearing a mask."

Even her cringing face was so mesmerizing, so Ian was just standing there with a blank look on his face. Ian nodded his head

late. Priesia said,

"In that case, it would be all right if I asked what you are trying to do here, right?"

Ian wiggled his eyebrows.

"You are here to save people, isn't that right?"

"…"

"You were about to swing a sword at me, but you stopped. You saved the man who was crushed under a building. Actually, based on these two things, I think the answer is already out. Isn't that right?"

As Priesia said, Ian was at the Right Solia to save people.

The Young Master that Ian came here with was now gone without a trace to find the source that was raising the corpses while Ian saved people. Ian was certain of this.

"I am similar to you. I am here to save the people. There still are many who are injured."

"In that case, why are you hiding your identity?"

“I cannot tell you that.”

“…”

“I am sorry. I cannot tell you why. All I can say to you is asking you to help me save the people.”

She also added and told Ian to not tell others that she was here. As if she was ashamed, Priesia lowered her head.

“…”

Ian vacantly stared at Priesia for a moment. He kept silence for a moment, and then extended his hand toward her.

“I understand.”

After seeing Ian’s hand asking for a hand shake, Priesia lifted her head with a bright face.

“I am wearing a mask right now, but as you guessed, I am staying here instead of my master to save the people. It is obvious this will be much more efficient.”

Ian put the sword back in the sheath, tapped at the handle, and led the way. Priesia followed him.

*

While leaving the rest to Ian, Riley left the scene because he had a few things he had to find out on the side. At the moment, he was staring at the direction where angry voice was coming from. It was from behind a collapsed building.

“About the story about the Lower Solia that was a big issue recently, I won’t mention it, but I will presume everyone knows about it. About that incident… who do you think caused it?”

The voice was agitated.

There were dozens of priests and holy knights gathered in front of the collapsed Holy Temple. The old man who was standing in the front of them all was the Archbishop Rebethra, the one Riley had been looking for to follow around.

‘I knew he was alive, but what’s this?’

The situation definitely looked like it was heading in a strange direction.

It seemed the holy knights and priests barely escaped the collapsing building. They were covered in dust. They were in shambles. However, for some reason, the look on their faces and eyes were full of fury.

“Dead people are being forced to stand up, and as if they are

puppets, they are charging toward people who are still alive.”

Standing in front of the holy knights and priests, Rebethra tightened his fist and spoke. The people gathered there started to grind their teeth.

“Who do you think is responsible for this?”

Having heard the Archbishop, Riley crumpled his face.

‘What?’

While Riley was crumpling his face, Rebethra continued with even more heart broken voice.

“Solia Castle, Solia’s Magic Tower... They have not shown any signs of atonement about the Astroa incident. We can’t just sit idly and watch like this forever.”

Rebethra spoke ill of the Solia’s Castle and the Magic Tower. He opened his arms wide and started to pour out tears.

“Instead of learning the lesson, they got greedy, and now the Magic Tower collapsed, and they have taken away from us our Holy Temple... and the daughter of the Goddess Irenetsa.”

Having heard the speech, Riley narrowed his eyes.

Rebethra was not just trying to stir up the priests and holy knights gathered there. He was trying to get everyone involved, even the other people gathered nearby who were watching him.

“We must not forget Goddess Irenetsa’s teachings... which says we should calm our anger and forgive the sinners. However!”

Rebethra tightened his fist while being in tears. Becoming sympathetic, there were people from the temple who were shedding tears just like him. Riley mumbled vacantly,

“... That runt... What is he trying to do here?”

Rebethra continued.

“They are trying to commit unspeakable sins, and they are committing unspeakable sins. They have abandoned the sense of humanity and moral. Do you think that just sitting idly and watching them be is... truly the wish of Goddess Irenetsa?”

As if people were responding in favor of Rebethra’s words, the holy knights raised their swords and shields, the Holy Temple’s priests raised their staffs, and believers of the Temple raised their hands.

“We can’t just do nothing. Now, we won’t just watch and do nothing either.”

“...”

“I can feel that even Goddess Irenetsa is infuriated. To those who have abandoned their humanity, give them the punishment from the God!”

Rebethra shouted out loud with determination, and the people of the Temple responded with even louder voice in favor.

“Give them the punishment from the God!”

“They have taken away the daughter of the God! Give them the punishment from the God!”

“Give them the punishment from the God!”

“Punish them…”

Rebethra filled people with fury. He slowly turned his body and narrowed his eyes.

‘Now, Priestess… I know you are alive. Are you still going to hide around despite this?’

Behind the building, Riley, who had been in hiding and watching Rebethra smiling, also narrowed his eyes and started to spin his brain.

‘Just what are you scheming?’

*

“Mister, behind you!”

“Kuk?!”

Ian’s sword circled around once and cut off the head and two arms of the corpse that was charging at him from the back.

“Guuurrrr.”

It was endless.

Ian had been cutting the corpses again and again, but despite that, Ian and Priesia had been fighting a tough battle.

“Tsk.”

There was a corpse that grabbed on to Ian. It was trying to bit Ian’s arm. Ian used raw strength to push it away. He then twisted his body in a large motion and swung his sword. This time, three corpses rolled on the ground.

“Miss, please.”

Instead of Priestess, Ian called her Miss and turned to look at

Priesia who was supporting him from the back.

“Yes.”

Priesia nodded and put forth her hand. She closed her eyes gently, and steady, soft white light exuded from her hand.

“… Guuurrr.”

When her hand started to shine, the corpse that was pushed off by Ian’s monstrous strength and lying on the floor started to exude light.

It was the cleansing light using her holy power. It was something that a priest from the Holy Temple could use, and because the Priestess was the one using it, its power was extra special.

“I finished handling one of them. I’ll handle the next one… Kuk?”

Priesia just finished cleansing one corpse, but she saw a zombie that was charging at her from the front. She quickly changed the direction of her arm and created a barrier.

“Kuuurrr. Kuuuaaaa!”

“Mister!”

The zombie that was blocked by the barrier started to scratch and bite the barrier. It was going wild. Priesia furrowed her brows as if this was such a bother. She turned to look at Ian.

“Hup!”

However, Ian was held up in middle of fighting dozens of corpses. The corpses constantly grabbed Ian. He could only shake them off or dodge them.

Actually, if cleansing the corpses was all that needed to be done, they would not have been having such a hard time, and it would not have taken so long either.

The problem was the magic that was being cast by a few corpses wearing robes.

“Ice… Arrow…”

“Fire… Bolt…”

There were heads of corpses just rolling around on the ground. However, when these heads mumbled with leaking wind like voices, the headless bodies cast magic and posed danger against Ian.

‘Damn it!’

Ian completely crumpled his face. In a hurry, he threw his own body behind rubbles of collapsed buildings and rolled.

Putting the sound of loud explosion behind him, Ian was able to hide behind the rubbles. It was a close call. Before Ian was able to catch his breath for a moment, Ian found a corpse coming at him with its mouth wide open. Ian extended his arm.

“Guuurrrr!”

“…?!”

Crunch.

It showed up right in front of Ian, so he was not able to get away. Ian’s arm was bitten by the corpse’s teeth.

“Kuuk!”

There were drops of sweats flowing on Ian’s face. They fell to the ground like rain drops.

“M… Mister! Just wait a bit! I’ll heal you right away…”

“Fire… Lance.”

Surrounding herself in barrier, Priesia was trying to get to where

Ian was hiding. However, from her behind, a corpse wearing a robe shot the Fire Lance, a pretty high level magic.

"Fire... Lance."

"... Uuuk?!"

Although she had the barrier on, being struck by the Fire Lance twice from the back took a toll on her. Priesia crumpled her face. Before she could walk a few more steps, she faltered.

"God damn it. What are the guards doing..."

'They are just corpses, so how come they can display such monstrous strength?'

Ian, who was struggling against the corpse that he ran into behind the rubbles, suddenly raised his ears.

'This sound is?'

Clank.

It was the sound of armors clanking.

'Are they finally here?'

Ian thought that these heavy noises must be from the guards or knights from the Solia Castle arriving at the scene. Ian's face was about to be brightened, thinking he was saved. However, it immediately darkened.

"... Guuurrr."

The armored things were approaching where Ian and Priesia were standing. Their eyes were pitch black.

"..."

They were corpses.

"At this rate..."

'At this rate, we will die.'

Ian was almost certain of this. He desperately pushed off the corpse that was coming at him. He then ran toward where Priesia was struggling to stand up.

"Are you all right?"

"Ugh... Ugh..."

Last spring, she withstood dozens of magic from Astroa.

However, now, she was covered in cold sweats and breathing hard.

This was as result of repeatedly performing heal and cleansing.

She healed the injured, cleansed the corpses, and had to defend against the nails and even magic attacks coming from corpses charging at them. The burden was increased three fold.

“Ugh… Ugh… M… Mister. Are you all right? Your arm was bitten. Please wait a moment. I’ll heal you first…”

“No. It is all right. A wound like this is something I always had hanging on my body while I was in the battlefield. It was like a medal of honor.”

Ian pushed away Priesia’s hand when she tried to heal him. Ian looked around the area and said,

“Besides…”

He noticed that the number of corpses grew substantially. He narrowed his eyes.

‘Their number is growing steadily.’

Before they realized, Ian and Priesia, who were saving people in the Right Solia, were fighting against greatly increased number of corpses.

Cutting, blocking and cleansing…

They were not sure for how long they had been doing this.

When they came to their senses, they realized they could no longer hear the screams or cry in pain from anyone anymore from the area. All they could hear now were ‘guuurrr’ sound in irregular pattern that was coming from the corpses.

“We are… surrounded.”

Under his mask, Ian had a desperate look on his face as he mumbled. Priesia, with her face covered in sweat, looked around.

“…”

The area was completely filled with corpses.

They could not see any particular path for getting past them.

Moreover, right in front of them, there were corpses from the Magic Tower wearing robes. They each had different innate type magic attacks readied and floating on the air. It looked like they were going to fire the magic attacks at any moment.

‘Goddess Irenetsa… Is this the end?’

Priesia tightly closed her eyes.

For some reason, the very last divine message that she received was coming to her mind.

<Follow the child of black butterfly.>

‘Black butterfly? What could she mean by that?’

It seemed Priesia’s strength was at its end. The golden barrier that she had to the front started to flicker.

“Mister… I am sorry. Because of me… this…”

Priesia was trying to apologize to Ian who was supporting her to stand. Blurring the end of her sentence, she suddenly had a vacant look on her face.

“…”

“Priestess?”

Since they were surrounded by corpses, Ian used the title, Priestess, instead of Miss. Wondering what was up with the Priestess, Ian tilted his head side to side.

“… Butterfly.”

“Pardon?”

“The butterfly…”

Instead of finishing her sentence, Priesia put on a vacant look on her face. She was chasing something with her eyes.

It was a butterfly.

On top of that, it was a butterfly with black wings.

Flap, flap…

As if it was dancing, it was flying around in front of Priesia and Ian’s eyes. As if the butterfly did not fear the corpses at all, it flew toward the bastards that was blocking the path behind the two people.

“… I am relieved.”

“…?”

“…?”

From behind them…

From the direction where the black butterfly was flying toward…

Someone mumbled ‘I am relieved.’

“… I was not late.”

‘This… voice is?’

Ian had heard this voice before. Just like Priesia, Ian vacantly opened his mouth.

Whooosh…

Standing in front of the zombies that were blocking the path she was trying to go through… The girl wearing a scarlet coat on her shoulder had a black flame on her left hand and an apple floating on the air. Standing like that, she was smiling.

Chapter 116 - Dark Layer (5)

It was at Lower Solia.

Peruda was fighting a tough battle.

“At this rate…”

To explain why he was having a tough time, he was having a hard time escaping Lower Solia, which was like a maze.

He was trying to stop the corpses from crawling out of Lower Solia and spread to the Main Plaza and other directions. He had been sealing off every entrance that lead to Lower Solia. Now, he was trapped in Lower Solia and unable to escape.

‘The pathways are too complicated.’

Thinking he should block the pathways more tightly and thoroughly, Peruda walked into Lower Solia just a little bit. However, by the time he realized it, before long, he was trapped in Lower Solia. He had been wondering around for a very long time.

“How many hours has it been… No, how many days has it been?”

He was not sure about his sense of time.

Peruda could not know how long it had been since he was

trapped here. However, he could tell one thing for certain.

Somebody in Lower Solia was getting in his way of escaping this place.

He knew because…

“Damn it, again…”

It felt like he had been going in circles, so Peruda had been putting marks on the floor or the sewer walls so he would not get confused. However, someone had been tempering with the marks, and Peruda noticed this.

‘Someone is changing the path marks.’

It seemed Peruda was anxious. He mumbled with a serious look on his face.

The direction of the dirty water’s flow, locations of makeshift plate bridges, narrow paths between buildings that look similar, and even sheets of fabrics that were placed to hide hidden pathways… Everything was changing little by little.

“God damn it… I can’t get out.”

“… Guuurrr.”

Getting lost was not the only problem.

There were pitch-black eyes corpses swinging their claws at Peruda who was circling and circling Lower Solia.

“Tsk.”

Having heard the cry coming from the back, Peruda cringed and twitched his fingers he had lowered earlier.

“Guuu…. Ugh…”

There was a corpse that was approaching Peruda, but it was stopped by sharp vines that came out of the ground which pierced its legs.

“Could these things have done it?”

The pathway in Lower Solia was changing. Wondering if it was done by the corpses, Peruda looked at it. Peruda shook his head.

‘No, these runts do not have any intelligence.’

Peruda used plant roots to pierce the corpse’s body and restrain it. It was like kabob with meat. Peruda closely observed the corpse’s body and ground his teeth.

‘It is being controlled by someone, but it is definitely a corpse. It is a dead person.’

The corpse was struggling while being pierced by the vines. It was moving its arm toward Peruda, struggling.

The vine that pierced its leg had penetrated and came out above its shoulder. Despite that, instead of losing strength, the corpse was struggling even more.

‘It is like a puppet.’

Even when its arms were cut off, and even when its head was chopped off, the corpse moved. For the first time in his life, Peruda hated his innate magic type.

‘Only if I could use some other type of magic..’

To eliminate the corpses, what Peruda needed was actually flame type magic. However, he was not able to use flame magic.

It was because he was born with the innate type that was the exact opposite of the flame. With plant magic as the innate type, using flame magic was impossible for Peruda.

“... I have never been to Lower Solia. To think that it would become such a huddle....”

Leaving the restrained corpse behind, Peruda started to walk again. He then heard someone's voice.

"Magic Tower's Head, Peruda."

"…?"

From somewhere inside the sewer, there was an echo of some man's voice.

"Let's do a trade."

Peruda was surprised. He started to walk toward the direction where the voice came from.

"It's pointless."

Peruda came to the place where he thought the voice was coming from. However, it was just an empty place. He looked around the area.

"In the Lower Solia, eye sight and hearing are not very useful. The only important one is the sense of smell."

Having heard the voice, Peruda put on a violent look on his face. With a weary look, Peruda asked,

“Who… are you?”

After a brief moment of silence, a response could be heard from the man,

“I am the man responsible for making you go in circles in the Lower Solia right now.”

Instead of an echo, this time, Peruda could hear the voice was coming from right behind him. Peruda opened his eyes big and rapidly turned his head. Peruda glared at the man who was approaching him.

“…”

After seeing the man who appeared behind him and hearing what he said about being responsible for making Peruda going in circles, Peruda was about to use his magic and restrain the man. However…

“If you are intending to do something to me, it would be best for you if you gave up?”

“…?”

The man continued to talk, so Peruda stopped his finger movements.

“There are many watchful eyes in Lower Solia.”

Having heard what the man said, Peruda moved his eyes and felt dozens of presence that he did not notice at all until now. Peruda ground his teeth.

He was being threatened.

“I am sorry, but all of them are currently my eyes, noses, and mouths, so… If you act carelessly toward me, you may never leave this place.”

“You…”

“Well, if you obliterated the entire Lower Solia, then that would be a different story.”

The man closed his eyes and mumbled leisurely. He then narrowly opened his eyes all of sudden and glared at Peruda.

“If you want to leave this place, it would be in your best interest to listen to me. Peruda, the Head of the Magic Tower.”

It was a bold threat. Peruda ground his teeth. He was going to talk back and say ‘don’t make me laugh.’ However, the man suddenly covered Peruda’s mouth. Peruda furrowed his brows.

“I know you had been trapped here for quite some time now… By

any chance, don’t you want to know what is happening outside?”

“…?”

“Make a guess. Should I give you a hint?”

The man who covered Peruda’s mouth and was smiling continued.

“The Magic Tower collapsed.”

The man’s eyes were burning with desire for revenge.

*

The one that appeared in front of the corpses at the Right Solia was a girl.

She had black hair and ivory-white skin that contrasted with her hair color.

She had scarlet outwear on her shoulder like it was a cape. She had a black flame floating on her left hand. She threw the black flame to the front and moved her right hand.

“… Guuurrr!”

The black flame made a direct hit to one of the corpses that was surrounding Ian and Priesia. Along with a beastly roar, the corpse burned to crisp and became ashes.

“Guuurrr?”

It was not certain if the corpses actually had a sense of comradery. However, when one of them was burned, as if they were responding to it, others turned to look at the direction where the flame came from. In other words, they looked at the direction where the girl was standing.

“… Kuuurrrr!”

They saw the girl staring at them with a cold gaze. The corpses identified her as an enemy and started to charge toward her.

Sururung…

The girl moved her right hand earlier. She drew the sword that was hanging on her waist.

“There are a little less than one hundred?”

After drawing the sword, the girl estimated the number of corpses that were charging toward her. Her stance looked very leisurely with moments to spare.

Maintaining her leisurely stance, she was watching the corpses running toward her. When there was about three steps between the corpses and herself, she started to swing the sword she held on her hand.

“Guurrrr, Keke!”

The girl swung her sword, and…

Flame followed along the path of the blade.

It felt like she was waving a fabric made of flame.

Whoosh…

Everytime the blade was swung, along its path, flame appeared and burned the corpses that were charging toward her.

“Kuuuuaaaa!”

The corpses were cut by the blade, and they were immediately set on fire, preventing them from moving again.

“What in the world…”

With her left hand placed on her back, she just had her right hand to the front and chopped down the corpses one by one as they

came at her. Watching this, Ian and Priesia vacantly opened their mouths.

“Ice…”

“N… Nainiae! The corpses are using magic…”

Nainiae.

Priesia called out the name of the girl who was swinging the sword. A gust of wind passed by Priesia’s cheek. Surprised, Priesia stopped shouting.

“…?”

Priesia was creeped out by the wind. She slowly turned her head.

All of the corpses from the Magic Tower, which were casting spells, had their heads chopped off, and purple rings appeared on where their heads were.

“Kek, kuk!”

“Guuuaaaa… Kek!”

The girl in the scarlet outwear was leisurely cutting down the corpses as she twisted her body. Nainiae suddenly dragged her feet

and moved her arm with the sword back in a large motion.

“Hup!”

She then swung the arm forward with force. The sword left her hand and made a sharp sound as if an arrow was shot.

“Kuk!”

“…?!”

Ian was vacantly watching Nainiae swinging her sword. Ian heard the sharp wind noise and flinched. He turned his head.

“Guuu…. Kuk… Kuk!”

There was a corpse that was quietly approaching Ian from behind to bite him. On the corpse’s mouth, Nainiae’s sword was stuck on it.

“… Mr. Ian.”

From front of Ian, Nainiae’s gentle voice could be heard. Ian vacantly opened his mouth.

‘I’m wearing a mask to hide my identity. How did she figure it out?’

“The sword, I have used it well all this time.”

While Ian still had his mouth vacantly open, Nainiae expressed her gratitude with voice full of thankfulness. Nainiae lowered her head.

The sword that was currently stuck on the corpse’s mouth, the sword that Nainiae threw, was... Ian’s most treasured sword that Ian allowed Nainiae to borrow when she left the mansion to be cured of her illness.

“N... Nainiae?”

The girl expressed her gratitude with pride. In response, Ian also vacantly mumbled Nainiae’s name just like Priesia earlier.

“... Well then.”

Nainiae lifted her head and looked at the remaining corpses around them. She took a deep breath.

“Guuurrr...”

It seemed the corpses decided that they needed to neutralize Nainiae first. The corpses ignored Ian and Priesia. The corpses all ran toward Nainiae.

“Rest in peace.”

Nainiae mumbled. Although she didn’t recite any spell in particular, dozens of magic circles appeared around her.

Each and every one of the magic circles were gigantic. Their humungous sizes were enough to make Ian and Priesia gasp for air from the shock.

‘Oh my…’

Ian was shocked, but Priesia was shocked even more.

The girl’s lifespan was going to last until autumn at most even if it lasted long.

However, now that girl was using magic like that. Somehow, it looked very dangerous for the girl.

“N… Nainiae… You don’t need to do that!”

“It’s all right.”

Out of concern, Priesia was trying to stop Nainiae from overexerting herself. Nainiae looked at Priesia and put on a refreshing smile on her face. The scarlet coat on her shoulder was waving in the air. Nainiae swung her left arm.

“I need to show off this much at least so that my Teacher’s pride is not tainted.”

‘Teacher?’

‘Did she just say Teacher?’

Ian and Priesia had no idea what she was talking about, so they floated question marks on their faces. Dark colored curved layer appeared around Ian and Priesia.

“Guuurrr!”

The corpses were not frightened by the dozens of magic circles that appeared around them. The corpses still charged toward Nainiae. Above the corpses’ heads, bombardment of black colored magic started.

‘Oh my…’

From above the protective barrier, magic attacks completely filled their view. Ian and Priesia vacantly opened their mouths.

About a minute… No… It didn’t feel like it took longer than even 30 seconds.

“… Phew.”

When the view outside of the barrier could be confirmed again, the sight around them was the kind where they could not see any trace of the corpses.

“I adjusted it appropriately. Are you all right?”

Literally, at an instant, Nainiae eliminated the corpses. She canceled the barrier that she raised to protect Ian and Priesia and then asked the two.

“N… Nainiae… What happened?”

“Is it… really you?”

Nainiae confirmed that they were safe. She nodded and said,

“Excuse me, Mr. Ian.”

“…?”

She lightly dusted off her hands and approached Ian. Watching this, Ian just stood there with a blank look on his face. He was not able to respond.

“That…”

There was an apple floating on Nainiae’s right side. After that,

Nainiae grabbed the apple with both of her hands. She covered her mouth with the apple and ask in a shy voice,

“Where is Young Master?”

Chapter 117 - Secret Conversation

After stirring up the people from the Holy Temple, Rebethra made all of them head toward the Solia Castle. He then said he had something else to do. Rebethra separated himself from the group, and he was now walking in a different direction.

'It seems the collapse of the Magic Tower has something to do with this runt, but... Just why is he trying to turn the Solia upside down?'

It had been a while since the whole incident started. About now, the news about the devastation in Solia would have reached not just the royalty, but even other nobilities.

The reinforcement would start to arrive from each region.

Even without any of them, this was the Solia 'Castle' that they were headed.

It was highly likely that the Solia would not collapse so easily.

Even the riot that was about to happen by the people from the Holy Temple could be subdued before long.

'Is it because of the corpses? Just like when he was trying to swallow the entire Rainfield in whole, is he doing this to make more people into corpses? This is a little complicated? If I summarized it, would it be like this?'

Nara said the dark mage that they met in Rainfield, Kabal the mercenary from Ansyrium, and Holy Temple's Archbishop Rebethra all had purple color.

Because something stank, they had been digging around Rebethra's back, and... The animated corpses, just like the ones from Rainfield, were sighted in Solia.

Currently, with the Magic Tower collapsed, Rebethra stirred up the people from the Holy Temple and sent them to the Solia Castle.

'No matter how I look at it, he is just trying to increase the number of corpses. Maybe he also has the ability to control the corpses.'

Riley thought about the possibility that all purple colored humans might have the ability to control corpses. He then tried to figure out the next puzzle.

'Young Master, the people with pitch-black eyes were... some kind of sacrifices. My Master was also a sacrifice.'

Riley thought about what Ian said. While he was tracing Rebethra's back, Riley furrowed his brows as if something was icky.

'A sacrifice...'

While Riley was thinking about what Ian said and was furrowing his brows, a horrible stench went past his nose. Riley stopped thinking about it and looked at where Rebethra was headed.

'Lower Solia?'

After making the people from the Holy Temple to go to the Solia Castle, Rebethra was going through the Main Plaza and heading to Lower Solia. Riley wondered why as he rolled his brain continuously. In that moment,

"... Hand over the information about that lass."

Having heard the voice, Riley stopped the thought and tuned in to the voices.

"That lass?"

There was another voice that could be heard. Riley thought it sounded familiar, so he looked toward the direction of the new voice.

The voice belonged to the current Head of the Magic Tower, the one who Riley knew well.

'That's Peruda?'

It seemed he wondered around Lower Solia for a long time. From

the tip of the shoes to the top of his head, he was a mess. He was not in a good shape.

"I'm talking about the lass that you Magic Tower bastards dragged to the basement and experimented on!"

Having heard the sharp remark from the man standing in front of him, Peruda flinched. As if he felt wronged, Peruda talked back.

"Why do you want that…"

"Aren't you curious what's happening outside?"

"… Kuk."

The man was not going to forgive Peruda for talking back. The man threatened Peruda. Having heard the threat, Peruda's face crumpled desperately.

"If you are talking about the people who were e… experimented on… There were so many of them, so even if you ask me, I would not know…"

"… Nainiae."

"…?"

“Nainiae. You should know that lass very well?”

The homeless who was standing in Peruda was Hamil. Having heard the name of the girl, Peruda opened his eyes big and faced Hamil.

“How do you know her… No. Why are you looking for her?”

Peruda steadily stared at Hamil’s face. It seemed Peruda just remembered the face. He pointed his index finger at Hamil and mumbled,

“Wait, you are?”

“…”

In the past, under Astroa’s order, Peruda had been charged with selling the Magic Tower’s broken or disposed failures to nobilities, merchants or mercenaries in secret. Peruda started to break cold sweats.

“Back then… that…”

Peruda was remembering the time at Lower Solia where he sold a girl with limited life span.

“If it is that child, you should know her better?”

Now, Peruda crumpled his face and glared at the homeless that purchased Nainiae with money last winter. Peruda asked,

“Why are you asking me that?”

That girl did not have long to live. Her appearance and mind were in pieces. She was full of injuries and wounds. She had nowhere to go. She was literally waiting for her moment of death. The one who purchased her was the homeless who was standing in front of Peruda’s eyes.

“Actually, I want to ask you. What child... What happened to that child? Is she still alive? If she is...”

“... Why?”

“...?”

“Why!!”

Hamil’s eyes were filled with murderous intent. He was glaring at Peruda and shouting at top of his lungs.

“How could you not know! According to that runt, you would know where that bitch is!”

“Ugh?!”

“Tell me! You are hiding here, aren’t you? Tell me!”

Hamil grabbed Peruda by the clothes near his throat and shook him. Peruda cringed one of his eyes as he looked around. While minding the others, he started to fiddle with his fingers.

“… Looks like you abandoned her.”

“What?”

“You abandoned that child. Isn’t that why you are asking me? You guys said you needed her and bought her, and then you abandoned her. You guys always complain that the world abandoned you, yet in the end… You are becoming of the trash in Lower Solia.”

“Ugh, Ugh!!”

“As you said earlier, I did have many conversation with that child. That’s why I’m even more certain that… she would not have done anything wrong first.”

Despite being grabbed by Hamil near the throat, Peruda did not give in. Peruda glared at Hamil’s infuriated face and talked back.

“What about you guys?”

“Shut up.”

“She would not have done anything to buy grudge from you. In that case, you guys must have betrayed her first. Isn’t that right?”

“That mouth, shut up!!”

Overcame by his anger, Hamil raised his right hand. It seemed Peruda seized the moment. He was fiddling with his fingers, and now he suddenly tightened his fist.

‘I don’t like this much, but if he is a resident of Lower Solia… With him tied up like this…’

With Hamil restrained in vines, Peruda was trying to find a way out of Lower Solia. Peruda’s shoulders suddenly flinched.

‘Ugh?’

Puk!

With a blunt sound, the fist that Hamil swung collided with Peruda’s frontal face.

‘Kuk?!’

Peruda was rolling on the floor with dirty water. Peruda looked confused.

It was not that he didn't understand that he was hit on the face.

He was wondering why the magic he used was not activated properly.

'What is going on? Why is my magic…'

With a look of panic on his face, Peruda looked down at his hand. He then opened his eyes wide.

'A High Level Silence Magic?'

He noticed tightly packed purple rings around his wrist and other rings around his mouth. This was the reason why he opened his eyes wide.

"… Oh my… How ungrateful."

He could hear the voice.

The voice sounded pretty familiar to Peruda.

It felt like it had been a while since he heard the voice.

It belonged to…

“You… are?”

To see who said it, Peruda turned his head toward the direction where the voice came from. Peruda’s jaw dropped out of shock.

“You… how could you be?”

The grand mage of Magic Tower that supposedly died last spring was standing right in front of Peruda, very much alive.

“Astroa…”

Peruda was not the only one who was surprised.

‘What is that runt?’

Riley had been watching the situation while in hiding.

‘Why is that runt alive…’

Back then, Riley threw his sword and pierced Astroa’s heart. He definitely ended this mages life. However, Astroa was alive. Wondering why, Riley looked at the bastard’s eyes first.

‘His eyes… are normal.’

He wondered if Astroa had pitch-black eyes like the corpses, so he

checked. Having confirmed that the eyes were normal, Riley moved his eyes, thinking that something was not right. This time, he looked at Rebethra.

“Now, now. Please calm down for now.”

Rebethra had been just watching the situation as well. Now, just like Astroa who just made an appearance, Rebethra also revealed himself.

“Rebethra? Why are you here too?”

Peruda seemed shocked again from Rebethra entering the scene as well. Peruda was lying on the ground upside down. His eyes shook in disbelief.

“For now, why don’t you get up, Peruda? Your cheek is seriously swollen up.”

Rebethra came to front of Peruda, who was lying on the floor. Rebethra healed Peruda’s cheek and extended his hand toward Peruda.

“You…”

Given the situation, although Rebethra healed Peruda, Peruda was not grabbing the hand. He was on full alert. He glared at the three men gathered there, going back and forth between them.

“I am disappointed. I was probably the one who congratulated you the most when you became the new Head of the Magic Tower.”

Peruda struggled and got up. He then took steps back. Watching him, Rebethra casually turned his head and looked at Astroa.

“Hurial, I think it would be best to withdraw the spell. Having a conversation while having a knife to the man’s throat is a little…”

“Um… That would be ungrateful.”

Astroa was called as Hurial by Rebethra. Astroa smiled, nodded, and retrieved the mana.

At the same time, purple colored magic rings that had been circling around Peruda’s wrist and face disappeared.

‘He is not Astroa?’

Riley had been listening to the conversation in secret. Having realized something was up, he looked at Astroa once again.

‘He is different.’

Appearance wise, he did look just like the dead grand mage. However, the mana inside him felt a little different.

It was a slight difference that would have gone unnoticed if Riley did not observe it closer.

‘It is a little different.’

If it was not for the conversation just now, Riley would have disregarded the difference as just a difference in mood. However, just now, Rebethra called Astroa as Hurial.

‘This energy is…’

A little bit more in detail, Riley observed Astroa a little bit closer, and he was certain now.

The energy felt from the man was almost identical to the energy felt from the dark mage that animated corpses in Rainfield.

‘That bastard… revived Astroa?’

When that dark mage animated the corpses, it felt like he was controlling them like puppets. In comparison, the Astroa that Riley was looking at now was, Hurial in other words, like the body and soul of a person was revived.

‘No. That is not Astroa.’

Riley narrowed his eyes. Astroa kept on saying ‘ungrateful.’

Considering that, Riley deduced that the shell and the inside were different.

‘It is that runt.’

The dark mage that Riley ran into at the Rainfield had the habit of saying ‘ungrateful’ a lot. This was how Riley could tell.

‘In that case, that runt is the most likely one with the ability to control the corpses.’

This time, riley looked at Rebethra.

It seemed Rebethra was definitely related to the dark mage. Although Riley could not come to a hasty conclusion yet… it was a possibility that Rebethra was the one who revived the dark mage from the Rainfield by covering it with Astroa’s shell.

‘Is the other runt not going to show up?’

Judging from how they were having friendly conversation, it was certain the dark mage and Rebethra, the two of the purple colored men were close.

‘If I could get them all at once, including that little runt, that would be great.’

If the mercenary that cut off Riley’s father’s arm showed up here

as well, that would have made Riley's job easier. However, unfortunately... that mercenary did not show up at Lower Solia at all.

"... It would be best to say nice things while the Solia's Magic Tower is the only thing that collapsed."

Rebethra shrugged shoulder and continued. Peruda ground his teeth and asked the three in front of him.

"It could be that you are lying to deceive me. Why should I coorporate with you?"

"Um. If you don't believe us, then I have no choice but to show it to you in person."

Facing Peruda who was grinding his teeth, Astroa, no... Hurial, put on a shady smile. He slowly turned his body and stepped aside.

"Show me? What..."

When Hurial stepped aside, the corpses behind him, which were hidden behind him until now, showed themselves. Having noticed the corpses, Peruda stopped what he was about to say. He just vacantly opened his mouth.

"..."

“It seems the Magic Tower is corrupt and rotten to the core. How ungrateful. They are trying to attack the Head of the tower.”

The corpses were wearing robes and ready to indiscriminately fire magic attacks toward Peruda. Hurial had his arms open wide and laughing like a lunatic. Peruda had his fist tightened until a moment ago, but now, it just lost strength and fell to the floor.

“How… how could this…”

He was devastated.

Peruda looked at the people from the Magic Tower who now became corpses with pitch-black eyes. Peruda mumbled that this could not be.

“This… this cannot be…”

“How about it. Would you like to cooperate with us before the Magic Tower’s people act even more ungrateful?”

“We didn’t want to do this either, Peruda.”

“… Guuurrr.”

“I…”

Hurial and Rebethra talked to Peruda, and the corpses from the Magic Tower scratched their own necks as if they are trying to tell Peruda to comply.

“I…”

“… Now, I am sorry, but…”

“…?”

“…?”

When Peruda was hesitating and keeping silence, a voice could be heard from the other side to break the silence.

“Your secret conversation ends here.”

There was a man wearing a mask. While fiddling with his mask, he revealed himself at Lower Solia.

Chapter 118 - Secret Conversation (2)

‘… What?’

A man suddenly appeared in the place where they were having a conversation in secret. Not just Peruda, but Archbishop, mage and even the homeless had their eyes wide open.

‘This runt… he is stealthy… I don’t feel his presence at all…’

Watching the man walking towards them step by step, Rebethra crumpled his face.

‘Is he an assassin?’

He wondered about that because he didn’t feel his presence at all although it seemed this masked man had been tailing him.

“You are?”

Before the sentence could finish, the masked man opened his mouth first and told them what he just heard from the secret conversation.

“You are the Archbishop from the Holy Temple, yet you are teaming up with a homeless from the Lower Solia and threatening the Head of the Magic Tower. As if that was not enough, a man who committed treason is included in the scene? This is…

definitely a big news, right?”

The man tilted his head slightly to the side and tossed the question. Rebethra had his face darkened for a moment, but he soon smiled brightly and asked back,

“Haha. Oh my... I don’t know where you are from, but I think there must be a big misunderstanding. Threat? That’s not what’s happening here at all. I am just asking him for cooperation.”

“Cooperation?”

“Yes, just cooperation.”

Rebethra slightly nodded. The man in the mask, Riley to be precise, smiled as if he found this to be entertaining. He then asked the next question.

“You stirred up the people from the Holy Temple and sent them to charge in to the Solia Castle. Is that just cooperation as well?”

“Stir them up? What do you mean?”

“...”

Having heard Riley’s second question, Peruda looked confused. Meanwhile, Rebethra’s face could not look more violent than this.

“Just how long have you been…”

“You are not denying this?”

The voice coming from inside of the mask was echoing inside the mask, changing Riley’s voice. It was making others unable to identify the voice.

“In that case, how about the fact that you put the dark mage inside the body of dead Astroa, the dark mage that is famous for controlling dead bodies?”

Having heard Riley’s next question, Rebethra and Peruda both furrowed their brows.

The man in the mask, who appeared to be an assassin, said something that could not be taken lightly. This was why.

“Um. You are showing wishy-washy response to this question.”

Riley leisurely mumbled. He casually rolled his eyes and looked at Astroa. Astroa had been glaring at Riley since a while ago.

“Ugh… Ugh…”

Astroa’s body was shaking. Riley was wondering why, but what he said right after made Riley realize why.

“You runt… You were that runt!”

Astroa’s eyes were buldging with murderous intent.

Riley wondered if he figured out who Riley was despite wearing a mask. However, it seemed that was not the case.

Riley thought so because…

“You dared to do this to me, Astroa… How dare… I am a grand mage… Ugh… Fuck. My body is… moving on its own…”

It was because his face’s left and right each had a different expression.

It was as if he was suffering from a mental illness. One side of the face was breaking cold sweat, trying to calm his body down. The other side was exuding thick deadly aura toward Riley.

“S… Shut up! The owner of this body is now… Astroa! No, Hurial!”

It seemed that the body was losing control. It looked unstable. Riley twisted up the tip of his lips as if he found this entertaining.

“Just what is this?”

Not able to figure out what was happening, Peruda and Hamil tilted their heads side to side. It was Hamil that decided to act first.

"... Tsk!"

With an uninvited guest making an entrance to the scene, it seemed Hamil thought something was not right. Hamil slowly turned his body and was trying to leave the place. However, his ankle was wrapped tightly by vines and restrained him from walking.

"Where do you think you are going! You can't run..."

"... Uuuaaa!!"

While observing Astroa going berserk, Peruda used his vine magic. However, Peruda could hear shouting of an old man. It was close to a scream.

"I'll kill... I'll kill you."

The old man had foams coming out of his mouth.

It was hard to believe that this man used to be the grand mage of Seven Circles that represented Magic Tower. He looked pathetic.

Looking at the masked man, Astroa kept repeating 'I'll kill you.' Not able to understand it, Rebethra turned his head with a

confused look.

‘Hurial is not able to control his body?’

It meant the original owner of the body was showing a severe response.

‘… Is it because of that runt?’

When the man in the mask made the entrance, Astroa’s body went out of Hurial’s control. It was going berserk, and it started when he appeared.

In other words, it meant the man in the mask and Astroa have met before. Also, the fact that Astroa was showing such a severe response meant that the mask man was related to Astroa’s death.

‘By any chance… that runt…’

Although it was not officially made known last spring, those that should know already knew well that Astroa died.

It was Nainiae, the girl with the scarred face, who killed the grand mage of Seven Circles.

‘I always thought something was odd… I thought that girl was lacking in power to defeat Astroa on her own.’

Rebethra had been suspicious of Astroa's death.

After he died, Priesia quickly escorted to the Holy Temple the Six Circles mage girl who was full of scars and was on her way to death. Rebethra could not believe that this girl defeated Astroa.

"By any chance, are you the one who defeated Astroa last time in the Lower Solia?"

Having heard Rebethra's question, Peruda opened his eyes wide.

"If that is not it, there is no way Hurial's body would show severe response like this."

Rebethra asked in sly tone. Hurial was not able to stop it from going berserk anymore. In the end, the body put forth its arm and shot the magic that it had prepared earlier.

"Fireball!"

Boom!

Along with the sound of explosion, the ball of flame was launched forward, heating up the air along the path.

The target was Riley.

“Um.”

He slightly turned his body to the side to dodge the Fireball coming at him. Riley started to walk to the front.

“How ungrateful. You ungrateful! Kill... I must kill him!!”

Riley dodged the magic attack as if it was nothing, and now he was slowly coming toward Astroa. Watching this, Hurial, who was wearing the shell of Astroa, started to run amok, even more out of control.

“Judging from the response, I can be certain now. You are the man responsible for defeating Astroa. You used the girl with a backstory as the puppet and hid yourself... Ah, by any chance?”

While Rebethra was mumbling, Hurial, who had different expressions on each sides of his face, shot more magic attacks even though he was shaking his head hard left and right.

This time, it was not just one kind. There were multiple magic attacks, each with different innate types. They were all launched toward Riley at once.

“Die. Die! Dieeeee!!”

Riley clicked his tongue as if this was such a bother. There were attacks flying at him from the front, falling from the top, and coming up from the floor. Riley dodged them all in order as he

approached Astroa.

"... Are you the Young Master?"

Riley had been moving his body all over and dodging the magic attacks. Having heard what Rebethra said, Riley's face under the mask crumpled.

"The thing is, the timing was just too perfect. There was the word about Astroa being defeated by that girl, and... Not long after, the girl disappeared from Solia, but she was found in Iphalleta mansion, right?"

Rebethra asked the mask man as if he was just mumbling. Peruda, who had been just listening to the conversation, opened his mouth vacantly.

"Iphalleta mansion?"

Besides Peruda, there was another that flinched his shoulder.

"Iphalleta... you say?"

It was Hamil.

It was because Hamil collided with the people from Iphalleta House during the time of King's Swordsmanship Tournament.

“That… That bastard!”

Hamil was not thinking about the crime he had committed back then at all. He was only thinking that he lost someone he loved because they were done in by the people from Iphalleta House last time.

“That bastard. Because of that bastard, Beta was!!”

Because of the vines wrapped around on his ankle, Hamil was struggling at the same spot. Hamil started to yell at the top of his lung toward Riley.

‘Tsk.’

Riley clicked his tongue inside because there weren’t just four people here. Aside from the four that had been having the conversation in secret, there were homeless who were hiding in Lower Solia and watching the situation.

“It is hard to believe it. You are the Lazy-Sword Young Master who people say is lazier than a sloth… To think that you are the one responsible for defeating grand mage Astroa…”

“…”

“That mask looks uncomfortable. How about you just take that mask off?”

Rebethra barely managed to calm down Hurial who was huff and puffing toward Riley. Rebethra was talking while assuming with certainty that it was Riley who was under the mask.

“Actually, I did not believe the divine message from the Priestess that said you are the one who will stop the dragon that will come to Solia. However, if you really are the one that defeated Astroa here… I have no reason to doubt it anymore.”

Rebethra wiggled his eyes and continued.

“How about it. It seems you have something that you want to keep as a secret.”

Peruda could not believe that this atmosphere was coming from a man who was supposed to be the Archbishop of a Holy Temple. Somehow, the man was creeping out Peruda. With a look of disbelief, Peruda stared at Rebethra.

“If you cooperate with us, we will forget everything that happened today.”

“What?! Rebethra, you son of a b…”

“Silence.”

Rebethra raised his right hand. Hurial, who was huffing and

puffing, waved his arm toward Peruda and completely blocked the voice coming from Peruda.

“How about it?”

Rebethra asked once again.

“Cooperation?”

“Yes.”

Riley asked back. Rebethra, with the creepy atmosphere from earlier, smiled brightly.

“... I have nothing to gain from doing so. Why should I cooperate with you?”

Facing Rebethra smiling brightly, Riley asked.

“...?”

Rebethra floated a question mark on his face. Riley slowly tilted his head to the side and mumbled as if he found Rebethra’s attitude to be overbearing.

“I am the one that finished Astroa’s life. However, this is the first time for me to hear someone asking if I am the Iphalleta’s Young

Master.”

“What are you talking about?”

“If you are trying to grab a hold of me and shake me, then it would be better for you if you gave up. Your deduction is way off, Archbishop.”

Under the mask, Riley said with deadly look on his eyes. Rebethra also put on a deadly look on his eyes and engaged in a staring battle.

“Are you trying to bluff?”

“Bluff?”

Riley made sounds of suppressed laughter.

“If you would like, go ahead and spread the rumor. I have nothing to lose from that. Only one who would be hurt from that would be the whatever Young Master from the Iphalleta House.”

Riley was actually breaking cold sweat, but his voice and eyes were steady.

‘If you don’t have the guts and are going to shrivel, then why don’t you just die.’

‘Was my guess wrong?’

Rebethra could see the steady gaze coming from behind the mask. Rebethra crumpled his face.

‘I won.’

Riley was certain that Rebethra was thinking he might have guessed wrong. Riley pushed him further.

“As for me, you didn’t get the right answer, so it does not matter at all, but… What about you? Will you be all right? Will you be okay with ending your career as the Archbishop?”

“…”

Rebethra kept silent. With his finger, Riley tapped at the mask he was wearing and mumbled something that was going to be the most critical hit.

“To open the gate to the ‘World Below,’ you probably cannot afford to be found out by the people?”

“…?!”

“…?!”

Having heard what Riley said, Rebethra and Hurial opened their eyes big and strained them.

“I made a rough guess and poked at it, but it seems this is the right answer.”

“You runt… just where…”

Until now, Rebethra was using honorary form of language. Now, he started to use disrespectful form with a violent look on his face.

Riley merely baited them using what he heard from Ian. However, it felt like Riley just caught the biggest fish immediately.

“Has the table turned? As for the cooperation, it is not me that have to cooperate with you. It seems like you guys will be the ones who have to cooperate with me…”

“… Young Master!”

Breaking through the cold atmosphere, a girl’s voice could be heard.

“…?”

“There you were!”

Riley turned his head toward the direction where the voice came from. Riley vacantly opened his mouth.

There, a girl who could not be more overjoyed from being reunited after a long time was standing there while blushing her face.

Chapter 119 - The Girl Who Returned (1)

A girl made an entrance to the place of secret conversation. Looking at her, Riley's mouth opened vacantly.

At a timing that was completely unexpected, a person who he was not expecting at all showed up. This was why.

She was not wearing the maid uniform that she always had been wearing at the mansion, so Riley almost did not recognize her at first.

She was wearing a white collared button up shirt, beige colored long skirt and scarlet outwear resting on her shoulder like a cape. It was waving like a cape. The only thing that changed about the dark haired girl was her clothes. However... Unlike before, she had a mysterious atmosphere to her.

"N... Nainiae?"

When she made the entrance, Peruda, who was looking around while restraining Hamil, also had his mouth open vacantly.

'That child is...'

Her left hand, which looked shabby from missing a few fingers, and the right side of her face, which had scars and dead white eye, were as they were before.

‘Still…’

While even forgetting to blink, Peruda was just staring at Nainiae who was standing on the other side.

“I am sorry, Young Master… I tried to come back as soon as possible, but the training ended up taking longer.”

She seemed like she was feeling shy and overjoyed from being united after so long. She was blushing. Her face was as red as the apple she was holding.

‘That child is?’

Rebethra had been glaring at Nainaie’s face ever since she entered the scene. Having heard her voice, Rebethra narrowed his eyes and looked at the masked man.

‘Wait a minute. That means?’

The look on Rebethra’s eyes were changing constantly. Riley furrowed his eyebrows, finding the situation to be a major headache.

“Young Master, it is an apple. It’s late fall now, but… Fortunately, there are some left.”

Nainiae knew who it was under the mask. However, she could

not also know the expression that the man under the mask. She showed the apple that she was holding on her both hands and smiled timidly.

"Nainiae... You..."

Riley felt like it was only yesterday when he told her to develop some basic sense for situations and common knowledge while he and Nainiae were at the Rainfield. He was glad to see her, but on the side, he felt frustrated. Sigh leaked out of Riley's mouth.

"Ugh..."

Right when Riley sighed, explosive laughter leaked out of Rebethra's mouth.

"Ha, hahaha! As I thought... As I thought, it is you, Young Master Riley. You almost completely fooled this old man."

Rebethra looked at Riley and Nainiae back and forth and started to make belittling laughter sound. Nainiae, who had been smiling timidly while holding the apple, floated a question mark on her face and tilted her head side to side.

"Who are you?"

Having heard Nainiae's question, Rebethra waved his hand around as if he was trying to apologize. He extended his hand to the side and showed her Astroa, who was standing next to him.

"..."

Nainiae had only been staring at Riley until now, so she could not check the surrounding. She closed her lips.

"Thank you. I was about to get fooled by Young Master, but thanks to you..."

"... Nainiae!!"

Rebethra wiggled his eyebrows with a shady look on his face. There was a shouting from a man behind him. Rebethra turned his head back as if he found the shouting unpleasant.

"Nainiae! You! Because of you, Beta is!"

Before anyone noticed, the purple rings that had been circling around the homeless man's mouth to keep him under silence spell was gone.

"... Hamil."

Nainiae also faced the man who was glaring at her with deadly intent towards her.

It seemed she did not give a damn about what Rebethra said or showed to her.

“How shamless of you… You are wearing nice clothes, had been shoving good foods down your stomach… It looks like you had been living well like that? If you cared about Beta at all, don’t you think you should not be doing that? You useless…”

“… Hamil.”

“Uuup?!”

Hamil had been pouring out harsh insults toward Nainiae. Nainiae quietly mumbled his name and then continued in a rather low voice.

“Before I fall asleep, I always think about what happened to me in my past. Of course, I think about Beta still. Despite what happened, still… I considered her as my family once.”

Her eyes contained overpowering pressure.

It was the kind that could not be explained in words.

Hamil thought it couldn’t possibly be from someone who was a human being. Feeling the pressure, he could only open and close his mouth like a fish.

“I could not protect Beta.”

"..."

"Still, now... I don't think I have done something wrong where I deserve being criticized and get fingers pointed at me by you or others."

Nainiae faded the end of her sentence. Before long, her face had already turned gloomy.

"It was pickpocketing. Although it was to make a living... Hamil... What you and Beta did were definitely wrong. Consider it as a punishment for what you have done. I also... have things I have done wrong."

Nainiae was thinking about the time when she indiscriminately shot magic attacks at the Main Plaza of the Solia because Beta asked her to.

"I'll pay for my sins one day. Still, I..."

With determined look on her face...

Nainiae looked straight in Hamil's eyes and calmly continued mumbling.

"Still, I don't think I need to be subjected to criticism."

"Ugh... You..."

“If you are still going to say I am selfish, then it does not matter. I am able to stand proudly. I used my magic only to protect someone, and I never used magic for any other reasons.”

Nainiae paused for a moment. She gazed upon the apple she was holding. She looked at it with loving gaze, as if it was the most lovely thing in the world. Nainiae mumbled in a serious tone,

“I used to think I just… want to die. I only had been suffering losses and enduring pain. I was exhausted from my life. I thought that I had been living just so I can die one day.”

“…”

“Now… I definitely want to live. I think that way now.”

Nainiae grabbed on to the apple tighter. Her eye contained resolve that she never showed before. With that clear eye, she looked at Riley.

‘Young Master, here, look! It’s an apple!’

With her sparkly eyes, she was telling Riley that with just her gaze. Riley sighed and looked at Nainiae.

‘It is not the apple that I need right now?’

Riley also responded just with his gaze. He looked at her with a dumbfounded look on his eyes. Nainiae tilted her head side to side as if she was trying to ask why Riley was responding like that. Finally, Nainiae discovered Rebethra and Astroa.

"…?"

A question mark floated up on Nainiae's face.

"Shut up! I said shut the hell up! Beta… Bring back Beta!"

Thud, thud.

Hamil kicked off the vines that had been restraining his legs. Hamil shouted at Nainiae who was standing on the other side and then started to charge toward her.

"…"

Nainiae turned her head again and looked at Hamil who was running toward herself.

The expression on her face conveyed a sense of disappointment and pity. Nainiae raised her hand.

"I am sorry, Hamil."

Nainiae mumbled Hamil's name. Although there was no wind, the scarlet outwear resting on her shoulder waved once.

"B... Bring her back..."

Hamils steps looked like it was gradually getting slower. He eventually got on his knees all of sudden, and... he fell forward starting with his head.

'Just now, what was that?'

Peruda, who just witnessed what happened, opened his eyes big.

He knew a sleep magic.

However, the problem was that... The spell that Nainiae just used was done without reciting any spell and without any trace of mana movement. It was done literally at a blink of an eye.

"Even if it is for a while, stay there and dream. Later... I wish we could have a long conversation in front of Beta's grave."

Nainiae mumbled while looking at Hamil. Now, Nainiae turned to look at Rebethra and Astroa. She waved her right arm in a large motion from left to right.

"Young Master, I am sorry. How should I say this... I was unable to resist? I was so overjoyed... No, what I mean is, the situation

was such that it was hard for me to realize what was going on, so…”

Limply moving her right arm around, she made the apple to float in the air again. She looked at Riley. As if she was ashamed, she fiddled with her fingers.

“A… Anyway, I fixed it.”

Having heard what she just said, Riley slowly rolled his eyes and carefully looked at the space behind her.

The scenery around the place was distorted a little.

Riley got a rough idea of what she meant when she said she ‘fixed’ it. As if he found the mask confining and stuffy, he took it off and revealed his face.

“It is good that you fixed it, but just don’t cause the accident in the first place. You get it? If you came back, why didn’t you just stay in the mansion? Why did you follow me all the way to the Solia…”

“… Because I missed you.”

“What?”

“N… No! It’s nothing!”

Riley kept his face hidden tightly behind the mask until now. Now that Nainiae could see his face clearly, Rebethra, who figured it was Riley all along, narrowed his eyes, wondering why they were acting like that.

“Space… reversal?”

Looking at the distorted space, Hurial mumbled.

“What is that?”

“It makes a kind of barrier on the area. It is a Seven Circles magic. Unless the caster disengages the magic or a stronger mage forces the magic to be canceled, nobody can escape this magic.”

“…”

Having heard Hurial’s explanation, Rebethra put on a violent look on his face as if he found the situation to be annoying. Rebethra ground his teeth.

‘Space reversal?’

Peruda, who had been eavesdropping on their conversation, strained his eyes in disbelief and looked at Nainiae.

‘She was at Six Circles just last spring. That child is now at Seven

Circles?'

It was hard for him to believe that the girl who used to be trapped in the Magic Tower's basement went from Six to Seven Circles in just two seasons. However, Peruda was more shocked about the fact that she used space reversal, a magic that was counted among the high level magic in Seven Circles, and still appeared to be completely fine.

'Nainiae, you... just how...'

It was past the early autumn. It was now late autumn.

Magic Tower and Holy Temple both estimated that her life will not last until the autumn even if it lasted long.

However...

"..."

Perhaps Nainiae noticed that Peruda's eyes were full of worry for her. Nainiae's eye, which was looking at Riley, slowly moved to the side and met with Peruda.

'It has been a while, Mr. Peruda, my teacher.'

Nainiae gave him a refreshing smile to greet Peruda. She looked at Riley again.

“Young Master. Can you please give me a quick summary of the situation?”

Astroa, the one who Riley killed before, was alive and fine here. Rebethra was glaring toward this direction with a violent look on his face. Nainiae was asking Riley to explain them. Having heard her request, Riley…

“They are enemies.”

He responded with just three words.

Riley mumbled leisurely. Nainiae pulled her chin as if she understood it immediately. She asked,

“Well then, what should I do?”

Her question reflected her confidence. It conveyed the confidence in herself. She was certain she could eliminate them immediately as soon as the order came.

“Can you do it?”

She looked like she changed a lot from how she was before. However, she was also exuding atmosphere that felt the same as always… So, Riley peeked a smile and asked.

Nainiae also smiled big.

“I am not sure? They say you can’t know for sure unless you put them next to each other and see which one is longer.”

“What?”

“Excuse me… Did I say something wrong?”

“No… I just thought you made a great progress, so…”

“…”

Having heard Riley’s compliment, instead of feeling embarrassed, her shyness was taking the front seat. Nainiae started to purse her lips.

“Well, all right.”

Actually, Riley didn’t even bring a sword here. He shrugged as if he was trying to say that he will just sit back and watch. Because Andal said he wanted to play the part of being a teacher, Riley had Nainiae to be under his care for about two months. With a curious look on his face, Riley said,

“… Try it.”

Nainiae stepped forward and said,

“Okay.”

Astroa...

Nainiae was aware that Astroa was a powerful foe that she could not have defeated by herself if this was last spring.

That was not all.

There was Archbishop Rebethra as well, who Nainiae could not tell his true intent or identity. Rebethra was also one of the enemies that Riley explained earlier.

Despite that, she thought,

‘The apple, I should cut them for Young Master soon.’

Her mind was full of only the thoughts about giving Riley the apple that she had floating using mana.

Chapter 120 - The Girl Who Returned (2)

“That lass…”

Hurial and Rebethra watched the girl walking toward them, and they started to calm their breathing while flexing their shoulders.

It was because they could not help but to acknowledge her power.

It was her… who used the Seven Circles level space reversal magic without even flinching her face by just waving her arm.

‘Just what changed?’

When Hurial acquired Astroa’s body, he acquired all of his memories as well. He crumpled his face.

‘She was well on her way to the grave, yet she is still alive. How? Also, as if that was not enough of a surprise, she came back with a step higher Circles. How?’

Literally, they were mysteries.

He could not even begin to guess how this was possible.

‘Huk!’

Rebethra was narrowing his eyes and glaring at Nainiae who was walking toward them. Rebethra suddenly gasped for air and quickly tilted his head back.

‘Her reciting speed is?’

Rebethra panicked because magic attack came at him before he could even feel any mana movement.

Going past his hair, an icicle got stuck in the dirty water far behind him. The icicle was exuding white mist as if it was showing off how cold it was.

‘This… I better get a grip.’

Their opponent just sent them the first attack. Now that this happened, they could not just sit politely and die. So… Rebethra and Hurial exchanged looks and nodded.

‘First, we will use the corpses to draw her gaze away. After that, we can either prepare flame magic for the counter, or… we can choose to use the instant teleportation to escape…’

Their plan was for Rebethra to prepare the best barrier that he knew and Hurial to choose between the two options.

“I do not know how you were revived, but…”

Nainiae's scarlet coat was waving. She pulled her left hand back and swung it in a large motion. When she did, a wave of flame rushed toward Rebethra and Hurial from their rear.

"... it does not look like the situation calls for a congratulation, so..."

Having heard the sound of flame burning up from the back, they took quick looks behind their backs.

'From the back?'

It was a wall of fire, it was between beginners to intermediate level flame type magic. However... The wall was very wide as if it was pulling the burning path to the back. This kind of arrangement was not in Rebethra's or Hurial's memories.

'What a bizarre thing!'

Rebethra had his barrier focused to the front. He tumbled and turned his gaze to block the wall of fire that was coming toward them from the back. However, he suddenly felt heat coming from the front. He held his breath.

"Uuuughk!"

Before anyone realized, there were dozens of boulder-sized fireballs colliding with Rebethra's barrier.

“Tsk!”

Having realized his ally was in trouble, Hurial promptly prepared water magic and had it overlapped on top of Rebethra’s barrier. Hurial then started to recite another magic.

‘Is the Young Master not going to step in?’

The defense became a little easier with Hurial’s water magic. Anxious, Rebethra looked at Riley who was standing with his arms crossed.

“…”

He had a vacant look on his face.

He was even yawning occasionally.

Riley was leisurely looking at where Rebethra and Hurial were standing. Having noticed this, Rebethra ground his teeth hard.

‘Those eyes. He looks like he knows how this battle will turn out already.’

Riley could not look more leisurely than this. Rebethra clicked his tongue as if he acknowledged that he really lost this one time, and then he started to prepare another blessing magic that he

could use as an Archbishop.

'... They got us this time.'

Rebethra lived for a very long time.

At the moment, he was the Archbishop of the Holy Temple who was revered by the citizens of Solia. However... Throughout his past, he had tricked many people.

He tricked commoners. He fooled nobilities. He even tricked a king. He even tricked a priestess.

Just like how he had been successfully lying to everyone, he figured he could be sly and fool everyone again and could make even the great Goddess to bite on her handkerchief. He was thinking that.

'Looks like I got very dull. I became dull.'

However, it was arrogance.

Because the boy named Riley was infamous for being lazy and even had the title of Lazy-Sword from the Iphalleta House, Rebethra underestimated him although he was the one in the divine message that the Priestess received.

"Hurial."

Rebethra, who was preparing the blessing, called Hurial, who was on a tug war of magic against Nainiae.

“Kuk.”

Hurial was not able to answer.

Nainiae was continuously bombarding them with magic. Against Nainiae’s magic attacks, all Hurial could do was hitting back with barely enough magic to neutralize them.

Nainiae was pouring out endless bombardment of magic. It was as if she was trying to not give Hurial any time to recite long spells. Because of this… Hurial could not even dream of using Seven Circles magic that Astroa could use.

‘How is it possible for her to cast magic like that?’

Hurial hit back and neutralized Nainiae’s magic attacks once again. He was sweating like a pig. He had a look of disbelief on his face.

He combined his own knowledge and Astroa’s knowledge on magic and thought about this. However, he felt that what Nainiae was doing at the moment was impossible.

‘She didn’t even recite any spell, so how?’

Waving her scarlet coat in the air, she moved her finger around in the air or briefly moved her lips. However, doing just those resulted in barrage of magic attacks. Hurial crumpled his face, thinking this was impossible. Meanwhile, he completed a long spell he had been reciting.

“Flame Strike!”

It could not be said that this was the most powerful attack he could use. However, it was a pretty destructive flame type magic. It was completed and shot toward the target. Hurial smiled contently.

‘I did it! She cannot sto…’

It looked like Nainiae was not doing anything in particular to respond to the attack. Hurial thought he was going to be able to finally get a good shot at her, so he smiled. However, the tip of Hurial’s smile flinched.

“…?”

Whooosh. Pop!

The flame swallowed her body in an instant. Along with a sound that felt like something huge was being popped, it became quiet all of sudden.

‘Just what is that…’

With his two ears and eyes, Hurial definitely heard his magic hitting the target, and he definitely saw his magic hitting the target.

However, it seemed Nainiae was not affected by it at all.

‘What the? Am I just seeing things?’

Although she was engulfed in flames, she was firing barrage of magic attacks again with a leisurely look. Hurial and Rebethra quickly raised barrier and protected themselves.

‘It cannot be…’

Hurial looked outside the barrier. He saw that some of the flame that he shot at Nainiae still remained on her.

What was odd about it was that the flame was on… the scarlet coat on her shoulders.

‘That coat… The flame?’

The flame died out on the coat as if it was absorbed by the coat. Hurial crumpled his face.

‘That coat is no ordinary item.’

Nainiae mumbled her lips again, and six magic circles of the very magic that Hurial just shot at her were drawn behind her.

‘That crazy… She is at a different height.’

That perfectly described the situation.

Hurial thought that her way of casting magic and her efficiency were completely different from the people of the Magic Tower.

‘At this rate, we won’t be able to last 10 minutes. No… we won’t even last 3 minutes.’

Rebethra quickly glanced at Hurial looking anxious. As if he was feeling this cannot go on anymore, Rebethra said,

“Hurial.”

It seemed Hurial heard Rebethra. He was fully focused on the barrier, but he turned his head and looked at Rebethra.

“We will need to use ‘that.’”

Crack!

The barrier developed a crack from Nainiae's magic attacks colliding with it. Hurial cringed and asked Rebethra,

"You are going to bring that out already? You don't know what's going to happen if you bring that out now. You are going to do it here?"

"Given the situation, we have no other choice."

"…"

"30 seconds."

Rebethra whispered to Hurial and asked him to buy some time. After saying that, Rebethra gently closed his eyes and focused on imaging in his mind.

'What is this?'

Of the two layers of barriers, one layer disappeared. Having noticed this, Nainiae's eyebrow wiggled slightly.

She was not sure what they were up to exactly, but as if she judged that it would be no good to let this drag on any further, she started to rotate the magic ring of mana inside her heart to prepare a spell that was going to be a little taxing to herself.

'Nainiae, I am temporarily forbidding you from using magic that

would overexert your body. Use lower Circles magic if possible.'

Nainiae thought about what Andal, her master, said. Thinking this could not be helped, she bit her lips and completed a Seven Circles magic. She held the magic floating on her left hand.

'I am sorry, master. I will overexert myself just this once.'

Fire, ice, poison, lightning...

Because of the influence from her, all of them had almost ash-like color. Four spheres, each with different elemental type, circled around on top of Nainiae's left palm.

Hurial knew that this spell was a Seven Circles level magic. He opened his eyes big and opened his mouth.

'... Insane?!'

It seemed it was going to take all of the mana he had, mana he didn't have, and all mana that he would be using in the future to keep his life through this.

He didn't have long to be surprised. Hurial tumbled and prepared a Seven Circles level barrier that could withstand Nainiae's magic. He gritted his teeth and extended his arm.

'I need to block this!'

‘I’m going to break through them!’

Nainiae and Hurial each had opposing thoughts as they showed gleam in their eyes. At that moment, the magic that Nainiae shot collided with Hurial’s barrier.

‘Uuuuk?!’

It was significantly more powerful than what Hurial expected. With his arm to the front, he had been maintaining the barrier. However, with his cheek swollen up, he got pushed and dragged back.

“Uuuuuweeeek!”

Hurial had been standing his ground as he coughed blood. With his eyes cringed, he looked at Rebethra.

‘Just a little longer.’

“…. Ugh.”

It seemed that holding out longer was not possible. Hurial was on his knees with pale face. The barrier, although it had cracks on it, was barely holding until just a moment ago. However, now, it was shattered into pieces.

‘I did it!’

‘I did….’

Although both sides shouted ‘I did it!’ inside, the side that could relax the face was… Rebethra’s side.

“…?”

The magic attack hit them right on.

As a proof, along with the explosion sound, there were flame, mist, lighting and poisonous gas dancing around where Rebethra was standing.

‘What is this?’

However, Nainiae was not able to relax her face.

It was because she saw that Rebethra tilted the tip of his lips just before the magic hit them.

‘… Huh?’

Because of the aftermath of the magic attack, she was not able to see the surrounding very well. With the scene calming down slowly, she was gradually able to identify what was happening. She

narrowed her eyes and then soon opened her mouth vacantly.

“This… What?”

It was not just Nainiae. Riley, who had been watching this with his arms crossed from the back, also opened his mouth vacantly.

“…?”

It was a gigantic head.

As the dust settled, they were able to see things in the area, and the one thing that stood out the most was a gigantic head that rolled its tongue out all the way to the front. It was dead.

“Ugh… Ugh…”

Next to the gigantic head that came from a dimensional space, there was Rebethra who was breathing hard. However, they were not able to notice him.

The thing was… The gigantic head that showed up was that shocking to see.

‘… A dragon?’

It was a dragon.

Just its head was out through the dimensional space, so it was shocking for the people to see.

‘By any chance…’

Its tongue was outside its mouth. Although it was directly hit by Nainiae’s magic, its eyes were not moving. Its eyes were completely white. The dragon was definitely a corpse.

“Huhu… Huhuhu…”

Someone’s arrogant smile could be heard. Along with that sound, the corpse’s eyes started to turn pitch-black.

Chapter 121 - The Girl Who Returned (3)

“Uuuhuu… Uhuhuhu… It is incredible. This one is really…”

It was a creepy laughter. Nainiae, who was vacantly staring at the head of a black dragon that popped out through the dimensional space, turned her gaze toward Hurial who was making belittling laughter sound.

‘… It cannot be?’

“Truly ungrateful…”

The one with creepy laughter was Hurial, who just took Nainiae’s magic with his barrier and fell on his knees.

His white beard was full of red blood. He had mad smile on his face. Nainiae was watching while holding her breath. She was getting serious goosebumps.

“We should return the favor as much as we received.”

Despite his condition, Hurial laughed continuously without getting exhausted. He raised his right arm, which was shaking. The dragon’s head was lifted with a heavy momentum.

‘It is moving?’

Nainiae was facing a pitch-black dragon head. She opened her eyes wide and was petrified.

It was the head of a dragon, the same being as her master.

“Gururururururururu.”

With pitch-black eyes, it was starting to make a sound. It was full of overwhelming pressure.

“No. We shouldn’t be so ungrateful. We should return the favor in folds, shouldn’t we? Huh?!”

The gigantic dragon head opened its mouth wide as if it was tearing it open. It started to violently draw in the air from the surrounding.

“Ha, haha! Ahhahahaha!”

The wind was pushing her from the back. It made her falter. Nainiae looked at the dragon’s wide open mouth and opened her own vacantly.

‘This is…’

The dragon’s mouth was not just sucking up the air or dirty water.

The pure energy around the area, the mana, was being collected and lumped up or mixed at its mouth.

Suuuuuuu...

Wind, dirty water, and mana were getting mashed up together in a round shape in front of the dragon's mouth. The sphere had grown to the size of a person's head, and it was gradually swelling up.

'Breath?!'

One time, her master, Andal, mentioned a dragon's breath. Nainiae remembered it just now, and she became petrified.

"Since we brought it out... For the Great One! For our life long wish! We shall gather more sacrifices and go back!"

Hurial yelled as hi splashed blood from his mouth. Hurial started to laugh like a mad man again.

Kuuuwwaaaaa.

The sphere, which was initially small, was now swollen up to the size of the dragon's head. It was overshadowing the head.

"I, Hurial, the Great One's left hand, shall take your bodies and definitely use them for the sake of achieving our life long wish,

so…!”

Along with Hurial’s shouting, the gigantic sphere all of sudden became compressed to a small size.

“Ha! Uhhaha! Ah hahahaha!”

Breath of a dragon was something that the dragons, which were called great, ancient beings, used with pride. It had power beyond anyone’s wildest imagination. The compression was signaling that the technique was about to be launched.

‘Tsk!’

In his past life, he had seen a dragon using the breath once. He looked at the compressed breath and Nainiae and quickly moved.

‘Damn it. I don’t have a sword.’

He gritted his teeth and threw his body to the front of Nainiae. Not sure of what could happen, Riley raised up the mana inside him and tightly held Nainiae who was petrified.

“…?!”

Having realized Riley just hugged her, Nainiae was shaking her eyebrows and flinching as if she just came to her senses.

“Young Master?”

Nainiae called Riley. However, she could not hear his voice.

Along with incredibly loud sound of explosion, enough to make one go deaf, the compressed breath sphere in front of the dragon’s mouth was launched toward them.

‘No!’

She was overwhelmed by the dragon’s head that was popping out of the dimensional space. Having felt the humongous energy emanating from the dragon’s breath in front of her, she gritted her teeth and raised her right hand to the front.

‘Block it!’

Of the rings that were circling around her heat, a red ring started to spin rapidly.

“Force of Barrier!”

Because of the sound of explosion, everyone’s ears were going deaf. However, her voice could still be heard clearly. Having heard her voice, Riley looked at the top of her head with surprised look on his eyes.

‘This is?’

It was because it felt just like how Andal used magic when Nainiae did just now.

“… Uk?!”

Before he could continue to think, the dragon’s breath collided with the barrier that Nainiae cast to the front.

‘Oh my… How could this…’

She only have heard about the dragon’s breath from her master. This was the first time for her to actually shield against the breath. She faltered to the back, but she managed to maintain balance and stand because Riley was tightly holding on to her.

“… Ah”

She vacantly opened her mouth while being held in Riley’s arms. She said “… Ah” but it could not be heard by anyone because of the explosive sound from the dragon’s breath.

‘I need to get a grip. At this rate…’

The barrier suddenly cracked. Nainiae was in Riley’s arms, blushing. She came to her senses and put mana into the accessory on her arm.

‘Young Master!’

Because she could not hear his voice, she had been rubbing her head in his chest as she called out his name in her mind. As if he realized her desperation, Riley turned his gaze to the right.

“Ugh.”

He saw a small dimensional space next to Nainiae. As if he was finding it to be a ridiculous idea, he clicked his tongue and said,

“Is this a souvenir gift from your traveling? Oh my…”

Riley saw a handle that was sticking out slightly from the dimensional space. He extended his hand toward it and let go of Nainiae.

“…”

At that moment… Instead of her right hand, which was extended to the front, she used her left hand and grabbed on to the back of Riley who was about to take the warmth away from her.

“What are you doing?”

Riley was drawing the sword from Nainiae’s dimensional space. Having noticed her hand, he asked.

“… Ah, No. It’s nothing. I’m sorry.”

Nainiae vacantly opened her mouth. She added that it was nothing, let go of her left arm and focused on the barrier that was cracked.

‘Hold on just a little longer…’

Nainiae bit her lips. A stream of black blood came out of her mouth. As if he was trying to say Nainiae should take a break now, Riley turned his shoulder around in a circle and stepped toward the barrier that was on the brink of being shattered.

<It’s all right now. Lower it now.>

“But…”

Nainiae did not wipe off the blood that came down to her chin. Concerned, she asked with a crumpled face. However, Riley shrugged as if it did not matter to him. He just turned his gaze toward the barrier.

‘That’s right. I should trust Young Master.”

They were reunited after a long time. Nainiae resented the fact that a situation like this came to them at this moment. However… She thought about how she was held in his arms, and she thought about the warmth she felt from him. Thinking about those, she thought that the situation was not a loss. She lowered the barrier.

‘… Not bad.’

The dragon’s breath was right in front of his nose now. Riley noticed that Nainiae had grown up noticeably. He peeked a smile and lightly grabbed the sword on his right.

‘If she was like before, she would not have been able to get a grip at all. She grew up a lot.’

Before the barrier could be lowered, Riley set his legs apart a little wider. He lowered the sword and fixed his stance. He narrowed his eyes and counted the timing.

“Young Master, I’ll lower it!”

Nainiae wiped off the blood on her chin and shouted. However, because of the explosive sound in the area, it was not possible for to be certain if Riley heard it.

“…”

Taking a stance, Riley was not moving at all. Nainiae realized Riley was focused. She waved her right hand to the side and lowered the barrier.

‘This brings back old memories.’

The barrier was lowered.

The breath that was shot by the dragon head summoned by Rebethra completely filled Riley's view.

'What a burp. It's worse than Andal.'

Perhaps it was because the dirty water from the Lower Solia was mixed in. Perhaps it was because of the smell of the rotting corpse. There was a horrid stench that was poking at Riley's nose. He narrowed his eyes and cringed.

"I think I'm going to throw up."

At the moment Nainiae's barrier disappeared, when the dragon's breath came right in front of Riley's nose, a long and narrow line, so fine that it would have gone unnoticed without a close examination, was drawn on the dragon's breath.

"…?"

Nainiae was watching Riley's back. In a blink of an eye, Riley's stance was changed. Having realized this, Nainiae just blinked her eyes.

Only a moment ago, his sword was near his left waist. Now, before she realized, it was above his right shoulder.

‘A cross cut?’

When Andal took her under his wings for training, she didn’t just do magic training. She also did not skimp on swordsmanship training. Watching Riley’s flawless stance, she mumbled,

‘I didn’t see him move at all, so how?’

Nainiae did not see the sword moving from the lower left to right above the shoulder at all. Nainiae opened her eyes wide.

‘… Huh?’

As a result of Riley’s swing, a whirlwind came blowing at Nainiae. It made her hair and her coat wave in the air.

“Young Master, just now…”

Nainiae carefully called Riley, but she saw the dragon’s breath beyond his shoulder. She gasped for air.

“…?!”

It could be best described by saying the dragon’s breath was cut in half.

The dragon’s breath, which was completely filling their view to

the front, was cut in half, left to right and they were shaking.

The dragon's breath, now cut in two pieces, swallowed the Lower Solia's sewers or old buildings, turning the surrounding into a chaos. However... it was not able to deal any damage to the original target.

"... Kuk!"

Coming after the whirlwind that was generated from Riley's sword swing, the aftereffects from the pieces of dragon's breath that were wobbling on the left and right sides came toward where Nainiae was standing.

'This was done by Young Master.'

Covering her face with her arms, Nainiae had been looking at where Riley was standing. Now, Riley lowered the sword that he just had raised up. Nainiae could see that he fixed his stance again.

'That's right. I should do things without getting in Young Master's way.'

Instead of just watching with a vacant look on her face, she decided to do something that would help Riley. She turned her gaze toward the dragon's breath on left and right which were splashing. She swung her left hand in a large motion above her head.

‘I need to do what I can do.’

With her hand swing, she distorted the surrounding space. She took a knee to the floor. With all of her might, she slammed the floor with her left hand.

‘… To the above, I’ll deflect them!”

When she slammed the floor with her palm, the slightly distorted space around her seemed like it was changing the angle. The splatter from the dragon’s breath had been coming at them like rain. However, now, they were redirected to above.

‘It worked.’

Nainiae prevented Lower, Left and Right Solia from being in danger. She quickly turned her head and looked at the direction where Riley was standing.

“…”

Riley was no longer standing there.

Nainiae figured that he probably went after the two who were responsible for creating this mess. She just trusted him and started to focus only on wrapping up the dragon’s breath.

“… Nainiae.”

“…?!”

With her hand touching the floor, although she was still not skillful at it, she managed to block the dragon’s breath by twisting or narrowing the space. She suddenly heard someone’s voice from the back. She flinched her shoulders.

“I think I definitely told you not to overexert yourself?”

The voice was low, heavy and extremely angry. She held her breath and turned her head around.

“Mast…”

She saw a red haired man.

“M… Master.”

The red haired man was flexing a few blood veins on his forehead that bulged up. He was Nainiae’s master. He was the red dragon who was on an amusement tour as a human… It was Andal. He was looking down at Nainiae with a violent look in his eyes.

Chapter 122 - Unprecedented Power

The power they were witnessing at the moment was simply unprecedented. They have never seen anything like it.

His power was best described as overwhelming. Against his power, even the dragon head that they brought out from the dimensional space was not being much of a help.

Riley, the boy who Hurial and Rebethra was witnessing right now, was the one who possessed this unprecedented power.

“That stench from the breath sure is horrible.”

In front of the dimensional space, standing on top of the dragon’s nose to be precise, Riley was tapping his shoulder with the flat side of the sword which had become substantially thinner.

‘Just where did someone like him pop out?’

Rebethra knew the story about Riley very well.

He was the brat young master who was born as the youngest in the Iphalleta House, the family which was most famous in Solia for the swordsmanship.

The rumors said Riley was a lazy and foolish young master who never held a sword despite being born in the house of sword.

That was the Riley that Rebethra knew.

Before this boy was mentioned in the Priestess's divine message about a dragon, and after the message was received... Rebethra actually never thought too hard about Riley.

It was because...

"It would be best for you all to keep your mouths shut, you disgusting little runts."

It was because he never knew that Riley was this strong.

Riley cut down the corpses that were controlled by Hurial. He cut them down like they were nothing. When Riley saw Astroa's Seven Circles magic, Riley just yawned as if it was nothing. When the dragon's head appeared out of the dimensional space, Riley was now stepping on its mouth as if he was squashing a bug, annoyed.

"Well then."

They wondered if they were just dreaming. The boy's power was just too overwhelming. The boy slowly turned his head and looked at Hurial and Rebethra who were on their knees.

"It is you guys' turn, right?"

Riley hopped down from the head of the dragon's corpse. He cracked his neck left and right as he approached the two who were sitting there vacantly.

"Uuuu. I wonder how long it had been since I moved like this. Thanks to Ian, I ended up this far."

Riley came this far because of a sincere request made by Ian, and this was the aftermath. With cold look on his face, Riley came to the front of Hurial. Riley raised his sword on his right hand.

"First, I'll kill the iron leech half way."

"…?"

Slash.

Riley's sword drew a blue line. It swept through Hurial's legs.

"Uuu, uuu?"

Hurial's mouth slowly opened.

"Ahah."

The way his face was getting crumpled was somehow slow. As if someone used time magic, the blue line that was drawn on his legs

was slowly separating his thighs and knees.

“Ahaak…”

His scream was stretched out long.

Hurial was certain now that someone had cast time magic on him. However… he had no way of stopping any of what was happening. His legs were slowly being cut off, and his face was crumpling slowly along with slow scream that continued.

“Are you feigning pain? You are the one who had been working dead people who died in pain.”

Although Hurial was screaming, Riley looked at him with a cold gaze. Without a moment of hesitation, Riley swung the sword again.

This time, he aimed for Hurial’s arms.

Just above the elbows, starting with the tendons, he cut the bastard’s arms clean. Riley then looked at Hurial’s eyes.

“Uuuu, uuuu!”

Noticing Riley’s gaze, Hurial thought that this must not be the end of it. For the second time in his life, Hurial’s eyes were saturated in fear.

“Pl……ease…”

His words continued slowly. Riley ignored Hurial’s words. As if cutting off Hurial’s arms and legs were not enough, he raised the sword again.

Hurial’s eyes were overflowing with fear. A long, blue line was drawn horizontally on his eyes and made the sound of wind passing.

“Kuuuuaaaaaa… ak!”

From his arms, legs and eyes, Hurial was drawing fountains of blood. It seemed he was affected by Riley’s time magic. Hurial was experiencing pain for extended period of time. He was not able to cast any spell.

“Don’t die yet. Sit tight and wait, all right?”

Hurial’s screams were not the only thing that was slow. The fountains of blood gushing from the cut places were moving at crawling pace. Riley watched it all and told Hurial to die slowly. Riley leisurely turned his body and looked at Rebethra.

“What are you looking at vacantly like that? You will become just like him too.”

"... Huuuu."

It seemed Riley was rough handling the sword until now. It seemed like the blade was going to be gone soon with a few more swings. The blade was that thin now. Riley mumbled as he examined the deteriorated condition of the sword. He noticed Rebethra was flinching his shoulders. Riley tilted his head side to side.

"Hu... Huhuhu..."

It seemed Rebethra had gone insane from the fear. Rebethra was smiling as he flinched his shoulders. Riley, with his cold gaze, raised the sword on his right hand once again.

"Hu... ugh!"

Unlike the Hurial's case, Riley cut off Rebethra's arms first. Riley casually turned his head and looked at the dimensional space where the dragon's head was still present.

'This runt... does he still have a trick left up his sleeve?'

Riley didn't have any ability to read people's mind. Finding Rebethra's behavior suspicious, Riley furrowed his brows and swung his sword again.

"Uuuup!"

This time, he swung it against Rebethra's legs.

"Huu.... Huu... Huuuuuu."

Just like Hurial, Rebethra was subjected to Riley's time magic. Feeling the pain from cut off arms and legs, he slowly shed tears. His eyes met with the boy's gaze.

"I can... only... say that... you are... incredible."

Unlike Hurial, who had gone mad from fear, Rebethra was maintaining his sanity. He struggled with words as he complimented Riley.

"To think... you would meddle with our work... this... much."

Although the time magic was stretching out his words, although his face was crumpled from the pain, it looked like Rebethra was feeling refreshed as if he dealt a blow against Riley somehow. Riley furrowed his brows and directed his gaze to the side.

"You... You are the Lazy-Sword, so how?"

"..."

There were Peruda and Hamil.

It seemed they just saw what Riley did. The two men vacantly had their mouths open. Annoyed, Riley looked at his sword.

Even if he was carefull, it seemed like the sword was not going to last after swinging two or three more times.

'It's fine. I can just kill them with bare hands.'

Riley bit his lips. He then turned his head away from Peruda and Hamil to look at Rebethra who was struggling in pain.

"I had to ask. What is this life long wish you guys mentioned?"

"..."

Riley asked toward Rebethra.

Rebethra fell to silence.

"This dimensional space... This is different from the dimensional space that I know about? Where did you get the corpse of a dragon?"

Facing silence, Riley nodded and asked a different question toward Rebethra.

“…”

Rebethra was silent again.

“About the world below, just what are you talking about exactly?”

“…”

All Riley got in return was silence. Without hesitation, Riley swung his sword and tore up Rebethra’s mouth wide. Riley promptly turned and walked toward where Hurial was.

“Uuu, uuuuu!”

Hurial could hear slow screams from Rebethra on the side. He could hear Riley’s steps coming toward himself. Hurial, choking on fear, held his breath and waited for Riley’s question.

“I’m going to give you an advice first. It would be wise for you to think carefully and answer straight. I’m not going to tear your mouth. I’m going to cut your neck.”

Hurial, in state of being subjected to time magic, nodded slowly.

“What is the life long wish that you guys mentioned?”

“… It is opening the world below by collecting human souls.”

“…?!”

It seemed Hurial was overwhelmed by Riley ever since he saw Riley cutting the dragon’s breath in half. Hurial lowered his head and answered politely. Having realized this, Rebethra, who was shaking in pain, started to glare at Hurial with violent look on his eyes.

“Where did you get the dead body of a dragon?”

“It was given by the Great One from the world below.”

“Hu…. ri… al!!”

Riley ignored Rebethra’s voice from the back. Riley furrowed his brows after hearing Hurial’s answers. He asked the next question.

“What is the world below exactly?”

“The world below is…”

Before Hurial could answer, it looked like his face was becoming squashy like a jelly. It looked like his head was boiling from inside. His entire face started to wobble.

“Uuu…. Uuuu….”

With his face wobbling, Hurial turned his head toward Rebethra. Hurial started to wave around what were left of his arms after they were cut off, which were shaking.

“Pl…. ease…”

With that as his last word, along with a ‘puk’ sound, Hurial’s head exploded and splashed black blood in all directions.

‘Self destruction?’

Although the body now lost its head, just before Hurial died, its arms were desperately reaching toward somewhere. Having noticed this, Riley quickly turned his head toward the direction.

‘That runt?’

It was headed to where Rebethra was.

“You dare… to… tell… our life long wish…”

Rebethra was cringing, not from pain, but from fury. He breathed in the air along with an audible breathing sound. When he did, from Hurial’s dead body, purple gas-like substance slowly came up, and it was absorbed by Rebethra as if snake crawled into him.

“Instead of your damn mouth, I should have torn off your head, right?”

It looked like Rebethra was up to no good. Having realized this, Riley walked toward Rebethra as he raised the thinned sword. It looked like he could swing it just once more. He raised the sword, but then he realized Hurial’s corpse was crawling towards him. Riley wiggled his eyebrows.

‘It cannot be?’

While Riley was wiggling his eyebrows, the dragon’s corpse, which was turned to a rag from being cut by the sword, opened its mouth again in a heavy motion. It aimed its mouth toward Riley.

“So, you are saying you are going to go as far as you could possibly take this to, right?”

Suuuuuuuuuuu.

Once again, the mana was being collected toward the dragon’s corpse. Riley ground his teeth and fixed his grip on his sword.

‘Damn it. Only if the sword was a little better…’

The sword was noticeably thinner now. Riley thought about the sword from his past life which was able to endure his mana. Riley

realized he could not afford to let this drag on any further. He quickly moved his body.

‘I’m going to just smack away that ragged piece of mouth. As for the others, I’ll end them with bare hands.’

The dragon’s head looked like it could throw up the dragon’s breath in any moment. Facing the dragon’s head, Riley, with deadly look in his eyes, was about to swing his sword. However, at that moment, a graceful but stern voice could be heard through his ears.

“… Stop!”

The voice was coming from the sky.

It was not just ringing his eardrums. The voice was shaking his entire body. Riley, who was about to swing his sword, quickly glanced up.

‘That is?’

What he saw was a being with long ears, an elf. She was floating in the air and looking down at Riley.

‘What’s an elf doing here…’

Riley had read about elves in books. Riley thought hard about

why an elf was here. With his eyebrows furrowed, he looked at the elf who was flaunting her silver hair.

‘Wait. She is not an elf?’

Elves were blessed with mana from their births. However, it was impossible for any elf to possess the humungous mana that Riley was sensing.

It felt similar to what his friend had. Riley thought she might had more than Andal. Riley looked up at the elf. With a serious, straight face, Riley asked,

“What’s a dragon doing in a filthy place like this?”

Riley had only known one dragon until now. This was the first time for Riley to meet another dragon besides Andal. Riley asked with a violent look on his face. The silver blonde elf, a dragon on an amusement tour in the form of an elf to be precise, lightly lowered her head to show respect. She then came down.

“Sir Riley, correct?”

It seemed she knew his name. She came down and landed on the tip of the nose of her kin’s dead body. The silver blonde dragon looked at the corpse of her kin and continued in a low voice.

“As the leader of my kind, I have a responsibility to stop further damage being inflected on my kin’s head, so I stepped in.”

The silver blonde elf took a knee to the floor. She gently stroke the dragon's nose. The dragon's breath looked like it was about to be shot toward Riley, but it withered away at an instant.

"... Also."

When the dragon's breath completely disappeared, the silver haired elf got up and turned to look at Rebethra who was grinding his teeth. The elf continued.

"As for this human's body, we will take it."

Chapter 123 - Unprecedented Power (2)

The silver blonde elf said she will take this human, Rebethra to be exact. Having heard what she said, Riley lowered the sword he raised and asked,

“You are going to take him?”

Riley seemed to not like the idea. He looked up at the elf who was standing on top of the dragon’s corpse. His eyes were full of doubts when looking toward the elf. Not easing his gaze, Riley asked the elf,

“I don’t even know who you are. Why am I supposed to just let you have this bastard?”

Based on what the silver blonde elf mumbled earlier about being an elder, Riley figured she must be at the top of the dragon’s kind.

“Didn’t you just ask me why a dragon came all the way here?”

Silver blonde elf faced Riley’s gaze. It seemed she realized something late. She smiled lightly and lowered her head.

“Now that I think about it, this is the first time we actually met in person. I should have introduced myself in detail. It’s a pleasure meeting you. My name is Isilteru. We, the dragons, have a mission. It is maintaining the world’s balance and the wheel of fate. So... I’m here to take that man’s body.”

Isilteru said as she looked at Rebethra, who was in a gruesome state. Riley also casually glanced at Rebethra.

It seemed Isilteru and Rebethra were not allies. Facing Isilteru steadily looking at him, Rebethra glared at her and ground his teeth.

“Are you saying you are going to take him because doing so is going to make the world’s balance or whatever safe?”

With a question mark on his face, Riley asked about Isilteru’s explanation.

Isilteru thought the conversation was going to end well. She smiled lightly and said,

“Yes.”

Riley peeked a smile like Isilteru. He took a moment of pause and said,

“… I don’t want to. What are you going to do about that?”

Riley refused to cooperate. Before his response, Isilteru’s eyebrows were elevated gently. Now, having heard his response, she slightly furrowed her brows.

“… Pardon?”

“I would like to say no to more bothersome things. That’s why.”

Having finished talking, Riley swung his sword.

The target was Rebethra.

“Wait!”

Isilteru panicked in light of Riley’s sudden move. She hurriedly extended her hand and cast defensive magic to protect Rebethra’s neck.

Riley’s sword was swung. Leaving a trace of blue line, the sword rushed toward Rebethra’s neck.

However, Isilteru barely managed to protect Rebethra’s neck with her barrier spell.

“He can’t die yet. Killing him later after getting enough information out of him first is not going to be too late.”

Isilteru continued as she broke cold sweat from the sword strike she defended against just now.

‘This is a blow from a mere human?’

There was a long blue line drawn above the barrier. The sword that Riley was holding had grown even thinner. Also, there was the size of mana that Riley had. Having observed them all, Isilteru felt the chill. She continued in order to convince Riley.

“Of course. I understand very well that the current situation is not to your liking. However…”

Riley crumpled his face as if all this was such a bother to him. He raised his sword once again and cut off Isilteru’s words.

“… If you understand, then don’t butt in anymore.”

The sword he raised didn’t just get thin to the limit. It even had a long crack.

“This son of a bitch even brought back dead bastards. You want to keep him alive? What for? Are you just messing around? I had enough of your nonsense. Don’t make the problem any bigger than it already is.”

Riley clearly expressed that Isilteru should not meddle in any further. Isilteru cast yet another barrier and placed it on top of the one that was already there. She tried to persuade him again.

“If you kill him right now, it might make things easier for the next hundred years or so. However, I can’t guarantee that it will continue like that afterwards! For the sake of the future, it is best

to keep him alive!”

Having heard what she just said, Riley stopped the sword he was about to swing at Rebethra. Riley casually moved his gaze and started to writhe his brows.

“… A hundred years later?”

It seemed Isilteru was relieved to hear Riley’s question. She sighed and nodded.

She was trying to convince Riley by asking him to think about the distant future instead of the present.

“Yes. Something like this had happened in the past. There is no guarantee that it won’t happen again for the third time, so… We need to stop this completely this time. If this man died right now, it will not be possible for us to prepare for what could happen in the distant future…”

As Isilteru continued her persuasion, she withdrew the barrier she cast to protect Rebethra. As soon as she did, Riley opened his eyes big without listening to the end of her speech.

“… Wait!”

Feeling his deadly aura, Isilteru flinched. She generated several dozens of light on her palm and weaved them into a chain. She used it to quickly restrain Riley who was about to swing his sword.

“You are just a lizard, yet…”

In response to Isilteru annoying him with her action, Riley genuinely seemed infuriated. He ground his teeth hard and glared at her.

“… Ugh?!”

Feeling Riley’s deadly aura, Isilteru flinched again. She had a confused look on her face. She gulped.

‘My body is?’

It was because she was not able to move her body.

“Don’t butt in. After one hundred years… For that time, let the bastards who will be there one hundred years from now to handle it. I…”

Riley mumbled with a violent look on his face. He snapped the chain of light from Isilteru that was restraining his arms and legs. He swung the sword toward Rebethra again.

“… will just live comfortably now.”

“NO!”

Because she was petrified from feeling Riley's deadly aura, her magic on the chain of light was completely undone. She raised up her mana and forced her body to move.

'As expected, should I say you are not an elder of dragons for nothing? I didn't think you would force your body to move at your current state. Still, now…'

Rebethra had pitiful look on his face. It seemed he gave up on everything. Riley was swinging his sword toward Rebethra as he mumbled inside,

'… this is the end!'

It seemed Isilteru was trying to recover Rebethra. She drew magic circle below him. However, Riley's sword swing was faster than the rate of completion of her magic circle.

The sword, which was swung multiple times while wrapped in Riley's mana, had become thin like an ice pick. The sword even had a long crack. It had become so weak that it looked like it couldn't be swung more than once. However, Riley estimated that it would be enough.

"…?!"

Riley certainly was thinking that until he saw the surprised look on Rebethra, the one who was about to lose his life by Riley's

sword.

<… I am disappointed, Rebethra.>

At that critical moment…

A deep voice could be heard.

The voice felt different from Isilteru, the leader of the dragons. The voice felt terrifying.

It was coming from the dimensional space where the dragon corpse poped out from.

“…?”

“…?”

Riley was not the only one who was surprised. Isilteru, who was trying to recover Rebethra just now, was not expecting the deep voice from the dimensional space. She had her eyes open big and was staring at the direction.

<… You awakened me too soon.>

It was just before Riley’s sword reached Rebethra’s neck. The dragon’s corpse that popped out through the dimensional space

disappeared without a trace. From the dimensional space, an arm suddenly came out. The arm's appearance had purple and black colored light mixed in.

"Kuk?!"

The black hand mercilessly pierced Isilteru's shoulder while she had her arm extended to retrieve Rebethra's body. The hand immediately charged toward Riley.

'What is this?!'

Riley used the time magic and made his body move faster. He turned the angle of the sword that he was swinging toward Rebethra. He then swung the sword toward the black hand that was rushing toward his chest.

"Kuk?!"

It was a close call, but Riley was able to stop the pitch black hand that was charging at him. However, the problem now was the condition of his sword.

The sword was already at its limit. The black hand broke the sword like it was a cookie stick. The hand scratched Riley's waist as it passed by.

"Ugh!"

Riley dodged fatal injury by deflecting the black hand. He saw the hand snatching up Rebethra.

Riley crumpled his face.

‘It cannot be…’

The arm, which stretched long like a rubber string, started to quickly shorten its length.

It’s hand held Rebethra that it snatched up just now. Isilteru, who was pierced by the hand earlier, quickly used teleport and came next to Riley.

“Kurhuk!!”

Isilteru coughed blood and collapsed to the front. However, it seemed Riley didn’t even notice her. Riley watched the black arm quickly reducing its length and getting sucked into the dimensional space. Riley’s sword was snapped in half. Holding the sword, he dashed toward the front.

“I never gave you the permission to take that bastard alive…”

<Oh, who could you be?>

Riley was going to cut through both Rebethra and the black hand

that were being sucked into the dimensional space. However, he heard the voice coming from beyond the dimensional space. Riley held his breath.

<Are you still wandering around aimlessly because of what happened in your past life?>

'... What?'

<Your memories are quite intriguing... All right. As a reward, I'll give you a gift.>

It sounded like belittling laughter was coming from beyond the dimensional space. Riley was dwelling over what he just heard from the voice, but then the black hand changed the direction and smacked Riley's body like a whip.

"Kuhup?!"

The top of the black hand bashed Riley. His body was bent like a bow, and he got bounced off like a cannon ball.

Boom, boom.

Riley's body broke through Lower Solia's sewers and old buildings. His body didn't slow down. It continued to bounce off and flew through above the Solia's Main Plaza in a parabolic trajectory. His body was plummeted at the outer wall of the Solia Castle.

“Up… Kuk!”

Riley didn’t just sustain physical damage. The reaction from the deadly aura that he spread to restrain Isilteru came rushing back at him at the same time. He suddenly coughed blood.

“Kuhuk. Kuk…”

Isilteru, who had her shoulder pierced and collapsed to the front, was coughing blood like him.

‘Without mana, just by swinging the hand, it generated that kind of power?’

Isilteru watched Riley being thrown off from the Lower Solia all the way to the Solia Castle. She plugged her pierced shoulder with her hand as she glared at the black hand and Rebethra. They were being sucked into the dimensional space.

‘Kuk. I can’t lose him like this…’

Isilteru floated light and was drawing something on the air with her finger. However, her consciousness was starting to fade. Unable to hold out, she was about to collapse to the front again. However, someone came to stand next to her and support her.

“… This is ridiculous. I don’t know what the situation is at all,

but…”

Andal, the red haired young man, supported her. Having confirmed it, Isilteru seemed relieved. She closed her eyes. The girl who tumbled and ran to follow Andal came next to her and finished the sign that Isilteru was drawing.

“… I attached it.”

Isilteru’s innate type was light, and Andal was lacking in that type. On the other hand, Nainiae, who was blessed in all elemental types, was able to complete the sign for Isilteru. She looked at the black hand and Rebethra disappearing into the dimensional space.

“…”

She still had scars on her face, and she still had her dead white eye. Her white eye was glaring at the dimensional space opening that was slowly getting narrower.

‘Where to…’

Soon, the dimensional space disappeared completely. Nainiae, who was glaring at it, opened her eyes wide. She vacantly opened her mouth as well.

“…?”

“Did you find it?”

Only a moment before this, Andal had been giving Nainiae a storm worth of advices in backseat driver style. Now, he was here to support Isilteru. Andal asked if she found where Rebethra went.

Nainiae, who vacantly had her mouth open, slowly nodded.

“Where?”

Andal’s leader was attacked. Because of that, Andal’s eyes were burning in flames out of fury. Having noticed Andal’s eyes, Nainiae bit her lower lips hard and turned her head.

“… Where is he, where is that son of a bitch.”

In the direction that Nainiae turned to, Riley, who was thrown and plunged into the castle’s wall, was walking toward them as he wiped off the blood with the top of his hand.

“…”

Riley was also exuding terrifying aura from his gaze that was just as deadly as Andal’s. However, instead of fear, Nainiae was feeling sorry first.

‘Young Master…’

Nainiae was biting her lower lips because... The black hand, which was engraved with a sign in the dragon's language by Isilteru and Nainiae, was currently at the same place that Riley thought about when he was having nightmares.

Chapter 124 - Unprecedented Power (3)

“You looked pretty cool flying off. Did anything break?”

Andal was supporting Isilteru. Having noticed Riley walking toward them, Andal asked while laughing.

“That mouth…”

Riley raised the hand he was using to wipe off the blood on his chin. Riley expelled his frustration at Andal. He then looked at Isilteru, the silver blonde elf, and crumpled his face.

‘If she didn’t show up, I would not have lost that son of a bitch.’

Riley soon corrected his thoughts and shook his head.

‘No. Even if this bitch was not here, at the moment I swung my sword… that black hand would have interfered.’

Riley corrected the target of his anger. With deadly eyes, he turned to look at Nainiae. He asked,

“So, where did that bastard run off to?”

Just a moment ago, the voice mentioned Riley’s past life. Riley thought about what the voice said. The look on Riley’s face was mixed with complicated emotions.

“…”

Nainiae kept silence.

“… Nainiae.”

She just vacantly stared at Riley’s face. She looked sad. She lowered her head and was not able to answer Riley’s question.

“Tell me.”

Riley mumbled in violent voice as he walked closer to Nainiae. Andal, who was watching from the back, seemed like he thought this must not continue. He raised his hand and grabbed Riley’s shoulder.

“Riley.”

“…?”

Noticing his friend grabbing his shoulder from the back, Riley, while maintaining his violent look on the face, turned his head toward Andal.

“That’s enough.”

“What?”

“I said that’s enough.”

“…”

“Now that it came to this, looks like I’ll have to say things that I was going to explain later.”

Andal tightened his grip on Riley’s shoulder and pulled back to make Riley turn to face him. Andal had just as violent look on his face and continued,

“Stop working Nainiae. Stop making this lass do grunt works for you. It seems you had been making her do lots of it before you let her be under my care. Instead of getting better at taking care of herself, she developed bad habits. She keeps on trying to overexert herself. Can’t you see?”

Having heard Andal’s backseat driving, Riley’s eyebrow started to twitch.

“She did the same earlier too. Before she went off to Solia, I definitely told her not to strain herself, yet I saw her doing that by herself.”

Having heard Andal, Riley twitched his eyebrows some more. Testing his own patience, Riley asked,

“So what?”

“What do you mean so what? If you are capable of doing some heavy lifting yourself, then don’t just sit around your butt. Move your ass, you get what I’m saying? Stop taking advantage of someone else’s pupil, all right?”

“Excuse me…”

The two were glaring at each other with vicious looks on their faces, and Nainiae was standing between them. She broke cold sweats, not knowing what to do.

“Did you just say, stop taking advantage of someone else’s pupil?”

“That’s right, you rascal! You get what I said, right?”

“Ah, of course! I understood what you just said! So, is that all you wanted to tell me?”

“E… Excuse me… Everyone…”

It seemed they could not hear Nainiae’s voice at all. Andal and Riley glared at each other. With just their eyes, it looked like fire sparks could splash from the collision of their glares. They were exuding violent energies.

“That’s right. I said everything I wanted to say! What are you going to do?”

“Ah! Hey, Andal. Aren’t you mistaking something a little?”

“Teacher… Young Master… Let’s calm down for now…”

“You have no right to order me around.”

“What?”

“It looks like you became full of yourself for acting as a teacher for a few months. This girl is actually…”

Riley was twitching his eyebrows. He suddenly tilted the eyebrows in the other direction and extended his arm out. He grabbed on to the Nainiae's shoulder, who was panicking and not sure about what to do to mitigate the situation, and pulled her toward himself.

“… Ah?”

Nainiae, who had her shoulder pulled, was held by Riley on his waist. Nainiae had a blank look on her face.

“She is mine. Didn’t you know?”

“… Ut?!”

Having heard what Riley just said, that she was Riley’s, Nainiae shook her shoulders.

She flinched because she remembered how Riley held her in his arms to protect her from the dragon corpse’s breath.

“You rascal. You were the one who lectured me and said I should not treat people like objects. Are you going to act like this now?”

“I am not treating Nainiae like an object.”

“Wow…”

“I merely stated the obvious.”

“Riley, you… It would be best for you to don’t over do it.”

“What? What is it that I am not supposed to over do?”

The atmosphere was becoming more violent. Meanwhile, Nainiae was blushing in Riley’s arms as she thought about what happened earlier. Having realized the worsening situation, she barely got a hold of herself and shouted,

“S… stop…”

Nainiae got out of Riley’s arms. She took in a deep breath. Having noticed this, Riley and Andal both opened their eyes big.

“… Please stop it!!”

“…?!”

She yelled in a ‘unique’ way. Riley and Andal faltered a little from the whirlwind that swept through the area. Nainiae went between looking at Riley and Andal. She then carefully asked,

“At the moment, a fight like this is meaningless. Both of you know this very well, right?”

“… Hey.”

“Even so, still…”

Nainiae got their attention. Andal and Riley both turned to look at her. Their faces looked like they were sick of this.

“Carelessly shooting the dragon’s language in a situation like this is a little…”

“That was the dragon’s language just now?”

The dragon's language could be expressed by voice or written words. It heightened the magic's efficiency and could shock the entire area. It was something that only dragons could use. It was a power of some kind.

Using the dragon's language alone exhibited power by drawing mana from the surrounding. Humans obviously could not use this power, and even elves, the beings blessed in mana, could dare to use this power.

"That is... Two of you are friends, but it looked like you were having a serious fight. It looked like this was the only way to stop the fight, so..."

Looking at the expressions on Andal and Riley, Nainiae lost confidence and withered. She started to mumble as she fiddled with her fingers.

"That's fine. It's the same old kind of bickering."

Still, it looked like the mood was vented. Riley relaxed his face quite a bit. He scratched his head and responded. Andal said,

"Still, this brat really..."

Having heard what Riley said earlier, Andal was pissed and reacted. He tightened his fist and shook his body in anger. Riley turned to look at Nainiae. He asked the question he didn't get to

hear the answer last time.

“So, where is that son of a bitch at?”

It seemed Andal was curious as well. He stopped being angry at Riley. With a serious look on his face, Andal looked at her face.

“That is…”

Nainiae was hesitant to answer. Instead, she kept on checking Andal and Riley. She threw her gaze toward Riley and walked toward him.

“Young Master, can you give me a moment…”

Nainiae called Riley to step away from Andal for a moment. She then checked Andal again, who was tilting his head side to side. She hid her mouth with her hand and whispered to Riley in his ear quietly.

“… I think I should tell you this separately.”

“… Just hurry up and tell me the whole thing quickly.”

Andal seemed to be not liking this. He cringed.

Andal slowly turned away, waved his palm around and cast a

magic.

“… Hu… Uk?”

Before anyone realized, Peruda and Hamil were watching Riley and others. By Andal’s gesture, they flinched once and collapsed to the front as if they just fainted.

“I’ll go wrap things up, so…”

Andal was not just talking about the witnesses. Things for him to do included moving the leader of the dragons to a safe place.

Andal waved his hand once more and cast teleportation magic. Andal disappeared with Isilteru.

Nainiae sighed big enough to make the ground sink.

“Ugh…”

Nainiae gave quick glances at Peruda and Hamil who were lying on the ground unconscious.

Nainiae looked uncomfortable. She explained to Riley why they fell asleep.

“This is the teacher’s work. When they wake up, they probably

will think they had really weird dream."

"..."

Peruda and Hamil were not going to be able to remember their dreams very clearly when they wake up because the dream that people have when they sleep were quickly forgotten when they woke up.

Of all options that Andal could take, it was the cleanest way of eliminating the witnesses given the circumstance. Nainiae would have chosen the same option.

"So, where did he run off to?"

Riley furrowed his brows as if he was not interested in her explanation about the sleep spell. He asked about the black hand that came out of the dimensional space again.

"... Since we are on the topic of dreams..."

Nainiae opened her mouth.

"Excuse me... Young Master... By any chance..."

Nainiae had her back turned to Riley because she was looking at Peruda and Hamil. She carefully asked,

“Are you from another world?”

“…?”

Riley vacantly opened his eyes and tilted his head side to side.

“… What?”

“That is… Before…”

Nainiae turned and looked at Riley. She had a bitter look on her face as she kept her gaze steady at the boy’s eyes. She continued.

“One time… I saw a world in your dream. It’s about that world.”

“…”

When Nainiae talked about that dream, Riley’s face petrified like cold ice.

“The scenery from your dream about that world is the same as the world that the black hand went to.”

Having heard what Nainiae said, now not just his face, but Riley’s entire body, starting with his shoulder all the way to the tip of his legs was petrified.

“How should I describe the scenery... There were so many of huge and tall buildings. Buildings in our world like the Magic Tower or Solia Castle can’t even be compared to the size of those buildings.”

Nainiae continued to describe the world she saw with her right eye.

“There were these mysterious carriages. They all looked pretty similar and had black wheels. The carriages didn’t have horses to pull them, but they carried people and moved around very quickly. People wearing strange clothes walked around with small, rectangular shaped objects held next to their ears. Although they didn’t use magic, fire came out of a device. There were boxes where laundry got done automatically...”

Nainiae pursed her lips and paused for a moment. She thought about if she missed anything. It seemed she remembered. She said,

“Ah, there were boxes where people came out.”

After that, she looked sad.

“But, in that world... There were no trees or land filled with soil.”

With a gloomy face, she explained the scenery she saw.

“It was harder to find a tree than finding those buildings that

were taller than the Magic Tower. The ground was covered in black rock looking thing and suffocating. Also…”

Nainiae looked at Riley. What she was about to ask was the thing that concerned her the most.

“Monsters and humans were fighting there. The fighting was far more violent and intense than here.”

“…”

“Should I call them… monsters? They had horns, goat-like legs or bat-like wings… I saw beings with things like that.”

Nainiae mumbled as if she was whispering. She mumbled more about what those beings were doing.

“Those things were slaughtering people.”

“…”

Although her explanation continued, Riley still kept silence.

“The person you saw in your dream was living in that world.”

Nainiae melancholically grabbed her chest tightly and asked,

“Is that person someone precious to you?”

It was a laughable question.

If anyone else heard this, they would have laughed it off and told her to stop with the nonsense. However, for Riley, the question felt a little… no… a lot different from how anyone else would have felt.

“Young Master. Please tell me. The world I just described to you… It is a world that you know well, right?”

“…”

“Isn’t that right? Occasionally, you told me and Lady Iris about your dreams. The dreams you told us about are just like what I saw through my right eye.”

Riley looked at Nainiae. He vacantly opened his lips, but then he bit the lips hard, hard enough that it was at the brink of bleeding.

“… Nainiae.”

Riley, who had been maintaining silence until now, plaintively called her name. With a very sincere face, Nainiae faced Riley and responded,

“Yes.”

“This is an order. Erase this incident from your head.”

“… Young Master?”

Nainiae’s mouth opened vacantly.

“It’s an order.”

“…”

Riley’s head was aching and pulsating. He held his head. He turned his body around from Nainiae and walked away.

“… Yes.”

Nainiae just watched Riley’s back for a moment. She had a similar look on her face. All she could do was keep pinching at her skirt.

Chapter 125 - Decision

Riot.

This incident, which involved chaos and destruction by animated corpses and followers of the Holy Temple, was summarized with that one word.

With the Magic Tower collapsed, there were talks about the incident being a conspiracy by the Magic Tower. However, it was found to be not true. Still, many of the Magic Tower's associates were found dead.

Rebethra had gone missing. The associates of the Holy Temple, who were persuaded by the Archbishop Rebethra, were all imprisoned at the Solia Castle and branded as fanatics.

As for the animated corpses with pitch black eyes that moved around, people were told that it was an evil act carried out by the fanatics of the Solia Holy Temple.

"Hm..."

All of the monarchs were shaken up by this incident. It was a huge incident that the newspapers on other cities had the news about the incident on the front page. What happened at the Solia's Castle, Magic Tower and Holy Temple were described in detail, also decorating second and third pages.

‘So that’s what they are going to say.’

Riley sat at the chair as if he was lying on it. He carefully looked at the newspaper. He then casually turned his head.

‘But why is she over there?’

With a dumbfounded look, Riley looked at someone. He was looking at one of the four people who were gathered and having a friendly chat.

Priesia.

Of the four, she was wearing the shabbiest getup. The girl was at the center of worries by the people of Solia. She currently had a reward placed on locating her.

“…”

The things from his past life kept coming up in his thoughts, so Riley was not able to look at Priesia so fondly.

“I see. The parts I could not heal using my holy power could be cured using medical techniques… Nainiae, I am so glad you met such a superb doctor.”

“I am so glad you are safe, Ms. Priesia.”

“Still, it looks like the face or the fingers could not be fixed.”

“I know.”

“Ah, yes… Actually, I didn’t have much expectations on those, so it is all right. I became left handed as well.”

The three people who Priesia was having the conversation with were, starting with the one at far right, Nainiae, Ian and Nara.

“… So, the treatments are not completely finished.”

“…”

“Anyway, that lass is human, you know? If you make her strain herself already, it will be hard on her body. So, although she learned a lot of things, until it is completely finished…”

Sitting pretty far from where the four were, Riley and Andal were sitting and talking face to face. Sitting in front of Riley on the other side, Andal continued talking about Nainiae. He then suddenly tilted his head side to side.

“Riley.”

Riley just vacantly held his head with his hand. Andal stared at Riley’s side face and furrowed his brows.

“Riley, did something happen?”

“Ah, Uh… No? Why?”

“What are you thinking so hard about? With a blank face?”

With a blank face, Riley was just staring toward the table where Nainiae and others were sitting. Riley was deep in thoughts. Having noticed this, Andal asked what it was that Riley was thinking so hard about.

Having heard the question, Riley closed his mouth.

“…”

Riley was thinking about the past life that Nainiae mentioned. Riley was also thinking about the Priestess from his past life who had convoluted bad fate intertwined with his own. Riley was also thinking about the favor that Ian asked.

“I wasn’t thinking about anything in particular. I was just thinking about what to eat for dinner.”

With the index finger of the hand he was holding his chin with, Riley tapped at his cheek. Riley gently closed his eyes so that he won’t stare at the table where Nainiae and others were sitting.

“By the way, what did you just tell me?”

Riley opened his eyes again. He asked as if he could not remember what Andal just told him. Andal, with a frustrated look on his face, scratched his head to turn it in to a mess as he said,

“I was talking about my pupil. About my pupil.”

“Ah, that’s what it was?”

It was not certain if Riley just didn’t hear it or heard it but forgotten it. Riley was asking as he tilted his head side to side. Seeing Riley’s response, Andal sighed.

“Ugh. I explained to you about Nainiae’s condition. Oh my… From what point do I need to explain again?”

“Uh… That is… I was reading the newspaper, so…”

“By any chance… From the very beginning?”

Andal looked like he was sick of it. When Andal asked, Riley scratched the back of his head and slowly avoided Andal’s gaze.

“Wow… You disgusting rascal… If you make me explain this for the third time, I’m going to do it in the dragon’s language, so listen up this time.”

Andal turned to look at Nainiae who was having a conversation

with others. He repeated the explanation he gave earlier.

"It can be said that her current condition is just as unstable as before. She had a limited lifespan. With magical treatment, I merely extended her life a little."

With his nail, Andal drew a horizontal mark on the table, and he made another horizontal mark. Having heard Andal's explanation, Riley flinched his eyebrow.

"... What?"

Riley flinched because what Andal just said meant the illness that Nainiae had was something that even dragons could not fix.

"Tsk. So, why didn't you listen to my explanations earlier? Hold on. I still have more to explain."

Noticing Riley's reaction, Andal clicked his tongue. Andal waved his palm around to say Riley should wait a minute. Andal continued.

"The treatment I gave her was pushing away all of the Circles she learned so far and teach her from the start again. Instead of human's method, I used the dragon's way."

"Dragon's way?"

“Do you remember the shouting that lass did last time?”

“…?”

“I’m talking about the dragon’s language.”

“Ah.”

Riley nodded.

“There must have been a problem with her Circles. Once I swapped everything inside with new Circles, it felt like her body’s condition improved. However, the problem is here.”

Andal brought his index finger to his eye and made tapping noise.

“… The eye?”

“That’s right. Her eye.”

Andal was talking about Nainiae’s right eye. The look on Andal got convoluted. He leaned on the chair’s back support.

“Her eye is the problem. It’s the eye… Something even more convoluted and tangled up than what was spread on her body is there. It’s like a lump of tangled strings, and it is rotting there. I can’t fix it all at once at the moment.”

Riley carefully thought about what Andal said so far. Riley had a confused look. He tilted his head side to side. Andal continued.

“I wish I could swap everything at once inside her eye just like what I did to her Circles and other parts. However…”

Andal showed his left palm and scratched it roughly with his nails. He pretended to be digging on a dirt ground and shook his head to say it was not possible.

“If I recklessly attempt to clean up the lump of strings in her eye… Instead of healing her or whatever, it will probably lead to her dying more quickly.”

Andal shrugged his shoulder and added why Nainiae would die from doing that.

“It’s because she is human.”

“Because… she is human?”

“I don’t know if it is because of the experiments that humans did on her or she is just natural at magic. That lass is pretty quick at learning, so she mastered up to the dragon’s language in a flash, but… The illness that she has is far from being related to that, so…”

Riley looked confused. Having noticed this, Andal decided to make an analogy to help Riley understand more easily.

“Let’s say there is an old sword. It’s super old. It has blood and rust on it. If you wipe it off clean with cloth or water... for now, the sword will be clean, right?”

“Right.”

“So, you polished the sword clean. You did, but you started to notice something on the sword that you didn’t notice before. What would that be?”

“...”

Riley kept silence. He said the very first thing that came to his mind.

“... A crack?”

“That’s right.”

Andal snapped his finger and made an exhilarating noise with it. Andal continued.

“That’s her current condition. All I have done is wiping off the impurities that piled up inside her and make her mana flow like us.”

Riley thought about how Andal yelled at him and said not to make Nainiae strain herself. Riley furrowed his brows.

“So, what’s going to happen now?”

“The problem is the crack.”

There was a dish that was laying around on the table. Andal brought it closer to himself and pointed at the soup on the dish.

“This dish with the soup shatters like this.”

Andal held the dish with two hands and tore it into two pieces. The soup fell to the table and splashed.

How it happened was reminiscent of how Nainiae coughed off huge amount of blood on the corridor last time.

“Now, with the soup dropped on the table, nobody can eat it now. The dish is broken so it cannot hold the soup anymore either.”

Andal carefully put the two pieces of the dish together and said,

“Nainiae is the same. Well, it is not like she is going to die right away if anything happens to the part where the crack is. I applied some measures so it won’t happen. However…”

“However?”

“Even if you put the dish back together with sticky resin, would the dish be just as strong as before?”

Having heard the question, Riley thought about several tens of thousands of swords that he had swung in all of his lifetimes.

‘If a skilled blacksmith mended a broken sword back together, could it still be just as strong as before? No. It cannot.’

“So, what we need is a stronger dish.”

“A stronger dish?”

“That thing that humans do often to armors... What is that called? Coating? It’s like that.”

Andal placed the two pieces of dish together and put his palm on top of it. He then mumbled something as his lips moved.

“Like this.”

It seemed the mumbling was a spell. The broken dish started to change into shiny golden color as soon as his palm passed by.

“…”

When his hand completely left the dish, the dish looked nothing like earlier. Now, it was a sparkling golden dish.

“Now that I did this, the dish is stronger than before. It can even hold soup again.”

Andal used telekinesis and slowly lifted the soup he dropped to the table. He placed the soup on the dish and looked at Riley.

“From the start, I broke apart the Circles inside Nainiae and fixed them for the sake of this process. It is just that… this process is not something I should decide for her unilaterally.”

Andal locked the fingers between his hands. He slowly turned his head and looked at Nainiae who was still carrying on the conversation with the others.

“Judging from what you are saying, it looks like you have not done the dish swap yet? You had been telling me not to make her overexert herself. You didn’t even finish her treatment yet?”

Andal nodded and said in a low voice,

“For now, I thought I might need your agreement. That lass said the same thing too.”

“My agreement?”

Andal nodded and said,

“For now, you are her master.”

The tone of his voice sounded like he was not liking it, but the voice had some courtesy in it, which was not typical of Andal.

Riley was agonizing inside because of his past life. Having heard this friend’s voice, Riley showed respect in his gaze. He soon peeked a smile and asked,

“So, what do you need me to agree on?”

Andal mumbled,

“She needs to give up being human.”

“… What?”

It was the most unexpected idea. Riley furrowed his brows and asked back.

“It’s as I just said. With a human’s body, she cannot withstand it much longer with that crack. I went through the trouble of showing you the broken dish and transformation analogy because I

wanted to explain that the human body won't do and it needs to be changed."

Having heard the explanation, Riley vacantly turned his head.

Nainiae was talking to others while smiling. Riley just stared at her.

"It is for you to decide. That lass also said she will respect your decision."

"…"

"Choose. Allow her to give up being human, or let her die as human."

Chapter 126 - Decision (2)

Having heard what Andal just said, Riley, who was staring at Nainiae, looked like he was deep in thoughts for a moment. Riley carefully asked,

"If she gives up being human, what's going to happen to her?"

"What do you mean what happens to her?"

"You said she will not be human anymore. That means..."

"Ah, I get what you are asking."

Andal nodded as if he understood what Riley was asking. He explained what would happen if Nainiae gave up being human.

"If Nainiae chooses the path of giving up being human, she will become an artificial summon spirit from that point."

"Artificial ... summon spirit?"

"You don't know much about spirits?"

Because it was going to take a very long time to explain it all from the start, Andal scratched his head as if he found this annoying. Andal chose to just show a spirit to Riley.

“Heliona.”

<Yes, Master!>

When Andal mumbled the name to the thin air, a small flame was ignited in front of Andal. The flame gradually changed its shape and started to take form.

<It’s a pleasure meeting you! I am Heliona!>

Soon, a tiny human with wings of flames stood in front of Riley and greeted him.

<I am the second spirit who serves Andal, the red dragon who is the flame itself.>

While striking an adorable pose, the palm-sized human introduced herself. Riley glared at Heliona as if he was going to punch a hole through her with his gaze. He then furrowed his brows as if he was asking what the hell this was. Andal explained,

“She is a summon spirit.”

“Spirit?”

“The humans and orcs aren’t all who live in this world, right? Now that I think about it, there is a basilisk there as well.”

With his chin, Andal pointed at a young boy who was sitting with Nainiae on the table in the distance and continued explaining. Riley looked at the palm sized girl again. It seemed Riley was intrigued by the girl.

“This is a summon spirit?”

<Ah… You are making me blush.>

“…”

Heliona was twisting her body and was getting embarrassed. It seemed Riley was not liking it. He crumpled his face.

<By the way! By the way! The one who Nainiae talked so much about to the point of her mouth wearing off… That person is you, right? Um… It doesn’t look like you are all that dashing looking… Nainiae sure have a strange taste. Right? Master?>

Having heard Heliona’s clear but high pitched voice, Riley was going to quickly extend his hand out and grab the bladder mouth spirit. However… His hand only grabbed air.

“…?”

<Oh my… Y… You surprised me.>

Heliona looked down on the hand that just went past through her body. It seemed she got scared. She flapped the wings behind her back and hid behind Andal's head.

"You cannot touch her. She didn't manifest herself yet."

"Manifest?"

"It is a special ability of the spirits. The spirit world is a place where we cannot physically touch. From that world... No. That's enough! If I am to explain this too, it will make the explanation too long."

Andal stopped explaining. Instead, as if he was annoyed, he just shook his head. Heliona, who was hiding behind Andal's head, started to complain as if she was hurting.

<Aehek? Why? Why? Please do it! Please do it!>

"Shut up."

<Please do it! Please do it!>

"I said shut up, Heliona."

<... Uuuu. Master is such a pissy face. You are a lazy bum.>

“This lass!”

<Kiiiak!>

Andal shifted his eyes into dragon form and showed his fang. Heliona screamed. She then quickly flapped her wings and flew to where Nainiae was.

“That… That lass… If she was not the heir to the Spirit King… I would just…”

Heliona hid behind Nainiae as if she was the shield. Andal made a tight fist. He continued explaining about the artificial summon spirit.

“Anyway, she is a normal spirit. The path Nainiae will take is artificial spirit. There is no need for me to explain things like the history of the spirits.”

Andal turned his eyes back to human form. He blew away his bangs and added,

“You just need to think of it as Nainiae becoming something like that lass over there.”

Although it was just a matter of adding the word ‘artificial’ to the mix, Riley felt that it was a huge difference somehow. Riley asked,

“Is that very different from her?”

“Ahah, artificial spirit will be very similar to her, but also very different.”

Andal compared the differences between the normal spirit and artificial spirit as he bent his fingers. He explained it in a way that was going to be easy for Riley to understand.

“An artificial spirit’s body is going to be based on the natural body before becoming the artificial spirit, so… The appearance won’t change much.”

“Wait, that means?”

“That’s right. Artificial spirits, whether they used to be humans, orcs, or elves, have the form of their original individual species preserved. What do humans call this?”

Andal continued as if he remembered what a few drunk people shouted out when he was running the bar.

“Ah! Reborn!”

“Reborn!”

“That’s right. It is going to be like being reborn.”

Andal continued,

“With her native species as the basis, the best features of being spirits will be swapped in.”

Andal explained that Nainiae will have human form, wings, although he was not certain what kind of wings they would be, and become semi-transparent like spirits.

“It’s strange. There’s only advantages?”

Riley crumpled his face, thinking something felt off. He asked to go over the fine details, and Andal nodded and said,

“Of course, there are drawbacks.”

There were many drawbacks to being an artificial spirit. If the two biggest drawbacks were to be selected, they were as following.

“First. It’s the matter of the mana. Once she becomes an artificial spirit, it becomes impossible for her to move without mana like she could as a human. For example… it will be like a golem.”

Riley had seen a stone monster called golem inside Andal’s cave. Riley nodded.

“So, artificial spirits always need a pretty substantial amount of mana.”

‘Like the machines in my past life… They need something like batteries?’

“The second drawback is being subjected to curses by the spirits.”

Riley was thinking about the machines from his past life. Having heard the second drawback, Riley floated a question mark on his face.

“Curses by the spirits?”

“We dragons got permission from the bastard that wears crown among the spirits to create the new beings called the artificial spirits. However… There were spirits who were opposed to the idea.”

“So, curses from those spirits who opposed the idea?”

“That’s right.”

The Spirit King and elder spirits agreed to allow the dragons to create the artificial spirits. However… Not all of the spirits acknowledged the artificial spirits.

So, the ones who live as artificial spirits were subjected to the fury and hatred from some of the spirits, which was a little unfortunate that they had to embrace such through their entire

life. That was Andal's explanation.

"In case of Nainiae, I'll have Heliona or other high ranking spirits to be on her side, so I think she will be all right on that regard. Still..."

With a high ranking spirit befriending the artificial spirit, other spirits of lower ranks could not dare to act out against the artificial spirit, mitigating the second drawback to some degree.

"Fortunately, Nainiae is not just talented in magic. She is also pretty high in her ability to fraternize with spirits. Look at that lass. That lass... Just look at her sticking to Nainiae. Look."

Andal pointed at Heliona rolling around on Nainiae's hair. Andal clicked his tongue.

Heliona...

Andal said that Heliona belonged to a very high ranking society.

"Well, those are about all of the most glaring drawbacks. About the mana supply issue... You won't have to worry about that."

Andal narrowly opened his eyes and looked at Riley. Riley also narrowed his eyes and glared at him as if he was trying to say what the hell he was glaring at.

“Likewise, you won’t have to worry about the second drawback. I think it would be best to have Heliona accompany Nainiae. She chirps and chirps. It’s not like she is a water spirit. She yapps away through out the whole day. I think it would be better to assign her for that role soon. Seriously.”

Riley carefully went over all of the advantages and drawbacks of Nainiae being an artificial spirit. It seemed he thought it was too much of a bother for him to think about it any further. He thought about the greatest advantage.

“Anyway, this is the only way for that lass to live, right?”

“That’s right.”

Dururuk.

Andal pushed the chair back and got up as he answered.

“What is this? Where are you going?”

“Ah, I’m going to the west for a bit... Before I got to the Solia, I saw something suspicious. I’m thinking about going to check it again.”

Andal got up and looked at his wrist watch. Having noticed this, Heliona, who was playing around on top of Nainiae’s head, flapped her wings and asked,

<Uuuing? Master, are you going back already?>

“You stay here with Nainiae. It looks like the thing we talked about before are approved as well.”

<Wow?! Really?!?>

“…”

Having heard the conversation between Andal and Heliona, Nainiae, who was having a conversation with the other three people, slowly turned her head with a concerned look on face. She looked at Riley.

“The thing?”

Having heard Andal, Riley tilted his head side to side. Andal waved his palm around and explained,

“What we just talked about. That thing.”

“Ah.”

Andal checked the time and was about to slowly walk away. Riley suddenly extended his arm and grabbed Andal’s sleeve.

“Hey. Wait… What’s this? Aren’t you going to do it?”

Riley stopped Andal because Riley thought Andal was supposed to turn Nainiae into the artificial spirit to cure her illness.

“Why should I? You should handle it from here, don’t you think?”

“What?”

“You told me yourself before, didn’t you?”

Andal turned and looked at Riley. Andal had some veins popped on his forehead. He wiggled the veins and said as if he was mimicking what Riley said before.

“You said… You are her teacher, and I am her Master.”

“…”

<…>

“… As for the detailed explanation, you can hear it from Heliona.”

It seemed Andal was embarrassed. He flexed the facial muscle, shook off Riley’s hand holding on to his sleeve and left the hotel

like that.

<… I don’t know what to say.>

Watching Andal leaving the scene, Heliona sighed as if she was frustrated.

*

The outer border of the Solia was near a desert town.

Space at a corner of the hill seemed to be distorted a little, and Andal, a red haired young man, appeared with light.

“… You are here?”

A golden skinned orc, who was watching the desert’s scenery, greeted Andal.

“What about the culprit?”

“Not yet…”

The two dragons were looking around the desert.

Instead of the scenery being desolate, it was such a mess that the word ‘disarray’ was better fitting as the description.

“I still cannot believe it… Just two humans did this?”

The scenery was as what Andal saw a few days ago. He looked at the place once again carefully. It seemed he thought this was unpleasant. He cringed and mumbled.

“I am certain.”

Golden skinned orc also mumbled.

“Although I just cannot believe it.”

In the messed up desert scene, to pick a few unusual things that could be seen, the first thing was the sand.

The sands originally must have had tan color. However, for some reason, all sands turned black, and the sands were exuding abhorrent stench, enough to make ordinary beings feint.

“…”

This was also the reason why Andal was cringing.

The stench was so bad that even dragons were crumpling their faces. In fact, this meant the smell was close to being extreme poison.

Sickening epidemic that could do way more than just leading all living things on this desert to extinction... As if it was trying to let its existence known, it turned the water on the oasis into poison. It also turned fine sands into black mud bath.

“This is ridiculous.”

Andal complained in disbelief.

“I know.”

The entire area’s sands tuned black.

As if that was not enough, forest in far distance, well beyond the desert, were dying in black color before having had the chance to turn their color for the autumn. An epidemic of incredible proportion had spread here.

It was hard for them to believe that this was done by a human being.

“We have to catch these people. We absolutely have to.”

In the messed up desert’s scenery, if they were to pick another thing besides the sands... It was the cracks.

As if there was an earthquake, they could see several places with

large cracks on the ground.

“He probably could not attend the meeting because of something related to this.”

The golden skinned orc thought about his kin who was found as a corpse. Andal slowly pulled his chin and started to show deadly aura.

“That’s right. This time… we definitely will…”

Chapter 127 - Decision (3)

“Excuse me. Can you please help me for a while?”

At the moment, the recent incident at Solia was mostly wrapped up. To be precise, the Iphalleta House’s successorship competition was coming to an end at the moment. Riley and Nainiae were heading back to the mansion, and Priesia pleaded.

“What?”

“Please. Due to a circumstance, I cannot show myself to the public. Also, with the Holy Temple collapsed... There is nothing I can do even if I went back.”

“Um...”

Priesia gathered her hands together and showed sparkles in her eyes. Riley dug his ear with his pinky as if he thought all this was such a bother. He blew his pinky and refused her request.

“I don’t want to?”

It was because it was such a bother for him. However... It was also because Riley had such a terrible history with an existence called Priestess in his past life. He didn’t want to get tangled up with another Priestess.

“I won’t cause troubles to you. I’m just seeking shelter from the rain… If you help me just this once, I’ll definitely return the favor to you later.”

Priesia was showing brilliant shine in her eyes. Nara and the mercenaries who were packing their luggage had look of sympathies on their faces. They started to side with Priesia.

“Young Master, why don’t you take her with you just this once?”

“Can’t you just think of it as taking home a beautiful woman?”

“Don’t say such a ridiculous stuff.”

Riley waved his palm around and refused, and Priesia looked disappointed.

“Young Master really is something.”

“You know he is stubborn.”

“Hm. With a beautiful woman like the Priestess, Isen would have begged and asked her to follow him.”

“Rorona?”

“It’s not exactly a lie, isn’t it? You were staring at the Priestess’s

face like a fool earlier. I saw it all. You think I wouldn't notice?"

"Hey! D... Do you have proof? I asked, you got proof!"

"Could you two stop doing embarrassing shit? Priestess is watching."

When the mercenary group's Isen and Rorona bickered with each aother, Priesia was watching them and breaking cold sweat. Embarrassed, she lowered her head and sighed.

"Ugh. It's all my fault. If I was just a little more alert, this would not have happened."

"That's right. You still didn't quite grow up yet."

"... Ugh."

"You grew up in the Holy Temple while being pampered by a bunch of yes-men. You probably thought I'll listen no matter what just because you asked. You need to fix that attitude."

"... Uuu."

"Y... Young Master... Please be gentle with your words."

"Why? It is not like I said anything wrong..."

Riley was excited and belittling Priesia to his heart's content. Nainiae pulled his sleeve from the side, so he turned his head and flinched his shoulders.

"Hup.... Huuu...."

Priesia was biting hard on to her lower lips and shedding tears as she glared at Riley. This was why.

'W... What is this? Why is she crying?'

Riley panicked and checked other people's faces. It seemed like everyone was not thinking too kindly of what Riley had done.

"I am so sorry. Because I was just a brat, the Holy Temple collapsed, and I didn't even get to protect the people of the temple."

Priesia was wearing a rag on her head. She tightly held the rag and spoke. Meanwhile, Riley floated a question mark, wondering why she was crying, and looked at Priesia.

"If you helped me just a little as the divine message foretold, I would not have... I would not have been cornered like this..."

"..."

“I really agonized over things a lot! Every night, I couldn’t even sleep. All alone, I tried to do something! Huk… Huhup!”

“Ah…. Hey…”

Riley put his hand out and had a dumbfounded look on the face. Nainiae checked Riley and then went next to Priesia to console her.

“It’s all right. Please don’t cry. Young Master didn’t mean anything ill by what he said. You know that, right?”

“…”

“…”

It seemed everyone’s heart was shaken up from seeing a gorgeous woman’s tears. The three mercenaries including Nara and even Ian narrowed their eyes and glared at Riley.

“Ugh. Young Master, you have gone a little too far just now.”

“Young Master, I know well that you are not interested in religion. However… Priestess is a dignitary of high status. She is treated like the monarchs of the Solia Castle. To the people of the Holy Temple, she is even more important than the monarchs. How you spoke to her just now was not becoming of a gentleman.”

“The thing is…”

Having heard Ian's advice, Riley crumpled his face. He looked at Priesia who was crying in Nainiae's chest.

Riley knew very well that this Priestess, a young and naïve girl named Priesia, was a different person. She was not the scheming, sly Priestess that he faced in his past life.

"Ugh. Enough."

As if he was sick of watching her, Riley quickly turned his body around. He got on the carriage that was getting ready to go. He was trying to hide away. Ian was about to reach for Riley's back with his hand, but he withdrew his arm.

'Young Master...'

Riley wondered if something happened to Ian after they went their separate ways at the Right Solia. Lately, Riley felt that Ian was occasionally showing vacant looks or suddenly bust into anger. It made Riley concerned.

"... Ian."

"Ah, yes?"

Wheeec.

Along with Riley's voice, something hard was tossed at Ian. Ian tumbled and raised his hand to the front to catch the object that Riley threw.

It was a mask.

"What is this for?"

"If you are going to bring her with us, have her wear that."

With those as his last words, Riley went into the carriage. Ian thought Riley just cannot help himself after all. Ian tilted up the tip of his mouth.

"As usual, he cannot be honest with himself."

*

They returned to the mansion. While the carriages were being parked, Riley came to Nara's group that followed his carriage. Riley massaged his stiffened neck and asked Nara,

"You did as I asked, right?"

"Yes. I did as you asked, but..."

Riley asked something important for Nara to do while they were

in Solia. Having heard the response, Riley nodded and turned around.

“In that case, that’s enough.”

Priesia was wearing the mask that Riley tossed at Ian for her to wear. She was pretending to be a mercenary. Riley gave a quick glance at Priesia and sighed briefly as he walked toward the main entrance of the mansion.

‘Well, I’m sure Father will make the decision.’

Among all three brothers, it seemed Riley was the one who was most late. At the Iphalleta’s garden, there were Ryan and Lloyd standing to greet Riley’s arrival.

“Welcome back, Riley... I hope the results of the successorship competition are fair and square.”

“Yes, Big Brother.”

Ryan crossed his arms and greeted first. Riley nodded and responded.

“You think so too, right? Lloyd?”

“Pardon? Ah, yes!”

Lloyd had been standing there with a vacant look on his face. Having heard his older brother's voice calling him, Lloyd tumbled and responded half a tempo late.

"Ah, of course. Father will be deciding it, so it certainly will be fair."

Lloyd also lowered his head a little and responded to show respect to his older brother.

"Well, Riley... considering your growth rate... I'm guessing you had Ian do everything to play out your schemes, but..."

"B... Big Brother..."

"Ah, right! When I came back to the mansion and heard the maids talk, I heard your maid came back to mansion as well... You must be happy. I am glad she is all right, so I would like to congratulate her too."

"Yes, thank you."

"Hm!"

Flinching the facial muscles around his cheek, Ryan had been trying to get on Riley's nerves. Ryan shrugged his shoulder and turned around. Lloyd glanced around and then tumbled to follow Ryan's back.

“Excuse me, Big Brother.”

“Um?”

“The thing is…”

Lloyd was walking toward Stein’s office where Stein was most likely there and waiting. Lloyd was about to tell Ryan what he saw, but then he shook his head.

“Ah, no. It… It’s nothing.”

Lloyd was not able to tell him.

He couldn’t tell Ryan about how Riley suddenly went to Solia.

He couldn’t tell Ryan that he lost track of Riley around the middle and instead witnessed the disaster that struck Solia. He couldn’t tell about how he drew sword during the Solia disaster because the mercenaries asked him to.

Also…

*

They were at the Iphalleta mansion’s office.

“… I see.”

Stein had his three sons in front of him. It seemed he became conscious of his cutoff arm. He massaged the shoulder and said,

“All three of you, good work. Thanks to your efforts, I think a sense of vitality was brought back to some extent to Solia when they were shaken up.”

Stein heard of their exploits from the butlers who served Ryan, Lloyd and Riley. Stein looked at a piece of paper on the desk and said,

“First, Ryan.”

“Yes!”

It seemed Stein was going to talk to his eldest son first. Stein called Ryan’s name, and Ryan opened up his chest wide and responded energetically.

“I’ve heard that you saved many villages.”

“Yes.”

Ryan responded.

It was the truth.

He was not trying to show it off. Ryan actually diligently had been going to places to save the villages that Stein asked him to go help. After having visited all of the villages mentioned, he even went to places that Stein didn't mention and helped them as well.

"I see. You did magnificent work."

Stein lowered his gaze and looked at the paper on the desk. It was as if he was trying to say Ryan could step back now. Stein called his second born son.

"Lloyd."

"Yes, Yes!"

It seemed he was nervous. Lloyd shriveled and stuttered. He carefully walked to the front.

"…"

"…"

For a while, without saying anything, Stein just stared at Lloyd as if he was going to burn a hole through Lloyd with the gaze. All of sudden, he peeked a smile, tilted the tip of his mouth up, and said

one simple sentence.

"... Well done."

Having heard the response, Lloyd's face turned red. It seemed he didn't know how to stand still. He promptly lowered his head and expressed gratitude.

"Oh, it was nothing."

Noticing Lloyd's response, Ryan, who was standing next to him, blinked and wondered what it was about.

Ryan's response seemed to indicate that he was too focused in the successorship competition that he didn't know anything about what transpired in Solia recently.

"Lastly, Riley."

"..."

Riley was looking at Ryan. Having heard Stein calling his name, he quietly came forward without saying anything in response.

"... You..."

Stein gave a blank stare at his youngest son. Stein was going to

say something, but he shut his mouth as if something was getting in his way of saying it. Stein started to massage the temple on his head instead.

"..."

Meanwhile, Riley only waited for his father to speak. Riley could not look more leisurely than now.

Riley's response...

Father's response...

Ryan checked their responses back and forth. Ryan slowly tilted the tip of his mouth. He felt certain about the result now.

'It is done!'

Ryan was certain that he won the successorship competition.

"That's enough."

Stein waved his hand to tell Riley that he could step back now. It seemed Stein didn't want to talk anymore. Riley lightly nodded and took back steps to stand along his two brothers.

"As for the result of the successorship competition, I'll announce

it in two days, two days from today. Three of you... Be careful and keep yourselves in check until then. That is all."

With that as his last words, Stein spun his chair around. The three brothers bowed and left the office.

"Riley! Wait!"

After leaving the office, Riley was trying to move away from the brothers. Riley was walking toward the garden with heavy steps. Lloyd called Riley and stopped him.

"Um? What is it?"

Having heard his older brother's voice coming from the back, Riley quickly turned his head. He looked at Lloyd and tilted his head side to side.

"You..."

Lloyd stared at Riley as he crumpled his face. Ryan, who had been glancing at his brothers, watched the situation with a question mark floated up on his face, wondering what was happening here.

"..."

"... If you have nothing to say, can I go now?"

Silence continued for a while. Riley was just standing there. He carefully started to walk again and asked.

“O… Okay.”

Lloyd noticed Ryan glancing at them from the side. Lloyd apologized to Riley for holding him up for the moment. He added that Riley can go.

Having heard what Lloyd said, Riley promptly lowered his head. He started to walk toward the garden.

“Lloyd… It seems you changed a little.”

“Do you… think so?”

Lloyd was acting a little different from the usual. Ryan was finding his little brother’s behavior suspicious. Ryan tilted his head side to side.

Meanwhile, Lloyd tightly held on to the ‘something’ that he had in his side pocket and just smiled awkwardly.

Chapter 128 - Decision (4)

It was the daybreak. Today was the day of the Iphalleta House's successorship competition result announcement.

It was early morning, but the carriages of many nobilities who were interested in the result were coming in through the mansion's entrance.

"This is amazing. Morgared, Yusiel, Snowdrop, wow... Philisnion from the Duke's family is here too."

Sera, Iphalleta House's maid, had been diligently preparing food. She couldn't help but to mumble in excitement as she looked out the window and noticed carriages coming in one after the other.

"Well, we were expecting this much guests. Today is about deciding the successor of the Iphalleta family, you know?"

"Also, the situation at the Solia had been shaky lately, you know? There was the skirmish at the border, riot by the fanatics of the temple, and many other things."

"In middle of all this, Count Stein is going to announce the successor for the Iphalleta house, the family that represents swordsmanship of the Solia. It is no wonder why many nobilities are interested."

Sera looked out the window and counted the number of

carriages, and other maids were having a conversation with her, each adding a sentence or two.

"Well then, who would become the successor?"

"Won't it be Young Master Ryan?"

"Probably, right?"

"I feel that Young Master Lloyd had worked hard, but I can't shake the feeling that he is not quite catching up to Young Master Ryan."

"What about Young Master Riley?"

"Um... I am not sure."

"He even received a medal of honor from the Solia Castle. Sera, you know about this well, right?"

"Um? Ah, I am not sure? I don't know very well..."

All of her fellow maids' gazes were directed at Sera. Sera, who was vacantly looking outside the window, flinched her shoulders a little and mumbled that she didn't know very well.

"Actually... He has that Lazy-Sword title, so it will be hard."

“Still, he is younger than Young Master Ryan and Lloyd, so that might be an advantage for him?”

“Perhaps. Madam Oluli was kicked out of the mansion because of that incident. You never know?”

“Ah, now that I think about it, that happened too.”

“There is Lady Iris too.”

Listening to her fellow maids talking, Sera flinched her facial muscles. She rapidly turned her head toward them and let out her frustration.

“Ugh! You guys, won’t you all watch your mouths?”

It was because Sera was the designated maid for Iris that they just mentioned.

“I… I’m sorry… Sera is here too.”

“This is Count Stein we are talking about. He won’t choose the successor based on something like that.”

“Yeah, you are probably right.”

“What do you think, Nainiae?”

The fellow maids turned their gazes away from Sera and now directed them at Nainiae, the dark haired girl who was diligently cleaning dishes.

“… Yes?”

“About the successorship! Successorship!”

“Nainiae, who do you think will be the successor?”

“Idiot. If you ask Nainiae, you know there is only one answer, don’t you know? Right, Nainiae?”

Nainiae had been hugged by all maids of the mansion several times since she returned. It seemed she was feeling awkward about the winter maid dress she received. She fiddled with the tip of the clothes and hesitated.

“Um…”

“Oh? This is unexpected. You are not answering right away?”

“Should I tell Young Master Riley about this?”

“Ah, ahhahaha.”

Nainiae watched the growing number of people outside. She also noticed the mansion's atmosphere was turning into festivities as well. She carefully said,

"I am not sure? I..."

*

It was dinner time.

Most of carriages had arrived at the mansion now. Riley, who didn't like the commotion, hid himself on the mansion's roof corner.

'Are you still thinking about your past life?'

Thinking about what the voice beyond the dimensional space said when he was at the Lower Solia, Riley crumpled his face.

"Who would think about such..."

If anyone asked Riley how it felt to be born again with the memories of his past life intact, Riley could have explained in a few dozen ways to say how filthy it felt.

"..."

Riley thought numerous times, dozens of times, that it would have been so much better if he was born without remembering anything.

Even if he had forgotten all of swordsmanship he learned in his past life… Riley was certain he would had been better off without the memories of his past.

Riley felt that way because his past life was full of suffering.

‘Young Master. Please tell me. The world I just explained to you… It is a world you also know about, right?’

The garden was in celebratory atmosphere at full swing. Riley looked down at the garden from the roof as he thought about what Nainiae said. He wrapped his head around with his hands.

‘Isn’t that right? Occasionally, you told me and Lady Iris about your dreams. The dreams you told us about are just like what I saw through my right eye.’

What she described was not a dream.

It was from Riley’s past life.

“Young Master?”

"..."

Riley couldn't even laugh.

When he hated his past life so much... Riley, time to time, brought out the stories about his past life in front of his mother, Ian or Nainiae.

'Why?

Why did I talk about things related to my past life with a smile on my face, and why am I feeling so icky about it?'

"Young Master."

"...?"

Having heard Nainiae's voice coming from his side, Riley was awakened from his distracting thoughts. He looked at Nainiae.

"What is it? You came?"

Riley thought he was hiding pretty well. It was not like his mother found him. It was Nainiae who found him so quickly. Having realized this, Riley bluntly greeted her.

"I told you not to use the eye, didn't you?"

Riley said as he looked at her right eye. Nainiae smiled awkwardly and said,

“Yes, so… I didn’t use it.”

Nainiae smiled and said she didn’t use it. Doubting her, Riley narrowed his eyes and looked at her.

“Really. I looked everywhere in the mansion but could not find you. The garden was full with the guests. The library was in a similar situation. I thought about where you could possibly be, and I thought you might be here.”

Nainiae scratched her cheek with her index finger. Riley closed his eyes and thought it was enough. He lied down.

“Would you like to rest your head on my thigh?”

Riley was using his crossed hands as the pillow behind his head. Having heard Nainiae carefully asking him, he lightly raised his upper body and made space.

“Well then, for a while…”

Riley didn’t ask in words. He merely had his upper body raised. Nainiae lightly smiled and crunched down to sit.

“I… Is it all right?”

Riley placed his head on Nainiae’s thigh. He then slowly closed his eyes.

“…”

Riley didn’t answer.

He just lied there and was in deep thoughts.

“There are a lot of guests.”

It seemed Nainiae decided the lack of response meant it was all right. She relaxed the concerned look on her face a little. She looked at the scenery below to the garden and mumbled,

“For me, this is a little awkward. I think this is the first time for me to be in an occasion like this.”

Of the food on the table at the garden, there was one that Nainiae made. She was talking about that one.

“Ah, that pie and fruit pudding are something I made for the first time by following Ms. Sera. Everyone said mine are better, so Sera’s cheek got swollen up like a balloon.”

Riley vacantly lied there without any response. Despite this, Nainiae mumbled on, all excited.

“Nainiae.”

It was around the time when Nainiae yapped away for ten minutes by herself.

“Yes, Young Master?”

“You… Are you fine with it?”

Nainiae tilted her head.

“I’m talking about the artificial summon spirit. I heard you were asked to give up being human. Is that right?”

“Ah.”

Having heard Riley’s question, Nainiae pulled her chin. She had melancholic look on her face as she said,

“Of course I’m not completely fine with it. I had been worrying about it.”

Nainiae wondered if she should raise her right hand and brush Riley’s hair. Nainiae withdrew her hand and continued,

“I… feel more strongly toward continuing to being a human.”

“Really?”

Having heard Nainiae’s response, Riley’s face was crumpled slightly. Nainiae added,

“It’s because I did have one thing I was concerned about.”

Because her right hand was too horrid looking for brushing Riley’s hair, Nainiae just waved her right hand in the air. Instead, she placed an apple on her palm and continued.

“Once I am no longer human, I am concerned you may not want to have me around you anymore, so… I felt more strongly toward being a human.”

She turned her upper body slightly toward the right and held a carving knife on her left hand. She carefully peeled the apple on her right hand and said,

“Still.”

Slice, slice…

The sound of the apple skin being peeled could be heard. Nainiae stopped talking for a moment and fell to silence.

Perhaps it was so she could focus on the apple.

She peeled the entire apple without the peeled apple skin being disconnected in the middle. She looked proud of it. Nainiae put away the peeled skin in the dimensional space.

“If I want to be by your side even for a little while longer, this is the only way. Master Andal told me.”

She was missing two fingers on her right hand. It must have taken quite a bit of concentration to peel the apple so clean.

Nainiae looked at the apple proudly and smiled. She then cut the apple into small pieces so they will be convenient for eating. She gave one to Riley with apologetic look on her face.

“I’m sorry, Young Master.”

“…”

Her apology was out of the blue. Riley slightly raised his chin and looked at Nainiae who was letting him rest his head on her thigh.

“This apple… I got to give it to you very late.”

The season had gone by so much now. The autumn was almost gone. It was almost winter now.

Occasionally, white mist could be seen from Riley and Nainiae's breaths, which indicated the seasonal change.

"..."

Responding to Nainiae's apologetic behavior, Riley grabbed the apple piece that Nainiae gave him. He took a bite out of it and mumbled,

"... I know."

After that, for a long while, Nainiae didn't say a word about what happened at the Lower Solia. Instead, she mumbled on about miscellaneous topics.

"Nainiae."

"Yes?"

"Next year... I'm counting on you again."

Having heard Riley, Nainiae smiled big and said,

"... Yes."

*

Around the time the garden's celebratory mood was reaching its peak, Count Stein, the owner of the mansion, appeared with Iris.

"Oh my... Count Stein... I've heard that he lost an arm during the battle at the border against Ansyrium. It was true."

"The successorship competition was probably because of the arm. Anyway, the Iphelleta family must feel like fire dropped on top of their feet."

"Considering the time, I thought it would be next year or the one after that because the situation in Solia is not very good at the moment."

With Stein making the entrance, all nobilities started to talk amongst themselves.

"So, who do you think will be the successor?"

"It probably will be Young Master Ryan. First of all, he is the eldest son. Also, rumors are everywhere saying he brought the best results."

"Because of the rumors about the Madam Oluli recently, I was thinking it would be Young Master Riley."

"Riley? Who is that?"

“You know, the one who received the medal of honor from the Solia Castle and has a Six Circles mage serving him…”

“Ahah! I remember! However, that Young Master’s title is definitely…?”

“I know. He never once held a sword… Still, Young Master Ryan has the problem due to Madam Oluli.”

“Hm… Hm… I see.”

The nobilities chattered away about who would be the successor to the Iphalleta house. They slowly turned their heads and looked at the platform placed on the garden.

Stein stood on the platform and brought out a small piece of paper from his chest. He started to deliver the speech that was written on the paper.

“Thank you all for brightening this place today where the Iphalleta house’s successor will be announced.”

It seemed Stein came prepared. His formality continued, and the nobilities didn’t stop chattering amongst themselves quietly while Stein delivered his speech.

“Judging from the mood, as I thought, I think it will be Young

Master Ryan.”

“You never know. I think it will be Young Master Riley.”

“Huhu. Looks like you will have to ride the right rope here? I think the one standing over there must be Young Master Ryan. Where could Young Master Riley be?”

A young woman around late teen to early 20s glanced at the nobles whispering on the side. She then picked up the fan she had hanging on her waist, opened it, hid her mouth with it and started to snicker.

“Huhu. It’s interesting.”

The nobilities slowly moved their eyes to look at her.

“What do you mean?”

“Ah, no. It’s nothing. It is just…”

The woman peeked her eyes above the fan. She seductively narrowed her eyes and continued.

“You are all acting like imbeciles, unbecoming of nobilities. You all look like jesters.”

“…?”

“… What.”

A few nobilities were furious. Some tried to step up with tightened fists. At that moment, it seemed Stein was finished with the speech. He got to the main point.

“… The successor is…”

The successor who will inherit the Iphalleta family name…

Stein said the name of the successor.

“Lloyd.”

“…?”

“The successor is Lloyd, Lloyd Fin Iphalleta.”

Chapter 129 - The Successor (1)

The one who was confirmed to be the successor was not Ryan, who had accomplished numerous exploits, or Riley, who received medal of honor from Solia Castle recently and had a skilled maid by his side.

“Lloyd, come forward.”

Of all people gathered at the garden, Stein looked directly at where Lloyd was standing. Stein peeked a smile and gestured toward him to call him to the stage.

“B... But...”

Having heard his father, Lloyd look around and hesitated, not knowing what to do. Iris looked at Lloyd and nodded with bright smile.

“That is, how could... I...”

Although Iris looked at him and nodded, Lloyd was not able to start walking. When he was being hesitant like that, he could hear someone clapping slowly.

“Uh? Uh?”

Clap, clap, clap...

It started at a corner of the garden. Smiling in response, Iris also raised her hands and clapped.

Sound of claps, which started with just one person, became two, and it spread as if it was infecting others. The number of people clapping grew to four, five and continued to grow.

“No, I... I don’t...”

Overwhelmed by the applause, Lloyd looked left and right, not knowing what to do. Someone came behind him and pushed his back lightly to make him move forward.

“Uuuaa. Ah?”

Wondering who it was, Lloyd turned his head around to see his back, but there was nobody there. He turned to look at the platform again.

“Come on up.”

Stein was telling Lloyd to come up. Lloyd looked at Stein’s eyes and then redirected his gaze again to a group of people at the garden.

“...”

There were Ryan, his fiancée Anabel, and other nobilities who were supporting him. They had look of disbelief. Lloyd, feeling awkward about it, turned his gaze away.

'Where's Riley?'

Lloyd could not find Riley at the garden. Lloyd was still just standing there vacantly. As if Stein couldn't stand to wait anymore, he extended his arm and called his second born son.

"Lloyd."

"Ah, yes?!"

"How long are you going to make us wait?"

Having heard his father, Lloyd tumbled and started to walk. He finally got up to the stage.

With many people's gazes directed at him, Lloyd stood on the stage. He shriveled after running into Ryan's glaring eyes. However, Stein wrapped his arm around Lloyd's shoulder and said,

"There might be many people who are not able to accept this result, so I would like to tell you this."

Stein looked around at the people gathered at the garden. He put his hand inside the pocket and brought out a medal to show to

people.

“This is the medal of honor that Lloyd brought home.”

Looking at the medal, the nobilities gathered at the garden started to mumble.

It seemed some already figured out how Lloyd got the medal. Some nobilities were talking quietly to each other with their mouths covered.

“A while ago, the unsavory incident that happened at the Solia Castle… I’m sure most of you are aware of them. This medal of honor is what Lloyd earned for his active part in subduing that incident.”

Lloyd merely kept his mouth closed while Stein talked. The people at the garden, who were looking up at the platform, started to mumble amongst themselves again.

“Now that I think about it, I think I’ve heard about this…”

“The riot by the holy temple’s fanatics was subdued by a brave nobleman and mercenaries, so Prince Daniel bestowed him a medal of honor. I heard about this.”

“The situation was in such a disarray at the time, so it was not told in detail… So, that was Young Master Lloyd?”

People were talking about it, and Stein was making a speech about how proud he was of Lloyd. Meanwhile, Ryan, who was standing quietly and looking at the stage, just tightened his fist.

"..."

*

"Young Master, will you be all right?"

At the mansion's corridor, having heard that Lloyd became the successor, Ian came to ask Riley. Having heard Ian's voice from his back, Riley nodded and asked,

"What about you? You had been up in arms and saying I should be the one to become the successor. It's not like you? You look rather calm?"

"I'm just pretending to be calm."

"Is that so?"

"The medal of honor that Young Master Lloyd received... It should've been you that received it."

It was Riley who asked Nara's group to divert Lloyd, who was tailing Riley, to the Solia Castle during the day of the incident at

Solia.

“Is there a need to put it like that? Nara said it too, didn’t he? Lloyd ran around all over the place to save people.”

“… That is…”

“Ian, I’m going to say this again, but I’m not interested in inheriting the position of the successor. I can actually say I hate the idea.”

It was because it was going to bring him even more annoying things to deal with if he was seated at the successorship.

To start with, there were things he had to learn as the successor. Also, there was the problem of mountain of paperworks. He would be summoned often by the Solia Castle. Finally, he even had to keep up the appearances and formalities with other nobilities.

It was impossible for Riley.

“My mother knew that as she clapped.”

“Wasn’t it you that clapped first?”

“I’m saying that my mother agreed. Are you going to nitpick on everything?”

It seemed Ian was telling the truth when he said he was just pretending to be calm. He kept on nitpicking at everything Riley said. Riley growled at Ian, but he stopped walking after hearing a voice coming from over the corner.

"... Why!!"

'Um?'

Because Riley stopped, Ian also stopped walking. Also having noticed the voice, Ian tilted his head.

"I think that's Young Master Ryan's voice?"

Ian whispered quietly so only Riley could hear it. Riley killed his presence and got close to the end of the corner. He stuck close to the wall and started to listen in to the conversation.

"Why did Lloyd get it instead of me?!"

"Lower your voice, Ryan. There are guests still at the mansion."

"Please tell me!"

It seemed Ryan was not the only one over there. Stein's voice could be also heard.

“Why did Lloyd become the successor instead of me? I… I cannot accept this.”

“As I said earlier, he received a medal…”

“Father!”

“…”

Stein was about to talk about the medal. Ryan interrupted his words in the middle and raised the voice.

“If that’s the case, that makes me unable to accept the outcome even more! That medal has nothing to do with this successorship competition! I… I save more villages than anyone!”

Hearing Ryan’s shouting, Riley, who was hiding behind the corner, also became certain Ryan was unfit to be the successor.

“Ryan.”

“…”

At the same time, Stein called his son’s name in deadly tone of voice.

“While I was going over the results of the work I have given you

all, what I looked most closely was the differences. What do you think is the difference between you and Lloyd that made me decided to choose Lloyd as the successor?”

“Difference?”

Ryan could tell his father’s voice was agitated. Ryan slowly bit his lips. He cautiously said,

“Is it the medal?”

“No.”

“In that case, is it the difference in swordsmanship?”

“No.”

Stein said no to both answers. With serious look on his eyes, Stein explained the biggest difference.

“It’s the heart.”

Ryan’s shoulder flinched.

Stein glared at his eldest son and said,

“There is a saying that states one should become a human being

before wielding a sword. Ryan, I'll ask you this. I am not asking this to a son. I am asking this to you as a man to man."

"Father?"

"Why did you do what you did during the successorship competition?"

In light of his father's gaze, Ryan was petrified. He was not able to answer right away. Ryan merely moved his lips around without words.

"Did you swing your swords just to get the successorship or did you do it to save people and villages?"

Stein was asking what came first as his motivation.

Stunned, Ryan was not able to say anything.

"I know you are brilliant. Your swordsmanship is superior to Lloyd and Riley, and I also know you had been working several times harder than them."

"..."

"However, your sword... You had been wielding them for the sake of obtaining the successorship instead of the people, isn't that right?"

“That is…”

“I had told Lloyd before the announcement.”

Surprised, Ryan dithered around. Stein continued.

“Last night, I asked him to come to the office. I told him I needed to have a long discussion with him. It was about the successorship.”

Riley and Ian were both new this. They perked up their ears and listened in to what Stein said.

“I told Lloyd that I’ll be giving him the successorship. When I told him this, do you know what Lloyd said?”

Lloyd’s response today during the announcement was that of someone who was not expecting it. Riley was finding this to be contradictory, so he listened carefully to what Stein said next.

“Lloyd said that the medal should be given to Riley instead of himself.”

“…?”

“Lloyd said he came to Solia in middle of the successorship competition because of Riley. Lloyd said Riley would be better

suited for the position than himself. That's what Lloyd said."

Riley ground his teeth big time and also face palmed with one hand. Ian killed his breathing and started to snicker.

"Lloyd... said that?"

Ryan's face crumpled out of feeling betrayed. Stein steadily glared at Ryan's face and nodded.

"Lloyd recommended Riley instead of himself, but I still choose Lloyd as the successor. Why do you think I did that?"

"..."

"This was also because... As I said earlier, his mindset was different. He had the desire to save people. Also, he understood well what it meant to be humble and courteous."

Stein looked at Ryan and said with cold voice,

"Look at your own face now. You... you are resenting Lloyd right now, are you not?"

"..."

Having heard Stein's question, Ryan fell to silence.

“Why are you resenting your own younger brother? Had he not been supporting you and wishing you to become the successor all this time?”

“…”

“In that case, I must tell you even more clearly that I cannot give you the position of the successor.”

Stein added that a person who lacks the heart and righteousness cannot inherit the Iphalleta name. As if he had no further business with Ryan, Stein just quickly turned around.

“Why…”

Riley had only been listening in. Now, he slightly peeked his face beyond the corner to look at Ryan who was flinching his shoulders.

“… I cannot accept this.”

Despite Ryan’s mumbling, Stein didn’t stop walking away. Ryan was breathing heavy in anger, and his eyes started to show deadly intent.

“I…”

Ryan’s fingers moved once. He slowly brought his hand toward

his waist. Ian followed Riley and peeked out of the corner, and Ian opened his eyes big.

"... I...!"

Ryan's right hand grabbed on to the handle of the sword he was carrying. Having noticed this, Ian opened his eyes big, and Stein, who was walking away, casually turned his head to look back, wondering what all the noise was about.

"...?!"

Sururuurng...

Sound of a sword being pulled from the sheath could be heard. Stein opened his eyes wide just like Ian.

It looked like he never expected that his own son would draw sword against him.

'Kuk?!'

If it was like his usual self in the past, Stein would have been able to easily subdue his first born son regardless of how skilled Ryan was. However... this was no longer the case.

'My arm...'

It was because he was missing an arm at the moment.

“Count! Look out...!”

With a shocking development happening in front of him, Ian quickly came out of the corner and tried to charge at Ryan. At that moment, Riley, who was still sticking close to the corner’s wall, said in a low voice,

“Ian. I’ll borrow this for a moment.”

“...?”

Ian’s waist felt lighter after Riley’s voice was heard. Ian was charging toward Ryan, but he looked down at his waist and was shocked.

Before he realized, the sword that was on his waist was gone.

“.. I cannot accept this!”

For the sake of obtaining the Iphalleta house’s successorship, Ryan had been diligent and even abandoned his own mother. Now, as if he was letting everything he had been holding down finally explode, Ryan screamed out loudly and swung the sword.

“Kuk!”

Looking at the sword raised up high, Stein resigned himself to the fate. However, he could hear something flying in from the back.

"…?"

Shooook.

The something that came flying made a sound. Stein looked at the sword that Ryan raised up and blinked.

'Sheath?'

Only a moment ago, Ryan's sword, which was drawn from his sheath, was exuding light from its edge. For some reason, now, it had its sheath on it again.

Chapter 130 - The Successor (2)

‘Sheath is… Why?’

There was sheath on Ryan’s sword.

It was a very narrow opportunity, but it was more than enough for someone as skilled as Stein.

‘I am not sure how, but…’

Ryan, who was possessed by murderous intent, seemed like he was still not aware of the sword being covered with the sheath. He still had his eyes strained and glaring at his farther, ready to swing the sword.

“How dare!”

Stein’s eldest son was about to commit sin. Stein was infuriated to the tip of his head. He put forth his remaining arm and charged in.

“…?!”

Noticing Stein’s movement, Ryan was about to strike down the sword, but he gritted his teeth and looked surprised for a moment.

“… Kuk!”

‘This imbecile finally decided to cross the line.’

Not just Stein’s arm, but it seemed Ryan was going to cut through his body as well. Ryan was swinging his sword with tightly gritted teeth. Stein also gritted his teeth and extended his arm toward the sword coming at him.

Puk!

The swung down sword, the sword covered in sheath to be exact, was blocked by Stein’s arm and made a blunt sound. It seemed Ryan finally realized his sword was covered in sheath. His eyes shuddered.

‘What is this? Why is the sheath there?’

He didn’t think about the sheath issue for long. Mad to the core, Stein’s face was red. His face came into Ryan’s field of view.

“I am disappointed, Ryan. Considering what happened with Oluli, it is not like I never thought this could happen, but to think you would do this instead of Lloyd…”

Even more agitated by what his father said, as if he thought he couldn’t let himself to be stopped like this now, Ryan started to inject mana into the sword.

Becoming of the Strong-Sword title…

It was to swing the sword like this and cut the target without being blocked by anything.

However…

“I’ll command you for the surprise attack. However, your method is no different from that of an assassin.”

With violent look on his face, Stein also poured in mana into his arm and threw off the sword to the side before Ryan’s sword edge could become sharp.

“Kuk?”

“To call you an assassin, compared to your upper body, your lower body is lacking in strength.”

As if it was Stein’s final expression of love for his son who tried to commit sin, Stein pointed out Ryan’s faults as a skilled swordsman observing a lesser skilled swordsman. Stein tripped Ryan’s legs and made him fall.

“Lloyd would not have such weak lower body.”

“Uuu…. Uuuuuuu…..!”

“Just because you received the title of Strong-Sword!”

Ryan fell to side. Stein stepped on Ryan’s shoulder and neutralized him. Looking down at Ryan, Stein said,

“You only trained your upper body!”

As if he was still trying to swing the sword, Stein’s eldest son was crumping his face. Stein kicked Ryan’s wrist with his remaining foot and continued to point out Ryan’s faults.

“That’s why you are in this predicament!”

“Kuuu!”

The sword left Ryan’s hand, and Stein quickly kicked away the sword. He then quickly put his hand down, grabbed Ryan’s head and smashed it to the floor.

Crack!

It was an incredibly hard smash. Along with that violent sound, the floor where Ryan lied cracked.

“…”

“Choose. Die here or get kicked out.”

It seemed Ryan was having difficulty talking. Ryan stuttered as he grabbed on to the tip of his father's pants.

"F... Father..."

"Choose."

It seems looking at his son grabbing on like this reminded Stein about kicking out Oluli, his first wife, during the last spring. Stein slightly furrowed his brows.

"..."

"Choose."

As if this was his last display of mercy, Stein spoke with strength carried in his voice.

"... Kuuk."

Ryan only had one option.

Being kicked out.

Just like what Oluli choose last spring.

"..."

Without saying anything, Stein withdrew his hand that was pressing down Ryan's face and got up. Ryan struggled and got up. His tight fists were shaking.

'We will see about this.'

Ryan mumbled like that inside. He grabbed the Iphalleta insignia on his clothes and tore it out. He laid it down on the floor and turned around.

"C... Count."

"Ian..."

Stein watched the back of Ryan who was leaving the mansion. Feeling the gaze on himself, Stein faced Ian who was vacantly staring at him while standing on the corridor.

"Did you do that?"

"Pardon? Ah, that is..."

Stein looked at Ryan's sword rolling on the floor, the sword covered in sheath to be exact, and asked. Ian pursed his lips and looked at the corner behind him.

“That is…”

Ian thought about what Riley said earlier when he charged out of the corner. Riley snatched Ian’s sword and said ‘I’ll borrows this for a moment.’ Ian broke cold sweat and said,

“… Yes. I did.”

“…”

“I did it.”

Ian repeated and said it was him that did it. Stein glared at Ian, picked up the sword laying on the floor and asked,

“Really?”

“Yes. Because you… appeared to be in danger, so…”

Ian responded as he nodded. Stein slowly turned his gaze and looked at his waist.

“I understand about the sheath, but what happened to your sword?”

“Pardon?”

“Your sword. There is just the sheath here. What happened to your sword that was originally placed in your sheath?”

“T… That is…”

Having heard the question, Ian fiddled with his waist for no reason. Again, Ian slowly turned his head and looked at the corner where Riley was standing. He was no longer there.

“Ah! T… There it is! I dropped it there! Oh my… Because I’m old, it seems my memory comes and goes sometimes. Hahaha!”

Looking at the sword laying on the floor of the corner, Ian sighed in relief inside. He walked over there to pick it up. Stein took out just the sheath from Ryan’s sword and handed it toward Ian.

“Try placing that here.”

“Pardon?”

“Your sword. Just like how you did it before, try putting it here.”

“Count Stein… Just what are you asking?”

Ian tilted his head to the side and asked, not able to understand what Stein was asking. Stein waved around the sheath on his hand and explained slowly.

“I am asking you to re-enact it. What you just did earlier.”

“…”

Having heard what Stein said, Ian put on blank look on his face for a moment.

“Huk!”

Ian looked at his sword and gasped for air.

“N… No! How could I do that with sword to you, Count Stein?”

“You did it only a moment ago, didn’t you?”

“… That is!”

“Show me.”

With a serious face, Stein was ordering Ian to show him what Ian did earlier. Ian broke cold sweats like a water fall. Ian said,

“That was… possible because it was a sheath. It was honestly a gamble. I would not have betted on it unless it was a sheath.”

At this very moment, Ian was thinking about the last time when an assassin came to the mansion.

At that time, when Ian was struggling with the assassin, a short sword was pierced in at the assassin's chest. Ian just realized it was Riley who threw it. This was why Ian was thinking about that moment.

Ian was able to realize this because of what he just saw.

'At that split second... He threw the sheath and placed it precisely on the sword that Young Master Ryan was about to swing. This is not something that can be done with simple luck.'

During that time with assassin, the short sword that pierced through the assassin's heart after flying in diagonally could not have been accomplished with pure luck.

Also, during the successorship competition, when Riley was slaughtering orcs targeting Alieve town... Riley threw the swords he was wielding without hesitation, and they pierced through monsters necks.

Moreover, Riley used six swords back then.

"You can't do it?"

"I fear that... you could get hurt, Count Stein. So, I think it would be best not to try it again..."

“It is just that you can’t do it.”

Ian was petrified.

“Was it Riley?”

Ian’s shoulder flinched.

“It was Riley.”

“…”

“It was Riley who did it, right?”

“N…No.”

“Ian, you had always been clumsy at lying.”

Stein tossed the sheath to Ian and sighed.

“I wonder if I raised my children wrong… I am worried.”

Ian placed his sword inside the sheath that Stein gave him. Having heard Stein’s mumbling, Ian had a concerned look on his face.

“Two of my sons had been hiding their true selves to me all this time… It is a little… heavy to think about.”

“Count Stein…”

“He must’ve had a reason, right? Does Iris know?”

Ian’s head felt heavy. He nodded his head as a replacement to a verbal reply.

“I see.”

Stein massaged the shoulder that was missing the arm. He slowly turned his body.

“Will you… be all right?”

Ian carefully asked about the punishment that Stein dealt to his eldest son who was about to commit sin.

“Surprise attack for the second time will not work, so it does not matter.”

Stein’s eyes were gleaming with deadly aura. Ian lowered his head as if he understood.

*

“Ian probably wrapped it up correctly?”

For some odd reason, his hand was numb. Riley repeated closing and opening his hand. He mumbled as he walked toward the library.

“I feel like I’ll be found out somehow. Should I go there again?”

He was half worried about if he should go back to wrap things up himself. The other half of his worry was about if he should have just thrown a sword and killed Ryan. Riley stopped walking.

“Um?”

From the other side of the corridor, there was a woman who was wondering around. It seemed she got lost inside the mansion.

“… Ah!”

It seemed the woman noticed Riley who was walking toward the library. She brightened her gloomy face and came toward him in light steps.

‘Uuuu… I get the feeling this will be annoying.’

Feeling what is coming, Riley crumpled his face. He looked around to see if there were any butlers or maids.

‘How come they are always not here when I need them like this?’

Having realized there were no butlers or maids around, Riley resented Nainiae for no reason, who must be working at the kitchen at the moment. Riley looked at the woman coming toward him and cringed.

“What brings you here?”

“I am sorry. I got lost in the mansion. Can you please lead the way for me?”

The woman was wearing a dress.

Her legs were completely covered, but her chest area was very low cut. It fully showed off her collar bones and voluptuous chest.

The design could be mistaken as a bar maid dress, but the dress, which had the design that could make men’s heart to flutter, seemed to be letting it be known that the wearer was of a high nobility. The dress had laces of graceful design here and there. The dress gave an unapproachable impression.

“Yes, well…”

Riley looked up and down at her dress. He then found a man who was quietly following her on the back and narrowed his eyes.

‘Is he a bodyguard? Judging from the mood, she doesn’t appear to be a daughter of some ordinary nobility.’

The man didn’t say anything. He merely stood behind the woman. Riley, who was looking at the bodyguard, turned to look at the woman again and asked,

“Where are you headed?”

“Ah, that is…”

Hesitant, the woman started to twist her body as if she was embarrassed.

“Toilet?”

“N… No! Not toilet!”

She held both of her arms tightly around her chest and twisted her body. Watching this, Riley popped a vein on his forehead.

“If you have no business, then I’ll just get going. I am busy.”

It was not that he was busy, but he was sick of annoying things, so he was just trying to escape the scene. Having heard what Riley said, the bodyguard who was standing behind the woman furrowed his brows as if he was finding Riley’s words unpleasant

to hear.

“Ah, wait! Please wait a minute!”

Riley’s clothes was quickly pulled to the back.

It was because the woman grabbed his sleeve when he was about to walk away.

“…”

Riley seemed annoyed and disinterested regardless of what kind of body the woman had, what kind of dress she wore, or how she was behaving. Riley flinched his eyebrows and stared at her as if he was trying to say she should hurry up and get to the point.

“What is it? If you don’t make it quick again, I’ll just get going.”

Riley complained. The bodyguard placed his hand at his sword handle.

“Stop. Don’t even think about causing a commotion at our host’s mansion.”

“…”

The woman ordered in a low voice. The guard lowered his head

and withdrew the hand he placed on the sword handle. The woman carefully said,

“The thing is, I am looking for a specific room.”

“Is it your room?”

The woman shook her head and said that was not the case.

“No. It’s not my room… It is…”

Riley was about to explode. The woman blushed and smiled big. She explained the room she was looking for.

“I’m looking for Young Master Riley’s room.”

“My room?”

“… Uh?”

Riley pointed finger at himself and asked. The woman opened her eyes big as if she was shocked. She also pointed at Riley.

“By any chance, are you Young Master Riley?”

Riley nodded to say that he was.

“Huk!”

The woman gasped and stepped back. She started to quickly check her clothes and hair.

“Uuuuaaa. What do I do! What do I do!”

“…?”

Watching the woman not knowing what to do and panicking, Riley floated a question mark on his face. The woman quickly fixed her dress and her hair. She then lowered her head.

“This is my first time meeting you! I am a daughter of Duke Philisneon House… Reutlina Philisneon!”

‘You are from the Duke’s family?’

Her position was significantly higher than what Riley thought. Riley lowered his head properly and greeted her. The woman, Reutlina Philisneon, lifted her head and said with red tinted face,

“I am supposed to meet you tomorrow for prospective marriage, so I thought it might be good to come and say hello to you first, so…”

Hearing hear word made Riley’s thought process to halt for a

moment.

"… What?"

Prospective marriage…

It was because of those two words.

Chapter 131 - Prospective Marriage Meeting

Reutlina Philisneon.

She was the daughter of Duke Philisneon House, the one who had many dismaying rumors in Solia.

Some said she had incurable illness.

Some said she was incredibly ugly looking.

With various excuses, she had never once showed herself in places of official business.

Of all rumors, the rumor about her being hideous was most prominent. Because of this rumor, despite being a daughter of a Duke, she was famous for never had been discussed about marriage.

"... No. It's not like that."

The woman sat in front of Iris and Stein. Reutlina shook her head and continued as if it was an unnecessary commotion,

"Actually... there had been several marriage proposals. However, I just didn't like the ones who were recommended to me."

Although it could be taken lightly as what's expected for a young

girl, combining all the rumors surrounding her family and what she just said definitely meant it should not be taken lightly.

Becoming of the title of Duke…

What she just said meant that they had done nothing about rumors on incurable illness or being incredibly ugly. Instead, her family only had been pressuring to make sure no rumors about her marriage discussions spread.

“In that case, why did you come all the way here? You are a daughter of a Duke.”

“The situation just overlapped with many things. A messenger came from the Iphalleta House, so I was pondering about if I should respond or not. At that moment, I also heard about the announcement for the successor. Moreover… I was actually curious at the moment. I was wondering who it was that received the medal of honor from the Solia Castle.”

“Ah…”

“I was quite surprised when you said Young Master Lloyd also received a medal. It is terrible that you lost your arm, Count Stein, but… congratulations.”

“Well, it is nothing. It is not like you should be congratulating me.”

Stein gave proper responses to Reutlina. He slowly turned his head and looked at Riley who was sitting next to her with a dumbfounded face. Stein gave a sharp glare at Riley.

‘Say something, will you?’

‘Why should I?’

‘This is an important meeting.’

‘…’

Riley ground his teeth from noticing his father’s gaze. As if he was seeking help, Riley looked at Iris who was sitting next to Stein.

‘Son, keep up the good spirit.’

‘…’

Riley felt betrayed. He opened his mouth wide. Still with the dumb face, Riley turned his head and looked at Reutlina. He then asked the question he was most curious about.

“By any chance, can you please explain about the messenger from Iphalleta that you mentioned just now?”

“Ah, that was about this prospective marriage meeting.”

“Ugh…”

Riley had his right fist tightened. His right fist carefully slammed the table.

“By any chance… You don’t… like me?”

Riley was showing agitated response. Having noticed this, Reutlina put up an awkward smile and asked carefully.

She was definitely different from the rumors.

She was overflowing with vitality and health, contradicting the rumors about being deathly ill.

Also, she had magnificent appearance. It made one want to go criticize the people who spread rumors about her being the ugliest woman in the world.

Her skin…

Her facial features…

Her body line…

Not just her looks, but she also had the title of Duke. Also, she

looked sharp and intelligent. Any men would have been begging her to go on a date. There was no other way to describe her. She was the most eligible bride to be.

"It's not that I hate you in particular."

Having heard the explanation about the Iphalleta messenger that went to Philisneon's house, Riley looked at his father once and his mother once and mumbled.

"…"

"…"

It seemed Iris didn't know what to do, which was reflected on the expression on her face. She kept on glancing to the side. Meanwhile, Stein sat there proudly as if he did nothing wrong and there was no need to explain anything.

'This is the work of my father.'

Riley realized this prospective marriage meeting was the work of his father alone.

Riley added one more sentence to his mumbling earlier.

"It's just that I am not used to a meeting like this."

Still, Riley was educated by Iris to have the bare minimum manner. Struggling inside, Riley calmed Reutlina's worry to some extent.

"I am relieved. I was worried again... about my intrusion earlier. I was concerned that may have spoiled your mood."

It couldn't really be considered rude or intruding, but last night... She ran into Riley at the mansion's corridor. It seemed she was still concerned about that.

"First impression is half of everything in deciding a person. As for me, I would appreciate it if you could give me a second chance."

Blushing, Reutlina timidly smiled. She suddenly turned toward Riley and lowered her head.

"It's a pleasure meeting you, Young Master Riley. I am Reutlina Philisneon, Princess of Duke. If my name is too long... It would be all right if you called me Reuna."

Riley looked uncomfortable. He stared at the top of her head. Knowing the situation could not be helped, Riley responded to her greeting.

"I am Riley Fin Iphalleta. It's a pleasure meeting you, Princess Reutlina."

*

It was at the mansion's entrance.

There were nobilities who were headed back to their manors and mansions. Just like them, Nara and the Lightning Boulder mercenaries had completed their preparation to leave the mansion.

"So you are leaving now."

"We can't be in debt indefinitely. We are mercenaries, and we live in a world that's different from Young Master Riley's."

Nara put all of the luggage on the carriage. It seemed he was really ready to head out. He looked back at the mansion with a refreshed expression on his face. Nainiae, who was there to see them off, asked Nara,

"Where are you headed? If I know where you are going, you never know if we may ran into each other later again."

Having heard her question, Nara looked up the sky and paused for a moment. He responded,

"Um... I think we will end up going to the west. We are thinking about finding the Horai Merchant Group. If he already found replacement mercenaries, then that could not be helped, but... We are few and good people, so I'm sure he will take in four of us."

There were four.

The group used to have just three members, but with Priesia hiding herself under the rag, there were four.

“Will you be all right, Ms. Priesia? Instead of straining yourself, it would be all right if you stayed at the mansion a little longer…”

It seemed Nainiae was worried about Priesia starting the life of mercenary with Nara’s group. Nainiae looked at Priesia who was wearing a mask and asked. Priesia responded awkwardly,

“No. It’s all right. It looks like Young Master Riley is not pleased with me for staying here. I don’t want to intrude further. I think it will be better for me to move.”

Just like Nara, Priesia looked at the mansion and walked inside the carriage.

“Well then, we will get going now.”

“I am sorry. Young Master was supposed to come and see you all off… I wish Mr. Ian could have come at least…”

“It’s all right, all right! We know they are busy!”

Having heard Nainiae’s apology, Nara smiled exhilaratingly and said it was all right. Rorona, the mercenary group’s archer, pouted

and entered the conversation.

“What about you, Nainiae? Will you be all right?”

“Pardon?”

Nainiae tilted her head. Noticing Nainaie’s response, Rorona corrected her question while grabbing tightly on to her chest out of frustration.

“I’m talking about Young Master. Young Master!”

“…?”

“Ugh…”

Nainiae blinked as if she didn’t know what Rorona was getting at. Rorona sighed deeply.

“Hey. Why is Rorona acting like that all of sudden?”

“I am not sure? You are the captain. If you don’t know, how would I know?”

Nara and Isen were not on the carriage yet. It seemed they were not sure why Rorona was acting this way. They had question marks on their faces and clicked their tongues.

“Ugh. I am talking about prospective marriage meeting! Young Master is having that meeting with a Princess of Duke right now? Are you all right with that?”

Unable to handle her frustration, Rorona asked directly. However, Nainiae’s response was the same.

As if she was trying to ask why that was a problem, Nainiae blinked her eyes naively. She only acted like she was not comprehending the question.

“Um?”

“Ahah. Seriously! This is so frustrating! Young Master is going to get snatched away from you, don’t you get it?”

“Snatched… away? By who?”

Having heard the words, Nainiae flinched her shoulder and put up deadly look on her face. Now, instead of tightly grabbing on to her chest, Rorona started to pound at her chest.

“I’m going to die from the frustration.”

“… Young Master is…”

Rorona pounded at her chest and turned around. Toward

Rorona's back, Nainiae mumbled quietly,

"Young Master is not an object, so..."

Her voice was small, but the voice was full of confidence.

It carried trust and care.

"There isn't anything to be snatched away to begin with."

Nainiae finished her words with a light smile. Rorona was about to get on the carriage, but she stopped and turned to look at Nainiae. As if she was giving in to Nainiae, Rorona relaxed her face.

"Nainiae, still..."

"...?"

"No. It is nothing."

Rorona looked like she was going to say something like an advice, but she held back. Rorona saw Nainiae's smile, shook her head and got on the carriage's driver seat.

"Well then, we will really get going now. Please tell Young Master Riley that we are thankful."

“We will be going now, Nainiae.”

“Please take good care of your health.”

“Ah, yes.”

The carriage with three of Lightning Boulder mercenaries and Priesia left the mansion. Nainiae bowed toward them to see them off.

“Haaaaaa…”

Nainiae lifted her head and looked at the carriage that was moving further. It seemed she felt her hands were cold. She raised her hands and blew breaths at them to warm them. She had a gloomy look on her face.

‘Nainaie, will you be all right?’

It was not just because the question that Rorona asked earlier zapped through her head.

It was because of her right hand which was missing two fingers.

Anyone who saw her hand for the first time would have cringed their faces. Her own right hand was that horrid looking.

‘It’s all right. As long as I could be by his side, that is enough.’

She punished herself by tightly holding her right hand. She turned around and walked toward the inside of the mansion.

*

“… Young Master…”

They moved to the garden area. Now, there were just Riley and Reutlina. Reutlina brought up a question first.

“Is it really true that you never once swung a sword?”

In front of Riley was a woman that would make any men’s eyes pop out. However, Riley had uninterested look on his face. He just read a book instead. He lightly nodded and answered,

“Yes.”

“Um? I heard that there isn’t anyone born in Iphalleta House who never held a sword before?”

“In that case, I guess I am the first one in the history.”

“Young Master, then what about that medal of honor? How did

you receive that from the Solia Castle? Can you please tell me how?”

“…”

“Young Master?”

With one hand supporting his chin, Riley just read the book. Looking at Riley, Reutlina asked more questions, but… It was not certain if Riley was listening or not. He didn’t take his eyes off from the book and responded as if he was mumbling.

“I am sorry, Princess Reutlina… I am at an important part.”

“Ah, ah haha…”

It seemed Reutlina was feeling awkward about continuing to talk like this. She started to put up a bashful smile. Ian, who was watching them from the side, face palmed as if he could not bear to watch it anymore.

‘Ugh…’

This was a prospective marriage meeting with a Duke’s daughter.

It was not a meeting that could be arranged easily.

‘Young Master, please read the atmosphere…’

It was not certain if Riley understood the situation or not. As soon as Stein and Iris left, Riley went straight to the library and picked up a book. He have not said a word with a gorgeous woman named Reutlina sitting in front of him.

‘Even a decorative statue inside the mansion would not be like this!’

It looked like Ian didn’t know what to do. He looked at Reutlina.

Although Ian was well aware of all of Riley’s strong suits, Reutlina only knew him as indolent Lazy-Sword. Ian was certain of this.

‘Even if you are not interested in woman, to think he is this disinterested…’

Ian thought about how Riley didn’t even bat an eye when he saw Priesia at the Holy Temple last time. It seemed Ian knew this was going to happen during this meeting as well. Ian made empty laughter.

“Huh… huh huh…”

Reutlina casually turned her head and looked at Ian’s defeated look. It seemed Reutlina was intrigued. She held her chin on her hands and started to glare at Riley’s face.

“…”

“…”

Silence continued for a moment.

“Young Master Riley.”

Reutlina held her chin with both of her hands and stared at Riley’s face. She suddenly smiled refreshingly and called his name.

“…”

Riley didn’t answer this time either. He merely nodded his head and flipped the page.

“Can I try to guess what you are thinking right now?”

Reutrina asked as she tilted her head slightly to the side. Having heard her voice, Riley’s hand which was flipping the page, stopped momentarily and moved again.

“… This meeting, it is such a bother, so I wish it could end soon. That’s what you are thinking right now, isn’t that right?”

“…?”

Having heard her question, Riley didn't nod his head this time. He moved his eyes and looked at her face.

"Instead of reading, you rather take a nap?"

Reutlina asked with seductive expression on her face. Riley's eyebrow wiggled once.

"Um... It seems you have not been able to get much sleep lately. Is there something like a nightmare you do not want to have?"

"... You, what are you?"

"Am I right? Haha. I guess I was right?"

Reutrina smiled with her eyes. Looking at her face, Riley furrowed his eyebrows, closed the book he was reading, and started to glare at her.

[The actual word for title translates to daughter of Duke House, but that would be too long to be used every time. More appropriate adaptation is Princess of Duke, and just Princess from that point for simplicity.]

Chapter 132 - Prospective Marriage Meeting (2)

“Um. From the look on your face, it seems I poked you where it hurts, Young Master. I would appreciate it if you didn’t get too mad at me.”

Reutrina hid her mouth with the back of her hand and smiled seductively. To calm Riley, she added,

“It is what you get for angering a princess first... You can think of it that way, can’t you?”

Reutrina lowered her hand and moved it toward the tea on the table. She then gracefully tasted what was on the cup.

“Ah, this tea has a pretty good aroma?”

Reutrina was leisurely continuing on about tea. Having noticed the reaction, Riley, who was shocked earlier, asked again as he opened and closed the left hand that he had hidden under the table.

“How did you do it?”

“What are you talking about?”

“What you did just now.”

“That?”

Reutrina tilted her head and acted like she knew nothing of it. Riley wiggled his eyebrows and said in a lower voice,

“Princess.”

“Oh my… Are you trying to threaten me now? Still… I think you are quite cool in a way!”

“…”

“Lazy-ass, never held a sword, takes nap through whole day… Because of all of those rumors, there are other ones questioning if you are a vegetable. The rumors about you being a lazy sword is… I think they are just smoke screens just like how mine are.”

This time, instead of the hand, she used the cup to hide her mouth. She smiled with her eyes and asked,

“Am I right?”

Riley didn’t answer. He clicked the tongue and opened the book that he closed earlier.

“If you are that curious… Should I tell you how I was able to read your thoughts, Young Master?”

Unlike his usual self, Riley was being dragged by someone else. Because the conversation felt like that, Riley decided to ignore her question and look at the book. However, perhaps because of the nightmares that she just mentioned, which refused to leave his mind alone, Riley was simply not able to keep his eyes on the words.

“However, I have a condition.”

“A condition?”

“Yes, a condition.”

Riley thought Reutrina must be trying to ask something, so he kept silent as if he was saying she should go ahead and ask. Reutrina laid down the cup on the table. She then tapped the table with her finger.

“Yes, princess.”

It seemed that must be how she called her guard. Her guard, who was on standby at a corner of the garden, nodded and came to where Riley and Reutrina were sitting.

“If you could step on my guard’s pride, then I might tell you.”

Reutrina said jokingly. Confused, Riley stared at Reutrina.

“I don’t think that was hard to understand. Young Master, with a sword… give my guard a beating. If you do, I could tell you.”

Having heard what she just said, Ian, who was vacantly staring at the guard coming this way, stepped in, wondering what this was about.

“P… Princess? Just what are you…”

“… Why should I?”

Ian’s words were interrupted by Riley.

“Ahah… The thing is, the guard that I brought had never once lost to anyone in our Duke’s House, so he is pretty full of it.”

“…”

“So, I would like you to straight him out so he will learn a little that it is a big world. A human being needs to know the bitter taste of defeat in order to grow stronger, right?”

Reutrina slurped at the tea. She then stopped drinking and winked at Riley.

“What do you think?”

Step on her guard's pride...

There were two things Reutrina could gain from this.

For her guard, there was something to be learned from the duel regardless of the outcome.

The other thing was getting a feel for the skill level of Riley, the one who held the title of Lazy-sword.

The request was the kind that had more for Reutrina to gain than simply asking Riley by saying 'please show us your skills.'

"Please don't think too much about it. I'm not trying to do something to you. This guard had been stepping in too often without knowing his place, so I am concerned it may lead to troubles later."

As if she read Riley's thoughts again, Reutrina seductively narrowed her eyes. She looked at the guard standing next to her and said,

"Remember yesterday? This guy tried to take out a sword against you at the corridor without knowing his place. There had been many instances like that lately."

"..."

“If it was not inside mansion but a market instead, he probably would have swung the sword right away.”

Having heard what she said, Riley steadily looked at the guard and asked in a low voice,

“Are you sure he is not just insane?”

“…”

Reutrina’s guard flinched in anger. He was moving his hand toward the sword handle. Ian, who was also standing, quickly moved his hand toward his own sword’s handle.

“… That’s enough. Do not move further.”

With murderous aura in his eyes, Ian glared at Reutrina’s guard. The guard did the same toward Ian.

“You are the princess’s guard. However, this is the inside of Iphalleta Mansion. Violent behavior cannot be allowed. Please know that.”

Reutrina watched Ian glaring at her guard. She snickered and said,

“Unlike what he is saying… It seems your butler is also looking

forward to seeing you show off your skills?”

“Ut?!”

“…”

She somehow read Ian’s mind. Having heard her piercing exactly at the heart of what Ian was actually thinking, he flinched his shoulders big time.

“No! Young Master, I really am not!”

“What do you mean you are not.”

Riley, who knew Ian better than anyone, double face palmed, sighed big and looked at Reutrina’s face through the gaps between his fingers.

“…”

“If you won’t, I’ll tell your father.”

“My father?”

Reutrina smiled and said,

“To Count Stein.”

As if he can't even take it as a joke, Riley closed the gaps between fingers and completely covered his face.

"I thought this is supposed to be a prospective marriage meeting. Is it actually an engagement meeting?"

"I am interested in you, Young Master. As for an engagement, I can always break it, so it does not matter either."

"I can't take you seriously. Tell my father? What are you going to tell him?"

"Um..."

Riley asked as he lowered the hands he had to cover his face. Reutrina, who was smiling, blushed for some reason.

"I'll tell him that you had been having trouble sleeping lately, so... I think... you will need... someone to be beside you in bed."

As if she was embarrassed, she was twisting her body. It was a threat that didn't sound like a threat. Having heard her words, Ian panicked and looked at Riley. Meanwhile, Riley wiggled his cheek muscles and glared at her.

"... Just you try."

“Ah, right! It seemed Lady Iris was also hoping to see a grandchild soon.”

The mention of Iris lead to Riley’s shoulders flinching and shivering.

“…”

“I… I had never experienced it, so I am afraid, but still, if it is with you, Young Master Riley…”

Against Riley’s threat, she responded with threat. She was blushing, and she held her head with her hands. She was acting like she didn’t know what to do. Unable to stand it anymore, Riley suddenly extended his hand and took out the sword that was hanging on Ian’s waist.

‘I’ll make you spill out everything, whatever you have or not have.’

Ian panicked. Ian knew Riley doesn’t usually show his serious self. Now that it came to this, Ian was concerned about what he should do now. He started to look around.

“Set him straight… Princess, that’s what you said earlier.”

Having borrowed the sword from Ian, Riley spun it once to relax his wrist and got up.

“Will it be all right if I kill him?”

Having heard the question, Reutrina broke cold sweat and looked at her guard standing next to her.

“Ah, killing him would be a little…”

“How about an arm?”

“That would be also a little…”

“Go easy on him. That’s what you are saying?”

“Pardon? Ah, yes.”

Princess Reutrina’s guard seemed he was not liking Riley who was asking questions after questions. He was glaring at Riley with deadly eyes. The guard also started to ask the same questions.

“Princess. You are saying it won’t matter if I killed him, right?”

“…”

“It would be unfortunate for the Count Stein, but would an arm be all right?”

“Um…”

“… I’ll go easy on him.”

Along with that, the princess’s guard also drew the sword from his waist and started to calm his breathing.

“Ian, you be the judge.”

“Pardon?”

“I said, be the judge.”

“Young Master… but…”

Ian got to face Riley’s murderous eyes. Ian gulped and walked toward the middle between the guard and Riley.

‘This is not like Young Master. He is being pretty sensitive.’

Ian was worried. However, he decided to be the judge. Standing in the middle, Ian raised his hand, and Riley and the princess’s guard each took stances.

‘I had gotten a lot of stress built up lately anyway…’

As he glared at his opponent, Riley tightly held the sword handle

as if he was going to crush the handle.

'... Wait.'

Riley furrowed his brows and looked at the guard standing in front of him.

'Why am I...'

Riley got a hold of himself just before Ian's arm fell. He reflected on why he got so angry. He lightly shook his head and threw the sword to the ground.

"I am sorry. I changed my mind."

Riley did that in middle of a tight atmosphere. Both Reutrina and her guard opened their eyes and mouths big.

"... What do you mean?"

Riley looked at the sword that he dropped to the ground just now. Still reflecting on his behavior, he slightly crumpled his face. He crumpled only slightly to the point that others could not have noticed.

"I won't do this."

Riley could not understand why he was so worked up earlier. He shook his head and refused the duel. Reutrina's guard ground his teeth.

"You... won't?"

Riley faced the guard's eyes with a cold gaze. Riley then turned to look at Reutrina and said,

"It's because I am not confident."

"What...!"

The guard, unable to stand the sudden turn of the event, was about to charge in and grab Riley just below the neck by the clothes. However...

"...?!"

He suddenly shook his body once, and then became as stiff as trees on the garden.

'What? My body is?'

His body was not moving as he wanted.

He couldn't even move his fingers and toes. Panicking, the guard

moved his eyes to look at the princess.

"...?"

He looked like he was trying to say something, but he was unable to. Instead, he was just standing there, petrified. Having realized something was up, Reutrina got up from the chair and said toward Riley who was turning around.

"Young Master."

Riley turned around with uninterested look on his face. Having heard Reutrina calling him, Riley just turned his head and looked at her.

"I need to use the toilet, so..."

"Before you go."

Reutrina asked,

"How did you do that?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just now, my guard..."

“Pardon?”

Riley was smiling. Looking at Riley, Reutrina could not finish her sentence.

It was because they just had a conversation that felt similar to this only a few minutes ago.

‘How did you do it?’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘What you did just now.’

‘That?’

A question asking how something was done, and the responses feigning ignorance…

The conversation now felt similar to the one earlier, but the table was turned in this instance.

“If it is not something urgent, then excuse me for a moment.”

Riley did a hand gesture to tell Ian to stay here. Riley leisurely walked away, and the guard who was petrified completely bent forward and breathed hard.

“… Ughuk?! Huuuk! Huuuk!”

“…”

Collapsed to the floor, the guard was struggling to catch his breath. Reutrina observed her guard and then turned her gaze to vacantly stare at the back of Riley who was walking away.

Chapter 133 - Prospective Marriage Meeting (3)

“Thank you for the corporation. So, it was true.”

After the meeting between Riley and Reutrina ended…

With the sun already set, it was not just Stein who was in his office.

“… I know.”

As if she was responding to Stein’s mumbling, the woman sitting at the office sofa tilted the tea cup, made slurping noise, and continued.

“Count Stein, I actually had been very much against it because you made such a strange request, but…”

She was wearing a low-cut dress. Gracefulness could be felt from the way she was drinking the tea. The woman was Princess Reutrina who had the prospective marriage meeting with Riley today.

“About the exploit regarding the Astora incident, I thought Young Master Riley received recognition by chance for being with the maid. However, it seemed like that may not actually be the case either.”

Slurp...

Reutrina enjoyed the tea on the cup and described the impression she got from Riley when she met him for the marriage proposal meeting today. Stein looked at the garden beyond the window and carefully asked,

“Could it be that you were mistaken?”

Reutrina shook her head and said,

“No. I couldn’t have. The guard’s response was quite a response, but the Mercenary Hero who was standing next to Young Master Riley showed responses that were more definite evidences.”

Reutrina was thoroughly observing Ian, the butler who was attached to Riley. Based on what she saw today, Reutrina realized Riley was hiding his true strength.

“My original plan didn’t include that kind of proposal. Because of the favor you asked, I ended up getting points deducted against me from Young Master, so you will have to take responsibility for this, Count.”

The Princess said as she ballooned up her cheeks. Finding it suspicious, Stein turned to look at the Princess.

“Hm… Princess, I thought you are here because you are interested in the family’s successor?”

As Stein asked, the reason why Reutrina stepped inside the Iphalleta Mansion during the day of the successor announcement was… to have prospective marriage meeting and propose the engagement.

“The schedule for today changed, so you had the prospective marriage meeting with Riley instead, but… actually, I thought you would be a little more interested in Lloyd?”

Having heard Stein’s question, she held the cup with one hand, and twirled her hair with the other hand. Reutrina took a dramatic pause for a moment and responded.

“I saw the successorship announcement too. I thought it might be Young Master Lloyd who will be the successor, so I made sure to check too. In the process, I ended up having some scuffle with other nobilities, but…”

Thinking about the commotion that transpired last time, Reutrina cringed for a moment. As if she thought that was not important, Reutrina continued.

“Anyway, that’s not what’s important. Young Master Lloyd is also definitely magnificent, but… I don’t feel that special something rushing at me.”

Reutrina looked at Stein and carefully murmured,

“Please excuse me for saying something like this, but to take the heart of a princess, Young Master Lloyd is a little…”

“But?”

“Young Master Riley seemed pretty good.”

‘To the world, Riley is known as the lazy-ass. Why are you blushing? What do you like about him so much?’

Noticing Reutrina blushing, Stein filled his face with question marks and waited for her next words.

“Personal taste… I am embarrassed to use the words, but my personal taste is someone older, not younger. That’s why.”

“Someone older?”

“Hoho.”

As if she was embarrassed, she smiled as she mentioned it. Stein carefully asked,

“Princess. How old are you?”

“I am 20. When this month passes, I will be 21.”

“…?”

The number of question marks on Stein’s face increased by three folds.

“Princess. Do you happen to know Riley’s age?”

“19… right?”

“… Yes.”

Stein slowly nodded and responded.

Riley was definitely one year younger than Reutrina.

Despite this, Reutrina was not taking back what she said earlier about liking someone who is older than her.

“So…”

Stein didn’t know what to say. He just thought really hard about it. Princess put down the cup that was on her hand and said,

“As a reward for doing what you asked me when I met Young Master Riley today, I would like to ask you for a favor. Would that

be all right?”

“Ah, yes… Please go ahead.”

Stein decided to think that the princess must have been kidding about what she said earlier. Stein waited for the princess to speak.

“About the invitation to the end of the year banquet at our family, the invitation was supposed to be given to the successor, but I wish it could be given to someone else.”

Reutrina mumbled while fiddling with her chin. Stein figured out what she was asking and cringed.

“Princess, by any chance…”

“Count! As I thought, you are quick on catching on!”

Clap!

She clapped in joy and explained,

“It’s not that big of a favor. I’m just asking you to gently switch the person who will be getting the invitation.”

“However, Princess… Riley is…”

"... Please."

Stein wanted to explain that there is a high probability of Riley not going to go no matter who asked. However, he was interrupted by Reutrina.

"I would really like him to visit. During the banquet, I get bees getting tangled up with me even when I try to hide."

As if she was done with the conversation, she got up from the sofa and walked out of the office right away.

'This is a difficult situation.'

It was a favor asked by none other than the Princess of Duke.

Stein couldn't just say no so easily. He was getting a headache. He crumpled his face and clicked his tongue.

*

It was at the mansion's library.

Riley had Nainiae sit at the sofa. To calm is pulsating headache, he was lying on the sofa with Nainiae's lap as the pillow.

'I strained myself too much.'

Feeling the pain inside, Riley thought about the power that he had been using since last spring.

It was a technique that he mastered in his past life.

Using his energy, the technique allowed him to oppress anyone that he glared at, making them completely immobilized. The technique was useful in many ways. However... it had one drawback of causing great strain on the user.

“Young Master, are you all right?”

It seemed Nainiae noticed Riley was not looking well. With Riley laying on her lap, she asked as if she was concerned.

‘Damn it... I got worked up and angry for no reason.’

He was tired both mentally and physically. With both of them overlapping, Riley was struggling with pain as he cringed. Nainiae bit her lower lips and asked carefully,

“Earlier, I heard from Mr. Ian. The prospective marriage meeting... At that meeting, you were about to have a duel against the Princess’s guard, but you suddenly stopped.”

Having heard Nainiae’s question, Riley relaxed his crumpled face. Looking at Nainiae from the lap, Riley said,

“That’s right. What about it?”

“By any chance… I was wondering if you were agonizing over it lately. That’s why I asked.”

Her question was loaded with concerns. However, Riley, the one who received the question, didn’t really have a pleasant expression on his face.

“…”

Instead, the look on Riley’s face got even darker.

“That’s enough. Instead…”

As if he was trying to casually move on to a different topic, Riley got his head off from Nainiae’s lap. Holding his pulsating head, Riley mumbled a certain summon spirit’s name.

“Heliona.”

Whaarururururuk!

A tiny flame started to burn next to Nainiae’s face. A palm sized fairy responded as she flapped her wings.

<Yes! Yes! I had been waiting for you to call!>

Riley looked at Heliona and got straight to the main point.

It seemed he was trying his best to avoid the hot topic that Nainiae mentioned earlier.

“About the artificial summon spirit, don’t you think it would be good to start getting ready for that?”

<Yes!>

“Where, when and how… Tell me about them.”

Heliona nodded and took a moment to pause and choose what to say. She explained it such that it would be easy for Riley to understand.

<As for the question of when… It would be best before the plants sprout next spring.>

“Next spring?”

<Yep. Next spring! Because my master took measures, we probably won’t have to worry until the winter of the year after next. However, if we want to meet the spirit who is perfect for Nainiae, it would be best before the next spring when the butterflies start to fly around. After that, it will be too late.>

“What’s this perfect spirit for Nainaie about?”

<Ah, Um… I’m talking about the spirit that will be placed over Nainiae. The idea is like a bowl.>

Riley figured it might be better to just ask all of his questions later. Riley said,

“Okay. Continue.”

<To meet the spirit that would become Nainiae’s bowl, from this place… Um… To the west? We need to head that way.>

“To the west…”

<As for what we need to do once we meet the spirit who we will be asking to be Nainiae’s bowl, I’ll tell you once we meet that spirit. Yes! Up to this part, do you have any questions?>

Furrowing his brows, Riley organized what he heard from Heliona. He asked the first question.

“You are telling us to just go to west without anything specific. Aren’t you being too impolite? Where in west exactly?”

<The place where black wings fly between white snow. It’s the place where bright songs surge without any sound.>

“…?”

<It’s the language of the spirits.>

Having heard Heliona’s response, Riley got annoyed. He said in frustrated tone,

“Explain it in human’s language.”

<I know humans won’t understand it, but because I’m a spirit… I can only explain it in the spirit’s language.>

“…”

<Ugh, aren’t you making it too obvious that you are annoyed? You have no manner!>

‘I think I understand why Andal did it.’

Riley got to think about Andal thanks to Heliona’s black-faced bunting bird like mouth. Riley started to grind his teeth.

<Ah! Please don’t worry too much!>

It seemed Heliona was afraid of the look on Riley’s face. Heliona flapped her wings and hid behind Nainiae. Heliona added in a

small voice,

<Actually, my master already put in good words to that spirit, so… That spirit is probably waiting for us right now too. The spirit probably will leave things like traces so we will be able to identify them when we get near the right place…>

Riley was chasing Heliona with his eyes. In the process, he naturally ended up meeting Nainiae's eyes. Riley unconsciously avoided his gaze and asked,

"What do you think?"

"I already prepared my heart for this. Also, if I could be next to you, Young Master… I would try anything, even something else that would be even more complicated. I am fine with it."

Nainiae said it with composure. Having heard the response, Riley nodded as if he was fine with it now. This time, instead of Nainiae's lap, Riley leaned his head on a sofa and closed his eyes.

"Young Master…"

Although Nainiae called Riley, he did not respond. She carefully continued.

"About the prospective marriage meeting with the Princess…"

“…?”

Nainiae was talking about something other than what Riley was expecting. Riley narrowly opened one of his eyes and looked at her.

“That Princess… Is she very pretty?”

“What?”

Nainiae’s voice was at the level of an ant’s voice. Because of this, Riley couldn’t hear the question correctly. He opened both of his eyes and asked back.

“She is the daughter of a Duke Family, so… She must be graceful, classy, and anyway, she is probably very…”

Hesitating, Nainiae avoided Riley’s eyes as she fiddled with her fingers. She started to mutter in even quieter voice.

“Just what are you saying? Can you speak up?”

<She asked if that Princess is pretty?>

“…?!”

Heliona explained what Nainiae said. Nainiae, who was playing with her fingers, suddenly blushed, turning her face red hot

completely and instantly.

“Princess?”

<You know? The lass that was chatting and giggling away with you while sitting on the grass during the evening. That one.>

“Ah ah.”

<That lass... I just don’t like her! Nainiae, do not worry! In my eyes, the great Heliona, the daughter of the Spirit King, you are far prettier... Uuuup!!>

Nainiae hurriedly blocked the mouth of Heliona that was chirping away on the side. With her face blushing, she turned to look at Riley.

“...?”

“T... This is the problem with Ms. Heliona! Mr. Andal pointed out this problem to you already, so it is about time you fixed it!”

<Uuup! Uuuuuuuup!>

“Nainiae?”

“I am sorry, Young Master. I’ll be stern and go over this problem

with her later.”

<Uuup!!>

Before Riley even had a chance to say anything, Nainiae tumbled and got up from the sofa. She then lowered her head toward Riley and quickly escaped the library with Heliona still held on her hand.

Chapter 134 - Chaos

Following Heliona's instruction, Riley was about to head out to the west with Nainiae. However, his father suddenly called him, so Riley stopped by at his father's office.

"... I've heard that you wanted to see me."

Riley opened the office's door and stepped foot inside. In there, Riley's gaze met with Lloyd who was getting educated on being the successor. Riley lightly nodded to greet Lloyd.

"Ah, you are here."

Having noticed Riley entering the office, Stein, who was teaching Lloyd various things, greeted Riley. Lloyd took a step back and said,

"Well then, I'll take my leave now."

"All right. About the task that I gave you just now, it would be good for you to thoroughly complete it today. If it gets delayed, it could turn into more work."

"Yes, Father."

Stein made a hand gesture, and Lloyd lowered his head in a big motion and left the office. On the way out, Lloyd took a glance at

Riley's face.

"Is there something on my face?"

"No. It a way to say have a safe trip... I just wanted to take a look at your face. That's all."

"... What do you mean, have a safe trip?"

"I don't even have my Big Brother anymore, so... How should I say this, it is rather empty here? No, it is nothing. Please forget it."

Riley couldn't understand what Lloyd was trying to say. Riley tilted his head. However, Lloyd left the office without resolving Riley's curiosity.

"So, Riley."

Stein used his left arm to press on the desk as he got up. He pointed at the sofa for Riley to sit.

"Sit down for now."

Having heard him say Riley should sit down first, Riley figured this was going to be a long conversation. Hiding the icky feeling he was having, Riley sat on the sofa.

“What is it, Father?”

After Riley sat down, Stein also sat on a sofa while facing his son. Between Stein and his son, there was a table, and Stein placed a letter envelope there.

“What is this?”

“The letter is for you.”

“For me?”

Riley tilted his head as he looked at the envelope. Riley checked the look on Stein’s face and picked up the envelope.

The envelope looked pretty thin. However, as if it was trying to prove that the letter was sent by someone very high up, the feel of the paper indicated it was a very high-quality kind.

“Um…”

Riley checked the front and back of the envelop. He casually moved his eyes and looked at Stein.

“Is this really for me?”

Stein nodded as the response.

‘Just who?’

Riley thought about a few people that could sent a letter like this to him. He carefully opened the envelope.

Inside the envelope was another piece of perfectly flat paper that was just as luxurious in quality.

‘An invitation?’

The top of the paper had the word ‘invitation’ written on the top. Riley lightly shook his eyebrows as he read the rest of the letter’s content.

<It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. This invitation is to invite Young Master Riley of the Iphalleta House to the end of the year banquet at the Duke Philisneon House. Please attend the banquet and empty a glass of wine at the mansion. As for the date and the direction…>

Riley read that far and put the letter down as if he didn’t need to read the rest. Riley said,

“… I am not going.”

As if Stein knew Riley was going to say that, Stein covered his eyes with his palm and sighed without making any sound.

“What is your reason?”

“It is such a bother. Even if I went there, it will just tickle my ear holes. Why should I…”

Stein was actually thinking the same.

Riley was famous with many poor rumors about him thanks to the Lazy-Sword title. Someone like him going to the banquet held by the Duke?

Riley becoming complimentary snacks for drinks for the nobles in their gossiping would be a fortunate scenario. Riley could be insulted right on the face if he went there. This was why Stein didn’t want Riley to go either.

“Father, by any chance?”

Stein suddenly closed his mouth tightly. Having noticed this, Riley had a bad feeling. Finding it suspicious, he crumpled his face and asked,

“That’s not it, right?”

“…”

Despite the question, Riley’s father didn’t open his mouth. Riley

suddenly got up from the seat.

"I am not going."

"Riley."

"... To begin with!"

Riley suddenly got angry and yelled. The stacks of papers piled up at the office waved in the wind that came through the window in response.

"To begin with, that prospective marriage meeting a few days ago was also... too sudden without any prior notification, don't you think?"

'It is too much of a bother.'

'I don't want to do it.'

Riley always said foolish things like that or disappeared from important moments as if he was playing hide and seek. However, he never once let out frustration like this before.

Having seen Riley's response, Stein vacantly stared at his son.

"... I!"

"..."

It seemed Riley read his father's eyes vacantly staring at him. Riley, who just shouted all of the sudden, also lost words to say. He moved his gaze away in silence.

'Damn it. Again...'

Again...

Riley realized he suddenly got angry again during an unexpected situation. For no reason, Riley made tight fists with his hands.

"Riley."

Stein looked at Riley and called his son in a low voice.

"I will also ask you this as your father."

"..."

Riley was somehow afraid of his father's serious voice. He was not able to look in his father's eyes. Riley just waited for Stein to continue.

"Why did you hide it?"

“What do you mean, hide it?”

“It would be good for you to stop feigning ignorance. I have things that I’ve heard from Iris, Ian and even Sera.”

Stein said that he had heard things.

Riley was petrified and not about to open his mouth. Having noticed this, Stein got up just like Riley. He then picked up a sword that was leaning on a corner of the office.

The sword was in its sheath.

“Try drawing the sword.”

Unable to say no, Riley drew the sword, held it and looked at Stein.

“Back then, it was further away than this, right?”

It looked like Stein was about to do something. He just held the sheath on his hand and took a few steps away. Stein took a stance as if he was about to throw the sheath. Until this point, Riley showed no movement on his face, but now, he slightly crumpled his face.

“Was it like this?”

Stein took an awkward pose, and he threw the sheath hard.

The direction of the throw was…

It was toward the sword that Riley just grabbed a hold of.

"…?"

Riley floated a question mark on his face as he watched the sheath flying toward him. He saw the sheath striking the sword and being bounced off. Riley now understood what Stein was trying to do.

"It is not easy."

Stein muttered as he looked at the sheath that fell on the floor.

"Although it got in smoothly last time."

Stein was talking about the sheath that was placed on the sword that Ryan was about to swing at the mansion's corridor during the day of the successorship announcement.

"Riley, was it you who did it?"

"…"

“Why did you hide it despite possessing masterful skills?”

Although his father asked again, Riley was not able to open his mouth easily.

“I’ll ask again.”

Riley was not showing any signs of opening his mouth. Stein took a step toward Riley and asked again.

“Why did you hide it?”

He was asking about Riley hiding his skills.

Why?

For what reason?

Having heard the question, Riley was agonizing inside about how to respond. In the end, Riley thought about the reason.

It was his past, his past life before this one.

It was because Riley did not want to repeat what happened in his past life. So, Riley lived a loose life without revealing his skills.

“Past…”

Riley was going to answer with mention of past life being part of the response. However, Riley’s lips became hard.

The situation was the same as when Nainiae asked.

When Riley thought about his past and tried to talk about what happened back then, it was difficult for Riley to breath. Also, he felt extreme urge to swear and curse that he could not take it. These were the reasons.

‘Haven’t you heard? It has to be you, don’t you get it? Why are you taking a knee? Get up! Haven’t you heard? The children are going to die! Get up! I said get up!’

‘If you were not here in the first place, this would not have happened in the first place.’

‘You promised you will protect them, didn’t you? Then dust yourself off and get up!’

‘A brave hero? Instead of a hero, I think you are a walking disaster!’

‘Please don’t die. Please survive.’

‘Get lost! We… We never asked you to save us!’

‘As long as I am with you, I don’t care what happens to the world…’

‘The children died because of you.’

The voices from his past life still felt clear in Riley’s head. Riley was cringing as he thought about his past life. While Riley was standing like that, Stein took another step toward Riley and called him.

“Riley.”

Because Riley slightly lowered his head, Stein could not see Riley’s eyes. With proud look on his face, Stein looked at the medal of honor that Riley received from the Solia Castle during last spring. Stein said,

“That medal of honor that you received must be also not something you got out of pure luck.”

Having heard what Stein said, Riley also looked at the medal that was hanging on the office wall. Riley vacantly murmured,

“… Medal?”

“That’s right. The medal that you brought home.”

“The one… that I brought home?”

Riley was furrowing his brows as he looked at the medal. Realizing something was up, Stein tried calling his son’s name.

“Riley?”

“…”

Without any response, Riley just stared at the medal on the wall. With a confusing look on his face, Riley turned to look at Stein.

“What do you mean I received it? That was…”

“…?”

Riley furrowed his brows and asked back. Stein also opened his mouth with a question mark on his face.

“What are you talking about? That medal was the one that you showed me when you brought Nainiae home for the first time, isn’t that right?”

“…?”

“Riley?”

Riley just stood there in silence as if he was lost for words. Stein also crumpled his eyebrows.

‘When I brought Nainaie home?’

Riley was busy tossing questions to himself, so he just stood there vacantly, unable to answer to Stein’s questions.

‘How did I meet Nainiae?’

She was the maid who was with him now.

She had scars on her face. Also, she was missing two fingers on her right hand. She was subjected to experiments at the Magic Tower. Recently, she became the patient and a student to Andal, his friend.

Although he was trying hard, Riley could not remember how he met the girl named Nainaie.

‘How?’

Riley rolled his brain around to remember what he could not. He could hear the voices from his past life again.

‘We trust you. If it is you, it can be done.’

‘We are blaming you. If you were not here…’

Could it be that Riley was feeling light headed?

His head was hurting badly. He placed his hand on the sofa’s arm rest for a moment. He was breaking cold sweat all over his face. Riley lowered his head and looked at the floor.

His memories were faint.

‘It’s all right. Even if they died because of you.’

‘No. I…’

‘You are a brave hero, isn’t that right?’

‘That’s right. It could not be helped.’

‘Because I survived.’

‘Please keep it up. We will cheer for you.’

Riley didn’t know what to do because of the voices in his head. Stein carefully extended his arm toward Riley.

“Riley… What is it?”

Riley realized that there was a hand coming toward him late. He swept away Stein's hand with the top of his hand and yelled,

"... I didn't kill them!!"

It was fury, or perhaps from being wronged... Along with cold sweats, Riley was also shedding tears. Riley looked up to face his father and questioned what he just did.

"...?!"

"Riley?"

"I didn't kill..."

Riley muttered vacantly. The voices could be heard in Riley's ears again.

'Now, two.'

'Young Master Riley. Please, I beg you. Even if you are going to kill me... My daughter... At least spare Oluli's life.'

'The limit is about four minutes... No, five minutes?'

'This child certainly has done a terrible thing, but she was not

always bad. She is actually kind inside! It's just that, just that!'

'It's as I thought.'

'... Uuuuu.'

'... Ah.'

'End...'

Although his memories were faint, the voices were incredibly sharp and clear. Riley wrapped his head around with his hands.

It felt like his memories of the past life and current life were mixing in complete disarray.

"Riley, are you hurting somewhere?"

Riley's condition didn't just look bad. It looked serious. Concerned, Stein looked at Riley's eyes.

Riley's eyes were shaking.

In the past, Riley said foolish things like 'it is such a bother,' or 'I am sleepy,' but his eyes never shook like this.

"Father, I am sorry. The condition of my body is a little..."

Riley was turning while holding his head. Stein was about to extend his arm and call his son, but he put his hand back down.

"..."

"I think... I need to rest for a bit."

Stein always took notice of Riley's sharp eyes. Because of this, Stein had hopes for Riley despite him always showing his lazy side. Now, with concerned face, he watched the back of his son.

"Riley..."

Riley was about to get out of the office. Having heard his father's voice, Riley stopped walking for a moment.

"... I believe in you."

Stein muttered in low voice.

"..."

Despite what Stein just said, the expression on Riley's face was not turning better.

Today, Stein actually called Riley to just praise him instead of

talking about the prospective marriage meeting with Princess Reutrina or the banquet invitation. Now, the expression on Stein's face didn't look good, just like his son.

Chapter 135 - Winter Trip

After talking to his father at the office, Riley's memories from the past life and the present life were starting to get all jumbled up. Riley realized he was no longer in good condition, so he said to his mother,

"I think I'll have to go on a travel for a while."

Every winter, Riley always barricaded himself in the library and enjoyed reading books in front of the fire place with cocoa. Now, out of the blue, he was talking about going on a travel when it was winter, not summer. Iris tilted her head to side and asked,

"Travel?"

"Yes. Now that Big Brother Lloyd became the successor... I just... For a few reasons, I would like to go enjoy going on a trip during the winter."

Concerned that his mother will be worried about him, Riley didn't mention anything about the problems with his memories. He just said he wanted to organize his stuffy mind.

"Of course, I'll allow it, but..."

Thinking what Riley just brought up must be the confusion and doubt during the puberty that came late for him, Iris nodded without any objections. She then watched her son with concerned

look on her face.

“It is cold, so you are probably not going to the Rainfield, right? Where are you planning on going? Have you decided on a destination?”

It seemed Iris was worried. She asked several questions at once. Riley put up an awkward smile and asked her to ask one question at a time.

“I didn’t decide a place in particular, but for the general direction, I would like to try going to the west.”

West…

It was the place that they had to go to handle the business related to Nainiaie.

“to the west…”

Riley also didn’t mention the matter regarding Nainiae. Riley avoided his mother’s gaze and moved his eyes away slowly.

‘There is no need to make her worry, so…’

Iris watched her son who was hesitant to look at her in the eyes. It seemed she was finding it suspicious, but she brightened the look on her face soon and said to Riley,

“My Riley… you won’t do something like not contacting like before, would you?”

For a moment, Riley didn’t understand what Iris was trying to say. He asked carefully,

“Like before?”

“Like what happened when you were at the Rainfield.”

“Ah…”

Riley opened his mouth vacantly like someone who just remembered something. Riley apologized to Iris with ashamed look on his face.

“I am sorry. During that time, there was a circumstance that could not be helped.”

“… It’s all right.”

Riley smiled like a fool. Watching his son, Iris stroke his son’s head as if she just could not help herself.

“You just need to make sure to not repeat the mistake.”

“… Yes.”

Do not repeat the mistake… Having heard Iris, Riley nodded with a bitter look on his face. Iris finally got to face Riley. She smiled gently and said,

“If you repeat the same mistake?”

“…?”

“When that happens, you need the courage to reach out to another for help… the courage to ask for help to not repeat the mistake.”

Having heard her gentle advice, Riley, who was vacantly opening and closing his hand, relaxed the bitter look on his face a little and nodded.

“Yes.”

*

The night when Riley told Iris that he will go one a trip, Iris asked Sera to come by. Iris steadily glared at the cup of tea that Sera poured before speaking.

“Sera, are you aware that Riley will be going on a trip tomorrow?”

“Ah, yes! I think I definitely heard that… he will be heading west? Nainiae told me. Now that they have Lady Iris’ permission, she will be preparing so they can leave immediately tomorrow. Is there a problem?”

This time, Sera asked, and Iris responded with a bit of hesitation.

“I have a favor to ask.”

As soon as Iris said that, Sera got excited as if she thought it was so unexpected, about as unexpected as the sun rising from the west. Sera looked at Iris and waited for her to explain the favor.

“When Riley leaves the mansion tomorrow, I would like you to go with him.”

“Pardon? Me too?”

Sera pointed to herself and asked back.

“It seems Riley looks a little… unstable. That’s why.”

“Young Master is?”

“Yes”

Iris nodded. With concerned look on her face, Iris asked Sera again.

“Can you please do that?”

“I’ll be okay, but… If I do, there won’t be anyone beside you?”

Now, Sera also looked concerned. Iris responded right away as if she thought there was no need to worry.

“It’s all right. I asked Willa.”

“To Ms. Willa?”

Willa was Sera’s boss.

Thinking about her strict maid boss, Sera gulped.

“She said she got some spare time now ever since Lloyd was declared as the successor.”

In middle of the sentence, it seemed she thought about Ryan who was kicked out of the mansion. Iris showed gloomy face for a moment before continuing.

“Anyway, Sera. Please, I’m counting on you. Ian is very lacking in fine details. As for Nainiae, she still has things she is not so

experienced in. I feel uneasy with just Nainiae and Ian accompanying Riley."

Compared to the butler who served Riley, Sera had a smart, snappy personality. Iris thought having her go with Riley along with everyone would be helpful.

"Yes, I understand."

Sera figured out what Iris was trying to say. She made tight fists and nodded.

"... By the way, what do you mean by Young Master Riley not looking so stable?"

"Ah, that is..."

Iris had a mysterious look on her face as she thought hard about something. Iris said,

"I really think he is going through... puberty."

"Puberty? Young Master is?"

"... Yes."

Sera snickered after hearing what Iris said as if she understood.

Sera said she will thoroughly carry out the task given to her and left Iris' room.

"..."

After Sera left the room, Iris gave a blank stare to the empty space as she wondered if she should not have told Sera honestly about the puberty. She pondered about it for a long time before she fell asleep.

*

"Ms. Sera, we are about to head out soon!"

It was right before the lunch. Sera, who was now going with them on the trip, was nowhere to be found. Nainiae shouted in front of Sera's room to call for her.

"Ah, wait just a minute! Just a minute! I'm almost done!"

It seemed she had a lot of luggage. Her bag looked like it could tear open at any moment. Carrying the bag on her back, Sera responded to Nainiae's call and tumbled to walk to the garden.

"That lass, geez."

"Sera, are you trying to move and settle on a new house?"

There were a few maids and butlers there to see the Riley's group off. Having noticed the size of Sera's bag, they either laughed or clicked their tongues. Sera, who was struggling because of the bag, snapped back.

"There is nothing wrong about being thoroughly prepared. Why don't you all mind your own business?"

"Sure, you are the expert, aren't you?"

Sera walked to the corner of the garden. Having noticed that the area looked like they had not prepared anything for the trip, Sera tilted her head to the side.

"Excuse me… We are going today, right?"

There was nothing.

To be precise, Sera looked at Riley and Nainie vacantly staring at the garden wall. Ian was also just holding his chin, wondering what this was about.

"Young Master, if you are going on a trip, shouldn't you prepare a carriage? We need to check the conditions of the wheels and the horses too before heading out… Also…"

"No. There is no need. We are going to walk there."

Having heard Riley interrupting Sera and stating they will be traveling by foot, Ian and Sera had their eyes turned into huge circles.

They had a good reason. It was none other than Riley who just proposed traveling on foot in this cold winter. This was why.

'He really is going through puberty.'

Sera mistakenly believed now that Riley must really be going through a stormy period. Sera smiled proudly and nodded.

"Of course, west is pretty far, so I don't plan on just walking."

"Now that I think about it, I don't think you mentioned exactly where you are intending to go? Are you going to just travel on foot without a particular destination?"

Although the trip was for Nainiae, Riley didn't bring that up. He responded half a tempo late.

"Um? Ah, yes."

"Young Master, shall we get going now?"

It seemed Nainiae just finished preparing the thing that Riley asked. Nainiae, who had her eyes closed and focused on something, turned around to face the others and asked.

“Go? What do you mean?”

“Ah, by any chance…”

Sera tilted her head to the side. It seemed Ian got a bad feeling about it. He started to break cold sweats.

It was not certain if Riley noticed the look on the two behind him. Riley just nodded, and Nainiae turned to face the wall again as she said,

“Well then, I’ll open it.”

Nainiae waved her left arm in a large motion. The space around her started to distort. The wall, which had nothing, suddenly developed a hole.

“The doorway will be maintained for about a minute, so we need to enter before the time is up.”

When Nainiae mentioned the doorway, the hole, which was the size of a palm, started to grow. It spun like a vortex and became enlarged enough for a person to go through.

“This is…”

From what Riley said earlier, the hole in front of them definitely

looked like a teleportation magic.

“By any chance… Is this… magic?”

Ian have heard before about a magic spell that allowed one to travel a long distance instantly. Ian carefully asked, and Nainiae nodded.

“Yes. It is teleportation. To make the move easier, instead of a magic circle on the ground, I made it in the form of a gate.”

Teleportation was something that Nainiae was not capable of performing before. However, she was not even breaking sweat now. Instead, she just casually explained the magic she just used.

“Oh my… What is this?”

“She said it is t… teleportation.”

“Isn’t that incredibly difficult to cast?”

Witnessing otherworldly sight happening at the corner of the garden, the few servants who came to see Riley and everyone off had their jaws dropped as they stared at the doorway.

“…”

Riley also vacantly stared at the doorway that Nainiae made for a while. He then quickly entered the door.

“Ah, like Young Master…”

It was not certain if Riley heard Nainiae. He didn’t stop walking. Instead, he walked through the door and disappeared without a trace. Ian gulped.

“W… Well then, we will get going now!”

Unlike Riley, who got sucked into the doorway without saying anything to the people, Nainiae said goodbye to everyone. She gestured to Sera and Ian to follow her.

“Ms. Sera, Mr. Ian, please come over, quickly. When it closes, it will take a while to open it again. It will be a little dizzy for the moment when you cross through it, but you won’t throw up… Well then, I’ll go first.”

With that as her last words, Nainiae walked to the door and got sucked in just like Riley. She disappeared without a trace. Now, there were just Ian and Sera left. They started to glance at each other.

“…”

“Come on! I… It’s not like this is going to kill us, right?!”

They both stood there vacantly in front of the door. Of the two, Sera closed her eyes tightly and charged in.

Flash!

It sounded like a whirlwind. Along with that sound, Sera also disappeared, and Ian flinched his shoulders.

“Uuuuu, Uuuuuuu…”

The door was getting smaller. Looking at the door, Ian was still hesitating about if he should enter or not.

“Excuse me, Mr. Ian? It is about to close?”

“Will it be all right if you don’t go?”

Fellow butlers carefully came behind him and asked Ian. Ian shouted like a hedgehog raising the needle spikes.

“S… Shut up! I am going!”

*

“… You are here. Where’s Ian?”

Having gone through the doorway, Riley was waiting for the rest to arrive. He asked Sera who arrived later.

“Pardon? I… I am not sure… I just charged in, so…”

Sera said she didn’t look back when she went through the door. Nainiae stared at the doorway with concerned look. The doorway was gradually getting smaller.

“Excuse me. Young Master, somehow, I am getting a bad feeling about this.”

It seemed Riley was also thinking the same. He quietly watched and waited for Ian to show himself through the doorway.

“…”

It was not certain how long they waited in silence.

Five seconds…

Ten seconds…

When about 30 seconds have passed, the doorway that Nainiae made had become narrow. It was now at a size where only a small child could go through.

“Uh? Uhuh?”

Sera watched the doorway getting smaller. Concerned and wondering if it was all right to let it be like this, Sera looked at Nainiae.

“N... Nainiae... Could Mr. Ian... get swept up in the magic the wrong way and...”

Sera carefully muttered. Nainiae shook her head and said,

“The magic didn’t fail. If it failed... Mr. Ian’s body would had been transported here all mixed up or only a part of his body would have been transported.”

The results were terrifying and horrible just to think about. Sera gulped.

“The fact that nothing is happening means...”

Although it could be said nothing happening was a good thing... the problem was that nothing, even something so horrible, was happening.

“Mr. Ian?”

The doorway that Nainiae opened was getting smaller even as they thought about this.

The doorway was now so small that only a baby could pass through. Looking at the shrinking door… Sera vacantly mumbled Ian’s name.

Chapter 136 - Winter Trip (2)

“… Att!”

“Um? Ah ah, what are you doing!”

Nainiae was thinking about the scene of Riley and Reutrina being on the prospective marriage meeting at the garden. While thinking about this, Nainiae cut her thumb.

“Are you all right? Did you cut deep?”

“Ah, Yes… I’m all right.”

Putting up a look on her face as if she was fine, Nainiae put her thumb inside her mouth. Sera sighed in relief and asked,

“Ugh! What were you thinking about so vacantly?”

“I was just…”

Nainiae was blurring the end of the sentence. Sera brought out the emergency herb from the bag that was full of stuff. She rubbed the herb and got the juice out of it. Sera snatched Nainiae’s thumb.

“If Ms. Willa saw this, you would have been scolded by the bucket load, you know? You should be careful. Nainiae, your hand is quite pretty.”

“… Pardon?”

“Your hand. It is pretty.”

Sera tightly held Nainiae’s hand that was missing two fingers. Nainiae’s thumb had a pretty deep cut. Sera applied the herb juice on it and continued,

“It will sting a little.”

Unlike what Nainiae said earlier, the cut appeared to be deep. With concerned look on her face, Sera looked at Nainaie’s face.

Although this herb was definitely going to make the cut wound to sting, Nainiae’s face looked completely fine. It was to the point of being weird.

“Are you all right?”

“Yes, a pain like this is…”

Nainiae had endured significantly worse pain at the Magic Tower.

When it came to a cut on her thumb, she couldn’t even call it pain. It was more like tickling.

However, for some reason…

Nainiae couldn’t finish her sentence. Instead, she cringed.

“Excuse me, Ms. Sera.”

With the herb juice applied, Sera carefully wrapped bandage on Nainiae’s thumb. Sera looked at Nainiae’s face and tilted her head to the side.

“What is it?”

“My hand, is it really pretty?”

When Nainiae was at the Magic Tower and being experimented on, in order to withstand the pain and hunger, she chewed off and swallowed her own fingers without realizing. This was why she didn’t have two of her fingers.

“You know… It is definitely hideous.”

With her hand, she couldn’t even wear the precious treasure that Riley gave her some time ago. Nainiae mumbled as she looked at her hand.

“You don’t need to say nice things that you don’t really mean. Please tell me honestly. My hand… it is definitely hideous, right?”

Sera's first aid was perfect.

Nainiae looked at her thumb which was neatly wrapped in bandage. She picked up the carving knife she dropped to the floor and started to clean up the potato again.

"..."

Sera watched Nainiae working on the potato again. She then grabbed her carving knife as well and said,

"I was being honest?"

"...?"

"It's hard to use that hand, but you use it to swing sword, pour tea for the Young Master, do laundry, and even now, like this... you are cooking too?"

Facing Nainiae who was vacantly staring back at herself, Sera greeted with bright smile as she continued,

"Nainiae, your hand is a pretty hand. If you get it injured more, it really will become ugly, so you shouldn't let it get any more scars, all right?"

Nainiae watched Sera's smiley face. Nainiae's cheeks were red

from the cold weather. Now, they were even more red.

“O… Of course.”

“…”

“In that case, would it be all right to use this hand to… brush Young Master’s hair?”

“Pardon?”

The question was so out of the blue. Sera showed a stunned response for a moment. She then snickered. Sera said,

“I am not sure? I don’t know about that?”

“…”

Having heard Sera’s response, the expression on Nainiae’s face changed rapidly.

“Puuuhup.”

As if Sera found it fun to watch, Sera snickered again. She looked at Riley, who was just sitting and enjoying the snow field view, and said,

“Why don’t you ask Young Master yourself? No, instead of asking… just do it.”

“Just do it? That would be a little…”

“What’s so bad about it? If you get scolded, then you’ll get scolded… If Mr. Ian heard about this, he might cause ruckus for a bit, but Mr. Ian is not here for the moment. As long as you mean well, I don’t think Young Master would get angry?”

Riley had his chin resting on his hand. He was enjoying the snow field view. Now, his eyelids were flickering, and his head was knocking.

Perhaps he was tired. He appeared to be sleepy. Sera pushed Nainiae’s back hard and pointed with her chin as if she was trying to tell Nainiae to go for it.

“We readied the vegetables. We just need to boil them, so… You can leave the rest to me. Please get going.”

Despite Sera’s suggestion, Nainiae still was not able to put down the carving knife. Sera tapped on Nainiae’s back hard once again. Unable to say no, Nainiae finally laid down the knife and started to walk.

“… Excuse me. Young Master.”

What Sera did was cheering for Nainiae in a way that was not

really cheering. Because of what Sera did, Nainiae ended up walking to front of Riley. She carefully looked at Riley's face.

"…"

Riley was staring at the snow field with a blank look on his face. There was a dark shadow casted on his face.

Although this winter trip was to fix Nainiae's illness, this was a trip still. Riley should be enjoying the trip, but his face had a shadow casted on. Having realized this, Nainiae felt frustrated inside.

"Young Master?"

Could it be that her voice was too small to be heard?

Nainiae looked at Riley with concerned face. She raised her voice and called him again.

"Um? Ah ah. Nainiae."

It seemed her voice finally reached him. Riley turned his head and looked at Nainiae. He rubbed his sleepy eyes and asked,

"Is the food ready?"

“No, not yet… The stew is being prepared. I think it will take a bit to boil it.”

“Is that so?”

As if she was hurting inside, she lightly crumpled her face.

It was because of what she noticed under Riley’s eyes.

They were something others would not have noticed without taking a closer look. It was a minor part that only Nainiae would have been able to notice. They were pretty dark and deep.

“Young Master, are you all right?”

“What is it?”

“It seems you have not had good night sleep in the past few days. Your face does not look so…”

“Huh?”

Nainiae looked concerned as she asked. Riley acted like there was nothing wrong and said,

“No. Nothing in particular… You saw me yawn all the time, haven’t you? Why are you asking me that all of the sudden?”

“But…”

“In that case, now that you brought it up, should I get some shut eyes for a bit? You said the stew will take a while, right? Can you bring your lap down here?”

Having heard what Riley said, she sat to turn her lap into a pillow for Riley. Riley leaned his head on Nainiae’s lap and closed his eyes, and Nainiae stared at him.

“Young Master.”

With his eyes closed, he was breathing like a sleeping baby. Having noticed him being like that, Nainiae called him in quiet voice.

“…”

Riley didn’t answer.

If anyone else saw him, they would have thought that Riley was asleep.

“You can’t… sleep?”

“…”

Riley didn’t answer this time either.

It looked like he was sleeping.

Nainiae bit her lower lips.

“You can’t… No, you are not sleeping.”

Riley, who had his eyes gently closed, twitched his eyebrows once.

It was as Nainiae said.

Riley was trying not to sleep.

It was to the point where he could not remember how long he had been doing this.

“I’m going to sleep. Don’t bother me.”

Riley answered.

Of course, he had no intention of actually going to sleep.

He was planning on just closing his eyes and killing time before

opening his eyes and saying ‘Ah, I slept well!’

“Young Master, I…”

Nainiae looked at Riley sympathetically. It was at the moment when she was going to continue her words as she fiddled with her right hand.

“…?”

Uuruuruung!

They could hear the sound of beastly roar from nearby.

Chapter 137 - Winter Trip (3)

It was because of the black stains.

The stains were tangled up on their fur like mud. The pitch-black stains were twitching irregularly as if they were alive.

“This stain... It is the same as the phenomenon I observed at the desert area near by the Solia Castle.”

“Desert?”

“Young Master, by any chance... have you seen it before?”

Riley nodded.

During the successorship competition, Riley saw traces of stains similar to this at a cave near the Alieve village.

It was highly acidic, made boiling sound, and smelled so horrible that even Riley had to snap close his nose... The stench was at epidemic level.

‘Let’s see.’

Riley brought his nose close to the stains on the wolves and checked the smells.

“Ugh…”

It reeked. It was puke inducingly horrible.

The stench was definitely the same as the one he smelled at the cave near the Alieve village.

“That’s right. I’ve seen this before.”

It seemed it had been a long time since the stain got on the wolves. Compared to what Riley saw before, the stains were weakened. However, the stench was most certainly the same one.

“This stain… If it is what I think it is… It must be left by the two people that my teacher and Lady Isilteru are pursuing.”

“People they are pursuing?”

“They are people who are similar to Rebethra or dark mages who can raise the dead.”

Using the wind magic, Nainiae carefully cut away the dark stains clumped on the wolves’ fur. She cringed as she dropped the stains to the ground.

Bubble bubble…

The black stains were getting absorbed into the ground while exuding horrible stench. This was why.

“The mercenary named Kabal, the one who took away our Count’s arm, is suspected to had been at that desert.”

Nainiae brought up the name as she watched the ground and grass dying.

“Kabal?”

She carefully eliminated the stain on the other wolf. Having heard Riley’s question, she described the scenery she saw at the desert.

“Yes. That’s why I said they are similar kind of people.”

She described that the sands on the desert were all soaked in black stains, the oasis had gone dry, and there are several craters as if several tens of explosion magic spells were cast there. On top of that, she also said the locations of the hills were changed in disarray.

“As you suspected, they are people who can use special abilities other than magic, and they are doing it without mana.”

Riley thought about the dark mage who raised the dead. His

thoughts naturally got to Rebethra and the voice that came from beyond the dimensional portal. Riley started to grind his teeth.

"A... anyway... These two children... it will be all right if I took them in, right?"

Nainiae realized Riley's face was starting to crumple. To change the subject, she proposed taking in the wolves. Riley relaxed his face and started to scratch his head.

"Won't it be fine to just let them go?"

Having heard Riley's question, Nainiae shook her head and said,

"Young Master, I didn't make this choice just to save them."

Nainiae stopped Riley when he was trying to draw his sword. She then walked toward the wolves that were snarling and extended her hand toward them. She did it all, but it wasn't exactly because she valued the wolves' lives.

"It's for you, Young Master."

"For me?"

Nainiae answered as she brushed the wolves. Riley tilted his head to the side.

“I read on a book while I was at the Rainfield. It said wolves are pretty useful on snowfield.”

“…”

“So, I thought they might be helpful to your travel. Instead of killing them… doing this is far better, right?”

Having heard Nainiae’s answer, Riley rubbed his face with his right hand and sighed.

“… Ugh.”

It was because he realized that he was mentally exhausted. He realized it with certainty at this very moment.

‘If it was me from before…’

Riley felt that the choice that Nainiae recommended was more like him than the idea of just killing the wolves without thinking.

Riley used to be able to come up with such ideas with ease before. Now, he was not able to lately, and this was the reason why Riley sighed just now.

“Do as you wish.”

Riley answered as if he was muttering. Nainiae slowly nodded.

“E… excuse me…”

“…?”

“…?”

Riley and Nainiae turned their heads toward the direction of the cautious voice.

There was Sera hiding herself behind the pot and holding the ladle tightly. With her face full of tears, she was looking at the two.

“Can we just send them away?”

*

It was nightfall in the forest.

They took care of dinner with the stew. Of the people next to the bonfire, there were just two who were awake.

“Come on, Nainiae. You said you will give Young Master the lap pillow so he could sleep soundly. How could you fall asleep instead?”

The ones awake were Sera and Riley.

In particular, Sera was looking frustrated as she watched Nainiae sleeping while leaning on Riley's shoulder.

"You are not angry about the wolves, right?"

"I am not, you know?"

Near Nainiae's lap, two wolves rolled themselves up and were sleeping. Sera was watching them, and the wolves' tails rose up all of sudden. Sera flinched her shoulders.

"I... I really am not, you see?"

'Sera's sense of smell is like wolves... No, her sense of smell might be better than wolves, yet she is the one who is afraid of wolves?'

Riley learned something fun. He peeked a smile. Meanwhile, Sera pouted and started to complain.

"Yes, that's right. Actually, I am a little afraid of dogs."

Sera hugged her knees and brought it up. Riley jokingly mumbled,

“These are not dogs, you know?”

“A… anyway, they look similar!”

Sera shouted all of sudden. One of the wolves got up and blinked its eyes, and Sera stopped acting up. Instead, she started to hold her breath.

“…”

The awakened wolf stared at Sera and then rolled its body back up. It went back to sleep.

“… Puuuuaaaaa!”

Sera coughed out the breath that she was holding. In tears, she continued what she mentioned earlier.

“When I was young, I was bitten by a dog. The memory is still there as a trauma, so…”

Riley thought about how Sera was shaking while holding a ladle. Riley nodded as if he understood.

“I think I can understand that.”

“Young Master, do you not have any?”

“What?”

“Things like trauma.”

In light of Sera’s question, Riley vacantly stared at the bonfire.

Tadak. Tadak.

He merely tuned in to the sound of the woods burning. In the end, Riley didn’t answer her question.

Chapter 138 - Winter Trip (4)

“I got it. I got it. Please, it is all right to stop apologizing now. I figured you must’ve gotten tired from using that... Teleport? Magic.”

Sera smiled as if she thought Nainiae could not be helped. She explained to Nainiae that she didn’t need to apologize anymore and calmed her down. Nainiae sighed.

“Ugh...”

“If you are that sorry, please tell the wolves this for me. Please tell them to don’t come close to me.”

“Um? You don’t need to worry so much... Ah... If it is all right with you, would you like to try becoming close with them? They won’t bite even if you pat them!”

“Huuuiik?!”

Sera became pale and walked back. Riley, who was watching this from the back, pulled Nainiae’s ear.

“That’s enough.”

Thinking she was saved by Riley, Sera sighed in relief. Nainiae realized her mistake and made amends.

“I… I’ll definitely tell them.”

Riley scolded Nainiae several times, and Nainiae tumbled. She withdrew the wolves that were trying to get close to Sera.

“Ha, hahaha…”

It seemed she was feeling very guilty about falling asleep first last night. Nainiae looked gloomy again, and Sera noticed this.

Still, it seemed befriending wolves was going to be difficult for Sera. She lightly moved away and put distance between her and the wolves.

“By the way, these wolves had those black stains on them, right?”

Sera was blushing and widening the distance with the wolves, and Riley smiled in secret as he watched. Nainiae was having a conversation with the wolves, and Riley asked her about the stains.

“Where did they say they came from?”

As if she understood the request, Nainiae, who was watching the wolves that put distance from Sera, carefully said,

“Ah, about that… They are from pretty far.”

“Both of them?”

“Yes. They are from at least two mountains away from here. Unfortunately… it seems their kinds all died from the epidemic”.

“They are only survivors?”

“… Yes.”

Nainiae added that not just the wolves, but the forest that they used to live also rotted and died. She carefully asked,

“Are you… going to that direction?”

Having heard the question, Riley diligently rolled his brain. Riley looked toward the direction beyond the mountain where the wolves said they used to live. Riley asked Nainiae,

“What about the direction that Heliona said?”

“It’s different. If the wolves’ former habitat is beyond that mountain, the place I’m supposed to go to is straight this way.”

“Make a left turn or go straight… So that’s the question.”

Riley nodded after hearing the explanation. It seemed he was

deep in thoughts for a moment. He looked to the front and said,

“Let’s go forward.”

Forward... It meant Riley was saying they should handle Nainiae’s matter first. Nainiae didn’t ask why. She just nodded.

“... Excuse me, both of you? What are you talking about in secret? Can you let me in on it too?”

Sera was weary of the wolves on the front, but she felt excluded as she watched Riley and Nainiae whispering to each other. She asked, hoping to know what they were talking about.

“It’s nothing. We were just talking about which direction to go.”

“Ah ah.”

“Yes. We decided to go straight.”

Nainiae raised her palm to the front and created fire.

“Ms. Heliona.”

<Um. What is it? Where is this place?>

Sera didn’t understand why Nainiae suddenly put forth her palm.

When the flame on her palm spoke, Sera flinched her shoulders.

‘W… What is this now?!’

*

“Uuuu….. That arrogant little bastard… that arrogant little bastard…”

Kabal the mercenary was a mess. His hammer had turned completely black, and over half of it melted away. He tossed it without care and spat out phlegm.

“How could a little bastard like him become the Left Leg. I really cannot understand why. Chopping his head off after killing him won’t be enough to quench my anger.”

Kabal confirmed that the phlegm that he spat to the ground was pitch black. As if he was disgusted, he stepped hard on it with his left foot and complained.

“God damn it. If it wasn’t for that blind bitch meddling on it!”

Wheeeec.

Wheeeeec.

From left and right, snow wind was blowing. Sitting there, Kabal let out his frustration. From his back, sparks started to fly along with ‘zizizizik’ sound.

“Um?”

Kabal casually turned his head back to look. Wondering what that was about, he glared at the area.

<… Heed my words, Right Leg.>

Ominous voice could be heard from the place where sparks flied. Kabal, who was sitting at a boulder, quickly got up and lowered his head toward the direction of the voice.

“Right Leg is listening to your voice.”

Kabal called himself the Right Leg. Kabal’s body was shaking before he noticed.

Some may have assumed he was shivering from cold. He was at top of a snow-covered mountain after all. However… He wasn’t shaking from cold.

It was the voice.

<We lost the Left Hand.>

“…?!”

Having heard the words, Kabal, who had his head down, opened his eyes big.

‘Hurial died? That is not possible? Rebethra would have retrieved that guy’s corpse?’

The voice continued.

<Right Leg, go with the Head and find someone who could take the Left Hand’s place. This is my order.>

Kabal lifted his head and looked toward the place where the voice was coming from.

Zizizizik!

From the space where lightning was pouring out, something that looked like a hole appeared. From the hole, an orb, size of someone’s fist, suddenly popped out and dropped to the snowfield.

‘This is!’

It was black. Inside, there were purple gas like thing swarming around. Looking at the orb, Kabal’s eyes became red.

‘Really… Hurial… That bastard is?’

<Also.>

“…”

<There is a wound on the Heart. From now on, treat the Heart with care.>

Kabal had his two hands on the snow field. Having heard the words, he tightened his fists.

The words meant that… Not only Hurial, his comrade, but Rebethra was also attacked.

‘Who…’

Soon, the sparking sound started to subside. The hole disappeared, and the frightening voice could no longer be heard either. Kabal lifted his head.

“Who! I’ll tear you apart to pieces!”

Kabal opened his eyes big. The gleam on his eyes had purple light lingering there. The light was as frightening as the voice earlier.

Chapter 139 - Winter Trip (5)

‘What should I do? Is there anything I can do… Is there nothing?’

Nainiae mumbled inside. As if she read Nainiae’s mind, a flame bloomed on Nainiae’s shoulder.

<Are you worried?>

It was Heliona.

“Yes. A little… No. I am very worried.”

<Um. I know. I can see how you feel from the look on your face.>

“Uuu…”

Because of what Heliona just pointed out, Nainiae rubbed her face and corrected her expression. Wondering if Heliona had any suggestions, Nainiae looked at the summon spirit.

<Even I am not sure about this. We summon spirits cannot fight the need to sleep. Even my master cannot win against that. I always thought nothing in this world can beat sleep, yet…>

Having mentioned even Andal, her master, Heliona stared at Riley, the human who was fighting off sleep, as if she was disgusted by him.

<That one over there... No matter how big of a fiend he is... I think something horrible will happen if he keeps going like this.>

Instead of chewing on food, Riley was eating as if he was biting off a piece of rag. Heliona fiddled with her chin and turned again toward Nainiae who looked very anxious. Heliona asked,

<What did he say as the reason for not sleeping?>

“That is... I do have one reason I can think of, but it is not something I can tell you without his permission, so...”

<Ugh. You humans sure have your lives so complicated.>

Wondering if there was any great idea, Heliona leaned on Nainiae’s cheek and thought hard about it together. Heliona mumbled,

<Um... Well then, it cannot be helped?>

*

It seemed the snow storm outside was pretty strong. Although it had been a while, the storm was not showing any sign of winding down. Riley made a suggestion to Nainiae,

“... Let’s keep going.”

“Like this?”

Wheeeeec.

Having heard the sound of the wind outside the cave, Sera didn’t know what to do. She asked with concerned look on her face.

“It cannot be helped. We don’t even know how much further we have to go either, so…”

Riley got up from his seat and mumbled. Nainiae, who was rolling her thumb around, had similar look on her face. Nainiae said,

“Young Master, even so… don’t you think it might be a little dangerous? In a snow storm like this, we could get separated from each other too.”

“That’s why we took in two wolves. If not… you can use magic too.”

“That’s true, but…”

“All right. Let’s get going. My body aches because I had been trying to sit still.”

Having heard Riley, Nainiae and Sera both glanced at each other.

‘Of all people, Young Master just said that?’

This was quite the contrary to what Riley was doing earlier. Earlier, Riley was dozing off, blinking his eyes with blank look on his face as if he was mesmerized by something.

‘I need to move.’

If this was any other day, Riley would have spent the time away taking day time naps while lying down. Now, he was saying his body was aching to move. He didn’t really mean that.

He was trying to keep his eyes wide open by forcing himself to move continuously.

“Young Master…”

“I’ll get going first. Follow me.”

“Young Master!”

Riley got outside into the snow storm. Sera, who extended her arm toward Riley, turned to look at Nainiae, not knowing what to do.

“N… Nainiae… shouldn’t you stop him?”

“…”

Nainiae spared the response. Contrary to what Sera was hoping for, she straightened her knees and got up.

“Now, we should head out too.”

“Nainiae?”

“It will be all right.”

Unable to comprehend Nainiae, Sera was about to have an argument with Nainiae about this. However, Sera noticed the determined look on Nainiae’s face. Sera relaxed her crumpled eyebrows.

“Ugh.”

It seemed Sera trusted Nainiae. Sera followed suit and got up. She also got out of the cave, in to the snow storm.

‘Uuuu… the snow storm is…’

Sera faltered because of the harsh wind. The snow storm was so severe that she couldn’t see what was right in front of her. She started to look for Riley who went out into the open first.

“Young Master!”

Sera covered her face with her arm and called Riley. She realized the intensity of the snow storm that was harassing her had subsided substantially. Sera opened her eyes big.

“Ms. Sera, are you all right?”

It seemed Nainiae used magic.

Unlike how the scenery looked, something was resisting the snow and wind. It suddenly became easier to move. Sera lowered the arm she used to cover her face and called for Riley again.

“Young Master!”

Unlike them, Riley was walking through the snow without Nainiae’s magic. Having noticed Riley, Sera quickly followed him.

“Young Master, please wait! I’ll cast resist magic for you!”

Nainiae operated mana inside her body and extended her hand toward Riley.

“Resist magic?”

“Yes!”

Having heard what Nainiae just said, Riley turned. As if he understood it, he made an okay sign with his right hand.

‘… Ms. Heliona, help me.’

Having noticed Riley’s hand, Nainiae nodded lightly and looked at her own shoulder.

Despite the snow storm, the summon spirit of flame was burning up in full force. The spirit locked her eyes with Nainiae and nodded.

<You need to buy me pudding later, all right?>

‘All right.’

With her hand to the front, Nainiae prepared magic and casted not the resist magic but sleep magic.

‘Please.’

Although she said it was resist magic, she cast sleep magic instead. She felt guilty inside, but hide her emotion and hoped she would not be found out.

‘Please, he must not notice this.’

Nainiae thought Riley would withstand the spell if she just cast the sleep spell, so she chose this method.

<That guy is already on his last leg. It’s ridiculous that we have to cast sleep spell like this to him in the first place, but…>

Heliona was helping Nainiae to use the magic. Heliona mumbled as she broke cold sweat.

‘If I get scolded for this, that’s that… I can’t just sit and watch this anymore.’

Nainaie apologized inside. She gathered up all of her mana, even ones she didn’t know she had, and used them all to cast the sleep spell on Riley.

“You don’t need to cast something like this for…”

Riley was standing there and looking back toward where Nainiae was. His eyes slowly closed. At the same time, his body also slowly tilted.

“… me.”

Because Nainiae said it was resist magic, Riley let his guard down. Also, it seemed the exhaustion from days worth of lack of sleep

came rushing at him at once. Riley collapsed to the front as he fell asleep.

“Y… Young Master?!”

Sera didn’t know what was really happening. She saw Riley suddenly losing consciousness and collapsing. She tumbled and rushed toward Riley.

“Young Master!”

Fortunately, he fell to the snowfield, so he didn’t fall hard. The problem was that it looked like he just fainted.

“Nainiae! Young Master has… Huh?”

Sera turned to look at Nainiae who cast magic on Riley. Sera had a question mark on her face.

Only a moment ago, Nainiae was behind Sera. Now, she was gone without a trace.

“N… Nainiae?”

“… Young Master.”

Only a moment ago, Nainiae was behind Sera, but now she could

hear Nainiae's voice from the front. Sera blinked her eyes vacantly and turned to look at where Riley was.

Nainiae was there.

It seemed she used a short-range teleportation magic. Nainiae instantly appeared in front of Riley. She supported Riley who was a sleep. It looked like Nainiae could cry.

"I am sorry. I'll receive the punishment later."

"Ugh, I thought you disappeared."

Sera was worried how they were going to move if Nainiae was gone. She sighed in relief and came next to them.

"How's Young Master?"

"He fell asleep. That's all."

"Did you do it?"

Nainiae nodded.

"Yes. I... did it."

Nainiae held Riley a little tighter in her arms. She bit her lips and

said,

“In the past few days… no… few weeks, he didn’t get proper sleep. I was concerned about his wellbeing, so…”

“Few weeks? I definitely saw him sleeping during the morning?”

“He probably just had his eyes closed.”

“What?!”

“For now, let’s go back to the cave.”

Nainiae looked at Riley sleeping. This time, she used a more powerful resist magic.

Chapter 140 - Guests Without Invitations

To spin her brain, Sera fiddled with her chin. Thinking that this must not continue, Sera shook her head lightly.

“We cannot wait that long. We are almost out of food. Moreover, since we don’t know when Young Master would wake up from sleep… his illness will only get worse in a place like this.”

Having heard Sera saying this was not a good place for Riley to be at the moment, Nainiae, who barely managed to calm down, started to blame herself again.

“If I was a skilled member of the Holy Temple…”

If she was like Priesia, if she was at least on par with a bishop of the temple, she might have been able to help Riley… However, Nainiae was just a mage, and she had no abilities like the people from the Holy Temple to heal people. She was hating herself because she realized she didn’t possess such abilities.

“Like I said, there is no need for you to criticize yourself like that.”

Nainiae looked upset. Sera pinched and pulled Nainiae’s cheek to make her get a grip. However, Sera was anxious just like Nainiae.

“If you are going to blame yourself, it won’t be too late if you did it after Young Master woke up first.”

Riley had been asleep for days, which was a problem. However, the snow storm outside was also a problem.

To help Riley heal, they needed to go somewhere at least. However, because of the snow storm, the chance for them to make the move was not coming.

‘We can’t let it be like this.’

It seemed like Riley was having a nightmare. He was struggling. Watching Riley struggle, Sera, who was hesitant until now, said to Nainiae as if she was certain of something,

“We need to get to another place.”

Sera got up. Nainiae, who was tending to Riley, looked at Sera, wondering if that would be all right.

“Anywhere… We need to go to a better place. With your magic, you can provide us with some protection from the environment, but… the problem is the supplies including the food. We are about to reach the limit.”

Sera got up and went to her bag. She realized the bag was now substantially lighter than it was when they first headed out from the mansion. She anxiously crumpled her eyebrows.

‘There’s about a day worth of food. Nainiae brought in a bit in the past few days, but… they are not even close to being enough. We don’t have enough.’

Last night, they lied and told the mansion that ‘Riley’s fine.’ Now, the situation was so dire that Sera was even regretting it. She wondered if she did the right thing or not.

‘Sera, be calm. You need to somehow.’

Sera brought out the map from the bag and went next to Nainiae. Sera asked,

“Nainiae, where are we approximately?”

For the past few days, Nainiae had been going out of the cave to make up for the diminishing food and find nearby places that could help them. Nainiae said,

“We are probably around here.”

Nainiae pointed at a place on the map with her finger. Sera looked around the place and narrowed her eyes.

‘This place is?’

Duke Philisneon’s Manor.

She found the letters not far from where they were.

‘Duke Philisneon’s Manor… Certainly… If it is the Duke’s mansion, the place is probably better than the cave… No, that place would obviously be better than here.’

There would be soft beds, and they would even have food for patients instead of the kind that they had at the moment for travels.

The place was definitely better than here beyond comparison.

The problem was if the Philisneon Manor was going to let them in.

‘Young Master was invited to the Duke’s end of the year banquet, but Young Master didn’t bring the invitation because he didn’t feel the need to go… We don’t even have any insignia to prove the Iphalleta name…’

Sera was furrowing her brows as she looked at the map. It seemed Nainiae realized what Sera was thinking. With concerned look on her face, Nainiae asked,

“Ms. Sera, are you… going to go there?”

Now that they have found a place that was different from the cave, a place that was far better and suitable for stay… They had to go no matter what.

“We can’t stay here like this.”

Sera folded the map and placed it back in the bag. She started to wrap up the luggage that were unfolded on the cave here and there.

“Let’s try going there. If we explain the situation, they might listen.”

*

“… I am sorry, but…”

The snow storm was blowing in full force.

“Those without permission cannot enter this place.”

They were at the Philisneon mansion’s entrance. The Iphalleta mansion couldn’t even be compared to this place. The mansion was almost the size of a castle. In front of the mansion, Sera tightened her fist and argued.

“Why? I am telling you, we are from the Iphalleta family?”

“You would not have been able to enter the mansion now even if you said you are the royalty from the Solia Castle.”

“Why?”

“It’s because the end of the year banquet is in session right now.”

Perhaps because of the cold winter weather, the guard was wearing layers after layers of insulating clothes. He looked rather fat because of that. The guard mumbled with uninterested tone.

“High nobilities are having conversations inside right now. It will be hard to deliver messages to them in person. Also… if it is Young Master Riley from the Iphalleta family, I am certain an invitation was sent to him last time?”

“…”

“You didn’t even bring the invitation, yet you are just asking me to let you in… Can’t you see I cannot help but to feel suspicious about this? Wouldn’t you think so too?”

The man had no idea how difficult it was for them to get here, yet… The snow storm was even worse now than when they were at the cave. Sera’s breath was creating frosts like clouds. Her face was frozen red. She started to argue some more with the guard.

“Still… Still, we have a patient here, so how could you!”

“Please try to understand from my perspective. Even if he is a

patient, it is not confirmed if he is a nobility or a commoner, isn't that right? If I let people like you in and said 'Oh my... are you all right?' the Duke may say off with my head right away. My life could be in danger."

"Huuu.... How could..."

Sera bit her lips in front of the guard.

She came this far, thinking they would not be denied entrance, but... Her expectation was heartlessly stepped on.

She was feeling sorry for Nainiae and Riley who came all the way here because they believed in her. She was disappointed about being denied by the guard. It was obvious she was devastated.

"... Huuuu."

Tears started to form around Sera's eyes.

"Huuuk..."

Standing in front of Nainiae who was faltering, Sera thought to herself to stay strong all this time, however, she was also a fragile woman.

She was in a very pressing situation. The tears that started to form around her eyes was like a dam that was about to burst.

“… You really cannot let us in?”

Nainiae had been watching Sera trying to negotiate with the guard. Having heard Sera suddenly crying, Nainiae was unable to just stand there. She stepped forward.

Blankets, clothes, and all sorts of warm things… Riley was wrapped in them all. Nainiae was carrying Riley on her back.

“Ugh, you ladies… I said you cannot go in.”

“Please…”

“If I said you cannot, that means you cannot go in.”

The guard looked at Nainiae who was coming toward him with frosted breaths. The guard crumpled his face as if he ran into something unpleasant.

The scars and missing fingers…

Because she was standing behind Sera all this time, the guard didn’t realize this. He now discovered her horrid face and the hand which only had three fingers. This was why.

‘Seriously, you are ugly to the extreme.’

“Ms. Sera, please step back for a bit.”

The look on Nainiae’s face looked colder than the snow storm. With that look, she faced the guard and talked to Sera.

“…?”

Having heard her voice, Sera stopped crying, looked at Nainiae’s back for a moment and walked back.

“You cannot let us in no matter what?”

Having heard Nainiae’s question, the guard fixed his grip on the spear he held and answered,

“What is this? Are you trying to go at it?”

It seemed Nainiae was not concerned with what the guard had to say. Nainiae took another step toward the spear which was aimed at her and said,

“If you won’t let us in…”

As she said those words, at the same time, the spear’s tip started to melt and fall as if it was placed inside a smelting furnace and pulled out.

‘Huh?’

The tip of the spear melted down in black. The guard’s eyes shook.

“W… what the hell?”

Nainiae warned with deadly look on her face. The look could not be more fearsome.

“… I shall be demonstrating my power.”

Chapter 141 - Guests Without Invitations (2)

The nobilities talked about Priesia, the one who might know about the cause of the incident, and sighed.

It was because the Right Solia, the place that they had so much faith in, collapsed first before the Lower Solia, the place that should have crumbled a long time ago.

“The absence of the Holy Temple, absence of the Magic Tower… Ugh… Just why do we even have the Right Solia?”

“I know. As if the Count Stein losing his right arm was not enough, we lost many of the Solia’s mages and Holy Temple priests. The Solia is definitely in serious danger, more than ever before since the establishment of the kingdom.”

“Now that you mentioned it, I had been forgetting about the Count Stein’s arm. I heard that the successor of the family had been decided? Definitely…”

“I heard Lloyd, the second born, became the successor.”

“Huh? I thought Ryan, the first born, would definitely be the successor?”’

“About that Ryan… The rumor is that he drew sword at Count Stein when he didn’t become the successor.”

“Huh…”

“Well, it looks like he got kicked out, but… Count Stein probably choose the second born because he was aware of Ryan’s character.”

“Now that you mentioned the Iphalleta Family’s successor, I must mention the following too.”

“Um?”

“At that place, Princess Reutrina was there as well.”

“P… Princes Reutrina?”

“Really? Wasn’t she supposedly a vegetable like the youngest of the Iphalleta Family?”

“Apparently not. In fact, she was incredibly beautiful.”

“Huh…”

“I am curious what kind of beauty she is.”

“Now that I think about it, even though this is the banquet held at Duke Philisneon’s Family, I can’t even get a glimpse of the Princess.”

“Mysticism… perhaps it is something like that? Anyway, that is not important.”

The conversation was going off the tangent. The nobilities redirected it back to the discussion regarding how to overcome the danger that befell on Solia.

“Not only should we seek assistance from ally cities, we should try every method. Lately, Ansyrium’s movement had been very suspicious.”

“You must be talking about that mercenary.”

“He is no different from a mad dog. It doesn’t look like he is making his move based on countries either.”

“That means even we can hire him with money… That’s how it is.”

“He is the mercenary that tore off Count Stein’s arm. We need to get him.”

Holy Temple’s fanatics, Priestess’ unknown whereabout, Princess Reutrina who is not making appearance on the banquet, mercenary who is said to be ridiculously strong… and other stories could be heard.

‘Boring…’

Meanwhile… The Princess, who was the talk of the banquet, was walking around the banquet hall with a fan hiding her face. Reutrina's face was filled with boredom.

'They are all uninteresting stories.'

It seemed she realized there was nothing to gain from walking around further. She sat at a corner of the banquet hall where it was away from the people's eyes and sighed big.

Boredom, repetitiveness, and disappointment…

Because of those emotions mixed in, she looked down. It looked like she was muttering 'this is the least interesting banquet ever.'

'Ugh.'

Although none of the conversations were fun, she walked around the banquet hall in high heels for one reason. It was to find where the Young Master of a Count family who she personally wrote the invitation letter to was.

'In the end, he didn't come?'

Although he was nowhere to be seen, Reutrina was thinking about when she met him at the Iphalleta mansion for the prospective marriage meeting. Back then… Young Master Riley

had uninterested look on his face despite having her sit in front of him.

‘Well. Considering his personality, I figured he would not come, but…’

It’s such a bother.

I rather take an afternoon nap.

I rather read one more letter on a book.

“Puup.”

Reutrina thought about her prospective marriage candidate who did not come to the banquet using various excuses. She vacantly held her head by the palm and laughed briefly.

‘Really, he is an interesting person.’

Riley was definitely different from Young Masters of other nobility families.

‘He didn’t seem interested at all.’

A boy of his age would have his eyes instantly drawn to the dress with fully exposed cleavage. However… Riley’s response indicated

he didn’t have even the slightest interest in a woman’s bare skin.

‘Moreover, that’s how he was really feeling.’

Not only that Riley was really not interested in such, he was truly thinking that it was such a bother as well. To Reutrina… those facts are the reason why she was interested in him.

“… Um?”

Reutrina was snickering as she thought about Riley. However, she found a servant who was looking all over the banquet hall in search of someone. She tapped at the table and let the servant know that she was there.

“Ah!”

Philisneon Family’s servant found Reutrina because of the tapping sound. Glancing around at other nobilities, the servant carefully approached Reutrina.

“Princess, something big happened.”

“Something big?”

“That is… Uninvited guests showed.”

“Uninvited guests?”

Reutrina put up bored face again and looked at the servant. The servant nodded and said,

“Yes. They said… they are from Iphalleta Family. The uninvited guests are now…”

Having heard the word ‘Iphalleta,’ Reutrina got up immediately.

“Iphalleta?!”

“Pardon? Ah, yes…”

Because Reutrina shouted, other nobilities who were engaged in conversations opened their eyes big and started to stare at her.

“These people… Where are they now?”

Not caring at all about other nobilities staring at her, it seemed Reutrina was only interested in the uninvited guests. She had sparkles in her eyes as she asked.

“Pardon? Ah, yes… One of them were ill, so we gave them a guest room with a bed. Why do you ask?”

“A guest room? You said a guest room, right?”

Reutrina looked like she was about to go over there right now. The servant reached for the Princess to stop her and shouted,

“P… Please wait, Princess!”

The servant uttered the title of Princess. The nobilities who were looking at her started to mumble.

“Did you hear that just now? That servant called her Princess?”

“That means, that woman is?”

“Oh my god, she is a beauty like that?”

“Just who spread rumors about her being ugly…”

Having noticed the nobilities mumbling amongst themselves and staring, Reutrina furrowed her brows and glared at the servant.

“About the responsibility for this incident, I’ll ask you later.”

The servant flinched after hearing there will be punishment for this mistake, but regardless, the servant delivered the message that the servant didn’t get to finish explaining.

“Princess, you will need to be careful.”

“…?”

“I heard that a skilled mage is with these uninvited guests. Go with at least one of your designated guard…”

Before the servant could finish talking, Reutrina headed toward the guest room where the uninvited guests were said to be at.

“P… Princess! Princess!

Chapter 142 - Guests Without Invitations (3)

It seemed Reutrina noticed what Sera was thinking about. Reutrina looked at Sera and peeked a smile. Reutrina walked toward a pot at the corner of the room and said,

"It's all right, because you are really from the Iphalleta Family. That is... Your name is?"

"I'm Sera. Her name is Nainiae."

"Sera and Nainiae... Although we didn't get introduced to each other, we have locked eyes with each other, haven't we?"

Feeling awkward, Sera scratched her cheek.

In fact, in hiding, Sera was watching Riley and Reutrina having prospective marriage meeting, and Sera's eyes ran into Reutrina's briefly.

"I am sorry. It must've been difficult to enter without the invitation, right? It's because of what happened recently at the Solia Castle, so please don't think too much about it."

"Pardon? Ah, yes."

Reutrina immediately brought up the matter of invitation paper. She then picked up two cups of tea that she prepared. Reutrina

walked toward Sera and handed her a cup.

“It seems the mood was quite deadly. I am glad there was no casualty.”

Reutrina also walked toward Nainiae and recommended a cup of tea.

“Would you like a cup of tea?”

“No. I am fine.”

Because Nainiae refused the tea, Reutrina put up awkward look on her face. She then brought the tea cup to her lips and apologized again.

“I don’t know what to say. I am so ashamed. I’ll apologize again for there being so much trouble when you tried to enter the mansion.”

“… Yes.”

“It seems Young Master is… not in a good condition.”

Nainiae was wiping off sweat from Riley’s face using wet towel. Watching this, Reutrina had saddened look on her face. She said,

“I thought he would not come, but he arrived. When I heard the news, I wondered why, but… I was not hoping he could come like this.”

“…?”

Sera tilted her head to the side, wondering about how Reutrina seemed like she was hoping Riley would come.

“Since he came without the invitation, he is not here for the banquet… Right?”

Reutrina turned to look at Sera.

“Ah, yes… The thing is…”

“Ms. Sera.”

Nainiae stopped Sera from talking. Nainiae slowly shook her head toward Sera.

“I… I’m sorry, Princess. I am not at liberty to discuss this without permission, so…”

Having realized Nainiae’s opinion that it would be best to be sparing with words, Sera lowered her head, looking ashamed.

“Um… Are you saying you are not at liberty to say? It’s fine. I can understand that much.”

Reutrina scratched her cheek and said she understood. She put the tea cup back to where it originally was and said,

“I’ll personally talk to other people in the mansion, so please tell the servants at the door if there is anything you find uncomfortable. If it is something I can help you with, I will.”

Sera opened her eyes wide and looked at Reutrina. Reutrina was being surprisingly considerate. It seemed Reutrina noticed what Sera was thinking. She smiled and said,

“Are you thinking the situation is being resolved too easily?”

“Ah, no… It’s not like…”

“Haha. Please do not worry so much. I am interested in Young Master Riley too, so…”

Having heard what Reutrina just said, Nainiae, who had her eyes narrowed, quickly turned to glance at Reutrina.

“Even if Young Master Riley is not here, we have right here the grand mage of Six Circles who killed Astroa of Solia Castle, isn’t that right? I was actually thinking the hospitality of this level is not good enough.”

Sera and Nainiae's eyes opened big.

"Pardon?"

"..."

It was because the higher ups announced to the public that the grand mage named Astroa was imprisoned in Solia Castle for violating the law about Narcotics.

"Just how do you know that?"

"Well, there are many people who wonder why Philisneon has the title of Duke, but... Unlike what's known to the people, our family does possess power that makes the family worthy."

Reutrina placed her fist just below her lips. Reutrina had a mysterious smile as she added,

"Just like the two of you have secrets that you cannot tell me, I also have things I cannot discuss. Ah! A woman's secret... I suppose I could call it that!"

Reutrina looked at Nainiae who had her eyes big. Reutrina snickered again.

"Well then, I'll excuse myself for a while. The banquet is still in

session, so… I can’t just leave the place easily.”

Nainiae watched Reutrina leaving the room. She then sighed quietly and turned to look at Riley who was still unable to wake up. Nainiae had bitter look on her face.

*

There was a human being who was born with the blessing of sword, the kind that happened only occasionally in a very long time. He was the one who could swing the holy sword and cut down evil.

‘We need to leave it to him.’

‘He can do it.’

The brave hero was the human being who was trusted by the people… He was the one who would always place the sense of justice first and help the weak. He must never be defeated by evil, and he must never falter.

‘That cannot be.’

‘He lost? That’s impossible.’

When he didn’t live up to the people’s expectations somehow, he had to prepare to face outcry that was far more than the

expectations he received.

‘By any chance, did he lose on purpose?’

‘If he was not here, things would not have turned out like this.’

The boy was thinking about his past life where he made his name known to the world as the brave hero.

“…”

From the birth and to the moment of death… From the moment he grabbed hold of the sword and when he shoot down the demon lord that was attempting to take the sky… Riley was thinking one after another about the events from his past life.

“Just what are you telling me to do?”

When he made moves to save people, he was told not to do it. When he didn’t do anything to save people, he was told to go save them. The boy was watching the brave hero like that from the back.

“They will die this way, and they will that way.”

Because of what people were saying, the brave hero was holding his head with his hands, uncertain about what to do. The young boy was watching him from the back.

“Instead of trying so hard to do something, it would be far better to not do anything.”

The boy had bitter look on his face.

“Lower your body so others won’t be able to see you at all. If there are others who might get in your way, kill them before they become trouble later. Like that, just keep quiet and… live comfortably. That’s better.”

The young boy mumbled, but his former self in his past life seemed like he didn’t hear it at all. The former self only swung his sword.

“… That’s enough.”

The boy said to himself in the past life.

‘If I was faster…’

As if he didn’t hear it, himself in the past life started to criticize himself. The boy crumpled his face.

‘If I was just a little bit…’

Himself from the past life was thinking people died all because of himself. To repent for their death, he had been relentlessly

swinging or throwing the sword although his body was being drenched in curses.

“Hey, that’s enough. It’s about time for you to stop…”

Riley extended his arm out to stop himself in the past life. At that moment, something small came flying toward him and started to show off its wings.

“…?”

It seemed like it was trying to show off its beauty. It was constantly flapping its wings. It was a butterfly.

“… Butterfly?”

Every time it flapped its wings, it spread small firefly lights. One thing unique about the butterfly was that its wings were… black.

Chapter 143 - Finger (1)

Once again, Nainiae looked at Riley who was sleeping soundly and then left the room.

<Sera is right! You need to refresh yourself too! Being cooped up like that can be unbearable, you see? It doesn't matter if you are a human or a summon spirit!>

When Nainiae got out of the room, Heliona appeared as if she was waiting for this moment. She stretch-yawned and insisted Nainiae should get some fresh air outside.

"You don't need to hush me. As you can see, I am on my way out."

Heliona was yapping away while pulling on Nainiae's hair. Nainiae smiled as if she just could not help how Heliona was. Nainiae was heading toward the outside of the mansion, but she stopped.

"Ah, Nainiae?"

"... Princess."

Nainiae ran into Reutrina. It seemed Reutrina was also intending to head outside for a walk. She was wearing relatively simpler clothes.

<Ah, it’s that ugly woman.>

Nainiae lowered her head, and Heliona whispered quietly to Nainiae’s ear.

‘Quiet.’

They were indebt to Philisneon’s family at the moment. Nainiae did not want Heliona’s words to be heard. Nainiae asked Heliona to keep her mouth in check. Nainiae raised her head and asked,

“Are you going out for a walk?”

“Yes, Ms. Nainiae, are you about to as well?”

Ever since Nainiae was pointed out as the grand mage of Six Circles, Reutrina had been addressing Nainiae respectfully.

“Yes, I am for a bit.”

“That’s good. Would you like to go together? I spent my whole life in the mansion, so I know a good place.”

Reutrina said she will be running into other nobilities everywhere because the banquet was in session. Reutrina said she knew a pathway that didn’t have many people around.

“Okay. I’ll accept your generous consideration.”

<Nainiae. Are you really going to follow her? Won’t it be better to just use invisibility magic and move around leisurely? It’s snowing too. The scenery at the rooftop would be pretty nice too. That woman makes me lose my appetite, you get it?>

‘Ms. Heliona, quiet…’

<… Ugh.>

Heliona was blowing up her cheeks. Nainiae barely calmed down Heliona and walked to the back door of the mansion by following Reutrina.

“When will it end?”

“Pardon?”

“I’m asking about the banquet.”

Reutrina walked out of the back door first and was stepping on the snow. With her hands resting on her back, Reutrina turned to look at Nainiae who followed her.

“From what I’ve heard, the banquet lasts for a week…”

Nainiae was wondering why Reutrina was asking her that question. Nainiae chose not to ask why. Instead, she gave a suitable answer.

“Yes, there were several strange incidents this year. The banquet is supposed to be for a week just like last year, but… the mood is suffocating. It is completely different from the last time.”

Reutrina used her right arm in fan shape swings to drag on the snow that was piled up in front of her. She then breathed out to form frosted mist as she put up an awkward look on her face.

“…”

“How is Young Master Riley?”

Nainiae looked up the sky and watched the snow falling. Having heard the question, Nainiae looked at Reutrina.

“It looks like nothing is happening. There does not appear to be any good progress.”

Although the fever subsided, Riley was still not waking up. Nainiae went around and described his condition indirectly. She looked upset. Nainiae started to fiddle with her fingers.

“Hm…”

Reutrina vacantly watched Nainiae's response. She then leisurely crouched down and started to form a lump of snow with what she brushed earlier with her right arm.

"Nainiae, by any chance..."

It seemed what Reutrina was about to ask was going to be a delicate matter. Reutrina paused for a moment, but then she asked directly.

"... do you like Young Master Riley?"

The area fell to silence.

"..."

At the pathway behind the mansion, there was just the tranquil sound of the snow falling and the crushing sound of the snow on Reutrina's hand.

"... It would be good for you to give up."

Nainiae was about to open her mouth. However, Reutrina broke the silence faster.

"Solia's Sword, Iphalleta... The name is not to be taken lightly. It's very likely that Count Stein will be against it too."

Crush...

Crush...

Reutrina crumpled the lump of snow and continued.

“What about your appearance? I suppose I can rate your skin as fair, but the scars on your right... They cannot be healed, right?”

<This lass is seriously!>

‘Ms. Heliona...’

<Ugh, why!>

‘Please calm down.’

<Ugggggggggh!>

Heliona wanted to unload a mouthful to Reutrina. However, Nainiae was shaking her head and stopping Heliona. Heliona looked frustrated.

“In that case, as I thought, it would be good for you to give up.”

Reutrina added that it would be good for Nainiae to give up. Nainiae stopped fiddling with her fingers. She looked at Reutrina’s

back and opened her mouth which remained silent for a long while.

“Even though I am a Seven Circles mage?”

“…?”

Her response was unexpected. Reutrina looked surprised when she looked back to see Nainiae.

“Seven Circles… If that is true, then I am a little surprised. At your age, you are at Seven Circles… I think others might mistake you as a dragon. Maybe your name will be mentioned in history books.”

Reutrina dusted off her hands and got up. Reutrina turned her body toward Nainiae and said,

“Still, don’t you think it will be hard?”

Nainiae vacantly stared at Reutrina. Reutrina silently smiled and started to fiddle with her own fingers just like how Nainiae was earlier.

“A ring… you cannot wear one, can you?”

“…”

Reutrina was piercing at the heart of the matter in Nainiae. Nainiae's face crumpled for the first time since they came out for the walk.

"You had been concerned about that for a long time, haven't you?"

Nainiae was not able to talk back. She just pulled her chin. Reutrina narrowed her eyes and said,

"In that case, I guess it won't work."

"I..."

Reutrina once again said it won't work. Having heard what she said, Nainiae tightened her fist.

"... Puup!"

Perhaps Reutrina thought Nainiae's reaction was adorable. She broke into laughter, waved her hand around and said,

"Nainiae, wedding ring is to be worn on your left hand. You wear the engagement ring on your right hand."

"... Pardon?"

It seemed Reutrina found making fun of Nainiae to be amusing. She steadily smiled and looked at Nainiae's left hand. As if there was nothing to be concerned about, Reutrina said,

"If you were concerned about your right hand, then don't worry too much. Your left hand is fine."

"Ah..."

Nainiae blushed.

"Puuhup... You are adorable."

Reutrina held her stomach and laughed. There were some tears on her eyes from laughing so much. Reutrina wiped them off with fingers and asked,

"Of the books you read at the Rainfield during the summer, it seems there wasn't one about a basic knowledge like this? Is that right?"

"...?!"

Not only did Reutrina find out about something Nainiae had been worrying about for a long time, Reutrina was asking a very specific question about something that happened. Wondering what it was about, Nainiae furrowed her brows.

Chapter 144 - Finger (2)

Heliona answered what Nainiae was curious about. Now, Heliona asked what she was curious about.

<By the way, you said you will go meet the spirit yourself? Have you figured out where?>

Heliona was asking if Nainiae figured out where ‘the place where the black wings fly between white snow. The place where bright song surge without sound’ was.

“… No.”

Nainiae shook her head.

<Then what is it?>

“I’m going to use the eye.”

Nainiae lightly brushed away the long hair to her right. She showed her right eye and asked again.

“Ms. Heliona. You said you have met that spirit before, right?”

<Huh? Ah, yes…>

Heliona was facing Nainiae's white eye. Heliona had vacant look on her face and nodded.

"Please think about the spirit. Please think about the spirit in as much detail as possible."

Nainiae strained her right eye as she spoke. Heliona had awkward look on her face, and Nainiae started to glare at her with piercing gaze.

<Ah... okay!>

It seemed Heliona was feeling uncomfortable with facing Nainiae's gaze. Heliona avoided her gaze and started to think about the summon spirit that she was supposed to introduce to Nainiae.

"..."

Strange atmosphere was flowing between Nainiae and Heliona. Sera looked back and forth between the two. It seemed Sera realized she should not step in. She took a step back and checked up on them.

'This is the first time for me to use the eye on a summon spirit, and I had never tried to locate a summon spirit with this either, but...'

It seemed Nainiae was nervous. She firmly closed her lips and looked at Heliona. Gradually, the outlines of the scenery started to

form in Nainiae's head.

'I'll definitely...'

Rumors about her spread recently inside the mansion. The Nobilities were talking about her as if it was a snack for their drinks. Nainiae was doing this so they won't be saying this like 'it is too bad, but that Lazy-Sword will have to part ways with that maid.'

'I'll definitely!'

It was also because she won't remain silent about the things Reutrina said and added that they were jokes. Nainiae gathered power in her eye as much as she could.

'... I can see it!'

The outline of the scenery became clear. What appeared to be fireflies could be seen in her right eye.

"Kuk?!"

It seemed the visual was too bright. Nainiae cringed, and Sera asked out of concern.

"Nainiae!"

<Are you all right?>

Concerned, Sera and Heliona asked. As if there was nothing to worry, Nainiae put forth her right arm and said,

“It’s all right. Jut for a moment... I felt throbbing pain for a bit, that’s all.”

She felt pain inside her eye, so she cringed for a moment. However, Nainiae have not blinked once. It was still steadily gazing upon Heliona.

“I found it. Almost... Just a little further.”

Heliona looked at Nainiae’s eye. Nainiae’s right eye was shaking, unable to focus. Heliona raised her hand, trying to say that Nainiae was going to overexert herself at this rate.

<Nainiae, that’s enough... I think it is...>

To ask her to hold just a little longer, Nainiae raised her hand and cast barrier. She continued to gaze at Heliona.

‘I found it!’

She screamed in pain. Nainiae covered her right eye with both of her hands and lowered her upper body.

“… Uuuuk.”

“Nainiae!”

Nainiae was faltering. Sera came to support her and asked as she wiped off the sweats on Nainiae’s face.

“Are you all right?”

“… Yes.”

“I have told you so many times, haven’t I? I told you not to overdo things! Young Master would not be pleased with this either!”

“I am sorry. I was being stubborn just now… I admit that. However, I found it.”

“Pardon?”

Sill covering her right eye with her hands, Nainiae raised her upper body back up. With her left eye, Nainiae looked at Heliona and said,

“The place where the black wings fly between white snow. The place where bright song surge without sound.”

She looked exhausted, but the look on her face seemed Nainiae was overjoyed when she mumbled the riddle. Still supported by Sera, Nainiae slowly turned her head.

“That place is…”

As she said, the place that Nainiae turned to after looking at Heliona was really not far.

“…?”

<…?>

Out of the blue, Nainiae was looking at Riley. Sera and Heliona both had confused look on their faces as they tilted their heads.

*

“Um…”

Although it was for a brief moment, Reutrina got to go on a night walk with Nainiae. Reutrina narrowed her eyes as soon as she returned to her room.

“She is at Seven Circles? How fierce.”

Having realized that the maid from the Iphalleta Family was at

Seven Circles, not Six, she was thinking she should alter her plans.

"If she is at the same level as Astroa, I think it will be tough. I heard she was at Six Circles during spring... It's only been half a year, so how could she grow so fast?"

She untied the string that was tying her hair. Reutrina shook her head and flaunted her hair waiving in the air as she walked toward the terrace.

"Should I have stayed there and try to read her thoughts some more?"

The terrace was filled with snow piled up.

"No."

Just like what she did when she was out for a walk, she gathered and lumped up the snow. With cold look on her face, Reutrina muttered,

"Nothing good will come from doing too much."

It was hard to believe that Reutrina right now was the same person that spoke with Nainiae earlier. Reutrina was exuding unbelievably deadly aura.

"... Um?"

Soon, Reutrina found something that flew through the snowing night sky. She extended her right arm out.

“A carrier pigeon?”

It was a black winged eagle. It had a long, folded letter that was attached on its leg.

“There, there.”

With its talons wide open, the eagle landed on Reutrina’s arm. As if it was trying to tell Reutrina to check the message quickly, it screamed once.

“All right, is it sent by our mad dog?”

It seemed Reutrina figured out who sent the letter. She had a shady smile on her face as she opened the letter.

“… It is.”

She slowly read the content of the letter. She then clicked her tongue and let out frustration.

“I thought this will happen, but still, looks like they didn’t catch him. How foolish.”

She started to flinch her shoulder.

"..."

To summarize the content of the letter, which had two main points, 'we lost the bastard we had been chasing, and two of our comrades were done in.'

"Huh."

The good news she was expecting were nowhere to be seen. Instead, the letter only had bad news. Reutrina started to crumple the letter mercilessly.

"Huh..."

Reutrina was looking down at the letter and shaking her shoulders. The following words were reflecting on her eyes.

[From the Right Leg, to the Head]

Wondering if she read the letter wrong, Reutrina slowly looked over the letter once more. It seemed she was agitated.

"haah... haah..."

She blushed and started to moan in excitement.

“Ah… Ah ah… As I thought! I didn’t see it wrong!”

Between her lips which was moaning just now, her tongue slowly came out and started to lick around the lips.

“… I want…”

Glamorously, as if she was seducing someone, as if she was trying to hold down something boiling inside her, she bit her finger. She licked the finger and muttered,

“… I want to have…”

Like a fox full of lust during the mating season, she was blushing red and mumbling as she licked her finger. Her eyes were… burning with purple light.

“Even more, I must have…”

Chapter 145 - Black Butterfly (1)

“Actually, I agonized over this. I wondered if I should have used this method sooner... We cannot afford to hesitate anymore. The reason why Young Master is unable to wake up... I need to go find it myself in his dream.”

Nainiae looked at Riley who was asleep and occasionally struggling. She was aware that he was thinking about someone. However, she didn’t know what kind of nightmare he was having.

This was why she was trying to confirm what it was.

Finding out what kind of nightmare Riley is having, and finding out why he is suffering so much... These were far more important than finding the spirit that would turn her into an artificial summon spirit.

“Ms. Sera.”

Heliona looked gloomy as if she had given up. Nainiae gently brushed her wings. Nainiae turned to look at Sera and said,

“I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“That means?”

<Entering a dream means, as I said earlier, it is a magic where she

will need to put her consciousness on the line to walk in to the dream. So… while she is using the magic, she will become defenseless for the duration.>

"Defenseless?"

"I'll probably fall asleep like how Young Master is."

Sera understood the explanation. With petrified face, Sera nodded and opened her arms to hug Nainiae.

"…"

Sera, without saying any words, embraced Nainiae. She released Nainiae from her arms and said,

"I'll wait for your return. Come back with Young Master Riley."

"… Yes."

In stiff voice, Sera said to Nainiae to come back. Nainiae also said she will come back later in stiff voice as she walked toward Riley who was lying on the bed.

"Well then…"

Nainiae looked back at Heliona and Sera for the last time. She

nodded lightly and started to move the mana inside her.

‘Dream Link.’

It was a magic that she learned after becoming Seven Circles mage. Nainiae’s body started to get surrounded by feint silver light.

‘Just a little while longer…’

With gentle look on her face, Nainiae looked at Riley. She got on her knees in front of the bed and brought her hands together to lightly grab on to Riley’s hand.

‘Wait just a little while longer.’

The silver light, which was surrounding Nainiae gradually, slowly moved, and it moved toward Riley through the joined hands.

“Nainiae!”

As if she was sending a prayer, Nainiae was on her knees with both of her hands together. Her body looked like it was about to tip over to the side. Sera barely supported her before it happened.

<… I think the spelled worked correctly.>

Asleep, Nainiae was in Sera's arms. Heliona looked at Nainiae and redirected her gaze toward Riley who was still asleep soundly on the bed.

<Have Nainiae lie on the side. From now on, all we can do is wait.>

"... Yes."

*

Nainiae opened her eyes inside the darkness.

"..."

The darkness came to her so suddenly, and Nainiae was not used to it yet. It was not easy for her to regain her sight. She extended her right arm to the front and recited a spell.

"Light."

She used Light, the most basic magic where the caster floats a sphere of light on the palm. Although she cast Light, for some reason... nothing appeared above her palm.

'I cannot use magic here?'

She could not feel mana either, so she realized she could not use magic here. She lowered her arm and started to look around.

‘It’s dark.’

She looked everywhere, but the entire area was just darkness. She started to strain her eyes.

It was in hope that her eye would get adjusted to the darkness sooner, even if it was just a little bit. Unfortunately, she could not see anything even though several minutes have passed.

“… Young Master!!”

With her vision still not restored, she decided to try sound. She put both of her hands together in front of her mouth and called Riley in loud voice.

Young Master…

Young Master…

Only echoes came back. She didn’t get any other response. She started to walk aimlessly.

‘As Ms. Heliona said… This place is like a maze.’

It didn’t feel complicated like a maze, but the fact that she couldn’t tell the directions apart, left, right, top or bottom, was the problem.

All there was just endless darkness. It was to the point where she was not certain if she was walking forward, backward, on land or sky.

‘I don’t have any other way in particular.’

Nainiae tried stepping hard on the floor. She also tried hopping on where she stood. She tried many ideas, and she came to the conclusion that walking would be best. She started to move her legs.

‘For now, walking aimlessly is the only thing I can do.’

Inside dark space where she could not even use magic, Nainiae walked alone for quite a long time. Instead of sense of fear, sadness and pity came forward on Nainiae’s face.

‘Young Master was in a place like this all by himself…’

Because the place she entered was Riley’s dream, Nainiae naturally was concerned about Riley first. She bit her lower lips and tightened her fist.

‘Don’t blame yourself, Nainiae. You have made up your mind, haven’t you?’

Nainiae shook her heads left and right and was about to walk again. However…

“… Huk. Huhuk!”

She heard the cry of a child coming from somewhere. Nainiae raised her ears.

‘This sound…’

She looked around everywhere, and the space was still filled with complete darkness. However, she could hear the cry clearly.

She slowly walked toward the direction where the cry was coming from. The sound was becoming more clearer as she walked, and she started to walk faster.

“… Haaah, haaah!”

Soon, she found a small firefly light at where the sound was coming from. Nainiae was having hard time catching her breath as she looked at the firefly light.

‘A firefly light?’

“Huhuk… Huk…”

Nainiae thought the crying sound was coming from the light. She slowly extended her arm out to the front.

“Young Master.”

Perhaps it got scared because Nainiae had horrid looking face with scars, her hand was missing fingers and her voice was torn a little from exhaustion. The firefly light tried to go away into the distance. Nainiae vacantly opened her mouth.

“Young Master…”

Watching the light moving further away, Nainiae blamed herself who was lacking in many ways. From behind Nainiae, a small butterfly flapped its wings and approached her.

“…?”

It came flying in silence. Nainiae, who had gloomy look on her face, turned and looked at the butterfly.

The butterfly’s wings were black.

The black winged butterfly came flying like that and sat on Nainiae’s shoulder. As if it was resting, it started to flap its wings lightly.

Flap, Flap…

The wings were moving in a regular pattern. It was like a clock work.

“…”

Nainiae was watching the butterfly on her shoulder. Out of curiosity, Nainiae carefully reached for the butterfly with her left hand’s index finger.

<… You are Nainiae, right?>

“…?!”

Breaking through the silence, the voice could be heard, and Nainiae flinched her shoulders. She started to look around the surrounding.

At the same time, it seemed the butterfly on her shoulder was surprised. It started to flap its wings and fly away from her.

“Who is it?!”

It was not Riley’s voice at least.

It sounded like she had heard the voice before. The voice was

beautiful like a pearl rolling on a silver plate. It was a woman's voice.

<I am sorry. I must have startled you.>

Nainiae started to look around her surroundings.

It was still all nothing but pitch-black. As if she became weary, Nainiae narrowed her eyes and said,

"Who could you be?"

When she asked, the black butterfly that flew off from Nainiae earlier started to spread small firefly lights around with flaps of its wings.

<... Please follow me.>

The butterfly lightly flapped its wings and flew toward her back as if it was trying to show her the way. Nainiae looked back at a firefly light where the crying sound could be heard. She eventually could not help but to follow the black butterfly.

<Ah, before we go, first...>

As if it forgot something, the voice said that.

"…?"

Nainiae was following the butterfly. Now, she vacantly blinked her eyes.

The scenery, which was nothing but black until now, started to become brighter slowly. This was why.

'Number of firefly lights are increasing?'

The firefly light where the crying sound came from, the firefly lights that were being spread by the black butterfly… their numbers started to increase one by one, and the scenery was starting to form.

<It would be good for you to see this first.>

Along with the voice, the view in front of Nainiae's eyes became completely clear. Nainiae, in disbelief, vacantly opened her mouth.

<The world that he used to live in.>

The place that she saw after the darkness cleared was the place where 'the black wings fly between white snow' and where 'bright song surge without sound.'

"…"

It appeared to be winter. There was snow falling on the street.

The road was covered in small, dark pebble like substance. There were carriages that looked similar but where different from each other. The carriages were moving around very quickly.

‘This is…’

There was a building with chimney that was bigger than a house. Black smoke was coming out of the chimney. It was piercing through the snow like ‘wings.’

There were buildings that were soaring to the sky, as if they could reach the sky’s ceiling. They had signs and windows that exuded various lights. They looked like they were ‘singing’ together.

They were the darkness and the firefly lights that Nainiae ran into when she first entered the dream.

“… By any chance…”

Nainiae vacantly mumbled.

<Yes, this place is…>

The voice answered,

<… his past life.>

Chapter 146 - Black Butterfly (2)

“… U… Uuuup?!”

The man got dragged away by the hands. He didn’t even have the chance to scream. With surprised look, Nainiae strained her eyes big.

“Just now… what happened…”

“Those hands… They are the ones that Mr. Riley fought in his past life. To explain more precisely… he fought against the beings who were trapped underground where those hands popped out.”

“Young Master did?”

Nainiae muttered. Instead of a reply, the woman sent another firefly light toward Nainiae.

<Shoot them! Shoot more! Fuck! Brave hero? Is he not here yet!>

<Captain! We are running out of bullets!>

<God damn it. Have the super naturals stand to the front at least! We need to buy time in anyway we can, shouldn’t we! Are you going to let all people behind us die?>

In the memory from this firefly light, Nainiae saw men holding

black staff looking objects on their shoulders and aiming at the monsters in front of them.

<T... That is! I don't see any super naturals around!>

<What?>

<I think they must have... ran away after noticing the demon's level.>

<Are you serious?!>

<Captain! Our bullets!>

<God damn it!>

Frustrated, the man threw away the staff that he held on his shoulder. He tightly closed his eyes, thinking this was the end. It was at that moment. A voice, familiar to Nainiae, could be heard.

<... Everyone, please move back. I'll fight it from now on.>

"Ah..."

Nainiae mumbled after hearing the voice. The men who were wielding the staffs muttered.

“… Young Master!”

<T… The brave hero!>

<We are saved! We are saved now!>

Facing a large monster that was coming to kill him, and with the gazes of the people with high expectations behind him, Riley was drawing the sword from his waist.

“…”

Although for a brief moment, Nainiae’s face brightened after hearing Riley’s voice inside the memory. However, having discovered the look on Riley’s face, which was in shambles, Nainiae turned back to the vacant look as if she just lost her soul.

“… How was it?”

The woman in black, who was watching the look on Nainiae’s face, carefully asked.

“He looked… exhausted.”

Nainiae said as she bit her lips. The woman in black nodded and started to explain about Riley from his past life.

“When he was three years old, he held the Holy Sword, the sword that can only be held by the one allowed by the fate. With that, be became the Brave Hero. Since then, he had swung sword without a day of rest, and…”

“Brave Hero?”

Nainiae muttered, and the woman in black continued in low voice.

“When he was seven, he killed a human being for the first time. It was a criminal.”

“… Pardon?”

“When he was nine, he was betrayed by the teacher who promised to lead him to the right way. He lost his own sister because of that teacher. That man raped Riley’s sister.”

“Wait, just what…”

“When he was eleven, he killed his teacher.”

“…”

“When he was twelve, including the demons he slayed, the number of heads he cut down was nearing a thousand.”

The woman in black took a moment to breathe and continued with the rest.

“When he was fourteen, he lost his parents because he was betrayed by a friend he trusted. Even at this moment, just because he ‘held the Holy Sword,’ to live up to people’s expectations, he was slaying the demons.”

“To live up to… the people’s expectations?”

“When he was sixteen, he finally learned that the friend he had been with all this time killed his parents. Having lost his mind, Riley hunted him down and killed him. However… while he was away, many people who were expecting his arrival to save them were killed by the demons.”

“That is…”

“When he was seventeen, people started to say that people are dying because the Brave Hero existed. Because of this, he stopped taking actions. As of result, half of the humanity lost their lives… Ironically, it was the Brave Hero who got all of the blame and punishments.”

“Punishments? How?”

“After this, he was blessed by… No… He was cursed by the Priestess of this world so he could not commit suicide. Since then, he had been swinging sword like a slave. Also…”

Every story was a tragedy. Nainiae's lips was shaking since a while ago.

"When he was nineteen, many innocent people were branded as demons or witches because of bad judgments of the Priestess. They cursed him as they were slain by his sword."

As if there was more, the woman in black continued.

"The Priestess' blessing and curses from the demons and the citizens... With all of them mixed in, he held all of the pain in his chest and continued to swing the sword. However, he only had one body... Occasionally, there were instances where he could not save a side because he could not be everywhere at once."

"..."

"When he was twenty-two, the children from a city that he could not save came back as demons... In the end, he had to cut those children down with his own hands."

The woman in black handed one of the firefly lights to Nainiae. The woman quietly pulled her chin.

<Mister... Mister... Who are you?>

<Fool... Cholok... Take a look at the sword I'm holding.>

<Holy… Sword? Then, are you a brave warrior?>

<… That's right.>

<'Hehe. That… is good… Mister… Then you came to… kill us?>

<… That's right.>

<Yes…>

<Fool. Why… Cholok… Why are you happy?>

<I should be happy… Mister… You said you will stop us, so…>

<Is that so? I guess that is right. You should be happy.>

<Mister… I have a favor to ask. Can I ask you just one favor?>

<I am sorry, but I don't take requests from monsters…>

"…"

Hearing Riley's voice coming through the head, Nainiae tightly grabbed her chest as if she was going to tear off her heart.

<We are not monsters.>

<Mister, we are not monsters. Really.>

<Huk… Mommy… I want to see mommy.>

<…>

<We are like this now because of you.>

<…>

<So, I'll ask you for one favor.>

<Comfortably, without pain, kill us like that.>

<Mister, it hurts so much. We are suffering so much.>

<Mister, hurry.>

In Nainiae's eyes, there was Riley, who was raising the sword with tears in his eyes, being reflected on.

Watching this, Nainiae also ended up shedding a drop of tear.

"… There are more. Would you like to hear?"

“…”

The scene from earlier, which showed Riley swinging sword in tears, disappeared. Now, the woman in black appeared again and asked. Nainiae lowered her head and shook it left and right.

“… When he was twenty-six, he lost his life when he defeated the demon lord.”

As if she was trying to say that this was the last, the woman in black muttered in quiet voice and gave Nainiae another firefly light.

<You have defeated me. So, how does it feel?>

<Since you asked…>

<…>

<… I’m tired.>

<What?>

<I’m tired… Honestly, I’m tired.>

The firefly light allowed Nainiae to hear the last words that Riley

spoke in his past life. The woman wiped off the tears from Nainiae's eyes.

"I had always been feeling sorry toward him."

The woman in black repeated what she said earlier.

"The fact that he didn't lose his mind to the very end... I still cannot believe that. Now... it seems the memories which he had been suppressing tightly are in danger of bursting."

Nainiae realized why Riley was refusing to sleep. With piercing gaze, Nainiae looked at the woman.

"So... at least in this life... I tried to let him rest. I tried. Unfortunately... The situation came to where I now have no choice but to seek his help again."

"..."

"If we left it be, many people will die. Not just the people in this world, but the people in your world will also be in danger."

The woman in black looked at the view below once and then Nainiae once. She unveiled her face and showed her white skin as she lowered her head down.

"You are..."

The beautiful face that was behind the veil was very similar to someone's face.

"... not a summon spirit?"

Nainiae asked the woman. The woman looked at Nainiae and nodded.

"That's right. I ended up deceiving Andal and Heliona, but... I am not a summon spirit."

Standing in front of Nainiae's eyes, there was a beautiful woman who 'looked exactly like herself.' It seemed Nainiae figured out the true identity of the woman. Nainiae pointed at her right eye and asked,

"You... You gave me this eye to me, didn't you?"

"..."

"Unlike myself, who has horrid looking appearance, you are the most beautiful person I had ever seen... You must be..."

Chapter 147 - Black Butterfly (3)

*

“Nainiae is... not waking up.”

It was at the Duke Philisneon mansion’s infirmary.

A boy and a girl were lying next to each other on the bed. Sera was looking at them. With her head supported by her palm, she sighed deeply.

<It’s only been two days.>

“It’s already been two days.”

<We have no other choice but to wait.>

“Ugh...”

<Ah! Would you stop sighing! That’s going to reduce lifespan!>

“That’s because you are a summon spirit, Ms. Heliona! I am a human. I grow ever so anxious with passage of time, so I cannot stand still!”

Heliona flinched after hearing Sera’s shouting. Heliona realized

that the passage of time felt by a human being was different from a summon spirit's perspective. Feeling awkward, Heliona scratched her cheek.

<Calm down for now. It's still true that there is nothing we can do, isn't that right? Are you going to learn Seven Circles magic like Nainiae and take on the challenge?>

Heliona mumbled as she proposed the idea. Sera shook her head to say that was beyond her. Sera said,

"No, that is..."

It was said that even talented ones took five years to get to Three Circles, yet going for the Seven Circles?

Sera came to sudden realization just what kind of incredible height Nainiae reached. With disappointed look on her face, Sera dropped her head.

<See?>

"... Yes. I am sorry."

It seemed Sera was thinking what she said earlier was too much. Sera lowered her head and apologized. Heliona blushed as if she got embarrassed. She fetched another idea.

<Why don’t you try praying!>

“Pray?”

<You guys have that goddess Irenetsa or whatever, right? I heard that humans do things like that and hold out when going gets tough.>

“Well, that is true, but… I’m the kind that doesn’t exactly believe in religions, so…”

Sera explained that she came to not believe in the existence of the goddess while she lived in the Lower Solia. Sera then asked a question that came up in her head.

“By the way, where did you hear that? Sighing will reduce lifespan, and people pray when things are tough.”

<That? My master, obviously…>

Her master… She was talking about Andal, the dragon who transformed into a human form to be on an amusement tour in the human world. She had picked up all sorts of stuff about humans from him. Heliona stopped in middle of the sentence.

“… Master?”

It was because she was not supposed to disclose things about her

master.

<Nainiae! I've heard them from Nainiae!>

She quickly changed her words. Instead of Andal, Heliona now said that she heard it from Nainiae. Sera was accepting her response, saying 'I see.' Having noticed that Sera bought it, Heliona secretly sighed in relief.

<... Phew...>

Sera was nodding as if she believed her, and Heliona was sighing. At that moment, sounds of steps could be heard outside the door. It was coming closer to the room.

"Um?"

It sounded like the steps belonged to a woman. It made tap sounds. Sera turned her head toward the door and went 'sniff sniff' with her nose to check the smell that was approaching.

'This scent... Is it the Princess?'

Sera got up from the chair that she had placed at the front of the bed. She then carefully approached the door.

Knock Knock

As soon as Sera got to the door, two or three knocks could be heard.

“Excuse me. Are you there?”

“Yes. What is it?”

“For the past few days, both Sera and Nainiae... I don’t think I have seen any of you. I came to ask if things were all right. Is Young Master’s condition still the same?”

Nainiae was practically like a lifeline. Now, even Nainiae was at a state where they had no way of knowing when she would wake up, just like Riley.

So, they decided to keep this a secret. Sera even decided not to leave the room for the time being. Having heard Reutrina’s question, Sera pulled her chin and said,

“Yes. His condition worsened, so...”

“Ah...”

“I’ll contact you when there are any improvements.”

With that as the end of her response, Sera was going to move away from the door. At that moment, Reutrina asked carefully from the outside,

“… Excuse me. Is Nainiae in there?”

“…”

Sera was going to take back steps and go back to the bed. She flinched her shoulders after hearing the question.

“Sera?”

Sera hesitated, not knowing how to respond to the question. With her voice full of panic, Sera asked,

“J… Just now, what did you say?”

“Nainiae. I would like to speak to Nainiae for a moment.”

Talkak

“…?!”

With that sound, the door handle turned. Sera, who took back steps to move away from the door, got petrified.

“… Excuse me.”

‘I was sure I locked the door?’

The locked door opened as if it wasn’t at all. Reutrina in a dress leisurely waked in.

“Princess… Just what are you…”

Reutrina opened the locked door and entered forcibly. Sera was going to question Reutrina for her actions. However, feeling that Reutrina’s atmosphere was definitely different from the usual, Sera lost her words. She merely opened her mouth vacantly.

“… What’s this?”

Having entered the room, Reutrina seemed she was not interested in Sera who was just standing there vacantly. Instead, Reutrina saw Riley and Nainiae lying next to each other on the bed and wiggled her brows.

“… There’s no fever either.”

Reutrina looked at Riley and muttered in low voice.

“… Just sleeping?”

Afterwards, she looked at Nainiae. The tip of Reutrina’s mouth got twisted in bizarre angle.

“Two of them are, next to each other?”

It was not certain if she was satisfied or angry about Riley and Nainiae lying next to each other. Reutrina’s smile was to the point of sending chills down the spine. With that look on her face, she turned and looked at Sera, who was petrified.

“Ha, ahhaha…”

“P… Princess?”

<…?!>

When Sera carefully called Reutrina, Heliona, who was hiding behind Sera’s shoulder and watching the situation, panicked and screamed,

<… Sera! Watch out!!>

Despite her shouting, Sera, who was standing there vacantly, did not manage to respond. Her body was bent like a bow.

“Uuuubup?! Khuuuurk!!”

Her stomach was struck. Sera coughed out blood from her mouth. She got thrown outside as she shattered the glass window.

<Sera!!>

Having seen what just happened, Heliona tumbled and flew outside the window.

“Well then… With the hindrance now gone…”

Reutrina shook off her right fist that she swung at Sera and dusted it off. With seductive look on her face, Reutrina turned to look at Riley.

“Well then, shall we leisurely enjoy ourselves?”

She extended her white finger as if it was a snake. She started to use her finger to brush over Riley’s cheek. Reutrina’s eyes were saturated in purple.

“It’s such a waste that I’ll be throwing away the title of Princess, but…”

She let out her tongue and licked her lips. Reutrina smiled as she looked at Riley who was asleep.

“If it is you, Young Master, you will show me a wonderful memory, right? So that I won’t feel that losing my title was not a waste?”

Chapter 148 - Metamorphosis (1)

Nainiae muttered the name of the summon spirit. Looking at where the wind sound was coming from, Nainiae noticed that the room's window was shattered. The place was a mess.

'What happened...'

Because of the wind, only the curtain was flowing in the air and made noise. However, there was no response from anyone.

"Is there nobody around..."

Nainiae muttered. She was wiping the tear on her cheek, but she suddenly stopped mumbling.

'What is this?'

It was because the sensation she felt on her hand as she wiped off her face was different.

It was different from sticky and bulging skin that she had from the scar. It felt smooth and soft.

That was not the only thing that was different.

Something different could be felt from the hand she was using to wipe off the tears.

‘… Ah.’

She lowered the hand that she was using to wipe off the tears and checked the hand. Nainiae vacantly opened her mouth.

She realized that the two fingers, the ones that she lost because she bit them off during the experiment at the Magic Tower, were attached on her hand soundly.

*

Sera, who was bounced off to the outside of the window, was flinching the area near her eyes. She barely managed to get up.

“Uu…. Uuuuk…”

It could be said that she was fortunate to have fallen on soft snow.

Feeling the snow wind grazing her face, she was barely able to come to her senses. In pain, she cringed and started to groan.

‘Ribs are…’

Holding her side, Sera checked how seriously injured she was. She realized that the situation was quite dire. Sera looked at the window she flew off from.

‘Just now, my body refused to move.’

Earlier, Sera did hear Heliona’s warning. However, Sera was unable to move. She was about to ponder why, but she knew that there was a more pressing matter at hand at the moment. Sera stopped her thoughts and got up.

“… Young Master… Nainiae.”

It was because Sera was concerned for Riley and Nainiae who were left inside the infirmary. She was worried about what Reutrina would do to them.

‘That intensity… It’s dangerous.’

Sera thought about how Reutrina quickly closed the distance and struck her on the stomach. Thinking about Reutrina’s arm, Sera felt the pain in her ribs and cringed once again. Sera faltered.

<Sera!>

Tak!

With the sound of snapping fingers, the sound of flame burning up could be heard. Sera, who was vacantly staring up at the window at the infirmary, looked to the side.

<Good. Looks like your head is still okay.>

“Ms. Heliona.”

<Are you all right? Do you think you can move?>

Heliona had serious look on her face. Sera struggled and nodded. Sera blew out frozen mist and said,

“I am all right, so Young Master… and Nainiae…”

Sera asked Heliona to quickly return to the room and stop Reutrina. With serious face, Heliona shook her head and said,

<It’s impossible.>

“Why… Kuuuk!”

<Because I’m a summon spirit.>

It was a dare situation. However, it seemed Heliona was maintain her composure. She slowly explained why it was impossible.

<Summon spirits like me cannot interfere with matter in this world alone. Because this is not the world of the summon spirits, even if I touch something, I’ll just go straight through. It would be a different story for an artificial summon spirit who completed

forming a contract, but…>

“In that case!”

<Sera, calm down. About that wretched bitch who swung her fist, I placed a seed of fire on her in secret.>

“A seed of fire?”

<In human’s words, an observer? Tracker? Well, I placed something like that on her. What was unusual was that Reutrina didn’t touch Nainiae at all. She only took Young Master Riley…>

Heliona fiddled with her chin and organized her thoughts. She looked back at Sera and muttered as if the situation could not be helped.

<I really think you and I should form a temporary contract.>

“A temporary contract? What’s that about…”

<We don’t have time. We need to move quickly. It looks like the injury on the side of your chest looks pretty serious, but you need to tough it out and move.>

“Ms. Heliona?”

<We don’t have time to exchange questions. For now, just do as I ask. Nainiae asked you to look after them, didn’t she? Are you going to disappoint her?>

Sera flinched after hearing Heliona’s question. Sera nodded as if she understood. Heliona spread her wings wide and said,

<All right. Fortunately, you appear to be born with some compatibility with summon spirits. This is a temporary contract, but you won’t have to worry about there being any negative side effects.>

With that, Heliona closed her eyes slowly and raised her right hand to the front.

<I, rocking flame Heliona shall form a temporary contract with Sera and bring forth flame in this reality to bless the fire that will remain after spreading ashes above white ground.>

Heliona mumbled incomprehensible words and put forth her hand. Sera put forth her hand forward as well as if she was mesmerized. She touched Heliona’s small palm with her own.

<… It’s complete.>

With their hands touching, their hands both burned in flame.

‘This is?’

Sera was a little surprised by the fire on her hand. However, she realized it was not hot to her hand. Surprised, Sera opened her eyes big and looked at Heliona.

<Sera, you are not a mage but a swordsman, right? In that case, you will have to do this in different ways than my master or Nainiae.>

Heliona sat on Sera's shoulder and took a brief moment to calm her breathing. Heliona looked at Sera and said,

<Draw your swords, Sera. Young Master Riley... His situation is not very good. We need to go save him.>

"Really?"

<He is being groped... How should I put this? He is being violated? Anyway, it is leading to something repulsive.>

Sera was shocked to hear what Heliona said. With hardened look on her face, Sera drew her swords from the waist.

Whooowaaarururururuk.

Soon, just like what was on her hand, the swords that Sera drew also started to burn up in majestic flame that was of same color as Heliona's wings.

‘This is?’

<They are my flames. This is your first time, so it will be difficult for you to handle them. Still, try your best to control them. They will help you break through.>

“Break through? What…”

With the pain in her ribs, Sera faltered against the snow wind as she asked. However, Heliona did not answer.

“Ah… I see.”

With her own eyes, Sera confirmed what she had to break through.

“…”

At the entrance of the mansion that Sera was trying to go back in, there were guards with eyes that lacked focus. It was as if they were mesmerized, under influence of something. The guards were wielding swords and spears and standing against Sera.

Chapter 149 - Metamorphosis (2)

<There are about fifteen guards to the front. I don't know much about swords, so I cannot tell you how strong they are, but... It won't be a problem for you. Just do as you usually do.>

Heliona mumbled in a serious tone. However, her voice contained confidence in Sera. Heliona was certain that Sera will be victorious.

'Do as I usually do...'

Having heard Heliona's confident words, Sera looked at her swords and the edges burning with flame in full force. Nervous, Sera bit her lips.

<Don't worry. Don't be nervous either. I, the daughter of the Summon Spirit King, will provide you with definite support, so... Just think of it as an honor and enjoy.>

Heliona added that Sera should enjoy this coming battle. It seemed hearing that was like igniting the fuse. Sera tightly held the swords and started to march forward.

Step, another step...

Initially, she moved as if she was just walking. Her legs started to move faster. Soon, she was charging in full speed.

‘I feel like my side is going to break down, but…’

Sera’s swords clashed sharply with the guards’ weapons, and the collision spread the flame from her swords.

‘… I don’t have the time to… hesitate.’

Melting the wind blowing around her, Sera charged toward the entrance of the mansion. She fixed her grips on her swords. With force, she swung the swords toward the spears that the guards were aiming at her.

“…!”

When the weapons collided, half a tempo later, Heliona’s flame on the swords shook and engulfed the guards.

“Uk.”

The guards all had somewhat dense look on their eyes. After being engulfed by Heliona’s flame, one after the other, they started to regain their senses.

“Uuuak!”

“F… Fire! Fire!”

After coming to their senses, the guards rolled on the ground in hurry to put out the fires on their bodies. Sera observed other guards who were charging at her.

‘What is this? Their eyes… something is off.’

Somehow, their eyes looked as if they were all hypnotized. While swinging her swords and looking at the guards’ eyes, she thought about how she could not dodge Reutrina’s strike earlier.

‘As if they were mesmerized by something, they are… being controlled?’

They had emotionless expressions. They were not making any sounds through their mouths. They just kept quiet and swung their spears. Having noticed this, Sera gritted her teeth and swung her swords in wide sweep to deflect the tip of the spears that were coming at her.

‘Kuk…’

In middle of the large swing motion, Sera felt the pain on her broken ribs. Sera crumpled her face.

<Don’t act like it hurts. Nainiae would have withstood it.>

“… Uk.”

Sera cringed after hearing what Heliona said. She endured the pain and continued her next movement.

‘That’s right. I can… endure this.’

She turned her body in circle and fixed the grips on her two swords. She swept away the weapons that were coming at her once again and started to dance.

She spun her fingers and changed the stance on one of the swords.

She moved her legs to get to different spots.

After her swords were swung, half a tempo later, the flames followed and waved as if they were cheering Sera.

It was like a fire dance.

“… Aaaaak!!”

Because of the pain, she roared as if she was screaming in pain. She pushed away four guards at once and finished her move.

“Uuuuuaaak!”

“F… Fire!”

Following the swords' trajectories, the flames came later and got on four guards who were charging toward Sera. The flames made the guards to come back to their senses.

"Ugh... Ugh..."

Sera swung the sword and dusted off her wrist. There were guards, who finally got a grip, staring at her. Not giving a damn about their stares, Sera looked around to check the situation.

"You are... a maid from the Iphalleta Family?"

One of the guards remembered that this was Sera, the one he met last time at the gate who pleaded with him to let them in. The guard, wondering what was happening at the moment, vacantly blinked his eyes.

<Given the situation, you should ask him for help.>

"Pardon? But..."

<Looking at these humans' eyes, I am certain that they were being controlled by something until a moment ago. It must be like hypnosis magic.>

'... Certainly...'

Sera must have been thinking the same. Sera nodded and said to the guards who had confused looks.

“Can you get up?”

“Ah, yes.”

Sera had one of her swords pierce the ground and then extended her hand toward one of the guards. Meanwhile, she swung the other hand with the sword to her back.

Whuwaaaarurururru!

Following the sword’s trajectory, the empty air got caught in fire and repelled the vacant-eyed guards from charging in.

“Uk?”

“Those guys, why are they?”

The guards were ordered by Reutrina to treat the Riley’s group well. The guard was confused from seeing his fellow guards’ behavior.

“I am sorry. There is not much time.”

She helped the guard to stand, drew the sword she had stuck on

the ground earlier, and asked for help.

“Can you please help me? Please stop those people for me.”

The guard was trying to remember what he was doing until earlier. He tried, but he couldn’t remember. He asked Sera,

“Just what is happening? Can you please explain?”

“I don’t know either. I am about to go and find out. I need to protect my Young Master.”

The guard looked at Sera and gulped.

“…”

Her clothes were crumpled as if she was struck by something blunt on her stomach. Things on her hair and shoulders were not snow. They were broken glass pieces. These were the reasons why.

“Please.”

Despite the broken ribs, she endured the pain and lowered her head. It seemed her sincerity worked. After a brief moment to think, the guard tightly grabbed his spear and said,

“… I understand.”

“Just one thing. Please explain to us what happe…”

The guard was gazing on his fellow guards’ eyes as he continued words. It was at that moment.

“… Kiiiiaaaaaaak!!”

A creepy scream, almost like a beastly roar, could be heard from inside the mansion.

“…?!”

“…?!”

<…?!>

Having heard the scream, not just guards and Sera, but even Heliona, who was being next to Sera and protecting her, flinched. It was that sickening to hear.

“This scream is?”

The scream sounded like someone was cringing in pain. Sera, who was standing there with blank look, soon guessed who it must be and mumbled in low voice,

“… Princess Reutrina?”

It was Princess Reutrina’s scream.

“I’m sorry. I’ll leave the rest to you!”

“W… Wait!”

Sera could not bear to stand there anymore. She dashed past the guard and ran into the mansion. The guard, who put his hand forward in her direction, realized his fellow guards approaching from behind. The guard ground his teeth.

“Kuuk? Hey! What’s wrong with you!”

The guard shouted in panic. However, as if the other guards were deaf, they tumbled around with dull eyes, only interested in catching Sera who just ran into the mansion.

*

Awakened from her sleep, Nainiae was alone in the room. She barely managed to come to her senses and run out of the room.

‘… There’s nobody around?’

Although she was outside of the room, she didn’t see any of the

servants who were there to keep them under surveillance. Nainiae narrowed her eyes and looked around.

She checked to the ends of the corridor to the left and right. She realized there was nobody around. Nainiae thought about the broken window earlier.

‘Something is happening.’

Instead of wondering about how her face and fingers changed... she was more anxious about Riley, Sera and Heliona. Nainiae tried putting her hand on her chest near the heart.

‘Mana is... still running normally.’

Unlike inside the dream earlier, her mana was running normally in full force. Having confirmed this, as a test, she tried spinning a ring inside her heart.

‘There isn’t any resistance. Well then, really.’

Having confirmed her body’s condition, she raised her right hand and quickly brought it down.

Huuuuk!

A high-level wind magic was activated. Along with the sound of whirlwind, Nainiae’s skirt waved in the air. In circular pattern, the

wind spread through the corridor and caused a small crack on the wall.

“I am… fully healed?”

If what the woman in the dream said was true, Nainiae was now something a little different from an artificial summon spirit. However… the important thing was that the illness was completely cured now.

“All right, then.”

Until now, Nainiae had been holding back on her magic. It was like enduring thirst by a few drops of water. Now, she decided to use magic to her heart’s content. She started to spin three of the rings in her heart.

‘First…’

Nainiae used three magic spells at once, and the corridor, which had nobody around, started to distort.

“… Kiiiiaaaaaaaak!!”

Watching the distorted space, Nainiae was able to hear the sounds echoing through the mansion clearly. She realized who it was that just screamed and mumbled her name.

‘Princess Reutrina?’

Because Nainiae only just woke up, she had no way of knowing what happened prior to this. With a question mark on her face, Nainiae walked toward the distorted space.

“… Kuuuuk! Hey! Get a grip!”

Nainiae walked into the distorted space and moved to the mansion’s entrance instantly. She looked at the guards who were fighting each other and then looked for Sera.

‘Ms. Sera is… not here?’

Along with the blink magic, she also cast summon spirit tracking magic to find traces of Heliona. Having noticed that Sera was not around, she again distorted the space behind her and prepared blink magic.

“Uuu um?”

After Sera left, the guard, who was struggling against vacant-eyed fellow guards, felt a presence behind him. He turned to look and flinched.

‘What?!’

As if a glass developed a crack, the space behind him was starting

to shatter along with cracking sounds.

That was not all. There was a beautiful girl who he had never seen before, someone who he would have believed if she claimed to have come from a fairy tale book, was breathing out frozen mist and looking around the area.

“W… Who are you?!”

Nainiae was widening the space behind like shattering a glass window and was about to move to a different place. She turned to look at the guard and tilted her head to the side.

“What do you mean who?”

It was because she had met the guard before.

It was the guard who she threatened to let them inside the mansion. He was the one who they didn’t make a good first impression.

“Ah.”

Nainiae was about to explain who she was. However, she noticed a spear coming at the guard from his back. She waved her right hand in the air and drew something.

“… Look behind you, behind.”

It seemed Nainiae's magic was faster than the spear.

The spear that was swung by a vacant-eyed guard turned soft like a rubber. It was rubbing the guard's back. The guard, who was mesmerized by Nainiae's beauty and just staring at her, finally got a grip and pushed his fellow guard away.

"Kuk!"

Afterwards, the guard turned his head and tried to chase the girls face with his eyes. However,

"..."

Nainiae was already long gone to a different place by piercing through the space.

"Hu.... uuuhup! Uuuuuu....."

After opening the space, Nainiae instantly teleported from the garden to somewhere inside the mansion. She finally had visual confirmation of the two that she had been looking for.

'Ms. Sera and... Ms. Heliona...'

It was pretty dark, but there was an orange colored light steadily glowing there.

It was not hard to check the area, so Nainiae found them quickly. However, she was hesitant to call them. Instead, Nainiae just bit her lips.

It was because she was worried.

She was concerned they may not recognize her just like how the guard did not.

<…?>

It seemed Heliona felt the gaze. Heliona, who was sitting on Sera's shoulder, turned her head and vacantly opened her mouth.

<… Nainiae?>

Sera watched the flames on her swords disappearing. She also opened her mouth and turned her head.

"…?"

Sera was not able to recognize Nainiae. She was about to carefully call out the name. At that moment, the scream could be heard again. It was making everyone there go deaf.

"Aaaaaaaak!!"

It was Reutrina's scream.

"Ah... ugh..."

Having heard the horrible scream, a boy crumpled his face and blocked his ears. He rubbed away eye boogers and complained,

"What's happening... What was that for? Also, where is this place? Moreover, what time is it?"

It was Riley.

"Uuuu! Uuuuuaaaa!"

"Ugh. That's hurting my ears."

Reutrina was pulling her hairs out and suffering as if she ate something wrong. From a while ago, she was muttering strange things and screaming as if she was having seizures.

"That cannot be! That cannot be!"

Reutrina wasn't just pulling her hair out. Tears, drools... Her face was a mess. She was struggling with the memories that she saw from Riley.

Chapter 150 - Metamorphosis (3)

Princess Reutrina, the one in charge of the ‘head’ portion of the people who were referred in six parts, received a letter from her comrade Kabal. A few minutes ago, she brought Riley, a guest who she gave the infirmary for him to rest as a patient, to her room by dragging him.

“Now.”

The otherworldly power that she possessed was reading the other’s thoughts and memories and controlling them. She dragged Riley here to use her ability.

“Young Master, show me your memories.”

She placed her fingers on Riley like a snake. She then exuded purple light from her finger and started to touch Riley’s forehead.

“… Let’s see.”

Using her ability, Reutrina started to dig into Riley’s memories, which were tightly hidden away in fogs. Reutrina furrowed her eyebrows after witnessing the very first sight.

‘What’s this?’

Going past the fogs, what Reutrina saw in Riley’s memories was a

place that was drenched in red blood and leaked of blood. If anyone asked where it was...

'A Holy Temple?'

It looked like a church or a holy temple.

'Why does it leak of blood here?'

Reutrina had smelled blood many times in the past, but it was the first for even her to smell this kind of blood. It was that strange. She tilted her head to the side and wondered, but then she saw the back of someone who looked familiar.

'... This man is?'

The smell of blood was coming from that man.

'Young Master Riley?'

He was wielding a brilliant and majestic sword, but even the sword had the strange blood on it. One thing interesting about it was that the blood color was not red. It was purple.

"Your eyes look as if you are about to die at any moment. How could you have come all there way here, standing before me? I really... cannot understand this."

Having heard the voice coming from somewhere in front of Riley, Reutrina, who was watching the memory in hiding, turned her gaze to the front of Riley.

'That is?'

In front of Reutrina, in front of Riley to be precise, the being had red skin although he was not bleeding. The being had a palm sized black horn on his head.

"That sure is."

Having heard the man with the horn, the man who appeared to be Riley shook his head and responded in a low voice.

He looked exhausted.

His voice was so weak that the one who just said 'That sure is' would not have looked odd if he just collapsed right now.

"You may be a Brave Hero who were born with blessing, but... Still, you are just a human. Nothing would look out of the ordinary if you died right now."

"Instead of a blessing, it is probably a curse."

"Curse. Certainly, you do have many curses cast on you, but they should only pale in comparison to the blessings you have?"

The man with the horn called Riley a Brave Hero. Riley, with bitter look on his face, muttered,

“Hu… A Demon Lord is being concerned for a Brave Hero? You sure are something. This is unbelievable. The fact that a Demon Lord is kinder than Priestess… I don’t know who I should bring this up to.”

Riley called the man ‘Demon Lord.’ The Demon Lord’s lips crumpled.

“Did you say… I am kind?”

“Ahah…. If I knew this sooner, I would have acted from being on your side instead. There won’t have been anyone trying to trip me over, and I won’t have had to worry about people’s opinions either.”

Riley roughly wiped the blood stained sword on his pants to clean it. The Demon Lord extended his hand toward Riley and made a proposal.

“In that case, even if it is from this moment and forward, how about standing on my side?”

“No.”

Riley had a bitter smile on his face. He said,

“The bastard called God always does things as one pleases. The God is selfish too.”

He was refusing the proposal.

‘Just what is this? Brave Hero? Demon Lord?’

They mentioned Brave Hero and Demon Lord. The conversation was incomprehensible for Reutrina. She stood there like an invisible woman. It was around the time when she furrowed her brows. Riley aimed his sword to the front.

“I don’t want to drag this out any further, so… Regardless of who wins, I think it would be best to finish this soon.”

The sword that Riley aimed to the front was engulfed in steady light. The Demon Lord, who had his arms crossed on his chest until this moment, lowered them and started to look at Riley.

“… Before that.”

To be precise, the Demon Lord was starting to look at the invisible woman who was standing behind Riley.

‘…?!’

The Demon Lord was looking at her with violent look on his eyes. Reutrina, who was standing there idly until now, flinched her shoulders.

“There is a kitty cat there watching us in hiding.”

The man’s eyes started to overflow with purple light. Reutrina, who had the same purple glow in her eyes, muttered in disbelief,

‘Y… You are?’

He was similar to a great being that she knew and served. However, the pressure from Demon Lord was far more over overwhelming. Looking at the Demon Lord, Reutrina started to stumble back.

“You are just a trifle thing. You dare to pry on me?”

‘Ah, ah ah…’

“I do not recall giving anyone the permission to watch me fight.”

The Demon Lord extended his hand. Riley, who only showed the back of his head until now, also casually turned his head and looked at Reutrina who was stumbling back in fear.

“…”

‘… Ug.’

His eyes could not look any deadlier.

As soon as she had her eyes meet with Riley’s, she could not breathe. Before she thought ‘I’ll die!’, her vision was painted in darkness.

It felt like she was deep under the sea where there was no light.

“You sure do handle a lot of annoying things although you are supposed to be a Demon Lord.”

“A Brave Hero has the qualification to fight me undisturbed. That’s why.”

“Ha! That’s interesting!”

With that conversation as the last thing she heard, Reutrina was kicked out of Riley’s memories. She looked like she was frightened from a terrible nightmare.

“Kiiiaaaaaaaak!!”

She screamed and took her hand off from Riley’s head.

Afterwards… Riley opened his eyes.

*

Thanks to Reutrina, who was screaming at the moment... Thanks to Nainiae to be precise, Riley was able to wake up from the long slumber. He was cringing as if his ears were hurting.

“That mouth needs to be plugged up....”

He still looked sleepy. He rubbed his sleepy eyes and looked around. He felt gazes from his back, so he turned his head and found a beautiful girl with ivory white skin.

“Ah.”

Soon, as if he turned his head just now in order to find this girl, Riley had bright look on his face. He opened his mouth and called the girl’s name.

“Nainiae.”

“...”

The girl flinched her shoulders.

“... Yes.”

She was concerned.

The guard did not recognize her. Heliona took a moment before recognizing her.

‘In that case, would Young Master recognize me?’

She was concerned about that.

In the end, it was unnecessary.

Even though her face changed, and her right hand became whole again, Riley immediately recognized that the girl was the maid who served him.

“Did you say… Nainiae?”

Sera was standing there vacantly. Having heard what Riley said, she started to stare at Nainiae in disbelief.

“Before that one starts yelling again, can you please put a plug on her mouth?”

Riley put up his thumb and pointed to the side. Having heard the order, Nainiae nodded and said,

“… Yes.”

She finally got to lock gazes with the man who she was concerned for so long because he was not able to wake up all this time. Also, he recognized her face immediately. Besides these, Nainiae had several other complicated emotions surging through her inside. Still, she held in her tears and moved her right hand.

'Silence.'

In the Dragon's Language, she used the highest-level silence magic that she could cast. After casting the spell on Reutrina, Nainiae immediately gathered her two hands and lowered her head to greet Riley.

"Young Master, have you... slept well?"

In tearful voice, Nainiae asked if he slept well. Riley asked back as if he found the whole thing bizarre.

"What's that? Why are you about to cry?"

With her head lowered, Nainiae wiped off her tears. Soon, she showed smiling face and shook her head as if there was nothing to be concerned about.

"... No."

Finally... Finally... It was because she finally got to understand

just how painful the memories that Riley had.

“It’s nothing.”

Having heard her response, Riley moved his eyes and looked at Sera as he raised his arm to the front.

“Sera, hand me your sword for a moment.”

“Sword? Why…”

“Just give it to me for now.”

Sera was vacantly staring at Nainiae, who had a completely different feel to her. Sera tilted her head to the side as if a wind blew in from somewhere. She then tossed one of the swords that she was holding to Riley.

“I’m not sure why, but…”

Riley snatched the sword from the air. He vacantly stared at the sword in his hand for a moment. He then leisurely tried swinging it. Riley put up a puzzled look on his face.

“… is it just the mood?”

Meanwhile, Reutrina was growing more insane as she either

pulled her hair out or drooled. She moved her lips and put her hand toward Riley.

'Young Master!'

Reutrina's hand was glowing with purple light. Nainiae was going to use magic immediately at Reutrina's hand. However, she stopped her right hand before using the Dragon's Language in the middle.

"What the... What's with the Princess?"

With her head lowered, Reutrina was approaching Riley from the back. Riley avoided Reutrina's hand without even looking. He smoothly tripped Reutrina and made her fall over. He pierced her skirt with the sword he was wielding all the way down to the floor to get her stuck.

"..."

Because of the silence magic, others could not hear what Reutrina was saying. They could only observe her mouth moving. Reutrina tore the skirt that was getting in her way and got up. She charged at Riley once again.

"Are you really that interested in me?"

Riley remembered that Reutrina had been sending sticky gazes toward him ever since the prospective marriage meeting. As if he

was annoyed, he dodged her hand and picked up the sword he had stuck on the floor.

“More importantly, we were at the cave. Now that I opened my eyes, we are here. So, what are we doing here?”

The Princess was still unable to come to her senses and running wild. Riley dodged her hand several more times and looked at Sera and Nainiae, wondering what this was about.

Sera was panicking from watching Reutrina faltering around as if she had let go of her sanity. Sera asked Riley,

“Y… Young Master, don’t you remember?”

“Remember or whatever… I took a nap and got up, and the scenery changed. Do you think the situation does not warrant a question?”

“N… Nap?”

“Ugh, what a pest.”

It seemed Riley got annoyed by the Princess who kept on trying to stick to him. Riley cringed and lightly turned his body to the side. He used the side of the sword to smack the back side of Reutrina’s knee.

‘Um?’

However, the sound that was generated from the impact was something completely different from what Riley expected. Riley furrowed his brows.

‘She is not falling down?’

An ordinary woman would have lost strength in her legs and plummeted from this. However, for some reason, instead of getting on her knees, Reutrina was running even wilder now. It was as if what Riley just did only added fuel to the fire.

‘Something is wrapped around?’

Riley carefully checked Reutrina’s legs and confirmed purple energy. Meanwhile, Sera, who was watching with anxious look on her face, shouted,

“Y… Young Master! Look out! There’s something about Princess Reutrina!”

Riley dodged Reutrina’s hand yet again. Having heard what Sera said, Riley narrowed his eyes and started to inject mana in to his sword.

‘That is…’

A steady light started to flow in to the sword that Riley was holding. Nainiae, who was quietly watching from the back, thought that this must be what she learned about Riley earlier.

‘The one that Young Master have acquired in his past life… The Blessing of Sword.’

From Riley’s dream, Nainiae got to hold all of his past life’s memories in her chest. From the memories, she thought about the blessing that Riley had.

He could wield the Holy Sword.

He was without equal in swordsmanship.

He could gather mana just from breathing or sleeping.

It was a blessing that quite literally showered him with love from the sword. Riley had this since his past life, and he still had it wrapped in his hand.

‘As I thought… He needed sleep.’

Nainiae recalled the passing remark by her teacher. Andal once said that ‘This rascal is a fiend.’ She also thought about why Riley slept so much. Having thought about both, Nainiae mumbled inside and tightened her fist.

‘The fever last time must be also because of the blessing. His body requires sleep, yet he avoided it for so long…’

Riley was making the move with the light engulfing the sword. With her eyes, Nainiae chased his moves.

“I don’t know what kind of trickery that the Princess used, but…”

Reutrina was still in panic. The side of the sword, which was endowed with mana, smacked the back of Reutrina’s knees.

Slap!

This time, instead of a dull sound, a pretty loud sound could be heard. It seemed the strike worked this time. Reutrina lost strength in her legs and plummeted. She sat on her knees.

“As I thought, you are not my type.”

Chapter 151 - Metamorphosis (4)

Puup

Having heard Riley saying Princess Reutrina was not his type, Nainiae could not help herself but to laugh. Meanwhile, Riley was pouting big time as if he was not liking this. Nainiae looked at Riley.

‘Type…’

Having heard it being mentioned, Nainiae suddenly fell in to deep thoughts about the subject. However, her thoughts couldn’t continue for long.

“What happened? Explain.”

It was because Riley asked a question.

“That is…”

Sera was not sure where to start. The situation was bleak. Around the time Sera tilted her head to the side, Reutrina, who appeared to have completely lost it finally, flopped to the floor with her mouth wide open.

“We are not sure either…”

Watching the Princess falling over, Sera thought about how the Princess attacked her at the infirmary. Trying to say she was not sure, she shook her head and blurred the end of the sentence.

“Where is this place?”

“It’s a Duke’s Manor. It’s Phillisnion’s.”

“Phillisneon?”

Riley’s eyebrows got bent out of the shape.

“Are you saying we instantly teleported here from inside of the cave? Nainiae, did you do this?”

Nainiae flinched from Riley’s gaze. However, having heard ‘inside of the cave,’ she thought that Riley must not know about the sleep magic. Nainiae carefully said,

“… No.”

Nainiae shook her head and responded. To add more explanation, she started to tell Riley why they were at the Duke’s manor.

“That is… You were taking a nap at the cave, but you were not showing any signs of waking up. At the same time, the condition of your body was getting worse too, so unfortunately, we ended up

being in debt to the Duke Phillisneon's Manor which was nearby."

Nainiae lightly swapped the truth about the fact that she used sleep magic on him. She glanced at Sera and waited for the response.

"Nap?"

"... Yes."

"You brought me all the way here because I was taking a nap? Two of you did? You guys carried me?"

In disbelief, Riley furrowed his brows and asked. Sera glanced at Nainiae and nodded.

"Yes. You suddenly fell asleep in the cave. Since then, you just never work up, you see? It seemed you also caught cold. You were boiling in fever. You have no idea how worried Nainiae and I were..."

Sera bit her lips as she explained. Riley, who had confused look on his face, scratched his head and asked,

"How long has it been since I fell asleep in the cave?"

"Probably a little over a month."

“A month?”

“Yes. Really… We were so worried.”

Sera was about to smile with tears in her eyes to say she was glad he finally woke up. At that moment,

“… Princess! Princess! Are you all right?”

From outside, clanking sounds of armors were getting closer.

‘Guards?’

Based on the voices asking if the Princess was all right, Nainiae thought that they must be the mansion’s guards. She quickly waved her right hand in the air and cast magic.

“First, I’ll move us to a different place.”

The Princess had tears on her eyes and nose, and she was kneeling. If the guards saw this, Riley and others would have definitely been branded as suspicious bunch. This was why.

“Ms. Sera, please take a deep breath.”

“Pardon? Nainiae, wait…”

Riley figured out what Nainiae was about to do. He lowered the hand he had to hold his chin and went to stand next to Sera. Sera panicked and didn't know what to do.

"... Uuuuaaaa!"

Suuuuuk

With that quiet sound, Riley and Sera's bodies disappeared from the spot without a trace. Immediately, Nainiae, who was still there, looked at Reutrina and slowly put forth her hand.

<Nainiae.>

It sounded like the guards were gradually coming closer. Heliona, who was with Nainiae, called her.

<What are you going to do?>

"I need to fix it."

<Fix it?>

Nainiae brought her hand toward Reutrina's forehead. Nainiae spun two of the mana rings rotating in her heart and cast two magic spells at once.

Kwang!

The door behind Nainiae closed with a loud noise and locked itself although nobody touched it.

<Nainiae, you are not trying to kill her, right?>

It seemed one of the magic spell was cast. Having seen the door closing on its own and locking itself, Heliona asked Nainiae, concerned.

“Although I did hear harsh things from her... I am not like the teacher who acts rashly.”

Nainiae smiled and shook her head. Of the two magic spells she prepared, she activated the remaining one.

“As I said earlier, I’m just going to fix it.”

Nainiae’s hand, which was placed on Reutrina’s forehead, started to shine in grey light.

<Memory magic?>

Having realized what magic Nainiae was going to use, Heliona mumbled. Nainiae nodded and said,

“Earlier, when the Princess withstood the swing of the sword from Young Master, although it was for a split second, I definitely saw the purple energy clumped up in that spot.”

Nainiae was thinking about what the woman in black said in Riley’s dream.

‘When you wake up, please find Mr. Riley’s Holy Sword. In your world, one of the purple people probably has it. Please find the purple human who will help you and Mr. Riley.’

So, because Reutrina was speculated to be a purple human, Nainiae used a spell related to memory on her. It was to gather information from Reutrina and also fix the situation.

‘Her memory is… blurry.’

With her hand on Reutrina’s forehead, Nainiae went through her memories. The guards were banging on the door behind her. Having heard the noise, Nainiae cringed.

“It’s fine. Let’s go back.”

Other than the ability that Reutrina had as a purple human and the fact that her memories were all jumbled up, Nainiae was not able to find out anything else. She judged that there was nothing else to gain from reading further, so she used the teleportation magic.

<Um? Already?>

“Yes. There is nothing else to gain. It seems that… she suffered dearly for it when she tried to pry on Young Master’s memories.”

<Young Master’s memories?>

Nainiae was about to move to where she sent Riley and Sera. Having heard Heliona’s question, Nainiae flinched inside.

‘Oh no.’

Riley’s memories… His past life to be precise…. It was because she thought it would be good to not mention that to others.

“Let’s talk about that later. Let’s go back too.”

Nainiae brushed it aside and used the teleportation magic. Along with Heliona, Nainiae disappeared without a trace.

“… Princess!”

Right after Nainiae disappeared, the guards smashed the lock and got in the room. They only saw Reutrina on her knees.

*

Nainiae joined Riley and Sera. Sera was glaring at Nainiae's face, which was now completely fine. Leaving Sera be, Nainiae brought just Riley to the side and started to talk to him.

"What? What is it?"

"Young Master, by any chance..."

Concerned there might be someone listening, Nainiae used magic and checked the area once again. She carefully said,

"Do you remember purple humans?"

"Are you talking about bastards like the dark mage that we met at the Rainfield?"

Riley furrowed his brows and asked. Nainiae nodded and said,

"Yes. The people who use strange powers without mana."

"I remember. What about it?"

"I checked, and Princess Reutrina... also have that power. I think she is one of the purple people."

"She is?"

As if he was surprised, Riley furrowed his brows and asked. Nainiae nodded and added,

“I fixed things without overdoing it, but I was wondering if it is right to leave things be at this point, so I wanted to ask.”

Nainiae explained that she only checked Reutrina’s ability and handled her memories before coming back. She was asking if Riley was okay with letting Reutrina live.

“…”

Having heard Nainiae’s question, Riley held his chin and started to think hard about the matter.

It was because, regardless of all these, Reutrina was a Princess of Solia.

“From what I saw earlier, she seemed to be all hazy. What happened exactly?”

“To explain in detail…”

To choose the answer, Nainiae thought about it for a moment and said in a quiet voice,

“She now has mental retardation.”

“Mental retardation?”

“In other words, she became a fool. I think it would be hard for her to do anything without servants from now on.”

Riley looked at Nainiae’s eyes and asked the next question.

“Did you do it?”

“No. I stayed within a reasonable bound and handled things. She was already like that before I had a hand in…”

Nainiae lowered her head. She couldn’t finish her sentence.

It was as she just said.

Considering the ability that Reutrina had, it was certain that Reutrina had gone insane while trying to pry on Riley’s memories.

‘It is that kind of memories.’

If it was not for the woman in black’s help, Nainiae might have also wondered around in Riley’s memories for eternity or become a fool like Princess Reutrina. It was highly likely.

<No… I didn’t kill them… I didn’t.>

<Shut up! You killed them! Because you sat back and watched, people died... I knew it from the start when people celebrated a murderer as a hero!>

<No!!>

Nainiae had her head lowered. For some reason, another drop of tear rolled along her cheek.

“... Ah?”

“...?”

Riley wondered why Nainiae was shedding tears out of the blue. He tilted his head to the side.

“I am sorry. I think something... must have gotten in my eyes.”

Nainiae tumbled and wiped off the tear rolling down her cheek with her hand. However, her hand stopped in the middle.

“Hey.”

Riley put his hand at Nainiae’s face. He then pouted big time like a duck and complained,

“I didn’t make you cry, got it?”

“… Pardon?”

“I said I am not the one who made you cry.”

Riley said in gruff voice. He then wiped off the tear from Nainiae’s cheek with his finger before turning away.

“So, don’t say anything odd to my mother.”

Riley wiped off the tear from Nainiae because of what Iris taught him. After Riley retrieved the hand, Nainiae, who was vacantly looking at his hand, laughed.

“Kuk.”

“It might cause troubles if you suddenly laugh while crying.”

Having heard what Riley just tossed out, Nainiae was now certain that the lie about something getting in her eye was found out. Nainiae promptly apologized.

“Young Master, I’m sorry for lying.”

“What were you thinking that made you cry like that?”

Riley wiped his hand on his waist and asked. Nainiae strained her

lips and slowly shook her head as she said,

“I am sorry, Young master.”

Although Riley asked quietly, all he got in return was another apology. Riley put his face right in front of Nainiae’s and glared at her face with his piercing gaze.

“…”

Nainiae panicked from having Riley’s face so close. She started to hold her breath.

“Hm.”

Could it be because she was holding her breath? Her face could not be redder. It was about when her face was going to explode. Riley pulled his face back and said,

“Well… Everyone have things that are difficult to talk about.”

Through her eyes, it seemed he read the thoughts Nainiae had. Riley didn’t ask anymore. Looking at Nainiae gasping for air after holding breath. Riley peeked a smile and continued.

“So, Reutrina became a fool?”

“… Yes.”

To calm her chest, which was in state of panic, Nainiae tried to calm her breathing. She nodded and responded.

“What about the chance of her ability coming back or recovering because of other bastards?”

“I cannot be certain, but it is probably impossible. Just in case, I even had a seed of fire attached to Reutrina through Ms. Heliona, so… if anything changes, we will be able to know right away.”

“We need to think about the possibility of the hand we ran into at the Lower Solia last time coming to snatch up the Princess.”

Riley was carefully rolling his brain. It seemed he came to a conclusion. He said,

“I think it would be better to keep the Princess alive than have her killed. I think there will be some storm of aftermath from this situation, but keeping her alive will be easier than killing her. Also, if we are lucky, we can use her as bait to catch other purple humans.”

“Yes.”

It seemed Nainiae also left the Princess be because of the same reasons. She didn’t ask questions or objected. Instead, she just waited for the rest of his words.

“Ah, right… Now that I think about it.”

It seemed he just remembered something. Riley lightly smiled and looked at Nainiae.

Chapter 152 - Metamorphosis (5)

“As for the artificial summon spirit, has it been handled?”

Riley finally observed Nainiae’s face, which was now without scars. He asked as he remembered the real reason for this winter trip.

“Ah, yes.”

Ever since she woke up, she still had not had the chance to take a look at her face. She felt the face around her right eyes where the scar was gone and responded in shy voice.

“Weren’t you supposed to find the summon spirit that could help you? Did you get it all done in a flash while I was asleep?”

“… Yes.”

Nainiae actually met someone who was a greater existence than a summon spirit. She omitted the part about it and nodded. She simply said all process was now complete.

“Excuse me, Young Master.”

Riley thought the conversation was pretty much wrapped up, so he was going to go back to where Sera was waiting. However, Nainiae called him.

“Um?”

Riley casually turned just his face and looked at Nainiae. He tilted his head lightly to the side, trying to ask what was up.

“Have I changed a lot?”

Riley was looking at Nainiae. Feeling conscious, she fiddled her face around the right eye and her fingers as she asked in mosquito sized voice.

“What did you say?”

Because of the small voice, he could not hear her. He asked again, trying to tell her to say it again but louder this time. Nainiae mumbled.

“I didn’t change a lot, right?”

“…”

“The guards and Ms. Sera did not recognize me. I’m asking because… I am worried. What if it is because my face look even worse now?”

Even Heliona, the summon spirit who was with her for so long, didn’t recognize her and just opened her mouth vacantly.

First, Nainiae thought Riley, the one she served, recognizing her was enough. However, thinking back at what happened, she really did not feel at ease about this.

“Mr. Ian, Ms. Willa, Ms. Iris... Do you think they will recognize me? Have I changed that much?”

Nainiae let out her concern. She tightly grasped her right hand, which was made whole now, and asked Riley.

“Um...”

He held his chin and carefully observed Nainiae’s face again. He smirked and shook his head left and right.

“I am not sure?”

“...”

It was a wishy washy response. Nainiae seemed disappointed. Her shoulders sunk. Riley was about to go back to where Sera was, but he added,

“Even if you changed a little, isn’t that still fine? You are still you.”

Nainiae was suppressing the look of disappointment. Having

heard what Riley said, she regained the glow.

“Even if you changed, there probably isn’t anyone who would hate it.”

*

Two days later, a guard came to visit the infirmary at the Duke Philisneon’s Manor. With a violent look on his face, he started to ask all sorts of questions.

“Young Master, during that night, where were you?”

“I was lying on the bed in the infirmary?”

“Are you certain?”

“I was boiling with fever? I couldn’t even regain consciousness, so where could I have possibly have gone?”

“People said your maid was lurking around the entrance of the mansion while drenched in glass pieces… What was that about?”

“People of the Iphalleta Family tend to take the swordsmanship training to the extreme. It is the same for the servants. Unless they are seriously ill, they do this much training everyday.”

“So, that was just training?”

“That’s right, training.”

“Hmmmmmmmmmm.”

It seemed the news about Reutrina situation reached the people in the mansion. The guard asked many questions and got answers. He turned around without finding any problem in particular.

“Anyway, what do you think happened to Princess Reutrina?”

With the guard now gone, Sera, who was still at the infirmary, looked at the window that Nainiae restored and muttered.

“I really think it was odd, no matter how I think about it. Young Master, you said it would be best for us to keep quiet, but the Princess was a little odd that day. When she swung her arm and struck me on the stomach... It felt like an ogre punched me, you know?”

Sera cringed. It seemed she was still hurting on the ribs. She continued to chatter away.

“I held on to the ribs in pain and got over the mansion to get to where the scream was coming from, and... Young Master, you were awake, and the Princess was screaming away to flood the entire world. As for Nainiae, she came back as a different person.”

Sera thought about all of the things that happened during the day Riley woke up. Finding it suspicious, she asked Riley with a serious face.

“Young Master, could it be that, the Princess…”

“…”

Riley thought Sera’s sense as a woman was about to do its thing. Riley started to tighten his shoulders.

“… is possessed by a ghost or something?”

Riley relaxed his shoulders.

“A ghost?”

“Yes, a ghost!”

Sera tightened both of her fists. She didn’t see the hollow look on Riley’s face. Instead, she continued.

“Everything that happened would be hard to explain unless it was a ghost, don’t you think? About the Princess, although she was foxy, I could never shake the feeling that she was very intelligent, yet… All of the sudden, she became a bulging ogre and entered the room. Also, only a little later, she became mentally retarded.”

Sera placed her hand on her waist and took a stance as if she was trying to ask what Riley thought of her deductions. She snorted and was asking Riley to compliment her. Finding it to be ridiculous, Riley shook his head.

“I am not sure?”

“It has to be the ghost! A spirit of the Duke Philisneon Family who had been wondering the mansion for a long time… must have taken possession of Princess Reutrina’s body! Uuuuuu… How scary!”

“That sure is… interesting.”

That sure was a very Sera like story. Riley peeked a smile and got up. He walked toward the door.

“Ah, are you going to go out?”

“You said today is the last day of the banquet, right?”

“Yes.”

Riley nodded and opened the door. He explained why he was going.

“I’ll come back after taking a walk.”

Sera was going to go with him, but Riley asked her to organize the luggage instead. Riley leisurely walked by himself and got to the garden inside the Phillisneon Family's mansion.

The garden was booming with nobilities trying to enjoy the last day of the banquet. Most of them were talking about a girl who appeared at the mansion.

"That girl is the girl?"

"The one who defeated Astroa of Solia?"

"The Six Circles mage?"

"Huh... She is definitely worthy of being the Magic Tower's master."

She was the prime suspect of what happened to the Princess Reutrina, so she was asked to stay in the mansion until the end of the banquet and be investigated. Nainiae sat on the garden and vacantly killed the time.

"Excuse me. Miss... If it is all right with you, would you like to have a drink with me?"

"If you would like, would you like to go for a dance with me in the center? I'll lead."

Although she was sitting there with blank face, she looked like a work of art on a canvas. Men from other nobilities came by one after other and recommended drinks or dance.

“No, it’s all right.”

“In that case… Please remember my name. My name is…”

“No, it’s all right.”

She declined all men. It seemed she was uncomfortable with the gazes of the people coming her way. She signed lightly and started to fiddle with her clothes.

‘I like the maid uniform better…’

Because of a request from the mansion, instead of her maid uniform, she ended up wearing a dress. She complained inside as if she found it uncomfortable.

“… It’s awkward.”

The dress she was wearing, the place she was sitting, the gaze of the people, the face that was changed, and everything she was feeling in this situation… They were all uncomfortable for her.

“Ms. Nainiae, if it is all right with you, how about you come to

visit our manor around next spring?”

“Ms. Nainiae, I think this dish is quite delicious. Please try some.”

“Ms. Nainiae, you are truly… beautiful. If it is all right with you, would you like to have a conversation in private with me?”

Most of the noblemen were trying to talk to her.

“I am sorry.”

Unlike the past, none of the gazes seemed to be indicating that people were looking at her and thinking ‘disgusting.’

They were all responding positively and taking interest in her.

This was unthinkable when she still had the scar on her face. She should be happy, but surprisingly, she was not all that happy.

‘I was so happy when Ms. Sera complimented me, but… why?’

Nainiae tossed the question at herself inside. She got up and asked the men around her to make way.

“Ms. Nainiae, please wait!”

“Ms. Nainiae, can you please answer?”

“I will wait for you!”

She got countless love calls from the noblemen. However, she refused them all. She walked away as if she was annoyed. However, she found someone who had the arms crossed leisurely. She opened her eyes big.

“Young Master.”

From her mouth, for the first time, something other than ‘I’m sorry’ came out. The noblemen who were surrounding Nainiae all directed their gazes to where she was looking at.

“Young Master?”

“If you are calling him Young Master, then…?”

“Ah, the Iphalleta Family’s…”

It seemed they recognized Riley. They started to mumble among themselves.

They said things like the Lazy-Sword or bum.

Most of what they said were harsh. Finding it unpleasant to hear,

Nainiae crumpled her face.

“Speaking ill of the Young Master is…”

Nainiae was going to get apologies from the noblemen who spoke ill of Riley. However, having noticed Nainiae who was about to do this, Riley shrugged, telling her that it was fine. He gestured with his hand to ask her to come over.

“…”

Having noticed the hand gesture, Nainiae, who was about to use magic, could not help it but to walk over to where Riley was instead.

The noblemen around her made ways as if they noticed the mood she was exuding earlier. Dumbfounded, they glanced around.

“How was it? It’s a bother, right?”

Riley peeked a smile and asked quietly so that others could not hear it. Nainiae lightly nodded.

“See? It is such a bother.”

Riley added that this was the reason why he always did not try to stand out in a place like this and snuck around. He then pulled Nainiae’s hand.

“Still, if I don’t step in, I thought things will get bothersome for you, Young Master. So…”

While she was being lead away, Nainiae mumbled quietly as if she was trying to make excuses. It seemed the people around them misunderstood the whole picture. They were showering Nainiae and Riley with sharp gazes.

“What’s this? Look at those two?”

“Now that I think about it, Ms. Nainiae is definitely… a maid from Iphalleta Mansion, that Lazy-Sword Young Master’s maid.”

“Huh? Is that true?”

“Yes. So, there was that talk before.”

“If you are talking about Young Master Riley’s maid, isn’t that supposed to be that girl who had a scar on her face? How could she look like that?”

“If I knew this would happen, I should have made good connections with the Iphalleta Family.”

The two were exuding mysterious atmosphere. Some clicked their tongues in regret. Some were showing gleaming eyes, saying they could take on the challenge.

*

It was at the Karuta desert.

The desert was located on the boarder of the Solia. Currently, the place was in a disarray with dead, pitch black sands. Number of living beings on this place and people who passed by had decreased substantially at the moment.

“What a horrible stench.”

Through the middle of this desert, Kabal the mercenary was carrying a hammer on his back and walking with his subordinates.

“Hurry up. Before we lose the track, we need to catch up.”

“Commander! Ugh, Commander! Wait. Let’s slow down a bit! Just who are you trying to find? Why are you doing this, coming all the way to a desolate desert? Why?”

Because this was desert, each step sunk deep into the sand. A subordinate was following slowly. He asked Kabal where they were headed in such a hurry.

“Lightning Boulder Mercenaries.”

“Lightning Boulder Mercenaries?”

Kabal responded to the struggling subordinate as if he was shooting an arrow at him. It seemed Kabal found something. He narrowed his eyes and took a knee.

‘Is it around here?’

What he was looking at was a track left by a carriage. It seemed it had not been long since the carriage passed through here. The track was still clear.

‘Damn it. Where is that lass doing and what’s she up to? If she got the letter, she should join us right away.’

Kabal thought about Princess Reutrina of Solia and cringed his eyes. Kabal got up.

“Looks like we almost caught up.”

After getting up, he started to walk again and went over a hill on the desert. It was night fall now. In the distance... he could find a group of mercenaries who were camping in front of bonfire.

“... I found them.”

In the distance, of the mercenaries, Kabal found a girl who was the only one wearing a hood. Kabal muttered quietly.

Chapter 153 - The Remaining Work (1)

Now, Nainiae's illness was completely cured. Riley woke up from his sleep as well. Sera finished organizing the luggage. She fixed her grip on the bag on her shoulder and asked the two,

"Well then, shall we get going?"

With her illness cured, Nainiae no longer had limitations on the teleportation magic. It would not have been odd if they immediately returned to the mansion.

"Thinking about how Mr. Ian would panic after seeing your face makes me laugh! Ah, I want to show him soon!"

It seemed Sera could not be more proud of Nainiae's changed face, or her face without scars to be precise. She snickered and added they should go back soon. Nainiae, who was keeping silence, carefully said,

"... Excuse me."

Sera already had the bag on her back. She was singing while moving her shoulder up in excitement. Having heard Nainiae, she tilted her head to the side.

"I am sorry, but can you to return to the mansion first? I still..."

With her hands to her back, Nainiae was fiddling with her hands and blurring the end of the sentence. She carefully said,

“I still have something left to do.”

“Something you need to do?”

‘She was cured of the illness, and she even had the scars gone from her face. What was left to do? Why is she asking us to go back by ourselves first?’

Wondering why, Sera asked,

“Even if you stayed here, you will just get a load of glances.”

“No, I am not saying I’ll stay here.”

Nainiae thought about what the woman in black said in Riley’s dream. She wondered how she could explain all that to her. Soon, she thought of a good way to avoid it all and started to explain what it was that she still had to do.

“My teacher… No, the doctor who helped me heal before… I was thinking about visiting him to say hello. Although he didn’t heal me completely that time, I am still indebted to him, so… I think it is only right to visit him.”

Nainiae realized she made a mistake when she said ‘teacher.’

Nainiae quickly corrected herself and smiled. Sera tilted her head again and put up a puzzled look on her face.

“By any chance, that red haired man who visited the mansion last time?”

It seemed Sera remembered Andal from the visit last time. Sera pounded on her palm with her fist and asked. Nainiae quickly nodded and said,

“Ah, yes!”

It seemed Sera was convinced by Nainiae’s explanation. She turned to look at Riley. She figured this could not be helped. She said,

“In that case, just us…”

“I’m going too.”

“… Pardon?”

Sera was going to say just her and Riley should go back, but she didn’t get to finish the sentence. Riley said he will go with Nainiae as well. Surprised, Sera asked,

“Young Master, you too?”

Sera was not the only one who was surprised. Nainiae also panicked and broke cold sweat.

“There is no need to be so surprised, is there?”

Riley looked at both maids who were surprised by his choice. Riley shrugged and said,

“Now that I think about it, I have forgotten to say hello to him. He is the doctor who helped healing my maid. I think it would be good to go express my gratitude at least.”

Riley emphasized on the word ‘doctor.’ Having heard him, Nainiae hesitated for a moment. She slightly lowered her head and said,

“Yes, I understand.”

“I can understand Nainiae, but... Young Master, are you really going to go?”

“What else? Could I go but not for real then?”

Nainiae raised her head and looked at Riley again. She was thinking about what the woman in black said.

She told Sera and Riley that she is going to go meet the doctor, Andal to be exact. However, Nainiae’s real goal was... finding

Riley's Holy Sword that the woman in black asked to find before the winter ended.

"Sera, you go back to the mansion first. Please say hello to my mother and Ian."

Riley smiled mischievously. Riley smiled and waved good bye toward Sera, wishing her safe trip back. Sera extended her hand out as if she needed a moment. She said,

"Wait. That means… this winter trip is not over?"

"Well, that's right."

After saying that, Riley, who was standing next to Nainiae, bumped at her arm with his elbow. It seemed Nainiae realized this and made a dimensional portal behind Sera.

"Ang? Uuuang? No! Wait! Then you shouldn't be sending back just me? If anybody is going to go back, won't it be better for all to go back together!"

Sera panicked and waved her arms around after noticing the dimensional portal behind her. Not able to stand still, Riley extended his arm out toward Sera to push her in into the portal.

"Young Master! Wait! Lady Iris was worried, you know? Having just Nainiae alone won't be enough!"

“She does not have any restrictions on using magic now, so well… I think having just Nainiae will be enough as a guard. Don’t worry. Have a safe trip back.”

“This is not about being a guard! As an adult, the problem with puberty…”

Sera was not able to finish her sentence. She was pushed by Riley and got sucked into the portal that Nainiae made.

Just like how it was when they first started the winter trip, she probably appeared all of sudden in the mansion’s garden.

“Puberty? What puberty? She is talking about some strange stuff.”

Riley looked at the dimensional portal and clicked his tongue. Riley turned to look at Nainiae and said,

“I thought about this, and…”

“…?”

“I’m certain I didn’t start this winter trip just to heal your illness.”

Riley rubbed his chin and muttered. With puzzled look on her

face, Nainiae looked at him and waited for what he was going to say next.

“Besides that, I am sure there was something else as the reason why I started the winter trip? Nowadays, my memories are fuzzy. Could it be that I have dementia in my age?”

“…”

Having heard his question, Nainiae vacantly opened her mouth. She knew why his memories were coming and going as if he was suffering from forgetfulness.

Even before Riley fell asleep, he appeared to be like a patient with forgetfulness symptoms. This was because of the memories from his past life.

It was because he could not contain all of the memories from his past and this life.

‘Will he be all right?’

It was not certain if Riley was aware that Nainiae was worried about him. Riley mumbled in low voice,

“Ah, right… the purple people.”

“…?”

Having heard his words, Nainiae barely managed to get a grip from her distracting thoughts. She looked at him again.

“I just remembered. I’m talking about the reason why I bothered to get up and go on this trip in this cold winter.”

Looking at Nainiae, who had surprised look in her eyes, Riley shrugged and explained why he was being active in this winter instead of hibernating.

“It’s because of that bastard.”

Nainiae was vacantly staring at Riley. She then firmly closed her lips that she had open lightly earlier.

“Kabal the mercenary... Was that the name? I’m talking about the bastard who took away my father’s arm during the collision at the border. I should have him pay dearly for laying his hand on my father.”

It was because of his eyes.

“Excuse me, Young Master.”

It seemed Nainiae was concerned about the look in his eyes. Nainiae carefully called Riley. However, Riley was not able to respond right away to her calling. He was in middle of thinking

hard about the reason why he decided to go on this winter trip.

‘To be precise, it was because of the thing that Ian asked me to, but…’

The thing that Ian asked, the matter regarding the world below which may have something to do with his past life… This was what Riley was thinking hard about.

“Your right eye… You can still use it, right?”

After thinking hard, Riley decided that he could not tell Nainiae about it. She looked at Nainiae and asked.

“Pardon?”

“That bastard named Kabal… Try finding where he is now.”

Riley ordered Nainiae to find Kabal, the bastard who threw off Stein’s arm. Nainiae took a moment of pause as if she was hesitating. As if she could not help the situation, she looked at Riley.

“…”

Using her right eye, she tried to find the mercenary named Kabal. She suddenly covered her eye with her hand and crumpled her face.

“… Kut?!”

She was suffering. Having noticed this, Riley approached her and ask, wondering what was happening.

“What is it?”

Having experienced gruesome experiments at the Magic Tower, Nainiae was the kind that didn’t even bat an eye from most pain. However, she was feeling incredible pain. It was making even her cringe.

“No, it is…”

She had no idea what was the cause of the pain. She uncovered her eye, but she froze like that vacantly.

“…”

She was shedding tears.

There was no change in facial expression. She was not sobbing either. She just had vacant look on her face as she shed tears.

“Nainiae?”

Riley wondered why she was crying. He could not understand why. With puzzled look, he called Nainiae. Nainiae barely came to her senses. She flinched and said,

“… Pardon?”

“You are crying again? What is it?”

It seemed Riley thought something was seriously not right. Riley asked in concerned tone. Nainiae tumbled and wiped the tears away. She put up an awkward smile.

“No. It is nothing.”

She could not tell him that she was crying because of sad memories from his past. Nainiae brushed it off casually. She moved her right hand and used magic.

“Well then, let’s go.”

*

Through her teleportation, Riley instantly moved to a new place. Smelling horrible stench in the air reaching his nose, Riley immediately crumpled his face.

“Ugh. What is it?”

There wasn't just the smell. The sand was making his legs sink deep, so he crumpled his face for the second time. He asked Nainiae who came through the dimensional portal after him.

"Where is this place?"

"I am not sure?"

Although she used the teleportation to move to this place, she was unaware of where exactly this place was. She tilted her head to the side and started to look around.

Wheeeeeeee

The wind sounded like someone was sobbing. The light sand was blowing in the wind as it made noise, which was quite eye catching.

"From the looks of it..."

There was nothing here besides the sand blowing in the air. As she checked the place, she carefully guessed,

"I think we are at a desert?"

"A desert?"

Having heard Nainiae, Riley kicked the sand under his feet. He saw the sand which turned pitch black and kneeled down.

“If it is desert, why is the sand…”

While cringing his face because of the stench, Riley extended his hand toward the sand, but he quickly dropped the sand that he picked up and dusted his hands after feeling the sensation on his hand from the sand.

“This is poison?”

“Poison?”

Having heard Riley, Nainiae kneeled down and touched the sand just like Riley. She opened her eyes big.

“It… really is. These are not ordinary sands.”

It was not just where they were standing. The entire desert area within their view range was all drenched in pitch black color. Because of this, instead of feeling like being at a desert, they felt like they could mistake and think they were in a cave with open ceiling.

“That bastard is here?”

Riley got up and looked around the desert as he mumbled.

“Yes. When I saw him with my eye… until just a moment ago, he was here. Judging from the mana used in this teleportation, I think we are at the border of the Solia.”

Because she didn’t have a map, she could only deduce that they were somewhere in the desert. Having heard the response, Riley scratched his head and estimated where this place must be.

“Outer edge of the Solia… In that case, I think we must be at the Karuta desert.”

The problem was that this place was a desert.

Even with a map, it was not going to be easy to tell what’s where in middle of a desert. Finding Kabal in this place was going to be the same as trying to find a needle in a sand field.

‘The fact that this place is a desert is a problem, but… the sand here…’

Riley lowered his gaze and looked at the sand which was drenched in dark color. He remembered the trace of epidemic that he found at the Alieve Village last time and started to roll his brain.

‘What was it called?’

He was trying to remember the words that were written at the

cave nearby the village. He was trying to move his memories which became very faint lately. He barely managed to remember the nickname and muttered.

“The friend who cannot breathe… I guess that one could be here too.”

“The friend who cannot breathe?”

“I’m talking about another bastard who is suspected to be one of the purple people. They might be together…”

Along with that purple human’s nickname, Riley thought about what the children at the village said.

‘By any chance, do you guys know who that is?’

‘Yes, we know him.’

‘It was a homeless man.’

‘Still, he was a very kind homeless man. He played well with us.’

‘He taught us numbers.’

‘He is a good person.’

Riley organized what the children at the Alieve Village told him. Eventually, he decided to set aside the thoughts about this friend who could not breathe and looked at Nainiae.

“Anyway, finding that Kabal bastard is our priority. There is the favor that Ian asked personally as well, so Nainiae…”

“Yes.”

“Let’s use your eye one more time. Where is he?”

“Young Master, the thing is…”

Having heard Riley asking Nainiae to use the eye again, she paused for a moment. Nainiae found it hard, but strained herself to say it.

Chapter 154 - The Remaining Work (2)

“I don’t think I can use the eye.”

It seemed Nainiae was ashamed to tell him this. She was unable to look at Riley in the eyes. Instead, she lowered her head and told him she couldn’t. Wondering why, Riley said,

“You don’t think you can use it? Why?”

She interlocked her fingers and didn’t know what to do. She responded in mosquito sized voice,

“About that, the pain is…”

Before they teleported here, when Nainiae used her right eye, she cringed in pain. Remembering this, Riley had troubled look on his face.

“You didn’t have pain like this before, right? Why is this happening all of sudden?”

Nainiae bit her lips and paused for a moment. It seemed she didn’t know why either. She shook her head as the answer.

‘Things just got difficult.’

Although it was the desert, perhaps because of the season, it was

not so hot that Riley, who was weak against heat, would be struggling. However... the problem was that there was nothing around them.

‘We don’t even have a map.’

Riley thought hard about this. He casually turned his head and looked at Nainiae who still had her head lowered.

‘Um... Did you not like having your face changed that much? It seemed like she didn’t appear to be in good condition lately.’

Nainiae had gloomy look on her face. It seemed she was sorry that she could not be of help to Riley. However, the mood was far more low-spirited than the past.

‘Is something troubling her?’

Looking at Nainiae’s gloomy face, Riley thought hard about this. He then remembered what Sera said earlier and wiggled his eyebrows.

‘By any chance... puberty?’

Riley thought about the age of the maid he had been working with. With odd look on his face, he stared at Nainiae and corrected the thought.

‘No, that is not it?’

Sadly, the girl named Nainiae had grown up way before other girls of the same age.

After the experiments at the Magic Tower, which were filled with nothing but horrifying pain, she was abandoned by her mother and abandoned again by the homeless of Lower Solia. She was the girl who wished for her death more than living.

The idea of a girl like her being troubled with thoughts in puberty now was hard to believe.

“Hm.”

Riley rested his fist on his waist and looked up the sky. He sighed briefly and made a proposal.

“It cannot be helped. It’s late now.”

“…?”

Riley was pushing the sands away to make the ground flat. He looked at Nainiae and said,

“Let’s think after sleeping for a bit. We don’t have a map, so we can’t move right away. I had been rolling my brain around, but I can’t think of any good idea in particular, so…”

It was night in the desert. The desert sky was somehow tranquil and beautiful.

“It would be nice if something could be done about the floor.”

“Ah, yes!”

Riley closed one of his eyes and glanced at Nainiae. As if she understood it, she nodded right away and moved her hand to use magic.

“Please wait a moment.”

it seemed Nainiae decided that cleaning the sand would be difficult. Instead, she chose to create a transparent floor above the sand. She opened the dimensional space and started to bring out items useful for the stay.

“It is done. I placed a layer above the sand, so it will block the smell or poison. Would you like to... try sitting there?”

“On the layer?”

“Yes, on the layer.”

Nainiae added that the sand won’t get on even if he lay down or sat on it. She made a simple bonfire with her fire magic and asked,

“What do you think?”

Riley tried sitting on the layer that Nainiae made above the sand. He confirmed that the sand didn’t get on him and nodded.

“It’s not bad.”

Having heard his response, Nainiae relaxed her face a little from the gloomy look she had earlier. She raised the fire on the bonfire some more and asked Riley,

“Excuse me, Young Master. Are you hungry? It’s the dinner time, so if you would like…”

Riley shook his head and said he was not particularly hungry. Nainiae asked something else.

“Well then, a map… Should I go get it now? I think it is in Ms. Sera’s bag.”

“You are going to go search Sera’s bag? Now?”

“… Yes.”

Nainiae asked anxiously, wondering if it was not okay. Riley said,

“Do you know what you are saying? If you returned to the mansion, Sera will ask you to take her with you?”

Sera currently believed that Riley and Nainiae went to see the doctor who helped healing Nainiae. However, they were currently in pursuit of the purple people on this trip because of a different reason.

“… Ah.”

Since they were in pursuit of the purple people, Nainiae thought that something might happen to Sera if she came along. She vacantly opened her mouth.

In particular, because Sera had exceptional sense of smell, there was a chance that Sera could faint from the stench of the sand that was covered in poison. Nainiae also had to consider this factor.

“Are you going to bring Sera?”

“No.”

Nainiae concluded that bring Sera here would not be a good idea. She shook her head and made a different proposal.

“In that case, I’ll go to Solia for a bit and come back. Maps are sold in Left Solia or the Main Plaza, so… If I bring a new map from there!”

“At this hour?”

Riley was enjoying the bonfire. He peeked a smile and asked. Nainiae opened her mouth vacantly once again.

“… Ah.”

“It’s very late. Even if there was a place that sold maps this late, since I already decided to sleep, let’s do it tomorrow… Starting tomorrow…”

Nainiae appeared to be anxious. Riley calmed her down and called her with his hand. He was trying to tell her she should sit down as well. With ashamed look on her face, she bent her knees.

‘We won’t lose him at least.’

Since the scars on her face disappeared, Nainiae no longer had any restrictions on using magic. Because he had her, Riley thought that it won’t be late even if they started looking tomorrow instead of right now. Riley plummeted and lay down.

“… Young Master.”

Riley interlocked the fingers and placed the hands behind his head as he lay down. Having heard Nainiae calling, he just moved his eyes and looked at her.

“What is it?”

Riley was thinking he should give her a lecture if she was going to talk about going somewhere or getting something and coming back again. Nainiae asked,

“Would you like me to lend you my lap?”

“…”

She asked carefully. Riley vacantly stared at Nainiae. He thought it was a very Nainiae’s kind of idea. He smiled and said,

“… In that case, shall I borrow your lap for a moment?”

Riley lay on Nainiae’s lap and closed his eyes gently.

Thirty minutes…

An hour…

When about two hours passed, Riley, who had his eyes closed, just could not fall asleep. He opened his eyes narrowly.

“Um…”

Zzzz

Zzzz

Because he was lying on Nainiae's lap, he looked up toward Nainiae's face. He saw that she was knocking her head and dozing off. Riley had a look on his face as he thought there was no way to stop Nainiae on this.

"… That's right. Sleep. Sleep."

To make sure Nainiae won't wake up, Riley carefully raised his head. He looked around the empty desert scenery and sat next to Nainiae.

"You sure sleep soundly."

Riley had been sitting there and staring at Nainiae's face from the side for a long while. However, it looked like Nainiae was not going to wake up any time soon. He carefully brought his hand toward Nainiae's clothes and pulled it.

'Oh no.'

He was going to pull at it lightly, but it seemed he pulled too hard. Nainiae's upper body leaned a lot. Riley hurriedly raised his arm and gently supported her neck.

‘Is she awake?’

“… Um….”

“…”

It seemed she was talking in her sleep. When she was tossing and turning, Riley thought she might wake up. However…

“Young… Master…”

Fortunately, it seemed she was in pretty deep sleep, more so than Riley thought. She was still breathing like a baby and not opening her eyes.

“You startled me. Geez.”

He moved his arm and decided to switch the roles. He had Nainiae’s head on top of his lap. He looked like he just got over a big huddle. With relieved look on his face, Riley looked at Nainiae below.

‘Have I changed a lot?’

Nainiae no longer had the scars on right side of her face near the eye. Her look was definitely beautiful now. She was so beautiful that it was to the point where any boys of her age or young men would have fallen for her in the first sight.

“Changed… huh.”

Riley was concerned that it might be uncomfortable for Nainiae because his lap was hard. However… Nainiae was sleeping soundly. Looking at her face, Riley gently brushed away the hair on the front of her face. Riley vacantly muttered,

“I think you are the same as always. Why did you even bother asking?”

Riley looked at Nainiae below. There was no indecency in his face.

Riley felt that it was just the scars that were gone. He didn’t think her face changed significantly.

He always judged people by their hearts. He never measured people over their appearances before.

He never had in his past life, and he never had in this life as well.

‘What changed is…’

Riley thought about what he heard from Sera last time and glanced at the sword he had untied and placed next to him.

‘Yes. You suddenly fell asleep in the cave. Since then, you just

never work up, you see? It seemed you also caught cold. You were boiling in fever. You have no idea how worried Nainiae and I were…'

'Probably a little over a month.'

Riley was thinking about Sera saying he slept for a month.

"…"

He was dreaming.

He was not sure how long he was dreaming. However, since Sera said it was for a month, it was certain he dreamed for a long time.

The dream was about his past life.

The moments where he wielded the Holy Sword where he said he will swing it to save the people and swung it even when he was coughing blood… The moments where he was pointed fingers at and criticized and was told to not butt in to save people… Riley was watching himself in those moments in his dream.

'I am probably the one who had changed.'

The mindset that he had when he was wielding a sword in his past life in comparison to the mindset he had now in this life… Riley was going over how much he changed.

*

It seemed the place used to be an oasis in the past. There were traces of people's dwelling in the ruined village. The boy entered the village and asked as he tapped his shoulder with the spear he was holding in his hand.

"Ms. Priesia, is this the place?"

The girl who was called as Priesia slightly removed the hood she had to cover her head and nodded.

"Yes."

She pulled up the hood and revealed her beautiful face. The girl looked around the scenery slowly once again and muttered that this place was the source as she exuded white light from her hand.

It was Holy Power.

It was a unique power that was different from mana, and it was something only those devoted to a Holy Temple could use.

"Commander, this place... could this place really be cleansed?"

The boy took a step back to help her focus. The boy's comrades carefully came to him and asked.

“She probably asked us because it is possible. We got help from Reitri merchant group too. Anyway, this is a good deed, so let’s definitely get it done.”

Nara quickly glanced at Rorona and Isen, his comrades, and looked at the girl who was focusing with her eyes closed.

Currently, there was a ginormous bounty on her. The beautiful girl had wrapped her body with Holy Power and was exuding mysterious atmosphere. She was the Priestess of Solia Holy Temple.

“Cleansing, huh…”

Having heard what Nara Basilisk, their young Commander, said, the mercenary group’s Isen looked around the desert scenery. He lightly lowered the mask that he had to cover his nose and mouth, but he cringed.

“Uuuk. I hope it works soon.”

The sand on the desert had the color changed to pitch black.

It had vertigo inducing level of stench. Also, the poison drenched on the sand was so strong that it would have worn off their shoes in a day if no special treatments were done.

“… Mr. Nara!”

“Ah, yes.”

Priesia had been focusing with her eyes closed. She suddenly hand gestured at him and asked him to come near her. Nara walked over to her.

“What is it?”

“I am sorry, but I think the cleansing work will take quite a bit of time. While I’m doing this, I would like you to… protect me, so…”

Having heard what she said, Nara tilted his head to the side. For now, he said he understood, and then he asked,

“In that case, how long will it take?”

“Not just the Karuta desert, but it seems the epidemic had spread to the forest at the end of the desert. I think it will take about… four to five hours.”

“F… Five hours?”

Through the travels, Nara had seen Priesia praying in occasions. He sent gaze of respect toward Priesia and rolled his tongue.

“We will be completely okay with protecting you, Priestess, but will you really be all right? You haven’t even had your breakfast yet?”

“During the fasting week, I had not had anything to eat for a whole week. It’s all right.”

“Huh…”

Nara thought that she didn’t become the Priestess just because of her beautiful face. He renewed his resolve and nodded,

“Yes, leave it to us.”

“Thank you. I received a divine message a few days ago, but the message was a very troubling kind.”

“A divine message?”

Priesia nodded.

“The message said that a leg is targeting me and walking toward me, so I should be careful. Nothing happened so far, but… I am still concerned, so…”

A leg is targeting the Priestess and is walking toward her? It was such a puzzling sentence. Nara tilted his head to the side and wondered. For now, he said he got it and nodded. He looked at his

spear and said,

“Please do not worry. Please focus on the cleansing.”

There was the request from Priesia. Not only that, there was the request from the Reitri merchant group. Also, there was the fact that he could contribute to restoring the nature. Nara vowed that he would make this cleansing work a success.

“What did she say?”

After making Priesia feel safe, Nara returned to his comrades on the back. Having hard the question, he shrugged his shoulder and said,

“She said it will take about four to five hours.”

“F… Four hours?”

“She will be standing like that and pray through it, right? She is not even wearing a mask, and… she is barefooted…”

Watching Priesia starting the prayer right away, Rorona muttered as if she was impressed. She shook her head left and right.

‘Anyway, what’s a leg?’

Nara tilted his neck left and right and did a light stretch. He then started to ponder about the divine message that the Priestess mentioned earlier.

A leg is targeting the Priestess and walking toward her?

To figure out what this meant, he tilted his head side to side as he thought about things. To Nara's back, sounds of steps on sand could be heard.

'Um?'

It was a little over ten people's worth of steps. Nara turned his head, and his eyes had become sharp like a snake.

"Oh? Look who's here?"

"..."

"Haha! It's Nara?"

Of the ten people who were approaching, the man on the front was dragging a human-sized hammer on the sand and greeting as if he was glad to see Nara.

Chapter 155 - The Remaining Work (3)

The daybreak at the desert was quiet because there were no sounds of chirping birds.

The stars in the dark night sky disappeared one after the other. The sky was gradually finding its original color, and this was the only indication that signaled the approaching morning.

"... Um."

Asleep, Nainiae was tossing and turning. Still looking sleepy, she opened her eyes.

'Was I a sleep... for a moment?'

Her memory was blurry. Nainiae thought about what she did last before she fell asleep. She remembered that she gave her lap to Riley for him to lie on. Having remembered this, she had a vacant look on her face.

"Are you awake?"

"..."

For some reason, her back was comfortable. Nainiae was just lying there, but she saw Riley's face that was looking down toward her. She slowly opened her sleepy eyes big.

“… Huh?”

“It’s morning, you rascal.”

“…?!”

It seemed she finally comprehended the situation. Nainiae, who was lying on Riley’s lap, quickly got up and fixed her hair and clothes that got out of shape.

“I am sorry, Young Master. I… for a bit…”

Embarrassed, she bit her lips and apologized immediately. Watching Nainiae, Riley struggled and got up. He stretched big and said,

“If you are awake, then we should slowly get going.”

Nainiae barely managed to get over the embarrassment. She looked at Riley and asked what they will be doing.

“Excuse me. Should I go get the map first?”

With just one gesture of her hand, she put all of the items they used last night in to the dimensional space. She let Riley know that she will go immediately to the Solia and get a map if he wanted.

“What about your eye? Can you use it?”

Nainiae touched the face around her right eye.

“… Um.”

Nainiae checked her condition as she touched her face around her eye. To try it out, she looked at Riley with her right eye, but she flinched her shoulders.

“Is it still not yet?”

“I am sorry. Even I… don’t know what’s causing this.”

The pain was so severe that it was impossible for her to even force herself to use the right eye. Nainiae wondered if it had something to do with her face being healed. She swallowed her worries inside and used magic.

“I don’t think this can be called a replacement for my right eye, but I’ll spread detection magic. If the man named Kabal is still in this desert, we should be able to notice him within time.”

She said it will not be as accurate as the right eye, but it will be able to help. Right after, she made a portal to Solia and said,

“While at it, I’ll also bring some food we could eat as breakfast. It

might take a while... Would you like to come along?"

She suggested they should stop by at Solia and come back to desert. Riley looked around the dark sand and raised his right hand as if he was asking Nainiae to wait for a moment.

"Wait... Over there... Are those carriages?"

Riley was asking with his right hand raised. Nainiae closed the portal on the back. She narrowed her eyes and looked at the group of carriages on the move.

"Yes. I think... they are carriages."

Using the detection magic that she used earlier, Nainiae was able to get close to the carriages to observe them. She explained what kind of carriages they were.

"I think they are.... Some kind of merchant group's carriages."

The carriages had loads of food and water, the crucial items for travel across desert.

"Would you like to see?"

She made a mirror-like thing in mid-air so Riley could also see the carriages and showed him the scene that she was observing through the detection magic.

“They have food and... water... and wooden boards? That’s no ordinary amount.”

There were numerous boxes on the carriage. Riley was checking the contents of the boxes. He found a box that had different color from the rest and looked at that one.

“Um?”

In the box, there were umbrellas.

‘Umbrellas?’

The umbrella looked familiar to him. Riley furrowed his brows and went over his fuzzy memories.

“Judging from the things on the carriages, it does not look like they have a business in the desert. Could they be trying to get out of Solia?”

Nainiae, who was observing the carriage, moved her gaze toward where Riley was looking at.

“Um? They are umbrellas?”

Nainiae learned that carriages didn’t just have food and drinks, but also boxes with umbrellas. She opened her eyes wide as if she

just realized something.

“Ah, those umbrellas… I know those.”

“You know those umbrellas?”

“Yes. It had such a unique shape, so I remember it. They are the umbrellas that Reitri from the Reitri merchant group had.”

It seemed Riley also remembered after hearing Nainiae’s explanation. With intrigued look on his face, Riley looked at the umbrellas again and said,

“Reitri… You mean the one we know?”

Thinking about the orange haired young man he met on the way to Rainfield, Riley asked. Nainiae nodded and said,

“Yes. Young Master, you remember Horai, the one who was complaining a lot about you… right?”

Riley remembered the brat who lacked manners. He muttered with bitter look on his face,

“Should we follow them?”

“Follow the Reitri merchant group?”

“That’s right. I don’t want you to waste mana going to the Solia and back. If it is just map and food, we can get them from them. The rascal would treat us that much for the debt.”

Reitri’s group was indebted to Riley at the Rainfield. It seemed Riley decided what to do. He was looking at where the carriages were headed. Nainiae carefully brought her hand toward Riley.

“Young Master, your hand…”

“Hand?”

It was not a long distance teleportation. It was moving short distance. So, Nainiae judged that it would be more efficient to just go instead of opening a portal.

“Here.”

Riley quickly gave her his hand. Nainiae pursed her lips and hesitated for a moment. She then grabbed his hand and used the teleportation magic.

*

“… Uuuuhk?!”

Suuuuuuuk

It seemed like a whirlwind was blowing, and a super natural phenomenon of strange fabrics being clumped up in midair was happening in the front. The driver who was on the very front end's carriage was surprised as he pulled the lead.

"W... What is this?"

"Wor... wor!"

Having noticed the front end's carriage coming to an abrupt stop, all carriages following behind hurriedly stopped one after the other.

"What is it?"

"Ah, there's something to the front..."

The driver tumbled and tried to explain the phenomenon. Around that time, the fabric looking things that were waving in the air disappeared. A boy and a girl made appearance.

"Uuuuak? P.... People?"

"..."

Riley scratched his head once and looked at Nainiae.

“Hey. Why did you put us in the path of the carriages? What were you going to do if we got run over?”

Having heard Riley’s criticism, Nainiae fiddled with her fingers in gloomy face. She whispered as if she was excusing herself.

“We would not have gotten run over… Really.”

Riley didn’t respond to her whisper. He walked closed to where the driver was. Looking at the driver sitting at the seat, Riley asked,

“Is Reitri here?”

There was a young boy, way below the driver’s age, casually asking where the owner of the merchant group was. The man instantly figured that Riley must be a nobility. He glanced at his comrades and asked Riley,

“I don’t know which nobility family you are from, but why is a Young Master asking about our leader…”

Because they appeared out of the blue, the driver thought they were ghosts. Now, he realized Riley was not a ghost but a Young Master from a nobility family who is with a mage. He gulped and waited for Riley’s response.

“Is he here or not? Just tell me that.”

Riley figured it would be faster to just talk to Reitri, so he said the above and cringed one of his eyes. At that moment, a voice could be heard from the back of the carriage.

“Young Master Riley?”

It was a familiar voice. Riley looked at the direction. Riley wiggled his eyebrows after finding a young boy who lightly had his face leaning out of the carriage.

“… Ah.”

“Horai.”

Nainiae, who followed Riley to the back, clapped and called the boy’s name in excitement. The boy flinched his shoulders.

“W… Who?”

A beautiful girl who he had never seen before was acting like she was so happy to see him and calling his name. He could not help but to panic.

“What is it? Why are we stop…”

Afterwards, just like how Nainiae followed behind Riley, an orange haired young man came out of the carriage from behind Horai. He found the two people blocking the carriages' path and opened his eyes big.

"Uh?"

It was Reitri.

"Young Master Riley!"

Reitri saw Riley's face. He welcomed Riley and was walking toward Riley. However, he also found Nainiae who was standing behind Riley and stopped for a moment.

"and... is she a new maid?"

Thinking about the maid uniform of the girl he met last time, Reitri tilted his head to the side and asked carefully. Riley smirked as if he found this fun and asked,

"I am not sure? Try guessing who it is."

Pointing at the beautiful maid who Reitri was not familiar with, Riley asked Reitri to guess. Finding it hard to believe, Reitri mumbled,

"It cannot be..."

The look on Reitri's face was growing more puzzled gradually. As if she was embarrassed, Nainiae lowered her head. She lightly lifted her right hand and ignited fire above her palm.

The fire was gray in color. It was the same color that Reitri mistook as that of a dark mage during the last summer.

"... Ahah!"

Horai was not quite sure until now, but he was certain after seeing the flame. He pointed at Nainiae and opened his mouth.

"That time.... That big sis maid?"

She closed her hand to extinguish the flame. She nodded toward Horai and greeted him.

"It's been... a long time."

*

Reitri had the carriages start to move again. He had Riley and Nainiae be on the biggest carriage and served them snacks and tea with great aroma.

"You received treatments. Congratulation."

“Thank you.”

“Really… You are a lot better now.”

Nainiae said she will pour the tea herself, but Reitri stopped her. He handed her the tea he made and smiled. Riley looked at Reitri and asked about him.

“What about you? I’ve heard that your merchant company became quite famous?”

“The Tess merchant group case that you informed me about last time helped us out, that’s all. There is not much that I have done.”

“Come on. There’s no need to be so modest.”

Even with good information, there were people who knew how to use the information and there were those that didn’t know how.

Reitri was one who was the kind that knew how.

Using the information Riley slipped him, rumor was that Reitri efficiently utilized it and let his name known widely in the merchant world.

“Anyway…”

Horai brought the map that they requested. Riley watched him handing it to Nainiae and asked Reitri,

“Have you met Nara? When I saw him last time, he said he will go find you. It looks like he is not here?”

Until he got on the carriage, Riley could not find Nara, so he asked. Reitri nodded and said,

“I met him. Actually, he is working for our merchant group now. He is not here because the Lightening Boulder Mercenary Group has a new mercenary, and they are out to help that person, so…”

“Priesia?”

“Ah, you know her?”

It was a secret that he was trying to hide, but Riley asked about Priesia. Reitri promptly explained the situation.

“Yes. Nara is not here because of a request by the Priestess. We are also moving our carriages to help her.”

“Help her? What exactly?”

“You probably already saw what the sand is like in this desert, right?”

Riley nodded and thought about the dark sand.

“It’s hard to see anything in this desert now. Let alone any people, animals like camels or commonly found scorpions and snakes are hardly seen anywhere. I don’t know how it happened, but the Karuta desert became quite literally a land of death, so… Priestess is currently trying to resolve this.”

“When you say resolve this…”

“Yes, I think she is trying to cleanse the entire desert.”

It seemed Riley was sick of it. He muttered,

“She sure has a generous heart.”

“Anyway, so, we are going to make the first move once she successfully cleanses the desert.”

Remembering the things loaded on the carriages, he looked at Reitri as if he knew what Reitri was talking about.

Reitri looked like a naïve young man from the country side. However, in the core, he was the leader who was in command of the Reitri Merchant Group.

“Young Master, you would like to go with us? Ms. Rorona said

she will let us know of her location by shooting a flare arrow during the lunch time. Considering the time, it is probably about now…”

While Reitri was talking, the carriage rattled once. The man who was driving the carriage on the front said in loud voice,

“M… Mr. Reitri! It’s the arrow!”

“Ah, looks like they just confirmed the arrow.”

“… Uncle! Uncle!!”

As if he was waiting for this, Reitri got up. He looked at Horai who was watching the outside through the window and tilted his head to the side.

“Horai?”

“Uncle, something terrible happened!”

“…?”

“The arrow, the arrow’s color!”

Chapter 156 - The Remaining Work (4)

Along with saying something terrible had happened, Horai also mumbled that the color of the arrow was strange. Having noticed Horai's response, Reitri rushed to the window that Horai had his face peeking out.

"Why the arrow…"

Reitri peeked his head out to the outside of the carriage through the window just like Horai. He saw the lighting arrow that was shot to the sky and put up a serious look on his face.

"That color is not right."

"What does it supposed to mean?"

"…"

After discovering the arrow's color, Reitri fell to silence and was petrified. Wondering what this was about, Riley tilted his head to the side.

"What? What is it?"

"… It's red."

"Red color?"

Riley had no way of knowing what the color was supposed to mean. He furrowed his brows as if he was trying to tell Reitri to explain properly. Nainiae, who was looking at the map she got from Horai, strained her eyes. It seemed she detected something.

‘Near us?’

She succeeded in finding something using the search magic she used earlier. She tapped on Riley’s shoulder.

“Young Master.”

Riley turned to look at her. Realizing that Nainiae had serious look on her face, Riley got up.

“You found them?”

“I cannot pinpoint the exact location, but…”

Nainiae held Riley on the shoulder and used a short-range teleportation magic.

They instantly got on the top of the carriage. She pointed at the lighting arrow that was rising to the sky in the distance that was shot by someone and said,

“Over there. At that place, something is happening.”

The rising smoke's color was red. It was the lighting arrow that Reitri mentioned earlier.

With the search magic, Nainiae was able to recognize loud sounds or traces of battles there. She narrowed her eyes and said something was off.

"That arrow is definitely the lighting arrow that Ms. Rorona told us she will use to contact us. However... the color is different."

Having heard Nainiae, Reitri, who had his upper body out through the window, looked up and explained about the lighting arrow.

"If things were going as planned, the smoke's color should be green. Unless there's something wrong with my eyes, that color is..."

The smoke's color was red.

"If it is red, then what does it mean?"

"It means we should not come."

"Don't come?"

'It means it is an emergency and dangerous, so we should not

come… That's what it means."

They could not know what was happening at the place where the smoke was rising from. However, it was certain now that they were in a dire situation.

"Young Master!"

Nainiae quickly assessed the situation and decided what to do. Nainiae extended her hand toward Riley and moved her mana. Riley seemed like he was thinking the same thing. He promptly grabbed hold of her hand.

"Two of you? Wait!"

When Nainiae and Riley just grabbed hold of each other's hands, Reitri realized they were about to teleport just like earlier. Reitri quickly called them.

"…"

Although he called to stop them, it seemed the timing was not right… Despite the calling, the two could not be seen on the top of the carriage. They were already gone without a trace.

"W… What should we do, Sir?"

With vacant look on his face, a merchant was watching the two

disappear through teleportation. He moved his wide-open mouth and asked Reitri.

“Huuuu.”

Reitri sighed.

It was like a habit when he had to demonstrate his intuition as a merchant who leads a group.

“What are you going to do, Uncle?”

Now, even Horai was asking what he was going to do. Reitri thought hard about this for a moment. It seemed he made a decision after using his merchant instinct. He opened his mouth with serious look on his face.

“Let’s go there.”

“R... Really? Are you really going to go there?”

“We need to at least check what happened there. However, I’ll go there myself and come back afterwards.”

“Pardon?”

Having heard that he will go there, other merchants jumped up

and asked him to reconsider.

“M... Mr. Reitri... Won’t it be better if one of us or other mercenaries went to check it out?”

“I think so too. If it is red arrow, that means it’s an emergency and we should not come, right? Instead of going there, I think it would be a better idea to turn back and wait for Mr. Nara and everyone from the Lightning Boulder Mercenary group to come back.”

“No.”

Reitri shook his head. He turned to look at the place where the red smoke was rising. Reitri said,

“I think it would be best if we went there.”

“Mr. Reitri...”

To the merchants, a figure like Reitri was hard to run into. Reitri was a great man.

He didn’t look down or belittle people under him. Also, as a merchant himself, he made sure to get all that the merchants wanted. He was a good man and skilled in the business. The merchants didn’t like the idea of him getting involved in a dangerous situation like this.

“Do you have to go?”

“Just why do you need to go to such a dangerous place….”

“… It’s an intuition.”

Reitri borrowed another merchant’s personal carriage. He grabbed the lead and said,

“My intuition is telling me that.”

A merchant making his move based on intuition was actually a very ridiculous idea. However, Reitri shrugged. It seemed he didn’t change his mind. He just swung the lead and had the carriage start to move.

*

Nainiae and Riley moved from the top of the carriage to the middle of desert. They quickly directed their gaze toward where the red smoke was rising from.

‘What is this…’

Before she found the red smoke, Nainiae found the surrounding in utter disarray. Finding it hard to believe, she opened her mouth.

“Young Master, this is…”

“…”

Riley also found the surrounding in disarray before finding the smoke and had serious look on his face.

The sand in the area had craters as if there were explosions.

Moreover, there weren’t one or two craters. There were several dozens of them.

“… Kuuuu.”

“…?”

While they were looking around, they heard someone moaning in pain. Riley and Nainiae both had their heads turn toward the direction.

“Ms. Rorona!”

The moaning in pain was coming from Rorona, the archer of the Lightning Boulder Mercenary. She was collapsed on the ground.

“… Who?”

To Rorona, her bow was like a part of herself. However, her bow was broken into three pieces. Also, her body was in shamble just like her bow. She was drenched in blood and sand.

“It’s me.”

Rorona’s consciousness was still only faint. She was not quite able to come to her senses. Nainiae brought out herb from the dimensional space and had Rorona bite on it. Nainiae asked Rorona if she was all right as she washed black sand on Rorona’s body.

“…?”

Because of blood and sand on her face, Rorona was not able to open her eyes properly. Now, thanks to Nainiae, she was barely able to regain her sight. However, she was still not able to recognize Nainiae.

“Someone like you… Why?”

Nainiae figured it could not be helped that Rorona was not recognizing her. She raised her hand and had a small flame bloom on her palm.

The flame had grey color. It was the color that the mercenaries, including Rorona herself, misunderstood during the last summer.

“Ah… By any chance…”

At first, Rorona was weary of her, but having confirmed the flame’s color, Rorona recognized Nainiae. Rorona was tearing up.

“N… Nainiae…”

“What happened? What happened here?”

Supported by Nainiae, Rorona opened her eyes. She bit her lips lightly and turned her gaze away.

“… We were ambushed.”

Cringing, she barely managed to say those words. She struggled to hold in tears.

“Isen was the first one. After that… It was the Commander, and then the Priestess…”

In brink of tears, Rorona explained what happened. Riley brought his face close to Rorona and asked who were the ones responsible.

“By any chance, is it that mercenary named Kabal?”

Rorona was surprised, wondering how he knew. In anguish, she

nodded.

“Because of a favor asked by the Priestess, we were here to help cleanse the desert, and that bastard came. Probably… It seemed he was tailing us for a long time… but I didn’t notice.”

Due to injuries, it seemed Rorona was having difficulties. She stuttered as she continued explaining. She took a deep breath and continued,

“Many of the Kabal’s Mercenaries came. The small fries were not the problem. It was Kabal.”

Rorona mumbled that they were powerless against Kabal’s incredible battle strength. She looked at the crater ridden desert in disarray.

“Honestly, I’ve only heard about him in rumors, but his monstrous strength is…”

Rorona looked around the craters as she talked. It seemed she was parched in her neck. She tightly closed her eyes and started to shed tears.

“That man is?”

Nainiae also directed her gaze toward one of the craters. She found a man there who was in shambles just like how Rorona was earlier. Nainiae muttered,

“Mr. Isen…”

He was the middle-aged man in Lightning Boulder Mercenary group who always carried a shield. Isen was lying on one of the craters.

“I could not… protect him.”

Having realized the man was not breathing, Rorona pulled her chin as if she could not look anymore. Tears dropped from her eyes.

“…”

Riley was looking at Isen’s corpse. He redirected his gaze to Rorona and asked.

“Where are the two?”

They could be corpses now. They could just be collapsed somewhere. Regardless, they should be nearby, but Riley couldn’t find them.

“As for the Commander and Priestess… They were captured.”

“Captured?”

“I think that was their goal to begin with.”

“When?”

“Just now…”

Riley responded immediately to her words. He widened his senses and checked if there was anyone moving away from the area.

‘To that direction?’

There were about seven to eight people who were moving away from the location. It seemed certain that they were the Kabal Mercenary group, Nara and Priesia.

“Young Master, wait!”

It looked like Riley was going to head there immediately. Nainiae, who was supporting Rorona, rushed and extended her hand toward Riley. However…

“…”

Riley already took off after kicking the ground.

*

“Tsk... Nara.... That rascal sure makes things bothersome for me.”

Kabal pulled out the spear that pierced through his shoulder. Annoyed, he threw it away as he looked back at his subordinates and the two who were being carried by them.

“Well, anyway, we grabbed what we wanted. I guess what’s left is convincing them. The Head needs to come soon.”

Kabal was looking at his subordinates who were carrying people on their waists. Kabal cringed and approached them.

“Hey. What are you doing?”

“Pardon? As you ordered...”

It seemed Priesia was unconscious. She was just hanging there with her eyes closed. Having heard Kabal, the mercenary who was carrying Priesia flinched and started to step back.

“That hand... It would be good for you to not massage her the wrong way unless you want me to choke you.”

Kabal leaned his face right at the man. Kabal completely forgot about the hole on his own shoulder and put up violent look on his

face.

“C... Commander. There is no need for you to create such a violent mood...”

“Why are you being so careful with her as if she is the most precious one in the world? Who is she?”

“Weren’t you going to sell her as a slave? She is quite pretty. I think she is a high-quality product. If you sell her to a nobility... No, before we sell her, if we have fun with her first...”

“...”

Slave, high-quality product... The subordinate was yapping away at will. Kabal glared at him and quickly walked toward him.

“... Kuuuaaak?!”

Kabal swung his tightly made fist at him.

“Uuuhuk?”

“C... Commander!”

The mercenary who was hit by Kabal’s fist was thrown off to the far distance over the hill. Other mercenaries, choking in fear, were

petrified. They looked at their Commander.

“Fools. You just like pretty faces... You guys still haven’t figured out who she is? Who this lass is?”

The girl was now on Kabal’s waist, but she was still completely loose. She wasn’t moving at all.

The mercenaries were merely mesmerized by her beauty. They had no idea who she was. They merely tilted their heads to side. Frustrated about his subordinates’ stupidity, Kabal ground his teeth and said,

“She is the Priestess! The Priestess! There is a reward placed on her recently by the Solia. She is the Priestess of Solia Holy Temple.”

The mercenaries finally learned who she was. They panicked and started to mumble.

“P... Priestess?”

“Really?”

“She is. She really is! This is the real deal.”

The subordinates were all excited. Kabal calmed them down and said to the mercenary who was holding Nara on his waist.

“The same goes for Nara. He is the last survivor of the Basilisks, humanoid beings. He will be useful in many ways, so be extra careful about how you handle him.”

Nara was completely loose like Priesia. He was unconscious while being held on the mercenary’s waist. However, unlike Priesia, Nara was in shambles.

His small body was full of bruises. The hands that held the spear before had he fingers twisted in wrong ways as if someone twisted them by force. The fingers were just hanging there.

“Ah, Yes… I understand.”

Despite the bleeding on his shoulder, Kabal didn’t even bat an eye and continued with violent look on his face. The mercenaries gulped and nodded.

“Be extra careful when handling…”

The mood rapidly got heavy. There was someone who was mixed in middle of the mercenaries. The man quietly mumbled.

“…?”

They never heard this voice before. They all floated up question marks on their faces and turned their heads toward the voice.

“Huh?”

There was a boy.

“How kind of you.”

The boy had chilled look on his face.

Chapter 157 - The Remaining Work (5)

“… What the?”

A boy who they never saw before made an entrance. Kabal and other mercenaries were surprised as if they just saw a ghost.

“W… Who are you?”

The mercenaries had vacant looks on their faces for a moment. They took a few steps back from the boy and brought their hands toward their weapons. The boy started to look around them.

“…”

Of the mercenaries, he found one who was holding Nara on the waist. The boy stopped moving his gaze. He confirmed Nara in shambles and muttered inside,

‘Is he alive at least?’

He was a mess from the tip of the head to the end of the feet. Only his fingers, which were twisted out of shape, occasionally twitched lightly.

‘… Looks like he is still breathing.’

Basilisks could see the color of people’s aura. To find the rest of

the ‘purple people,’ the boy still needed Nara.

“I asked who you are!”

It seemed the mercenaries could not stand the boy keeping silence for so long. They started to yell.

“Commander, what should we do?”

The mercenaries were asking their commander what to do about the boy who suddenly appeared.

“Should we kill him or capture him alive?”

They were talking about violent things loudly so the boy could hear. However, instead of cringing his face, he still had calm look. He was exuding violent mood.

“Commander?”

While the strange atmosphere was continuing, Kabal handed the Priestess to a subordinate and raised his right hand.

“… Haha.”

Having noticed Kabal’s gesture, the mercenaries put away their hands from the weapons and started to glance around.

“Oh my… Who is this?”

Kabal suddenly walked toward the boy and leaned his face right on the boy’s face.

“Aren’t you a Young Master of Iphalleta Family in Solia?”

“…”

“It’s been a while? Right? Last time we met, it was during summer, right?”

Having heard the family name, the mercenaries started to mutter.

“Iphall…eta?”

“If you are talking about Iphalleta, isn’t that the name of the Count who fought with our commander during the border skirmish last time?”

The mercenaries remembered the battle from the border skirmish. Having noticed the mood becoming even heavier, they even forgot to gulp. They just glanced at the boy and their commander.

“Well, about your father… I am sorry about that.”

“…”

“Uh huh. There is no need to make such a face! That place was a battle field… He should feel fortunate that it was an arm that got thrown off instead of his life! Well, you are still young, so you probably don’t understand this well.”

Kabal tilted the tip of his lips up and looked at his subordinates. The mercenaries had been quietly glancing around to figure out what Kabal and the boy were thinking. The mercenaries started to smile awkwardly after feeling Kabal’s gaze.

“So, what brings you here?”

Riley was crumpling his face as if he was displeased about something. Toward the boy, Kabal asked as he peeked a smile.

Still, he was not letting his guard down.

A moment ago, although Kabal didn’t feel anything, the boy suddenly appeared in middle of the mercenaries and talked to them. This move made Kabal weary.

“Young Master? Why don’t you say something?”

“Commander, could it be that he is choking in fear because he is still just a kid?”

“Ah ah. Indeed! After seeing the state that Nara bastard is in, anyone would be scared!”

The mercenaries were laughing. Standing in the middle, Riley was staring only at Kabal. Annoyed by the ruckus, Riley started to exude deadly aura.

“… Uk?”

It was as if the time stopped.

All Riley did was exuding his aura. However, the mercenaries were petrified as if they were frozen solid. They could only move their eyeballs.

It looked like they were wondering why they could not move and why they could not voice anything through their mouths.

“…”

Kabal was experiencing the same condition.

Of the Six Powers of otherworldly nature that should not exist, this was one of them…

Even Kabal, the one who possessed the Right Leg, could not help but be petrified. He was unable to continue his words.

‘Deadly aura?’

Kabal’s subordinates were not able to figure this out because the power was so overwhelming. Still, the Young Master from the Iphalleta Family was exuding deadly aura.

‘He immobilized us using only his deadly aura?’

In disbelief, Kabal, while petrified, faced Riley’s cold eyes.

“One, two, three… If I kill you, would that be four?”

Riley muttered in low voice.

‘Did he say… four?’

Kabal started to digest what Riley just said.

“Last time, that bastard said there were six. After I catch the Friend Who Cannot Breathe, then there will be just one left.”

Listening to what Riley said, Kabal’s eyes started to become bloodshot.

“You… you bastard…”

In heavy, slow steps, Riley walked toward Kabal. All mercenaries started to glare at Riley.

“Well then.”

It didn’t take many steps before Riley got to the front of Kabal. He slowly moved his right hand.

“…”

Riley’s hand was headed to the handle of the sword on his waist.

‘First, I’ll cut this bastard, and then…’

Holding the handle, drawing the sword, cutting Kabal’s arm, stomach, neck, or anywhere… Riley thought that’s what he should do.

‘If I cut him…’

Riley’s hand, which was headed to the sword handle, suddenly flinched and stopped.

“…”

His hand lightly shivered.

‘After cutting him with sword… what will happen?’

His sword handle was only a few inches away, but he was unable to draw the sword that was hanging on his waist.

‘Young Master, have I changed a lot?’

Before he grabbed the sword, he thought about Nainiae’s question.

It was because of the sword.

Riley had been swinging the sword throughout his past life and even in this life. He stopped his hand and thought about the reason why he wielded sword.

‘To begin with, why am I wielding a sword…’

In his regret filled past life, because of a sword, he was grinding away and then some for nothing. While he was at it… He swore that he will never hold a sword ever again and will never have hope that he would be able to save someone by wielding it… However…

‘Why?’

To himself who swore never to wield a sword ever again, Riley asked why, and he found an answer soon.

‘Why? Isn’t that obvious? My father… My father lost his right arm because of this bastard. I can’t leave a bastard like Kabal be when he hurt my family. So, that’s why I…’

In his past life, due to his lack of attention, he lost all of his family. When Riley was born in to this new life, he swore that he will protect his family no matter what.

So…

During last spring, when Oruli made Iris eat poisoned soup, he felt his heart sink. Unable to sit still, Riley picked up the sword.

‘Now is no different. It is the same. This bastard hurt my family. He is the bastard who took away my father’s arm. He is the bastard who hurt my family. To him… I should…’

Looking at Kabal in front of him, Riley, who had his hand just inches away from the sword handle, started to twitch his fingers again.

Thinking about what would result from this action, Riley feared about his current life ending up just like his past life, a life full of regrets.

‘Which one is it?’

Riley asked himself another question.

‘Do you want to rest easy? Do you want to continue swinging sword? Which one is it?’

He could not make up his mind.

Sometimes, he just lay down, saying he didn’t want to bother with the problems. In other times, he swung the sword, saying he won’t sit back and watch.

It was as if he was trapped in a maze. Riley could not make up his mind.

‘I…’

During this year’s spring, since when he saw his mother coughing blood after eating a poisoned soup and picked up a sword… Riley had not been able to make consistent decisions.

It was because he never quite decided clearly if he wanted to wield sword again or not.

It could be that he had a foolish desire left.

In his past life, he swung the sword to the very end and defeated the Demon Lord. However, his life ended before he could hear anyone telling him that he had done well or that he worked hard.

It could be that he just wanted to hear some words of recognition as a reward.

Like a ghost with grudge or obsession…

"…"

Facing the question, he was not able to make a decision quickly. A phantom voice could be heard in his ear.

Coward.

Lazy bum.

The voice was criticizing him. Listening to the voice, Riley was hesitating about holding the sword. It was around that time. Kabal, who was immobilized because of the deadly aura, started to move slowly.

"You bastard…"

Of the purple people, of the six parts, the power that he possessed was the monstrous strength. Last time, although Stein possessed superior skill, he still lost an arm because of Kabal's ability.

"You dare…"

Although Riley was restraining Kabal with his deadly aura, Kabal started to move his body using his monstrous strength alone. His face was completely red in fury. Kabal snorted toward Riley.

He was like a bull in a bull fighting arena. Not just his face, but the white parts of his eyes were bloodshot. Using his strength, he made a fist with his right hand and punched Riley's stomach with it.

"... Kup?!"

Riley was still organizing his thoughts about his past and his reasons for wielding the sword. Feeling the shock in his stomach, Riley crumpled his face.

"Huuuaaaap!"

Along with the shouting, Kabal swung his arm with all of his strength. Riley's body was bent like a bow and got thrown off to the other side.

"Kuuuhuuuu!"

"huk, huk..."

After Riley got thrown off to the distance by Kabal's fist, the mercenaries, who were unable to move until now, plummeted on their butts and started to grasp for air.

“How did this happen?”

“C… Commander… was it you?”

Kabal omitted the answer to his subordinates’ questions. His face was still red. Leaving it be, he started to walk and said,

“Take good care of Nara and the Priestess and wait at the meeting site. It would be good to tie him up well. That kid Nara might be young, but he is better than you all when it comes to quick thinking, so you can never know what he might do.”

“Commander? What about you?”

“I’m going to completely finish off that rotten Young Master.”

“…”

Their commander was exuding murderous intent to the maximum. The mercenaries gulped and nodded.

“I warned you earlier, but it would be good for you to not touch the Priestess other than having her tied up. If you don’t want to receive the heaven’s punishment from me that is.”

Kabal turned his head and warned. Facing his violent eyes, the mercenaries’ faces turned pale. They repeatedly nodded and swore

that they won't touch her.

"... Get going."

Kabal gestured with his chin. The mercenaries held unconscious Nara and Priestess on their waists and continued on their path.

"Well then... Now..."

Kabal watched his subordinates leaving. He looked to the direction where Riley was thrown off as he put his hand toward the hammer hanging behind his back.

"Shall I go greet our adorable Young Master who claimed to have come to avenge his father?"

Udududuk

Kabal tilted his head left to right to crack it. He haphazardly stopped the bleeding on the shoulder caused by Nara's spear piercing it. He started to walk.

"Young Master?"

He was thrown off very far by Kabal's monstrous strength. Kabal had to walk for a long time to get to Riley. He looked at Riley, who was unconscious, and snorted as he muttered.

“Hng. He’s alive?”

Riley was lying down as if he was buried under the sand. Riley had vacant look on his face, but he was definitely breathing.

“If you were dead, I was going to at least cut off your head and take it with me. This is fine too. Actually, this is better. I have a few things I wanted to ask you, Young Master.”

Kabal put his hand toward Riley and grabbed him by the collar to pick him up.

“It would be better to answer clearly.”

“…”

“I’ve heard that someone is meddling in our goal toward the life long wish. Is that someone… you?”

Riley was being shaken by Kabal who was holding him by the collar. However, Riley didn’t answer. Instead, he just had that blank look on his face.

“…”

“Answer!”

Kabal had veins popping up on his forehead, thinking he was being ignored. He put the hammer down and swung his fist at Riley.

"... Kuk."

Riley was punched on the face by Kabal's fist. Riley's face was turned rapidly to the side.

Puk!

Another punch struck Riley and made his upper body falter.

"Tell me, Young Master... If you do, I'll spare your life."

Breathing down on Riley, Kabal threatened him again. However, Riley still showed no response despite being grabbed and picked up by the collar or being punched.

"..."

"... You..."

Kabal hated being ignored. Unable to stand it anymore, he swung the arm that was holding Riley by the collar. He swung it big and shouted,

“You rotten brat!!”

Riley was swung around like a kite.

Kwang!

With that violent noise, his body was thrown to the ground.

“… Ug.”

Riley collided with the ground on his back. That kicked the air out of his lung. Riley cringed and moved his gaze.

The sand formed a large crater as if an explosion happened there. This was a good example that demonstrated Kabal’s monstrous power.

‘The scenery around Rorona earlier, what that also this bastard’s doing?”

Riley thought about how Nara must have fought this monster with ridiculous muscular strength. However, feeling the blunt shock in his stomach again, Riley cringed his face.

“Tell me.”

“…”

“I said tell me!!”

Kabal got on top of Riley and started to swing his fist at Riley’s face.

Puk

Puk

It seemed each punch he threw was carrying his monster strength. With the sound of each blow, the depth of the crater and the diameter was slowly increasing.

“Kuk… Kuk…”

Riley’s face was completely swollen up. It was full of bruises and cuts. He looked horrible.

Even though his face was turning into a pulp, Riley was still just agonizing about his past and current life. He was not able to find a definite answer.

“Huuk. Huuk…”

Sitting on Riley’s stomach, Kabal mercilessly swung his fists at Riley. Kabal realized that the boy’s head should have been turned into a pancake and then some by now. Instead, the boy was still

breathing. Kabal could not hide the surprised look on his face.

‘What the? How come… he is still alive?’

He had absolutely no clue why the boy’s head was still attached and so was his breathing.

After taking a beating from him like this, even the great existence like the dragons would have fainted or died. However, Riley was holding out.

As if he was thinking hard about something, with vacant look on his face, Riley was looking up in the sky instead of Kabal without any response.

“You little…”

Kabal, still infuriated, got his ass up from Riley’s stomach. He raised his right leg.

Puk

Crush

Violent sounds could be heard. Kabal’s leg repeated the stumping motion, and it started to splatter blood.

It was Riley's.

'Hold the sword or not... Just what should I go along with? What are you trying to say?'

Half of him wanted to just rest. The other half of him wanted to avoid the phantom voice. His head was all jumbled up. It seemed Riley was suffering from the headache more than the pain from beaten up face. He moaned in pain. As the blood made his vision red, Riley furrowed his brows.

Riley's mind was in chaos.

Ever since the nightmare last time, even now... His head and mind were being indecisive.

"You runt! You little!"

Kabal struck Riley on the face multiple times. He kicked and punched Riley's face, but Riley was not losing consciousness. That made Kabal even more agitated.

"... Die!"

Kabal shouted at the top of his lunge, enough to make his neck explode. Kabal stumped with his right leg again. This time, unlike the 'puk' sound, a different kind of crushing sound was heard.

“…”

Having heard the sound, Kabal thought it was finally done. He smiled victoriously and moved the leg again.

Crack

It sounded like Riley’s cheek bone was being crushed.

‘Well then, like this…’

‘If it is something I cannot find the conclusion, perhaps it would be best to just stop thinking… If I close my eyes like this, then maybe everything will end…’

Riley was muttering those thoughts in his head. It was at that moment.

“… Young Master!!”

A voice could be heard.

“Um?”

It was a delicate voice of a young girl. Kabal slowly turned his head and looked at the maid who appeared in the distance.

‘A maid?’

Wondering what a maid was doing here, Kabal stopped. Maid bit her lips lightly and started to run toward them.

“Now what is this…”

At first, because she was at quite a distance, he could only figure out her getup. Now, as she approached them, he was able to confirm her face. Surprised, Kabal wiggled his eyebrows.

‘Huh?’

Of all women he had ever saw throughout his mercenary life, she had the most outstanding beauty.

She was even more beautiful than famed bar maid who revived a dying pub.

She was more beautiful than renowned daughters of nobilities.

She was more astonishing than the Priestess of a Holy Temple.

Kabal even thought she might be a Goddess. With an adorable look on her face, she was running this way.

‘Well, I don’t know where this cake dropped from, but…’

Kabal decided to redirect his anger toward Riley at someone else. He licked his lips and turned toward the maid.

“Oh my? Are you this Young Master’s maid?”

With open arms, Kabal walked toward the maid. However, he blinked after feeling sudden wind.

“…?”

In a blink of an eye, the maid disappeared.

‘What’s this? Was I imagining it? Was it a mirage?’

Kabal thought maybe he just saw a mirage because this was desert. He thought about when was the last time he drank any water. However, that was not a mirage.

“Young Master!”

It happened because Nainiae used magic and swapped the locations with Kabal.

“What the?”

He heard Nainiae’s voice from the back. Kabal turned his head to

look. Having realized he got done in, Kabal crumpled his face.

‘A mage?’

After swapping the spots with Kabal, she held Riley in her arms. Looking at Riley’s face, which was a mess, she bit her lips again and asked,

“Why didn’t you fight back?”

She couldn’t know what happened exactly, but Nainiae knew well that Riley was not some weakling who would have been hurt like this one-sidedly.

“…”

Riley didn’t answer.

He didn’t want to tell someone about his troubled thoughts of his past life. He also just didn’t want to speak.

He didn’t want to be treated like a mentally ill person.

“…”

With no response, Nainiae glared at Riley’s face again.

His cheekbones were cracked. His skin was torn and messed up. However, she could still see the gleam in his eyes. She muttered quietly.

“… Is it because of your past life?”

“…?”

There was something empty about Riley’s eyes. However, having heard the question, Riley’s eyes shook.

“What did you… just say?”

“Is it about the Holy Sword you wielded in your past life? Because you had to watch many people die as result of it… Because you fear the things of your past life might repeat… You were agonizing over them, weren’t you?”

“You…”

Wondering how she could have known about his past life, Riley looked at Nainiae and muttered vacantly.

“You had been avoiding holding swords, but still… isn’t it true that you still want to wield it?”

She was not sobbing. She had serious look on her face as she started to shed tears. She looked at Riley directly and asked.

"... Sword."

Although she was crying, her strong eyes were unwavering. It seemed she had agonized over this several ten thousand times in that brief moment and came to a decision.

"I thought hard about this all along. Ever since I learned about your past life, I wondered if I should tell you that I know or not."

Nainiae briefly took a deep breath and continued,

"Until now, I couldn't decide, so I couldn't tell you. I was worried you might find it uncomfortable. However..."

Nainiae lowered her gaze and looked at Riley's right hand.

His hand was shaking lightly. It would have been hard for anyone to notice without taking a close look.

"I thought that... I should definitely tell you now."

Kabal, who switched places with Nainiae earlier, pounded at the barrier that Nainiae cast and muttered,

'What is this? What are they talking about?'

Because of the barrier, he could not hear anything from the inside. Frustrated, Kabal picked up his hammer.

‘I don’t know what they are up to, but I can’t just sit back and watch.’

With intent to shatter the mage’s barrier as if it was nothing, Kabal wrapped himself in purple energy and raised the hammer up to the sky.

“Young Master.”

It seemed Nainiae was not interested at all about what Kabal was doing on her back. Nainiae continued in quiet voice,

“You told me once before. If I become afraid of being criticized after working hard to live up to others’ expectations… The solution is taking a step back. Instead of receiving expectations from people, it is better to watch from the back.”

Back then… Nainiae said she could not find the answer and said ‘I am not sure.’ Now, like a person who had the answer, she smiled lightly and said,

“I am a little different.”

She said the solution she found was a little different.

“I am not sure if what I found is the answer you had been seeking, but this is what I think.”

“…”

“As I thought… No matter what happens, no matter what the result is, just doing what I want keeps my heart at ease the most.”

Behind her, Kabal’s hammer was smashed on to the barrier. Nainiae had been talking calmly until now. However, she crumpled her face slightly. The sound of cracks developing on the barrier could be heard.

“It is so that I won’t have any regrets for the choices I made.”

Nainiae had been following Riley because she wanted to. She was giving a lecture to Riley at the moment, knowing she was in no position to do so, because she wanted to.

Just because she wanted to.

So she won’t regret it later… This was the answer that Nainiae found for the question from the last autumn.

“If you don’t want to draw the sword, then you don’t have to. If you want to wield it, then that’s fine too. You don’t have to be wondering around about it. It’s simple.”

Using wind magic, Nainiae dusted off the sand that was on Riley's clothes and added the following with smile.

"Regardless of your decision, I respect you, Young Master."

Nainiae was intending to be Riley's sword if he chose not to draw the sword. If he decided to wield the sword, then she intended to reduce the burden of other people's expectations in his place.

"I... I will do what I want to do."

She was just a maid, yet she gave such lecture to the Young Master she served. If Sera or Ian knew this, they would have been shocked.

It was also possible that Riley might tell her off and say that he thinks she is an eyesore and should get lost.

Still, Nainiae was daring to think that she definitely won't regret it.

It was because she chose on her own what she wanted to do.

"... Break!!"

The barrier was littered with cracks. Kabal thought it will take just one more hit to break the barrier. Along with the shouting, Kabal smashed the barrier with the hammer he raised up.

“…?!”

Nainiae was going to attack as soon as the barrier shattered. However, she opened her eyes big and stopped.

“Um?”

Kabal’s hammer fell.

To be precise, Kabal’s right arm fell to the ground.

“…?!”

Riley drew his sword.

Chapter 158 - The Remaining Work (6)

“Ah?”

In that split second, Kabal, who was only looking at the barrier being split in half in front of him, lowered his gaze.

‘What is this?’

He eventually realized that the muscular arm lying on the ground was his. With look of disbelief, he turned his gaze to the front.

‘Why is my arm…?’

A gentle breeze tickled his face. He finally realized the situation he was in. He held his shoulder, where his arm had been – which was cleanly cut off – and started to take a step back.

“Kuuuuk!”

As he stepped back, Kabal was staring beyond the barrier that was just split in half. There, he found Riley who was holding a sword. Kabal had no idea when had Riley gotten up and drawn his sword. Kabal gritted his teeth.

“As I thought, you were…”

Riley was holding the sword in his right hand. With the arm fully

extended to the back, he had taken a standby stance. Facing Riley, Kabal exuded the purple light energy and started to swing the hammer in his left hand.

"You were the bastard!"

As if something snapped and he lost his mind, Kabal was charged at Riley like a beast. Nainiae, who was vacantly staring at Riley, showed a concerned look on her face for a brief moment. However, it was a baseless concern.

"Uuuk?!"

Only a moment ago, Riley was being held in Nainiae's arms. Now, Riley was already standing and parring the hammer that Kabal slammed down. Nainiae watched this happen in front of her.

"Kuk! Petty tricks!"

Watching Riley quickly closing the distance and deflecting his own hammer, Kabal huffed and puffed as he changed the angle of the hammer and swung it with his left arm, as if he was going to send Riley flying.

'Young Master.'

Watching Riley parry the strike again by pushing the pole portion of the hammer with his sword, Nainiae mumbled inside.

"…"

Although Kabal was missing an arm, the monstrous strength drenched in purple light was definitely not something that could be ignored. Despite this, Riley only maintained emotionless face as he moved his sword and deflected Kabal's attacks.

It was as if he was testing something.

He parried attacks from above by having them sent below and he dodged the attacks coming from the side. Riley was dancing with Kabal, as if Riley was toying with him.

"You little!"

It looked like Kabal almost had him, but he didn't. Somehow, in various ways, Riley was evading Kabal's attacks. Infuriated by Riley's belittling moves, Kabal looked at the ground. It seemed his target had changed.

'The ground?'

Nainiae realized Kabal was about to smash the ground with his hammer to bring about a quake. She hesitated as she thought whether or not she should prepare her magic. However, Riley responded faster than the smashing of hammer on the ground.

“… Uuuu, uu?”

Raised high above, the hammer was just waiting for the smashing motion to the ground. However, the hammer was stopped in that angle.

To be precise, Kabal’s body had become stiff.

Because of the deadly aura that Riley exuded, his entire body was not budging at all as if it became a lump of ice or a boulder.

‘It cannot be… Again?’

With his body immobilized, Kabal was not able to do anything but move his eyeballs to chase the culprit responsible for his current state.

‘Something petty like this…’

Like the last time, he was trying to use his strength to shake off the deadly aura that was suppressing his body. It seemed this was the right answer. His body, which was struggling, slowly started to move again.

“… Ha.”

Kabal shivered and started to move again. Watching Kabal, Riley snorted.

“That’s right. It’s done.”

“…?”

‘Done? What’s done?’

Kabal’s consciousness ended there.

“…”

Next to Kabal’s right arm that had been cut off earlier, Kabal’s head, which still had confused expression on the face, fell. After that, his body, and then his hammer, fell in that order.

“As I thought…”

Riley tossed the sword on top of the corpse and muttered. The voice was unlike before. It felt like his heart had become significantly lighter.

“… It’s such a bother.”

Afterwards, he turned to look at Nainiae. Seeing the look on Riley’s face, it seemed she felt relieved at last. She relaxed the anxious look on her face and put on a faint smile.

“Now…”

Having finished off Kabal, Riley walked to Nainiae, stared right at her face and said,

“I think I need to hear a few things from you.”

It seemed like Riley was not going to ask about the advice Nainiae gave earlier about the things that troubled Riley. As if he had things he wanted to hear from Nainiae that were unrelated to those, the expression on Riley’s face changed to refreshed look. He moved his hand toward Nainiae’s white cheek.

“… Ah.”

“…”

Feeling Riley’s hand gently holding her own cheek and creating a sweet mood, Nainiae blushed out of embarrassment. However, the moment didn’t last long.

“Uuuuu?”

Her blushing cheek was stretched out like marshmallow.

“Y… Young Master.”

Feeling the skin on her cheek being pulled, Nainiae cringed her eyes. She started to struggle. It looked like she was begging him to stop.

“What happened? How come you know about it?”

Riley had asked how Nainiae knew about his past life.

“T… That is… That is!”

It seemed she was asking Riley to let go of the cheek first. Nainiae was struggling with tears in her eyes. Riley brought his face close to Nainiae and smiled violently. He was implying it would be good for her give straight answers.

*

To prevent what happened at Solia, the last time from repeating, Nainiae put away Kabal’s dead body in the dimensional space. She organized the crater in the area as she told Riley about the things that had happened so far.

“… You received them in the dream?”

“Yes. A woman in black… She said she was the Goddess of the world that you used to live in your past life. I met her in the dream. I received the memories of your past life from her as well.”

Having heard the explanation about what happened in the dream, Riley crumpled his face. Noticing this, Nainiae carefully asked,

“By any chance… have you met her before?”

She asked because she was worried about Riley. However, because the Goddess’ face was very similar to her own, Nainiae was concerned that Riley might hate her because of it. That’s why she asked.

“No. I resented her, but I had never met her.”

“Is that so?”

“I wish I could see her face just to see what she looks like. What an ungrateful bitch…isn’t she? If she took advantage of me that much, it should have been enough. Yet, she is trying to put me to work again?”

It seemed that he didn’t like this. Riley ground his teeth and poured out curses at the Goddess in black dress, the one who they had no way of knowing what could have happened to her now. While at it, he listened to the rest of the explanation from Nainiae.

He listened to everything as Nainiae explained that the power used in Riley’s past life is creeping into this world and how the Goddess said it would be best to handle the situation quickly. Nainiae also mentioned what the Goddess said about the Holy

Sword.

“As I thought, there is something to the ‘World Below’ that Ian was worried about, but it was that. I see.”

Rile had a rough idea based on the purple colored people and what Ian had told him. With an annoyed look on his face, Riley started to scratch his head.

“What about Rorona’s side?”

Riley was scratching his head to organize his thoughts. He asked about Rorona, the mercenary who they had seen, before coming here.

“Fortunately, Mr. Reitri followed us, so I left her in his care and came to find you. On the way, I ran into Kabal mercenaries who were carrying Ms. Priesia and Nara on their backs, so I also left the two of them in Mr. Reitri’s care.”

Nainiae explained these were the reasons why she ended up joining Riley later than she expected. She rubbed her cheek, which had turned red and asked,

“Is there anything else that you want to know about?”

Now that he was finished with Kabal, he was going to go back and check on Nara’s and Priesia’s situation. Riley turned to look at Nainiae.

“Ah, I have one more thing.”

He said he almost forgot to ask this one thing. Riley came closer to Nainiae and asked,

“About me taking a nap inside the cave last time…”

Riley had an angry look in his eyes. Facing Riley’s glare, Nainiae flinched her shoulders and slowly avoided the gaze.

“…”

“About that, I recommend that you tell me honestly about what happened?”

Riley said it with a refreshing smile. Following his lead, Nainiae also smiled awkwardly. She then carefully opened her mouth.

“That is… I was worried about you, Young Master. So, I had no choice but to use a sleep spell…”

Nainiae muttered in mosquito size voice. However, Riley definitely heard what she said. He ground his teeth big time and brought his hand toward Nainiae.

“Ah, ah ah… Young Master, I’m sorry…”

Riley pulled Nainiae's cheek. Suppressing the frustration that he was feeling, Riley asked,

"I see. So, was that another choice that you made because 'you wanted to'?"

"Young Master, about that..."

"I also feel like I want to pull someone's cheek."

For a long time, Riley grabbed Nainiae's cheek and stretched it out as he ground his teeth. It looked like he had enough. He let go of Nainiae's cheek and forgave her.

"Uuu. So... What are you going to do now?"

At first, it was her right cheek. And now, it was her left cheek. Nainiae rubbed her cheeks with her hands and looked at Riley's back.

"Do you even need to ask? First, let's go get free lunch from Reitri, and then..."

"No, I'm not asking about that."

"Um? Ah... ah!"

It seemed Riley understood the question. Like Nainiae, Riley was rubbing his face which had bruises. He corrected himself and replied,

“It’s such a bother. I won’t.”

He had organized his mind which was in chaos. Unlike before, he now answered without hesitation. Watching Riley like this made Nainiae think about what had happened last spring at the Solia Castle. Nainiae snickered and smiled.

‘I’m telling you to leave me alone. Let me rest a bit.’

All this time, although he was agonizing over the things that happened in his past life, perhaps Riley’s answer had already been set since then.

“… Ugh. I wish I could eat a sweet bean soup.”

It was a dish that didn’t exist in this world. Riley muttered the name of a food that existed in the other world as he walked and worked up an appetite. Nainiae followed him and asked,

“Sweet bean soup? Ah, are you talking about that sweet soup?”

“Can you make it?”

“For the ingredients… sweet beans will be needed. I think I’ll be able to make it somehow.”

“Uh? Really?”

Perhaps because she had the memories of Riley’s past life, Nainiae said she thought that she could make food from the other world.

“In that case, try it.”

“Should I also try making that thing we ate during the summer too?”

“That thing?”

“What was it called? Ah! Flat fried dough!”

“No, we should eat that only when it is raining.”

*

At the Iphalleta mansion, shunned by Riley and Nainiae, a maid who ended up returning to her ordinary life stopped after sweeping the ground for a while. She sighed big.

“… Ugh.”

It was not because the work was tiring. She was just worried about the Young Master and the new maid who were both younger than her.

“Ugh…”

Sera heaved a big sigh again. There was a woman who was looking at Sera cleaning. The woman said,

“Sera, you are going to make the ground sink.”

“Still, I think I didn’t resolve what you were concerned about. That’s why…”

“Sera, what I asked you was to watch over the two. I didn’t mean you should resolve the concern. If it is those two, they will be fine.”

“Still…”

“Even if you don’t take it upon yourself to resolve it, they will be fine. Instead of worrying, don’t you think they would want you to trust them? Riley and Nainiae…”

“Ummm.”

Iris added that worrying so much will instead lead to problems

that really warrant concern. Having heard her, Sera put a stop to her worries and continued sweeping the floor.

“In that case, it cannot be helped.”

“Huhu. Right? Actually, I said the same to Mr. Ian recently. I was concerned you might react the same way as him.”

Iris brought it up as she smiled. Sera peeked a smile, indicating she could imagine. She stopped sweeping for a moment and asked,

“Now that I think about it, Mr. Ian… I haven’t seen him in days? Does he not know that I have returned?”

After she came back, even when she was all excited and told everyone that Nainiae’s face had become unbelievably beautiful, she didn’t see Ian. Thinking about him, Sera tilted her head to the side.

“Did he go somewhere?”

“Um? Did nobody tell you?”

Iris was reading a book. However, noticing Sera tilting her head to the side, Iris casually turned her head toward Sera and asked back.

“What do you mean?”

It seemed she had no idea.

“Oh my. It completely slipped my mind… I forgot to tell you.”

After seeing Sera’s reaction, Iris covered her mouth with her hand. She looked surprised. She rushed and brought her hand to the drawer and picked up a piece of paper that was there.

“Here…”

It was neatly folded. It appeared to be a letter. Iris handed the letter to Sera and Sera put the broom against the wall and carefully took the letter. She opened it.

[I am worried about Young Master. I feel so anxious and I cannot take it anymore. I’ll go to find Young Master. I don’t think I can rest easy with just Sera. I’ll come back with Young Master.

- Ian]

Sera’s hand, which was holding the letter, flinched.

“What is this…”

Sera’s face was covered by the letter. She peeked from above the letter; Iris had an awkward look on her face. She roughly explained the situation regarding how she had received the letter.

“About that… On the morning of the day you returned to the mansion… Ian vanished. He left that letter.”

Sera’s mouth was opened vacantly.

Chapter 159 - Leading A Carefree Life

Riley and Nainiae returned to the Reitri Merchant Group's carriage. They decided to have a funeral for Isen, the mercenary who had lost his life in the battle against Kabal.

"To think Mr. Isen would end up like this."

"At least we have the Priestess with us to perform the funeral."

"It's so sad."

The merchants also joined the funeral. They maintained a solemn atmosphere and were not able to suppress the sad looks on their faces, saying that it was a shame that Isen died.

"I know. Now, the desert cleansing work has been postponed too."

"Damn it all. If those bastards from the Kabal Mercenaries didn't show up..."

"Quiet everyone."

They noticed that Priesia was in the prayer position. The merchants firmly closed their mouths and lowered their heads to pay respect.

“…”

Priesia, the Priestess, closed her eyes gently and began to use her holy power.

With her hands gathered together, her holy prayer to send off the dead could be heard. Nara and Rorona, who were standing by Isen, bit their lips and lowered their heads.

“Will Nara… be all right?”

The prayer was over. Nainiae was watching the funeral from quite a distance. She carefully asked Riley who was sitting next to her.

“I am not sure?”

Riley was holding his head by the palm and thought about countless funerals he had attended in his past life.

“Anyway, since the Priestess personally performed the funeral ceremony… He won’t be going to Hell or something.”

Nara and Rorona lifted the torches. Their faces were stricken with grief. However, they didn’t cry and no tears were visible.

It seemed Nara and Rorona had hardened their hearts from living the life of a mercenary. They were enduring the death of their dear

comrade. Riley was watching them with his head held by the palm.

“He is probably not all right, but he seems all right.”

Having heard what he said, Nainiae looked at Nara and Rorona. Nainiae felt like he could understand them somehow. She nodded with bitter look on her face.

“I guess so.”

To the logs that Isen was lying on top of, Nara and Rorona brought their torches and set the logs on fire. Rorona, who had been holding it in well until now, could not endure it anymore. She broke into tears.

“Huhuk... Isen...”

“Don’t cry, Rorona.”

“Because of me.... Because of me...”

Nara watched Isen’s body being engulfed in the flame. Nara tossed the bandages into the fire that he had wrapped on his body earlier and said,

“Don’t blame yourself. Isen would not want that.”

“I know… I know…”

Rorona was holding the torch with both of her hands. She bit her lips and nodded over and over.

*

Under Priesia’s guidance, they held a brief funeral for Isen. When the funeral ended, Nara and Rorona walked to where Riley was and joined him.

“Are you all right?”

“Yes.”

Because she cried, Rorona’s eyes were all swollen up. Nainiae consoled her and pointed at a seat to invite Rorona to sit down. Rorona sat down and smiled awkwardly.

“Haha…”

“Young Master, you came.”

Nara sat down as well after Rorona. Looking at Riley, Nara finally got to greet him.

“I didn’t get to greet you sooner. My apologies.”

“Your body was crushed. Is it alright now?”

Given the situation, Riley acted like it was nothing. He looked over Nara’s wounds and asked.

“Yes, more or less… Thanks to the Priestess.”

Nara said he was able to recover quickly thanks to the Priestess although he was turned to pulp. The wounds still hurt and Nara cringed lightly in response.

“The Priestess and I opened our eyes in Mr. Reitri’s carriage. It is… thanks to you I presume, Young Master?”

While Priesia was in middle of the prayer, Nara lost her because of Kabal making the entrance to the scene. He looked ashamed. Riley said he is not the one who should be thanked in particular. He turned his head to the side instead.

“No.”

“…?”

“She did.”

Riley pointed at the maid with his eyes. Nara had his eyes met with astonishingly beautiful woman who was making his eyes pop

and twist. He blushed and lowered his head.

“Ah… Th… Thank you.”

Nara didn’t recognize Nainiae. Wondering who she was, Nara directed his gaze at Rorona.

Here was a maid he had never seen before, yet it looked like Rorona knew who she was.

“Who is she? Do you know her?”

Nara quietly asked, and Rorona peeked a smile and said,

“Yes, I know her.”

“You do? You mean like you saw her or were introduced to her earlier today?”

“Commander, she is someone you know as well?”

“What?”

Nara furrowed his brows, wondering what Rorona was babbling about. Nara looked at the maid next to Riley again carefully.

“…?”

She was blindingly radiant. Simply looking at her face once again was difficult for Nara. Her facial features were that gorgeous.

"... Who is she?"

Nara's face was still full of question marks. He looked at Rorona's face; he was asking her to tell him.

"Seriously? You really cannot recognize her?"

"Uuu...."

Not just Rorona, but even Riley smirked and asked. It seemed Nainiae was a little disappointed. She blew up her cheek.

"The thing is, even if you ask, I cannot recognize her..."

"Commander, I thought you of all people would be able to recognize her."

Rorona was looking at him with disappointed eyes. Nara panicked. As if he was trying to tell them to just sit back and watch this, he narrowed his eyes and stared at Nainiae who had her cheeks ballooned up.

"..."

For a moment, Nara's eyes turned to those of snakes and then, became human-like again.

"Uh?"

Nara observed the maid using the Basilisk's eyes. He recognized her color and put on vacant look on his face.

Of all people he had met in his life, very few had colors as pure as this.

The maid of Iphalleta who he ran into during the last summer clearly had the same color as her.

"It cannot be..."

Her name is...

"Ms. Nainiae...?"

Instead of a face with horrid looking scars attached, she had ivory white skin and beautiful features. She was wearing the same maid dress and had the same dark hair as the maid named Nainiae he remembered.

"It's been a while, Nara."

Nainiae finally relaxed her face and smiled refreshingly as she waved her hand at Nara.

“N… Nainiae? Is it really you, Ms. Nainiae? The thing is, I was so sure that you must be a new maid in the Iphalleta Family, so…”

Nara muttered as he looked at Nainiae’s face. Meanwhile, Priestess Priesia, who was away from everyone, came to join them.

“Excuse me. Mr. Reitri would like to express his gratitude to Young Master Riley for coming all this way… Um?”

Priesia found Nara with a vacantly open mouth while staring at Nainiae. Wondering what that was about, she tilted her head to the side. Riley asked Priesia as well.

“You never met her before, right?”

Having heard the question, Priesia looked at Nainiae. Thinking hard about the question, Priesia crumpled her eyebrows and floated up a question mark on her face just like Nara earlier.

“Um?”

“Young Master… This… Could you please stop doing this?”

Nainiae dropped her head with a gloomy expression. Riley

snickered and said he understood.

“Excuse me, by any chance?”

Based on their conversation just now, it seemed Priesia got a feel for the right answer. She had a quizzical look on her face as she carefully asked Nainiae,

“Nainiae?”

Hearing Priesia calling her name, Nainiae nodded as replacement for a verbal response. She looked relieved.

“Is it really you, Nainiae? Oh my… What happened to your face? You were healed? You were, right?”

It seemed Priesia could not look happier to see that her friend came back with her face completely healed. Priesia actually came here to see Riley, but she directed her attention to Nainiae instead.

“It’s so fortunate. Your illness is cured too, right? Completely?”

Priesia suddenly grabbed Nainiae’s hand and Nainiae panicked. Meanwhile, Priesia was pouring out questions after questions. To calm her down, Nainiae said she will go prepare tea and got up.

“It really was you, Ms. Nainiae… You look like a completely different person.”

“I think she looks the same. What’s all this ruckus about.”

“The same? What are you…”

Riley was leisurely shrugging. Nara started at him because he couldn’t understand Riley. Nara tilted his head to the side.

“Young Master, you changed a little too?”

“Who, me?”

Riley wondered if the bruised-up face was not healed completely yet. He felt his cheek. Watching Riley, Nara shook his head to say that was not what he was talking about. Nara explained what it was that changed.

“It’s your color.”

“My color?”

“Yes. Compared to before, how should I say this… You have become cleaner? You had a bit of a tainted color before.”

“Tainted? Who’s tainted.”

“I’m just saying that’s how your color was like! I’m not saying

you have a dirty personality…”

“Dirty?”

Nara shriveled his shoulders. Thinking he can’t come back from this one, Nara just shut his mouth. Riley was not liking this. He glared at Nara, but he soon changed the look on his face and said,

“Anyway, I have something I want to ask.”

“Yes? What is it?”

“Nara, it’s about the purple people you mentioned before. How many did you say there are?”

“The purple people? Let’s see… So…”

With his fingers, Nara counted the purple people he met so far.

“That Kabal bastard, the dark mage who we met at the Rainfield, The oldfart who claims to be the Archbishop of the Hotly Temple, a homeless we met at some nameless country village… and…”

Based on the six parts that the purple people talked about, Riley thought there must be six people.

Nara just mentioned Kabal the mercenary, Hurial the dark mage,

Rebethra the Archbishop and Epidemic the friend who cannot breathe... and the Princess Reutrina who had been hiding her true identity. Together, there were five of the purple people that Riley knew.

It meant there was one more.

“I don’t know who this person was, but I saw someone who looked relatively suspicious recently. That person was also purple.”

Nara just said he saw the remaining one. Riley narrowed his eyes and asked about this suspicious person.

“Suspicious looking person?”

“Yes. Because of a very thick hood on the head, I couldn’t see the face in detail.”

“By any chance, was it a woman of nobility?”

Riley asked because he wondered if the one he saw was Reutrina. Nara shook his head and said,

“No, this person didn’t appear to be a nobility. There wasn’t any guard either.”

Nara tilted his head to the side because he couldn’t remember

very well, and Rorona, who was sitting next to him, added,

“What really caught my eyes was that there was silver hair sticking out of the hood.”

“Silver hair?”

“Yes, silver hair. It was long, loose silver hair. Because the face was covered by the shadows, I don’t have anything to tell you about the face.”

Having heard the explanation, Nara was more surprised than Riley. Impressed, Nara looked at Rorona.

“Rorona, how did you see that?”

“Commander, you cannot underestimate an archer’s eyesight. I may not look the part, but I am quite the expert”

“Ah, I’m sure you are.”

Rorona flexed her shoulders and tilted her chin up. Nara clicked his tongue to tell her that is enough. Nara turned to look back at Riley.

“By the way, Young Master. Why are you asking about the purple people all of the sudden?”

Riley organized his thought and answered in terse terms.

“I just thought it won’t be a bad idea to know about them.”

It was as he said.

They were related to the so called the world below. The purple people were trying to break the boundary between this world and the modernized world that Riley lived in his past life. Riley thought it would be such a bother to go and pay a visit to each and every one of the purple people and beat the shit out of them one at a time, so he was not thinking about such a plan, but...

He thought it won’t hurt to know about them beforehand, so that’s why he asked.

It was also to prevent bothersome things from happening in the future.

‘The dark mage and Kabal have been handled. As for Reutrina, she became a fool and we had surveillance attached to her, so... There are three whose whereabouts are unknown? ’

Rebethra, who had been taken by the black hand, the epidemic homeless man who Riley crossed paths with in Allieve Village and another suspicious individual who wears a full body hood and has silver hair... They seemed to be the remaining three of the purple people.

‘Of the remaining three, the one who is most likely to bother us soon is… actually all of them…’

Riley thought about the three remaining purple people. Finding it to be such a bother, he furrowed his brows. Meanwhile, Nara asked,

“Young Master, what do you plan to do from now on?”

“Me?”

Riley was holding his head with his palm. As if he already had thought about the answer for this question beforehand, he answered immediately.

“This winter trip’s theme is to rest and express gratitude, so we are going to go see the doctor who healed Nainiae.”

The said doctor who had been running a pub at Iffa village near Iphalleta Mansion was currently away somewhere else. To check out what he was up to and also say hello to the man, Riley chose to do this.

“… Excuse me, Young Master.”

Having heard him, Priesia glanced around as she fiddled with her fingers. She carefully raised her right hand up.

“I have a favor to ask. Can you please help me?”

Chapter 160 - Leading A Carefree Life (2)

“A favor?”

Having heard the Priestess saying that she had a favor to ask, Riley tilted his head to the side and asked her back.

“Yes, a favor.”

The flow of the conversation felt like something that he had experienced somewhere before. Finding it suspicious, he glared at Priesia. Before hearing what she had to say next, he warned her,

“If you are going to ask me something weird like the last time, won’t it be better for you to just keep it to yourself? I clearly warned you last time, didn’t I?”

The situation now felt similar to the one which happened in the Solia Castle’s restroom during last spring. That’s why Riley warned her.

“Instead of pestering me, it would be better for you to go and look for someone els…”

“N… No! It’s not like that!”

Concerned that she would be refused before even having the chance to explain what it was that she wanted to ask for, she said

that this favor was not like the one she had asked before. She promptly went to the main point.

“Excuse me… Young Master, are you currently traveling?”

It seemed that she remembered the deadly threat from last spring. She was not able to look at Riley in the eyes. With cowering voice, she asked.

Riley frowned and asked back,

“What about it?”

“If you are traveling, I was hoping… if you could allow me to tag along with you.”

“What?”

Riley’s eyebrows rose in surprise. He had dumbfounded look on his face. He walked to Priesia as if he was daring her to say it again.

“Excuse me, Young Master, still, she is the Priestess…”

“Do you realize you look like a complete dirtbag thug?”

Noticing Riley glaring at Priesia with violent look on his face, Nara and Rorona pulled Priesia behind their backs. It was kind of

like the woodcutters hiding the deer from an evil poacher.

“It’s not like that. What’s all this? I just looked her, that’s all.”

After watching Nara and Rorona pulling Priesia behind them, Riley shrugged and said they were overreacting. However, the two mercenaries shook their head and retorted,

“Just looked at her? You looked like you were going to eat her alive?”

“Won’t it be more accurate to say you were glaring at her?”

Having heard their retort, Riley shrugged once again. He slowly turned his head and clicked his tongue. He wasn’t liking this at all.

“Tsk.”

In fact, Riley didn’t like the Priestess named Priesia.

It didn’t matter how pretty her face was. It didn’t matter how kind her heart was either…

Regardless of those factors, it was all because of the Priestess he met in his past life.

Although he knew very well that Priesia was a different person

from the Priestess he knew from his past life... And although he was well aware that she was different in every aspects, her face, appearance, personality and even the Goddess she worshiped... Riley couldn't just smile and tell her 'ah, is that so?'

"To start with, don't you think it is ridiculous that she is saying she wants to follow me? She is currently a member of the Lightning Boulder Mercenary. She thinks she can just leave as she wishes?"

Riley turned and looked at the three again and tsked. Nara scratched his cheek and glanced at Priesia to check her mood.

"Well, since I am the Commander of the group, I have the authority to decide on letting a member go, but... If it is the Priestess we are talking about, don't you think that changes the situation a bit?"

Having heard what Nara said, Riley started to glare at Priesia again.

"Wow, you sure get lots of sweet treatment from everyone. Maybe I should become a Priestess too?"

"No... Young Master, not everyone can become Priestess, you know. Before that, to start with, your gender is going to be a problem..."

"Tsk."

Riley kicked his tongue again.

“So? Why are you saying you want to follow me?”

It was not going to be about killing a demon lord, beating up a dragon or saving the world. Anyway, since this favor was not one of those kinds, Riley decided to endure it once. He thought to himself that he won’t endure it for the second time as he asked.

“Ah, yes! That is… There was a divine message.”

“A divine message?”

Having heard the words, his eyebrows twitched once.

“Around last week, I received a new divine message… I think I should follow you and Nainiae.”

A divine message… Priesia had just brought up one of the reasons why Riley hated Priestesses. Riley didn’t liking this. He furrowed his brows and asked what the message was.

“What message?”

“The message said I should follow the child of the black butterfly.”

“Child of the black butterfly?”

Riley tilted his head to the side. Nainiae, who left the scene a while ago to get some tea, just returned and said,

“If you are talking about the child of the black butterfly…”

Nainiae blurred the end of the sentence because she had a guess on what this could mean. Nainiae looked at Riley. Priesia nodded and said what Nainiae didn’t.

“Yes, I’m talking about Nainiae.”

To give supplementary explanation to Riley, she whispered to Riley in the ear,

“I think she must be talking about what happened in the dream.”

Last time, Riley heard from Nainiae about the dream where the black butterfly appeared. It seemed Riley had already guessed that this was about the dream. He nodded.

“Still, Priestess… If it is Nainiae who you need to follow, doesn’t that mean you don’t need to ask the Young Master for permission in particular?”

“Now that I think about it, that’s true… Why are you asking

Young Master Riley? You can just ask Nainiae."

"Still, he is the one who Nainiae serves, so in the end, I thought I should get his permission, so..."

"Come on..."

"In that case, that even more reason for you to ask Nainiae first. Asking Nainiae first would have made the conversation faster."

"Pardon? That would be faster? What do you mean?"

Riley was exchanging whispers with Nainiae. He could also hear the three talking in front of him. Annoyed, Riley crumpled his face.

"These guys, seriously..."

"Rorona, I was wrong. We can't say things like that. After all, Nainiae is Young Master Riley's maid."

Nara slowly directed his gaze to the side. Rorona felt betrayed. With hardened face, she glared at her Commander, who made excuses that really weren't excuses.

"A... Anyway... Priestess seems to be determined to follow Nainiae as the divine message said. I don't plan to object to this, and..."

Feeling Rorona's gaze, Nara was avoiding it and pretending as if he didn't notice. He went back to the main point.

"Well, to start with, we are a small group, so I guess we will really feel Isen's absence when Priestess leaves. His empty seat will feel bigger."

Nara thought about what it would be like with Priesia gone. There will be just two people left in the mercenary group. Nara had a sad look on his face.

"With just two, I think it would be a bit odd to call it a mercenary group, right? I guess we should call ourselves a duo from now on."

Rorona relaxed her face and added in gloomy voice.

"..."

The mood became melancholy at that instant. Even Riley and Nainiae were unable to open their mouths easily. Nara slapped his lap hard and said,

"Anyway, I don't have any objection in particular. I know that joining our mercenary group was a temporary measure for the Priestess to stay in hiding, but... I was proud to have her in our group. As proud as I was, I was also feeling the weight of the responsibilities and burden."

“I also don’t have any objections.”

“Commander, Ms. Rorona…”

Nara looked at Priesia and shrugged. Nara asked toward Nainiae,

“Ms. Nainiae, what about you?”

He was asking if it would be all right with Nainiae to have Priesia follow her.

“I am not sure.”

Nainiae scratched her cheek and hesitated on answering. It seemed Nara and Rorona were surprised to see this. They opened their eyes big and exchanged looks with each other.

They expected Riley would refuse and say it would be such a bother. However, they thought Nainiae would gladly allow it. However, instead, Nainiae was taking a moment and thinking hard about this. They never thought Nainiae would do this.

‘A Priestess…’

If it was before, Nainiae would have said ‘Of course, if you are okay with following me.’ However, Nainiae was agonizing over this right now because of the memories from Riley’s past life that were contained within Nainiae’s head.

‘Will it be all right?’

Unlike before, Nainiae had come to understand very well just how much Riley hated and loathed the Priestess from his past life, so… Nainiae was hesitating from promptly saying ‘it will be all right for you to tag along.’

“I’ll follow Young Master’s decision.”

Priesia believed Nainiae would be her ally in this, but instead, her friend had avoided responding. Although Priesia was hoping for a favorable reply, she nodded, understanding that this could not be helped. Priesia looked at Riley.

“What about you, Young Master?”

Riley was enjoying the aroma of the tea that had Nainiae prepared. Noticing Priesia’s gaze, Riley paused for a moment and said,

“I refuse.”

He paused for a moment, but he didn’t think about it at all during that moment because he had decided the answer beforehand.

There was the thing about him just not liking Priestesses, but more importantly, he thought it would be such a bother to have

another girl tagging along with him.

There was a reward placed on her and finding out her location. The reward was placed not just in Solia, but also in other cities as well. Riley was certain that there would be trouble.

Besides this, Riley had one more reason as to why he had refused her.

“Well, I’m sure you have many reasons, but... If you are the Priestess, don’t you have something else left to do before following me?”

It looked like he was really enjoying the tea’s aroma. He closed his eyes gently and said that. Wondering what was the thing she still had to do; Priesia floated a question mark on her face.

“... This.”

Nainiae poured the tea for everyone else, including Priesia, Nara and Rorona. Instead of Riley, Nainiae answered for him by pointing below with her finger.

“This?”

“Ah...”

The three had puzzled looks on their faces. Of the three, it was

Priesia who figured out the meaning first. She bit her lips.

“… You are right.”

“What is?”

“What does it mean?”

“I was careless. I was so focused on following the divine message that I forgot about something else very important.”

Priesia handed the tea cup back to Nainiae. She bent down on her knees and picked up a handful of the sand from the ground.

“Ah.”

“Now that I think about it…”

Finally, Nara and Rorona also realized what Riley was talking about. They vacantly stared at the sand that Priesia picked up.

The sand was black.

As if it was trying to prove that it still contained the epidemic, it was sizzling lightly, trying to melt Priesia’s hand.

“I still have something left to do here.”

Holding the sand in her hand, she gently closed her eyes. Using her Holy Power, she cleansed the sand that was in her palm.

Slowly... The sand regained its original color. The cleansed sand left Priesia's palm and fell to the ground, above the black sand, making a crumbling sound.

It was just a handful of sand.

In this huge Karuta desert, that was just a handful of sand. The black sand waiting to be cleansed was still rotten and covered quite a distance.

"Because of Kabal, she didn't get a chance to completely cleanse the desert."

The prayer that Priesia performed to cleanse the desert was interupted because of Kabal's interference. Remembering this, Rorona muttered.

"I know."

Nara directed his gaze toward the merchants of Reitri's group who were organizing their goods.

"Priestess?"

“I think the answer is decided.”

Priesia said in quiet voice. Meanwhile, Riley asked for another cup of tea. Watching Riley, Priesia had bitter smile on her face.

“Excuse me, Young Master. After I finish cleansing the Karuta desert... Would it be all right if I followed Nainiae then?”

“How long will it take to finish the cleansing?”

“Probably about three days...”

“Three days?”

Because the cleansing was interrupted once already, Priesia said she thought it will take quite some time on the second try. She asked carefully,

“Will it be all right?”

Riley held the tea cup at one hand and fiddled with his own chin with the other hand. Soon, it seemed he decided on the answer. He said with smile,

“No.”

“Pardon?”

“I said no. It will be a bother.”

Hururuk.

Enjoying the tea, Riley still said no. Priesia was hoping he might approve this time. Having heard the response from Riley, Priesia’s head fell.

“The two over there said they are feeling empty, so stay with them.”

Riley looked at Nara and Rorona and said three will be better than two. Nara shook his head as if he thought there really was no way to convince Riley otherwise. Nara asked,

“Young Master, are you going to leave right away?”

“I am not sure.”

He finished the second cup of tea. He looked up the sky. He said as he stared at the twinkling stars above in the night sky,

“Now that things turned out like this, I might as well rest for another day. I personally have something to tell Reitri, so…”

“Mr. Reitri?”

“Now that I think about it, isn’t it almost time for dinner? I guess I can talk to him over dinner.”

Riley got up, saying it was almost time for dinner. Nainiae, who was watching him from the side, lightly turned her head and looked at her shoulder.

‘It’s already dinner time, yet…’

For some reason, the summoned spirit had not shown herself throughout the whole day. Nainiae was concerned about her.

[Due to ambiguity of Korean wordings, this could also mean a child who is a black butterfly.]

Chapter 161 - Leading A Carefree Life (3)

Nainiae stood there vacantly for a moment before tumbling and following Riley who was walking toward where Reitri was.

"... Reitri!"

It looked like Reitri was not thinking about heading out yet. He had left the ropes that tied the horses as they were. Reitri was looking around the other merchants in his group that he was leading. Having heard Riley's voice calling him, Reitri turned his head.

"Ah, Young Master Riley."

It seemed that Reitri had also cried during Isen's funeral. His eyes were red. Reitri rubbed his eyes and welcomed Riley.

"Have you had a pleasant conversation with Commander Nara? He must be very sad because of what happened to Mr. Isen. I hope that his heart is not hurting too much."

Actually, Reitri appeared to be suffering from the loss much more than Nara. Riley peeked a smile and walked closer to Reitri as he said he had something to talk about.

"Something to tell me?"

“I would like this to be just between us.”

“Just between us?”

Reitri tilted his head to the side. He looked around what the merchants were doing. Thinking it would be all right, he nodded.

“Yes, well… All right. It’s just… Before we do, just for a moment…”

Reitri asked Riley to wait for a bit. Reitri waved at a boy who was busy running around other merchants. Reitri shouted,

“Horai!!”

“Um? What is it?”

“I have something to talk about with Young Master, so I’ll be gone for a bit. Handle the wrap up work well!”

“I got it! What about dinner?”

“Start without me!”

Reitri told his little brother Horai that he should start eating dinner first. That was all he wanted to do before taking his leave. Reitri turned to look at Riley and said,

“If you want to have a private conversation, inside the carriage would be good, right? I’m thinking about a soundproof carriage. Would that be all right with you?”

Riley asked,

“It doesn’t need to be soundproof. Instead, I would just prefer a nice carriage? While you are at it, a carriage with the best bed… I would like to be in your debt for the night and use it as a hotel.”

“Pardon?”

“The interior would be more important than the exterior size. Since I don’t know about your carriages, I’ll leave it to you to decide.”

Riley was listing features he wanted in the carriage. Having listened to them all, Reitri scratched his head and asked carefully,

“Will that be all right with you?”

Reitri asked again because he wondered if it would be all right to not have the soundproofing. It was because Riley said earlier that he wanted the conversation to be just between him and Reitri. Meanwhile, the maid who was standing behind Riley took a step forward.

“Please.”

Nainiae smiled softly and asked. Reitri realized why there was no need for soundproofing and nodded.

“Yes. In that case, I will.”

Following Reitri’s lead, Riley got to the best carriage and walked inside. When Riley and Reitri were walking into the carriage, Nainiae said,

“I’ll bring you dinner as soon as it is ready.”

She added and said to enjoy the dinner while having the conversation as she closed the door and cast soundproof magic.

“The bed looks nice. I’m satisfied.”

“I’m proud to know that the Young Master of Count’s Family is satisfied with the bed.”

For the conversation, Reitri brought out a desk and chairs and offered the seat to Riley.

“So, what is it that you wanted to talk about?”

The topic could be something trivial or serious. Regardless, it

looked like Reitri was ready to listen attentively. He brought out a paper and pen from his pocket.

“You still have that habit.”

Watching Reitri bringing out a paper and pen from the pocket, Riley smiled and muttered.

Reitri smiled awkwardly and said,

“Information is the lifeline for a merchant, so…”

“Well, I am not saying it is a bad habit. However, today will be an exception. If you are planning on using it to organize the thought, that would be all right, but if you are going to summarize and write what we are about to discuss, then I cannot allow it.”

Reitri opened his eyes big.

“Uh? Is… Is it that serious?”

Riley was implying that what they were about to talk about was so heavy that he could not allow Reitri to write any of it down. Having realized this, Reitri gulped.

“If it is something that will put my life at risk just from hearing it, then I would like to refuse beforehand.”

“I don’t know if it will put your life at risk. I’m going to tell you this because I think it might help you. I also have a favor that I want to ask from you.”

It was a give and take… What Riley wanted was a trade with Reitri.

“A favor?”

“I am certain that this will not be a losing business for you at least. Since I am the one who proposed the trade, I’ll tell you the information. You can decide afterwards if you want to take on the favor or not.”

“Hm.”

The moment to make a decision came. As a merchant, Reitri fiddled with his chin and took a moment to think hard about this. He nodded as if he understood.

“All right. Let’s hear it first. Since I’m acquainted with you, Young Master, if you are going to tell me the information first, then I have no reason to avoid it.”

It was possible that Reitri could take his leave right after hearing the information. However, Riley knew Reitri was not that kind of a man. That was why Riley was telling him the information first.

As for Reitri, he was aware that Riley was not some nobody

Young Master who would give him useless information and take advantage of him. That was why he accepted the trade.

“Duke Philisneon Family of Solia... You know about them, right?”

“Of course. I also know that they had the end of the year banquet amongst the nobilities of the Solia there. The most talked about subject was most likely... the Solia’s border which was threatened recently.”

“You know about it? Where did you hear about it?”

Riley was surprised by Reitri’s answer. Reitri shook his head and said,

“No, that was just my guess. After all, that’s what’s happening in Solia right now.”

Riley thought inside that not everyone could be merchants. He got to the main point.

“What about their Princess. Do you know about her?”

“The Princess?”

“Reutrina Phillisneon.”

“Ah, that mystery princess? I am not sure?”

Reitri tilted his head to the side.

“Nothing is officially known about her. Rumors say she is the ugliest woman of the century or the stupidest woman of the century… Well, there are full of rumors like that, but I have never seen her in person, so I am not sure.”

“Is that so?”

“Not just other merchants like myself, but I think other nobilities also probably don’t know about her. She is that kind of person. Only her gender is known… Ah! Now that I think about it, according to what I have heard recently, she made an appearance at Iphalleta Mansion during the announcement of the successorship…”

While Reitri continued, he said ‘oh no!’ inside and glanced at Riley to check on his mood.

“As for the successorship… It is unfortunate.”

“No, it is fine. I never wanted the successorship anyway.”

Riley acted like it was totally fine and went back to the main point to talk about the Princess Reutrina Philisneon.

“Actually, she seemed like a brilliant woman. As for her face too, well… she didn’t deserve the rumor about being ugly.”

“Ah, really?”

Having heard what Riley just said, Reitri was going to move the pen, but he realized what he was up to and put the pen down. Reitri scratched his head.

It was to commit what he had just heard to the memory.

“… It’s just that…”

Wondering why Riley was adding more to the story, Reitri tilted his head to the side.

“….?”

“She was until a few weeks ago.”

“Pardon?”

“Now, as the rumor said, she became a fool.”

Riley said with serious look on his face. Unable to comprehend what he just heard, Reitri had puzzled look on his face.

“Big change won’t be felt immediately from the outside, but eventually, because of this, the Duke Family will crumble.”

Reutrina was one of the purple people. She had the ability to read other people’s minds and use it to control people. Now, she had suddenly become a fool and so this would result in the Duke Philisneon Family’s downfall.

“Practically, the Duke’s Family was able to stay in power because of Princess Reutrina. This is no exaggeration.”

She probably had the Duke’s Family in her grasp with her power. Now, with her missing from the picture, the family was going to falter for sure. It was as obvious as watching the fire spread.

“Is she that important? To think that the family will falter without her… Even if she was a mysterious figure…”

“You are free to believe it or not. It’s just that it will be good for you to pay attention to the Duke Philisneon Family.”

If what Riley said was true, this could be a huge opportunity for Reitri.

It was because there could be a huge profit to garner from carefully checking the merchants and goods that were connected to Philisneon Family.

“I’ll keep this in mind.”

Although it looked like Reitri was not sure about this, he was, actually believing most of what Riley had said just now.

The Tess Merchant Group case that Riley had told him about last time was not a lie either and Reitri had certainly reaped a big profit from that.

‘All right. With this, I have two insurances.”

Riley muttered inside while watching Reitri who was nodding as he supported his jaw with his hand.

The reason why Riley leaked the information about Philisneon Family was not just about helping Reitri.

Nainiae had a surveillance magic cast on Reutrina, but he was not feeling easy about this with just the surveillance magic. Riley told Reitri about Reutrina, one of the purple people, so he could watch her through two layers of surveillance. It was installation of this trap that Riley was after.

“Well then, what is it that you want to ask me to do? If it is something our merchant group can do, we will help you as much as we can.”

Reitri had organized what he had just heard about the Phillisneon Family. He locked his fingers between his hands and asked about the favor that Riley said he was going to ask for.

“I want to ask you for information.”

“Information?”

Just like how he had given Reitri information, Riley also wanted information in return. Riley went straight to the point.

“It’s about the Karuta desert’s sand.”

“Ah, yes.”

“It’s because of an epidemic, right?”

Riley asked with serious look on the face. Reitri nodded to say he was right and directed his gaze toward the sand in the desert outside.

“It’s definitely an epidemic. Actually, I was concerned as well, so I had some people ask the Ansyrium’s Magic Tower and the researchers of the Rainfield to investigate, and… It is definitely an epidemic. It is quite long lasting and it has that foul stench and is highly acidic… It is definitely poison.”

Riley nodded after hearing the explanation and said that was the information he wanted.

“I need information about what made the desert to rot. To be

precise, I need information about that epidemic."

"Information about the epidemic..."

Reitri started to fiddle with his chin. While he was organizing his thoughts...

Knock knock...

They could hear someone knocking on the door.

"I brought dinner. May I enter?"

Reitri did not respond. He was thinking hard about what to say first.

"Come in."

Reitri was thinking so hard that he didn't even hear the knock, so Riley responded instead and told Nainiae that she could come in. Nainiae opened the carriage's door and walked into the carriage with dinner on the plate for the two people.

"Excuse me."

Nainiae glanced at Reitri who was in deep thoughts while holding his chin on his palm. She carefully placed the plate down and

glanced at Riley.

"Just wait here."

With her gaze, she was asking if it would be all right for her to stay here. Riley gestured to say she could stay and she might as well sit on the bed and wait. Riley started on the dinner on the table and waited for Reitri to finish organizing his thoughts.

"... Ah, when did the dinner come?"

"Just now."

"Huk!"

It seemed he was finally done organizing his thoughts. He finally found the dinner on the table. Surprised, he also found Nainiae who was sitting on the bed and greeted her by lowering his head.

"Ah... Thank you, Ms. Nainiae."

"The merchants prepared the dinner. I only brought it here. I should be the one to thank you for your generosity."

"Well then, I'll gladly eat it. It's just that, before I do..."

Before eating the dinner, Reitri decided to tell Riley the

information he had asked for. He carefully opened his mouth.

“Young Master... This may sound really... It may sound like a bizarre tale, but...”

“Um?”

“By any chance... If epidemic is alive and moving... would you believe it?”

“Epidemic is alive and moving?”

Nainiae tilted her head to the side and asked.

“Yes, honestly, it is hard to believe. It is a very strange story, but... It is a rumor that’s been going around recently and its credibility had been rising too.”

“What’s making the rumor’s credibility rise?”

“Only few know about this, but... I heard that some people saw the epidemic moving.”

“People saw it move?”

“Yes. I heard that the people who witnessed the epidemic didn’t live long. I heard that they said the following before they died.”

Reitri could not look more serious. He continued.

“The epidemic was breathing out black breath. It said, ‘please, I beg of you. Kill me.’

Chapter 162 - Leading A Carefree Life (4)

“It asked to be killed?”

“It’s strange enough for a living, moving epidemic to be talking, yet… it asked to be killed. Honestly, I cannot believe this story, but…”

Afterwards, Reitri started eating the food. He chewed and swallowed a piece of bread and continued.

“I received information that the epidemic is headed to Ansyrium. Because of this, people of Ansyrium were given evacuation order.”

“It’s headed to Ansyrium?”

“Yes, it is just that… It seems Solia had not noticed this yet. If Solia knew about this, they would have taken advantage of the epidemic and sought vengeance for the border invasion last time.”

Riley thought about Epidemic, the one who was called the friend who cannot breathe by the children of the Allieve Village. This one was one of the purple people. With blank look on his face, Riley organized his thoughts.

“A living epidemic…”

Considering what happened before, it was certain that what

Reitri just explained was not baseless rumor.

“The stories about living epidemic and people claiming to have met this epidemic are just rumors, but… The story about the epidemic heading to Ansyrium is a definite fact.”

It seemed Reitri was thinking Riley must be confused because of the blank look on Riley’s face. This was the reason why Reitri added more explanation.

“Please stay for the night in this carriage. Starting tomorrow, you will be traveling again… No. You said you will be going to see the doctor who healed Ms. Nainiae, right?”

“Well, that’s right.”

“In that case, I think it would be best if you avoid going in Ansyrium’s direction. If the rumor is real, if you run into the epidemic… it might be dangerous even for you or Ms. Nainiae.”

Hearing Reitri’s warning, Riley wondered if the epidemic was that dangerous. He nodded for now.

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

Riley was not sure if this epidemic, which turned the sand black, could really cause serious damage or not. However, he was certain that it would be such a bother if he ran into the epidemic.

“Anyway, I asked about the epidemic so I won’t run into it, so…”

Having heard the response, Reitri nodded. He saw the plate was almost empty. Reitri said,

“That’s all information I could give you about the epidemic. Is there anything else you want to ask?”

Riley shook his head and got up. He said,

“No. It’s all right. That was enough. I just need to avoid going toward Ansyrium, right?”

“Yes.”

“Nainiae.”

“Yes, Young Master.”

Sitting on the bed, she was tuning in to their conversation. She responded to Riley’s calling.

“Andal’s cave… No. About where the doctor is at, it is not toward Ansyrium, right?”

The pub was empty. Not only that, the secret passage way

underneath the pub was sealed as well, so Riley decided to go to the cave directly. He asked Nainiae about the cave's location.

"Yes, it is pretty far from Ansyrium."

Because Riley said the word 'cave,' Nainiae flinched. She smiled awkwardly and responded, and Riley nodded. He thought that was fine.

"In that case, we have no problem here."

Riley got up and walked toward the bed. Reitri also got up and asked,

"Excuse me, Young Master. Do you really have nothing else you want to ask? Compared to the information I received from you, what I told you in return is quite lacking. It doesn't feel right."

Reitri thought it was not an even trade. To preserve the moral of a merchant, Reitri asked. Riley plummeted and lay down next to Nainiae on the bed. He moved his eyes around, wondering if there was something else he could ask.

"I am not sure."

He moved his eyes and looked at Nainiae. He was asking if she had something she wanted to ask. Nainiae tilted her head to the side.

“Um.”

She wondered if she should ask about the remaining purple human who was not yet identified or if she should ask about Riley’s Holy Sword. She eventually shook her head and said,

“No. I don’t have anything in particular.”

Reitri nodded as if he understood. He walked toward the outside of the carriage as he said,

“Well then, let’s talk later if there is anything else you want to talk about. Please think of it as me owing a debt to you.”

Reitri said he will tell Riley one more information anytime. Reitri got out of the carriage.

“I’ll get going now. Please enjoy restful sleep.”

“Uu, Uu! My back!”

Immediately after Reitri got out of the carriage, Riley stretch-yawned big time. He looked at Nainiae who was just sitting there with vacant face. Riley wondered what she was up to.

“What is it?”

“The thing is… I wonder if something happened. Ms. Heliona have not appeared for a long time.”

“Heliona… You mean that chatterbox?”

“Yes.”

Riley looked at Nainiae’s shoulder and realized why Nainiae looked concerned through whole day. Riley put on an enigmatic look on his face.

“Since she is a summon spirit, isn’t she staying at the summon spirit world or whatnot and eating and sleeping there?”

“That’s true, but… Ms. Heliona is not the type who would not show up for a whole day like this.”

“I see.”

“Unless it was something very urgent, she would have at least told me something before disappearing… I am worried.”

What would be the urgent business that Heliona had to disappear for without even saying goodbye to Nainiae… Nainiae could not help but to be concerned. She had hardened look on her face. She shook her head and continued.

“Well, she is a tough person, so I’m sure she will be fine. Once I see the teacher, I’ll be able to learn about her situation as well.”

Nainiae extended her arm toward the brightly lit light on the ceiling and used a simple telekinesis.

The light made a small pop sound. It shook and was extinguished.

*

“Young Master, please get up. It’s morning.”

It was the next day morning.

It seemed the exhaustion from the day before was not completely gone. Riley was still sleeping in even though the sun had come up a while ago. Having heard Nainiae’s voice, he struggled to open his eyes and faced the morning.

“What time is it?”

“It’s a little after 11 am.”

Having heard the answer, he buried his head at the pillow again. He sighed lightly and muttered,

“In that case, it would be all right for me to sleep a little longer.”

Riley muttered he will sleep a while longer as he covered himself under the blanket. Nainiae was not sure about what to do. She started to glance at the outside.

It was because the Reitri Merchant Group and Nara’s Mercenary Group members all finished breakfast and getting the carriages ready for heading out. They were all waiting for Riley. This was why.

“Young Master, everyone is waiting.”

Nainiae knew this might be rude of her to do so, but she decided to uncover the blanket. She waved her hand in the air and used magic to start neatly folding the blanket.

“Ugh… Damn…”

Riley quickly put his hand out. He was trying to grab the blanket that was being taken away. He saw the fabric slowly escaping his grasp. Riley crumpled his face.

“Isn’t using magic cheating?”

It was one of the basic magic. It seemed Nainiae used the spell that temporarily disabled friction to make the opponent slip and fall. She used the magic spell on the blanket. Nainiae lowered her head and apologized.

“I am sorry, Young Master… However, I think it would be best for you to get ready to go out quickly.”

Nainiae neatly folded the blanket. Riley had frustrated look on his face. He looked like he was going to close his eyes again. Nainiae broke cold sweat.

“Young Master?”

Regardless of absence or presence of the blanket, as if he was trying to say that this was not going to stop him from the slumber… Riley raised mana and wrapped his body in it. He was trying to fall asleep again. Nainiae put his hand toward Riley.

“Young Master, please get up.”

“…”

“Young Master…”

Annoyed by Nainiae’s hand shaking his shoulder, Riley crumpled his face. Nainiae’s voice was growing gloomier by the second. Having realized this, Riley gently opened his eyes.

“…?”

Her face looked as gloomy as her voice. She had her head down.

Riley asked what this was about.

“Come on. I’m merely saying I would like to get some more sleep in the morning. Why does the mood feel like we are at a funeral?”

Having heard his question, Nainiae tried hard and hid her sad face and answered in whisper like voice,

“That is… I was concerned you may not be able to wake up like the last time.”

With her hands to the back, she looked like she didn’t know what to do. Riley looked at her with hollow look on his face. As if he was giving in, he acted out the frustration and got up.

“Are you trying to disturb my sleep?”

“No, that is… I don’t mean to…”

Nainiae shook her head. Riley placed his hand on top of Nainiae. He said it was fine and put on the shirt he had hanging on the hanger.

“Let’s go outside.”

Nainiae still had confused look on her face. Leaving her be, Riley came down from the carriage. He moved around his stiff neck to relax it and looked at the people who were waiting.

“Ah, he came out.”

“Young Master, shall we get going?”

To merchants, time was money. Reitri was waiting for Riley to empty the carriage. He rubbed his hands together and asked respectfully.

“That’s right. Go ahead. Go do it... By the way, where are you going?”

“We are going to help out with cleansing the Karuta desert which didn’t get completed. It’s just that the Priestess said she thinks she will need to move to a different location, so...”

“Hm, so, as I thought, that’s what happened?”

Nara, Rorona and Priesia, the three members of the mercenary group who were glancing around from the side lowered their heads after Reitri’s explanation to greet Riley for the morning.

“Yes. That’s what we decided.”

“What about you, Young Master? Are you going to get going right away?”

Nara looked at Nainiae who also came down from the carriage

after Riley. Riley shrugged and said,

"I should get going right away."

Riley turned to look at Nainiae who came to stand right behind him. Riley lightly nodded. As if she understood, Nainiae also nodded and prepared teleportation.

"You know where to go, right?"

"Yes."

Riley said that they had to go to the cave where Andal would be at, not the pub that he managed. He checked Nainiae who had her eyes gently closed to cast the magic. Riley turned his head.

"Well then, we will get going."

"We will wait to hear from you. Please visit us anytime, Young Master."

"All right. Next time, I don't need the carriage. Just carry some delicious food. It was fine with me, but I thought the food was quite lacking to be served to nobilities you might meet on the road."

"Ah..."

Riley was saying that the food that was served to him, which Reitri provided, was totally not on par with his taste. Reitri flinched.

“See, uncle? What did I tell you?”

It seemed that this concern was already pointed out to Reitri before. Horai was also there with Reitri to see Riley off. Horai poked at Reitri with his elbow and lectured him.

“Excuse me, Young Master!”

Priesia stepped forward and shouted. However, it was when Nainiae used the teleportation. They could not confirm if Riley heard Priesia or not.

“... He left.”

“It is incredible. This so called teleportation...”

“Young Master Riley is also amazing. Six Circles... No. He has Seven Circles mage as his maid.”

Along with light, Riley and Nainiae disappeared without a trace from the spot.

*

It was at the entrance of some nameless forest.

“Uu…”

Along with flash of light, a boy and a girl came out of the light.

“What the… Hey… Why did you use the teleportation directly instead of making a doorway?”

The sudden teleportation made Riley feel a little dizzy. He turned toward Nainiae and asked. Meanwhile, Nainiae was looking around the scenery. With puzzled look, Nainiae said,

“No. I also tried to open a doorway, but…”

There was a question mark showing on her face. Riley also put on puzzled look on his face. He slowly checked the surrounding.

“Um?”

They were wondering what was going on. It was the scenery.

They were going to teleport to Andal’s cave. However, they were standing at the entrance of a forest where they could hear bird cries.

“It’s a forest?”

“Yes. We were supposed to be teleported to the teacher’s cave, but we were teleported to somewhere else.”

Wondering if the magic was not properly controlled, Riley looked at Nainiae. She looked around the forest and mumbled,

“This place is where I trained?”

“Place where you trained?”

“Yes. This is the place where I learned magic. This place is… the entrance to the forest that leads to the teacher’s cave.”

Perhaps the place was affected by the big bad oldman who resided here. Even though it was winter, the leaves were dyed in flame like color. Looking at the leaves, Riley narrowed his eyes.

“… Ah!”

Riley was holding his chin as he looked around the leaves. Having heard Nainiae from the side, he turned to look at her.

“What is it?”

Nainiae was vacantly staring to the front. Riley followed suit and looked to the front, and he found a bear that was slowly walking toward them.

“That is?”

“… A guardian.”

“A guardian?”

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Nainiae nodded and explained.

“You can think of him as a gate keeper... who protects the teacher’s cave. He is one of the many who helped me train.”

It seemed Nainiae was glad to see the guardian. She had not seen him ever since she left the cave last autumn. Nainiae was about to start walking towards the bear that was coming toward her. However, she suddenly stopped walking.

“Mister?”

Nainiae hardened her face.

“...”

She felt that the bear was exuding animosity.

“Mister, can you hear me?”

To the red-haired bear that was slowly approaching them, Nainiae asked if he could hear her.

Guuuuuuuu!

The bear sounded as if he was scratching his neck. Nainiae looked at the bear and crumpled her face.

“Do you guys really know each other?”

It seemed that the bear was not happy to see Nainiae. Riley asked what this was about. Nainiae didn’t look confident as she nodded.

“Yes, I am certain. That scar… I definitely remember.”

The bear was sauntering toward them. Nainiae pointed at the area around the bear’s eye. She touched her own face for no reason as she mumbled,

“Can it be that he cannot recognize me because my face changed too much?”

“Wait, since he is an animal, shouldn’t he have recognized you by your scent somehow?”

“That is…”

While they were talking, the red-haired bear had come quite close to them. The bear roared loudly and quickly stood up tall.

“As I thought, I don’t think he is recognizing you?”

“Mister, it is me!”

The bear was exuding dangerous glare as he stood on his two feet. The bear looked down toward Nainiae and Riley and bared his teeth. He then raised up his arm, which were sharp like a weapon.

“It’s me! I’m Nainiae!”

Wharurrururu

It looked like the claws would strike down Nainiae anytime. The claws were engulfed in red hot flames. Riley thought he couldn’t just let things be. He poked at Nainiae’s arm.

“… Hey.”

“This can’t be. There certainly are many violent guardians on teacher’s mountain, but… He is not the kind who would do this.”

Thinking this could not be helped, Nainiae moved mana with a disappointed face.

It was to dodge the bear’s claw attack. The bear was coming at them for no apparent reason.

“I am sorry.”

Nainiae used magic to blow off the red flames on the bear's claws. She then used a close-range teleportation.

Suuuuuuc

Along with what sounded like wind, Riley and Nainiae's bodies were instantly teleported to behind the red bear.

"Grease. Swamp."

Having moved smoothly to the back, she used two ground type magic spells to make the bear fall. She also used the swamp magic to make the bear fall into a mud bath.

"... As I thought... Is this not enough?"

The bear fell on his back first on the mud. After plummeting to the mud, the red bear engulfed his entire fur in flames and started to burn the mud to black crisp. Having noticed this, Riley muttered in quiet voice,

"He really is a red bear."

The red bear burned the mud in flames and roared. The ground was now stained black from the flame. The bear stepped on it and started to charge at the two people again.

"It doesn't smell like booze in particular. If he is not drunk,

maybe he just lost his grip on his sanity?”

“I am not sure. For now…”

With piercing gaze, Nainiae glared at the red bear. She used magic again.

A water type magic.

A wind type magic.

Nainiae used two magic of elements that were opposite of fire. She used water to trap the bear’s mouth and four limbs and used the wind to blow away the flame on his fur.

“I think I should talk to him.”

Unlike the usual, the bear’s eyes were saturated in red color. Having noticed this, Nainiae had a rough idea of the cause. She swung her hand once again.

Churjurk….

Along with the sound, the wind that was blowing around the bear slowly froze. Soon, rectangular shaped walls started to form.

She looked at the tightly packed ice walls that she created.

Nainiae dusted off her hands and looked at the trapped bear inside. She mumbled,

“Is it done?”

Wharurururu…

“…”

Between the walls, the flame was gushing out. However, the ice was not melting despite the flame. Nainiae concluded that she successfully trapped the bear inside. She approached the ice prison that she created.

“… Mister?”

It seemed the bear was still full of energy. The bear was running wild inside. Nainiae observed the bear for a moment. She asked Riley to please wait for a while and looked inside.

“Uuu, uu uu….”

The bear was struggling inside the prison in an attempt to get out of it. Eventually, it seemed the bear was exhausted at last. He stopped struggling. Instead, he just plummeted and lay down on the spot.

“Mister, can you hear me?”

Nainiae confirmed that the bear's eyes had turned back to their normal color. She tried talking to the bear, and the bear slowly moved his eyes to look outside the ice prison.

"…?"

Kungkung

Wiggling his nose, the red bear smelled Nainiae. The bear looked at Nainiae and asked in human tongue,

"… Nainiae?"

"He can talk?"

Riley came next to Nainiae and was staring at the bear trapped inside the ice prison. It seemed Riley was surprised that the bear had talked. The bear glanced at Riley and looked at Nainiae again.

"Nainiae, how did you get here?"

"I'm so relieved. It seems like you have regained your senses. I'm here to see the teacher. What happened?"

"Uuuu. Cold. First… can you please remove these?"

“Ah, yes.”

Nainiae removed the water shackles and ice prison walls and gave back the bear’s flame that she blew away earlier with wind magic. Nainiae asked again,

“What happened? I never thought you would show such a violent side.”

Nainiae tilted her head to the side and asked, and the bear apologized and answered,

“That is… It’s because of the order from my master. I was ordered to be weary of anyone who approaches the cave.”

“Be weary?”

“That Andal said that?”

Riley, who was listening to the conversation, crossed his arms and furrowed his brows.

“That’s right. I didn’t get full details about what happened from my master, but anyway, he said that, instead of taking it easy… I should stop anything that comes this way.”

After saying all that, the bear scratched his stomach and explained why he lost his mind.

“Because of that, unlike the usual, I was on high alert, and… some human bastards came by.”

“Humans?”

“For some reason, although I tried to scare them, they kept looking for opportunities to get in. So, I tried to end it by just chasing them away, but… They were surprisingly good at running. In the process, I eventually…”

“Went berserk.”

“I didn’t realize it. I am so ashamed to face my master.”

The bear explained that he ran into Nainiae and Riley while he had gone berserk and was chasing the humans. Riley casually widened his senses and checked the forest.

“One, two, three, four… about four of them?”

Riley counted the number of people who were not so far from here. As if he was disappointed, he shrugged his shoulder and asked,

“What about Andal?”

“Just who the hell are you? Why are you so disrespectful and

terse with your words?”

The red bear was about to crumple his face while staring at Riley. Nainiae tumbled and stepped forward to explain.

“He is the Young Master! The one I told you about!”

“Ah, that one?”

It seemed her explanation was effective. The bear changed the look on his face immediately. Unlike a moment ago, the bear lowered his stance. With his head lowered as well, the bear started to walk toward him slowly in light steps.

“Kum. Hm. It’s a pleasure meeting you.”

“So, how’s Andal?”

Riley decided not to care about the change in the mood. Instead, he just asked about Andal. The red bear licked his front paw and said,

“I am not sure. Ever since his last order, I have not seen him come out of the cave, so… He even cast an isolation barrier.”

“Isolation barrier?”

“Ah, so that’s why…”

“Why?”

The look on Nainiae’s face seemed like she noticed something. Looking at Nainiae’s face, Riley tilted his head to the side.

“It was because of the isolation barrier. That’s why we were teleported to the outside of the cave instead.”

Nainiae looked at the top of the mountain that they could see above them.

“Still, it is weird. I believe he has never cast an isolation barrier before.”

It seemed she could not figure out why Andal would have cast the isolation barrier. Nainiae tilted her head to the side. The red bear mumbled as if he was feeling the same.

“It is not easy for me to imagine what the situation is, but it looks like it would be best to check what’s going on. You are here to see my master, right?”

“Yes. Will you come with us?”

“No. I have my orders, so I can’t. I’ll stay here, you go on.”

“Yes, well then…”

Nainiae watched the red bear turning around and heading back to his original post. She turned to look at Riley and said,

“Let’s climb.”

“Climb?”

“Yes, we must climb.”

“…”

Although Nainiae led the way and started to walk, Riley vacantly stood there and maintained a frozen stance. Dumbfounded, he asked Nainiae,

“Are you saying I have to do mountain climbing now?”

At the top of the mountain, there was a cave. Riley looked at the cave and pouted, thinking it was such a bother. Nainiae, who was leading the way, had already started to walk, said to Riley,

“Please don’t worry, Young Master. I’m good friends with all guardians here, so we won’t have to overcome things like trials. We will probably just have to go up the mountain.”

It didn't matter if they could just go up the mountain or had to wrestle with Andal's guardians along the way to climb the mountain. Riley was cringing just from the idea of climbing a mountain. He sighed big and went off on a tangent.

"What about that bear earlier?"

"He is an exception. He is usually very kind, but he can't tell friends from foes once he goes berserk. It's a special characteristic of his, so… Young Master? Aren't you going to climb?"

Having noticed Riley frozen solid and not moving at all, she wondered what this was about.

"I don't want to do a heavy labor for no reason… Is there a way to get to the top comfortably?"

Nainiae realized late what Riley was trying to ask. With awkward face, she said,

"As explained earlier, the teacher has cast an isolation barrier on this entire mountain area, so… carelessly attempting long distance teleportation is actually dangerous. If something goes wrong, just legs or arms could be teleported, so…"

"…"

In the end, Nainiae was saying there was no way to avoid climbing. Riley sighed again. He hesitated for a long time,

pondering if he should stay here or follow Nainiae. In the end, he followed after Nainiae.

“How long will it take?”

“About an hour? I’m overestimating it, so it probably won’t take that long.”

*

“… I think it’s been about two hours.”

“It’s only been one hour?”

“What? You said it won’t take that long, didn’t you?”

“That is… Yes, I did say that.”

Nainiae, who was leading the way and walking the mountain path, said in small voice. Riley, who was following her, pouted with just his lower lips and blew air out to blow his bangs.

“Andal, you little bastard. As soon as I see his face, the first thing I’m going to do is tell him to go swap the eyeballs of all guardian bastards, ugh… Why is every single one we run into not able to recognize you? They are wasting our time.”

Riley was thinking about the reason why climbing the mountain was taking so long. He counted the number of Andal's guardians they had run into so far and grounded his teeth.

"Uu... As I thought, are they not able to recognize me because my face changed so much?"

All guardians they ran into were hostile toward them. Because of this, Nainiae was conscious about her face which had changed. She lowered her head in disappointment. In complaining tone, Riley said,

"No, I'm telling you, you have not changed that much."

It seemed what the bear said about Andal's order was true. All guardians on this mountain were on high alert. They all appeared to be on the edge.

Riley thought her changed face may have played a role in the guardians' hostile responses, but he also thought it was more likely that Andal's order was the real cause.

"Anyway, why is that lizard making all his subordinates feel on the edge like this?"

Wondering if something really big happened, Riley looked at the top of the mountain again. He thought being stuck at snail pace was more bothersome. He got past Nainiae and said,

“I can’t take this.”

“Young Master?”

“If we climbed as if we were on a walk, I think it will take a lifetime. I’m just going to run there.”

Riley was saying that he was going to send mana to his legs and run up the pathway in a single breath. Nainiae proposed a method that she just thought of. She had forgotten about it until now.

“Young Master, we might as well…”

“…?”

Riley was about to move his mana and charge forward, but he casually turned his head to the back.

“… Uh? People?”

It wasn’t just because of Nainiae’s voice.

“There really are?”

It was because four people had revealed themselves from the bushes.

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“On top of that, I think she is a maid?”

“A maid?”

They made bristling noise as they made their way through the bushes. The four people walked toward where Nainiae was.

Based on their voices, based on their appearances... The four appeared to be very young, unbecoming of the place they were in. Even if their ages were overestimated, they appeared to be around the age similar to Riley and Nainiae.

“Why is a maid here?”

“...?”

The boys and girls each had either swords on their waists, bows or staffs. Having discovered the four, Nainiae glanced around at Riley, checked his mood, and asked on his behalf,

“Who might you all be?”

Having heard the question, a brown haired young man, who appeared to be the representative of the group, stepped forward and asked back,

“That’s our line. What business do you have in this place? This place is the territory of Andal, the infamous red dragon. By any chance… you are not going to say you got lost in your way, are you?”

The young man was narrowing his eyes and bringing his hand toward the sword on his back. Nainiae had dumbfounded look on her face. She turned to look at Riley on the back and checked how he felt about this.

“…”

Riley was also finding this to be ridiculous. With the gaze, he glanced at Nainiae and the four people. The four people were glaring at Riley and Nainiae as if they found the two to be suspicious. Riley, finding it to be such a bother, sighed.

‘Just handle it.’

Riley waved his right hand to deliver his thought to Nainiae. She nodded as if she understood and walked toward the four people.

‘Wait. Four…’

The number of people that Riley felt through his senses was four. Also, the number of people who were staring at Riley and Nainiae suspiciously was also four.

‘Are these the humans that the Mister mentioned earlier?’

The four humans who are very good at running away, the people who the red bear guardian lost in middle of pursuit seemed to be these four.

Nainiae only kept silence. There was no response from her. The brown-haired young man drew the sword from his back and shouted,

“Hurry and spill it out! Who are you?”

“As you asked earlier, I’m just a maid, but… Isn’t it only polite to reveal your own identity first before asking the other person?”

“What?”

“This will be the last time I’ll be speaking in respectful words. The four of you, where did you all come from?”

Nainiae thought about how could such young people could have followed her and Riley. She thought about all guardians she just met so far and furrowed her brows.

It was because she realized this happened because of her doing.

Using magic, one after another, Nainiae neutralized guardians who showed fangs against them. Because she was climbing like this, the four people were also able to get this far and meet Nainiae

and Riley. This was her guess.

“We are Brave Heroes.”

“…?”

Finding them to be such a bother, Riley was just going to ignore them and continue climbing. However, having heard what was just said, he perked up his ears and turned his head.

“Brave Heroes?”

Nainiae also perked up her ears and tuned into what the brown-haired young man had to say.

“That’s right. We are here to eradicate Andal the red dragon, the one who is threatening our village’s peace!”

Peace and whatnot, eradicate and whatever… The young man didn’t look all that skilled, yet he was saying stuff like that. Riley steadily gazed upon their eyes. Dumbfounded, he shook his head and turned away.

“Ah! You there! Wait!”

Riley was about to resume climbing, and the brown-haired young man thought Riley was trying to run away. He started to point his finger at Riley.

“Enough.”

To block the finger aimed toward Riley, Nainiae walked to the front of the young man. She glared at the four and said in low voice,

“Did you say you came here to eradicate Andal the red dragon?”

Because Nainiae was blocking his front... To be precise, because Nainiae came closer and he could clearly see her beauty, the brown-haired young man just had his jaw dropped vacantly. He responded half a tempo late,

“T... That’s right!”

“Just now, you said your village’s peace was threatened... Do you have any proof? I don’t believe such would have happened?”

Having heard the question, the brown-haired young man flinched his shoulders. However, refusing to lose, he talked back.

“It didn’t happen yet, but it will soon!”

“It hasn’t happened?”

Nainiae was trying to say that he should give straight answers. She questioned in cold tone of voice, and the young man’s face

crumpled.

“Kuk...”

Looking at his crumpled face, Nainiae lightly sighed and said,

“Well, it’s fine. This is not the first time people talked about eradicating the dragon. Scales, claws, teeth, heart... Sticking all sorts of reasons up there as the reasons, there were a few instances where humans came by.”

Nainiae mumbled about the story as she twirled her long hair to the front right of her face with her finger.

“Well, I have caused inconveniences to other guardians, so perhaps I should handle this for the day?”

Twirling her hair, Nainiae mumbled quietly. Looking at the four people, she said,

“I am sorry, but now that I learned of your objective... I cannot allow you to climb any further.”

“What?”

“That maid, it cannot be...”

“No. I am not exactly a guardian of this mountain, but…”

The four people were about to make strange assumptions about her, so Nainiae shook her head and said that was not the case. She blocked their path and explained,

“It’s just that…”

Nainiae swung her right hand with force, and ice walls with icicles formed to left and right of Nainiae. The walls were exuding cold energy.

“I… Ice walls?”

“She is a mage?”

The four people were quite surprised by her magic. They each drew their weapons and got ready for the battle.

“You just said you are all Brave Heroes. The words you spoke earlier… I do not like what you have done.”

Was she thinking about how Riley suffered in his past life? Nainiae was exuding atmosphere that was just as cold as the ice walls that were tightly packed next to her. She swung her hand once again.

“…?!”

The sound of someone gulping could be heard.

It was the brown-haired young man.

“I’ll warn you.”

Several hundred grey colored icicles appeared from the ice walls, and… They were aimed at the four boys and girls who were looking at Nainiae.

The icicles were like arrows on tightly drawn bows. It appeared as if they contained strong resentment toward the four people. The icicles looked like they would be launched and pierce the four targets as soon as Nainiae’s order came. The icicle arrows were all very real.

“Please, all of you, turn back now and go down the mountain.”

Several hundred icicle arrows were floating next to Nainiae. Watching her, the brown-haired young man appeared to be overwhelmed. His sword was shaking. With surprised look, he opened his mouth.

“…”

Due to the shock, they were petrified. Despite the warning, it seemed they were not intending to move at all. Having noticed

this, Nainiae shot one of the arrows as a warning.

"... Tsk."

From where the boys and girls were, someone clicking the tongue could be heard.

'Um?'

Immediately after the icicle arrow was shot, a girl charged forward. Watching this, Nainiae floated a question mark on her face.

Kaaang!

Afterwards, the arrow was deflected by the girl's sword with a clashing sound.

'She defected it?'

To save vacantly petrified young man, the dark-haired girl charged to the front and swung the sword. She quickly hid the sword behind her back and said,

"W... We understand!"

She deflected one, but there were still several hundred icicle

arrows left. It seemed the girl who clicked her tongue earlier was scared as well. She was shaking as she lowered her head.

“We didn’t know our place. We are very young, so… We were being foolish. As you advised, we will turn back immediately and go down the mountain. Please forgive us.”

She dropped the sword and pleaded for forgiveness. Nainiae vacantly watched her and looked at the other three.

“P… Please forgive us!”

“We will never come back!”

The other three followed after the dark-haired girl and lowered their heads. They turned around and started to go back down without ever looking back.

“… Just now…”

Of the four, instead of the brown-haired young man who introduced the group as Brave Heroes, Nainiae was more bothered by the black-haired girl. Nainiae glared at her back and mumbled vacantly,

“That swordsmanship. I think I have…”

It was a warning shot, but the girl was concerned the brown-

haired young man might get hurt by the icicle arrow, so she charged forward. Nainiae was thinking about her swordsmanship.

“I think I have seen it from somewhere?”

Nainiae disengaged the ice walls and icicle arrows. She held her chin and thought hard about this. In middle of it, she shook her head.

“It’s no time for this. I should follow after Young Master…”

To catch up to Riley who went ahead, she used magic.

It was the spell that she didn’t think about earlier. If she had, climbing the mountain would have been so much easier.

“… Fly.”

She used the magic that temporarily allowed her to fly. Her body floated up to the sky.

*

“… What? Where did you say you just came back from?”

“We were at the mountain where Andal the red dragon lives…”

“You must have a death wish.”

Inside an old worn-down house, in front of an old fire place, a woman with light purple hair was poking at the fire woods with kindling as she scolded the black-haired girl.

“Did you go there alone?”

“…”

It looked like she was currently receiving a punishment. She had her arms raised straight up. The girl shook her head lightly.

“Who did you go there with?”

“That is… There is a boy named Henson from the next village… There were lots of good rumors about him showing talent in his training to become a knight, so I wondered if he was the ‘Brave Hero’ we were looking for. That’s why…”

“Ugh, so you tempted him to go there.”

“…”

Wharurururu

The light-purple haired woman was shifting the fire woods with

the kindling. She sighed in frustration.

“If you are going to die, then you should die alone. If your blameless friend got tangled up and died together... then you will never be able to go to a good place after your death. Have I not told you this clearly before?”

The black-haired girl bit her lower lips. Feeling wronged, it seemed she had something to say.

“But, grandmother, you also told me this.”

“...”

“That there isn’t much time left.”

Having heard the girl muttering, the light-purple haired woman put the kindling down and walked to the girl.

“... Iril.”

“...”

It seemed she wanted to hear the girl’s response. The purple haired woman raised her hand toward the empty air and called the girl’s name again.

“Iril.”

Iril answered.

“Yes, grandmother.”

There was black blind on the woman’s eyes.”

“I’m here.”

Iril lowered her arms down. The woman was feeling up empty air because she could not see. Iril went to hold the woman’s hand.

“There you are.”

The woman’s light purple hair was incredibly fine. Her skin was pure white without any wrinkles. The woman’s appearance did not look old enough to warrant being called ‘grandmother’ by the girl. However… It seemed she was not in good condition. As if she was suffering from frostbite, her skin was cold.

“Grandmother, please stay next to the fire.”

It seemed Iril was worried about her skin, which could not be colder. However, the woman shook her head and faced toward where Iril was standing.

“Iril.”

Looking at the woman’s blind, Iril said,

“Yes, grandmother.”

“With the time to say goodbye approaching, I know you are feeling anxious, but… I don’t want you to throw away your life like that.”

“…”

Iril was holding the woman’s hand. She bit her lower lips again as she held in tears.

“Still, you are… my last pupil.”

“Grandmother…”

The woman slowly turned to face the fireplace.

“Just wait.”

Iril looked worried to hear that. She asked,

“But… But what if the Brave Hero never comes?”

“If that happens…”

She should not be able to see anything with the blind covering her eyes. However… she was directly looking at ‘a sword’ that was hidden inside the fireplace. As if she was muttering, she continued,

“… then that would be our fate.”

Chapter 165 - Leading a Carefree Life (7)

“Um?”

Riley was going past a few dozen trees with each step. He felt a presence above him, so he casually tilted his head up to see what was there and stopped dashing.

“What is it?”

Riley dragged his two feet on the ground and stopped the momentum. Watching a maid falling from the sky slowly like a feather, Riley crumpled his face.

“I said, what is it?”

“…”

Her Young Master was looking at her as if he was asking what she was doing. The maid pressed down her skirt and landed on the ground.

“Hey. Why are you coming down from the sky?”

“That is…”

“Right. Explain it.”

Nainiae pursed her lips and carefully explained why she just fell from the sky.

“I used a magic spell.”

“What kind of magic?”

“Fly. It is a flight magic.”

Having heard the explanation, Riley smiled refreshingly and asked,

“Wasn’t that supposed to be not possible here?”

“It slipped my mind.”

Riley was smiling, and… Nainiae wondered if she should smile too or if she should maintain her apologetic face. Nainiae pondered about this. Soon, she decided to go with the apology and lowered her head.

“I am sorry. I just remembered, so I was about to tell you, but the four people suddenly showed up, so… Also, you went ahead without me, so… I had no choice but to use the magic so I could catch up with you. Although it is late, I can cas uu u uuuuuuu…”

Her face was grabbed by two hands. Her cheeks were grabbed and

stretched out like marshmallow.

“…. I’m sorry.”

With stretched out pronunciation, Nainiae apologized again. Riley was letting out his frustration by holding her cheeks. Looking really pissed at Nainiae, Riley mumbled,

“You should have thought of it sooner. Sooner.”

Gritting his teeth hard, Riley was pulling out Nainiae’s cheeks. Having had enough, he unhanded her cheeks and growled at her.

“Grrrrrr.”

“… Yes.”

She raised her left hand to hold her reddened cheek. She raised her right hand to use magic. Nainiae felt around the empty space with her hand and made Riley’s body float up first.

“You used it?”

“Yes.”

Floating like cloud, his feet lifted off from the ground. Riley looked intrigued. He tried moving his feet in the air.

One step, two step…

Unlike swimming, he realized that moving his legs didn't make his body move forward or backward. He looked at Nainiae who floated up after him.

"I can't move as I want?"

"The magic isn't giving us wings or the ability to direct the flight, so…. That will be hard."

"Is that so?"

Having heard Nainiae's explanation, Riley grabbed the sword from his waist. For no apparent reason, he tried swinging it in front of him.

Paaaaang.

His sword spread blue mana to the air and caused a shockwave sound. Riley's body, which was floating in the air, suddenly moved as if he was pulled to the back.

"Oh?"

"…"

Watching Riley move in the air by swinging the sword, watching his ability to repurpose skills for the situation, it seemed Nainiae was at lost for words. She just vacantly opened her mouth.

“With a method like that… I guess it is possible.”

“This is pretty fun.”

Riley swung the sword several times and moved around in the air. Nainiae was already far from him. Looking at Nainiae, Riley tilted his head to the side.

“Where are you going?”

“That is… Young Master, you are the one who is moving.”

Nainiae vacantly muttered. She asked if she could be excused for a moment. She used telekinesis to pull Riley to where she was.

“As I thought, magic is mysterious.”

With just hand gestures, magic could be used to make a person float up in the air or pull a person from the distance. Riley said muttered as if found magic very attractive. Nainiae shrugged her shoulders and said,

“I find the way you swing your sword to be more of a mystery.”

Nainiae watched Riley's sword going back to the sheath at his waist. She used the float magic again.

"Well then, we will go straight to the teacher's cave."

"All right. Let's go see his face soon. We came this far for a good reason, yet he won't even come out to see us. Gosh."

Nainiae swung her hand to increase the floating speed and moved toward Andal's cave which could be seen at the top of the mountain.

"Um?"

They flew for about a minute. Nainiae's and Riley's bodies, which were floating in the air, started to fall by the gravity.

"What is this?"

It seemed the distance to the cave was shortened substantially because Riley had been climbing by dashing huge distances. Realizing the ground was coming closer, Riley asked Nainiae,

"Are we there already?"

"Yes."

Thanks to her flight magic, Riley was able to climb the remaining distance with relative ease. He looked at the huge cliff in front of him and tilted his head to the side.

“This place is not the top?”

“It is the top, but it is not the top.”

“Don’t talk like a summon spirit. Speak like a human being.”

“It’s as I said. I think you should be able to tell, Young Master. Can you tell?”

Having heard Nainiae, Riley widened his senses and realized the scenery in front of him felt strange. He had a look on his face as if he understood.

“This is also magic?”

“Yes. It’s an isolation barrier.”

To disengage the isolation barrier, Nainiae was looking around the place. She started to feel the ground and boulders around the cliff.

“As I thought, the isolation barrier had been strengthened substantially since the last time.”

She was fiddling with a boulder, and flame suddenly surged from it. Surprised, she took a few steps back. She looked like she was not sure about what to do. She started to look around the place again.

“To disengage this, I think it will take …”

Riley glanced at Nainiae who was looking around the isolation barrier. As if he didn’t want to bother with waiting, he brought his hand toward the sword on his waist.

“We are going in.”

His sword was swung without any sound. His sword went past the isolation barrier as it drew long blue line. The isolation barrier started to crumple in zigzag shape.

“… some time.”

Nainiae watched Andal’s isolation barrier being cut open by Riley’s sword swing. Nainiae vacantly muttered,

“What are you doing? Let’s go?”

“Ah, yes.”

Watching Riley going in to the gap created by the cut, Nainiae, who was standing there vacantly, tumbled and followed suit. She

thought,

‘That’s our Young Master all right.’

Other than Riley, there probably never was any human being who could break the isolation barrier cast by a dragon with a sword swing, and there probably never will be anyone in the future who would be capable of doing this.

“Andal?”

Stepping inside the isolation barrier through the cut, Riley called for Andal. He looked around the scenery inside which was slowly changing.

“Andal!”

It seemed like they were at the right place. It looked like the place that he had visited before through the pub. Riley called for Andal’s name again and let out his frustration.

“By any chance, it is not like he is currently absent from this place when we came all the way here to visit him, right?”

Riley called twice, yet no response could be heard, so he was thinking about the worse possible scenario. It was at that moment. He could hear the sound of flame burning up.

<… Who are you?>

It was a familiar voice.

“Ah, you showed up at last.”

“Ms. Heliona!”

Riley turned his head with leisurely face. Nainiae turned her head with joyful face to look at the direction of the voice.

<Um?>

Burning flame in midair, Heliona was summoned starting from the tip of her feet. She found the two people inside the cave and started to rub her eyes.

<Young Master Riley and… Nainiae?>

Nainiae missed Heliona. She opened her arms big. Heliona, who was just floating there in the air with blank look on her face, flew to Nainiae and was embraced. It seemed Heliona missed Nainiae too.

<Nainiae!>

“Phew… I’m so glad. I didn’t know what I would do if you didn’t

recognize me too like other guardians.”

<Come on! Why would I not recognize you?>

“This would be your second time to see her like this. If you don’t recognize her… then you should go see a doctor who specializes in summon spirit or something. Holy Power does not work on a summon spirit, right?”

<…>

Hearing Riley going off the tangent, Heliona flinched her shoulders.

“A… Anyway! How did this happen? I thought you were at the spirit world, but to think you were actually here in the cave and guarding it… What’s this isolation barrier for? Why are all guardians all on the edge? Where’s the teacher?”

Having heard Nainiae asking about what happened to Andal, her teacher, Heliona put up concerned look on face. Not sure about how she could handle this, she just avoided the gaze.

“About that…”

It seemed it was a question that was hard to respond to. Heliona was blurring the end of the sentence. Riley shrugged his shoulders and asked,

“What is it? Is he molting his scales or something because he is a lizard?”

<Molting?>

“Stripping… No. I’m asking if he is shedding his skin.”

Glancing at Nainiae to check on her mood, Riley changed how he worded the sentence and asked. Heliona shook her head and that was not it.

<I think it will be easier to just show you and explain.>

Heliona got out of Nainiae’s arms and started to fly toward a corner of the cave.

She flew to a blind corner. She entered another cave inside the cave and showed a hand gesture to tell Riley and Nainiae to follow her. They walked to where Heliona was.

“Um?”

Riley was following Heliona who flew ahead. However, he suddenly cringed and sniffed.

“This smell is?”

Nainiae noticed Riley cringing. She also focused on her sense of smell and sniffed several times. Nainiae cringed her face like Riley.

“Young Master, by any chance, this is…”

Nainiae guessed what the source of the smell was. She was about to say something to Riley, but Heliona spoke first.

<We are here.>

Riley and Nainiae stopped walking after hearing what Heliona said. They saw red scales in front of them and tilted their heads up.

Huge talons, huge body, and huge wings becoming of the body… The appearances reflected on their eyes in that order.

“Andal?”

“Teacher?”

It seemed the dragon heard their voices. The dragon with large, red body struggled and opened his eyes.

<… Who is it?>

Heliona was flying between Riley and Nainiae. She responded

instead.

<They are Young Master Riley and Nainiae.>

<Riley? Ah, that Riley?>

Andal seemed relieved. He closed his eyes, but he appeared to be in pain. He struggled and started to turn his body.

“Are you trying to take winter nap out of the blue? Why did you transform back to your original form and…”

Watching his friend looking lethargic, Riley laughed and teased him as always. However, he noticed something dark and stopped talking.

“…”

<As you can see.>

While lying down, Andal turned his body to show his arm which had turned black. In pain, Andal cringed his face.

<… I was done in.>

Nainiae vacantly stared at his darkened arm. Finding it hard to believe, Nainiae muttered,

“T… Teacher?”

<It is faint, but similar smell is coming from you guys… By any chance, were you at the Karuta Desert?>

“That’s right.”

<I see.>

Andal briefly coughed and said,

<The people who can use special abilities without mana… What did you guys call them? Purple humans?>

Riley nodded.

<Hair, skin, bodily fluid, blood… From the tip of the hairs on the head to the bottom of the feet, this human was drenched in poison.>

Andal narrowly opened his eyes and looked at Riley and Nainiae.

<His ability was special, but what was even weirder was… what the bastard said as soon as he met me.>

“What did he say?”

<He asked me to kill him.>

This was the same story that they heard from Reitri. As if he wanted Andal to explain more, Riley narrowed his eyes.

<So…>

However, Andal could not help but to close his eyes without continuing his words.

It seemed he was not able to handle his body very well because of the infection in one of his arms.

“What is it? Hey! Shouldn’t you finish what you were about to say?”

It appeared that Andal was asleep. Although Riley shouted all of the sudden, there was no response from him.

Riley asked Heliona,

“What’s the matter with him?”

<It’s because of the poison.>

“Poison?”

Heliona nodded and said,

<I don’t know what kind of poison it is… Master used cleansing magic several times, but he was unable to detoxify the poison. He is in the current state because he is trying to handle the poison. The isolation barrier was strengthened and the guardians were warned as a measure in response to the master’s rapidly weakened state.>

Nainiae understood what happened. With concerned face, she looked at Andal who was asleep.

“Teacher…”

“…”

After hearing Heliona’s explanation, Riley vacantly stared at his friend lying down. Riley mumbled,

“I can’t let this be. Now that it came to this…”

“…?”

Nainiae casually turned her head and looked at Riley who had his arms crossed. Riley said after a moment of pause,

“… It’s time for kidnapping.”

As if he had no time to waste, he quickly turned around and headed to leave the cave. Nainiae tumbled and followed him.

‘Kidnapping? Why all of the sudden?’

His proposition was so out of the blue. Nainiae pondered who he was trying to kidnap. Soon, she figured out who.

“Ah…”

She asked Riley as she thought about the prospective kidnap subject.

“Are you really going to snatch her away?”

“…”

Having heard her question, Riley flinched and stopped walking. As if he was at loss for words, he turned to look at her.

Chapter 166 - Abduction

“Where did you learn a word like that?”

Riley was about to leave Andal’s cave. However, he asked Nainiae where she had learned the word that she had just used.

“Pardon? If you are asking where I learned it…”

As if she was not sure why Riley was asking such a question, Nainiae tilted her head to the side. She paused for a moment and said,

“… I didn’t really learn it. How should I say it… It is one of those things that came into my head? Isn’t it a word that was used in the world of your past life, Young Master? Isn’t it used in a situation like this?”

From Riley’s response, Nainiae thought perhaps she didn’t choose the right word. Concerned, she asked.

“No, it is similar, but…”

The word meant abducting a woman against her will in secret. The word she had used was similar to what Riley had said earlier about the abduction. However, the problem was that it was Nainiae who said it, not Riley.

“Of all things.”

Riley thought he would not feel this awkward if it was Ian, Sera or anyone else. Riley avoided Nainiae’s gaze and mumbled,

“Hearing you say such a thing is a little…”

“Young Master?”

For some reason, Riley was looking elsewhere and pretending to be preoccupied. Nainiae, who had a concerned look on her face, carefully moved her hand toward his shoulder.

“Young Master.”

“Ah, I’m sorry. I was thinking about something else.”

“Anyway, you will be going back to the Karuta Desert, right?”

“For now, we should.”

Instead of the word, he decided to focus on what to do now and nodded.

Riley thought of a way.

Abduction. Today morning, they took the effort to ignore and

leave a Priestess behind at the desert when she said she wanted to go with them. Now, as the meaning of the word entails, they were going to snatch her and bring her here.

'Since I have already told her off to not follow me because she would be a bother, now I'll look super uncool, but…'

Riley thought about the divine message that Priesia mentioned last time. He pondered if she was supposed to have followed him because of Andal. Riley slowly shook his head.

'My source of freeloading is ill. I can't just sit back and watch.'

The dragon with red scale who was unable to open his eyes due to poison had been referred as such by Riley often. However…to Riley, Andal was his only friend in this world.

Riley was indebted to Andal. He couldn't just sit back and watch Andal suffer in pain. This was the reason why Riley was about to make the move.

Before going back to the Karuta Desert, Nainiae was working on the isolation barrier to prepare for their return later.

"I guessed this one must be pretty powerful considering he drenched the entire desert with the epidemic, but to think he put the teacher in that state… Do you think Ms. Priesia will be able to cleanse him?"

Nainiae asked, and in return Riley said,

“You saw her cleansing a handful of sand. From what she was saying about it, it seems, she was serious about cleansing the entire desert at once... She probably was given the title of the Priestess for a good reason.”

Riley had heard this before, but he was reminded again that there was a limit to detoxification through magic. Riley thought about the power possessed by a Priestess.

Riley was holding his chin. Meanwhile, Nainiae looked like she was done with working on the isolation barrier. Riley asked Nainiae,

“Are you ready?”

“Yes. Shall we get going now?”

“Yes. Let’s go right away.”

Riley nodded and responded. Nainiae put forth her right hand and opened a portal that connected to the Karuta Desert.

“Do you think everyone is still at the same place?”

“They said they were going to move, so probably not?”

Riley and Nainiae thought about Priesia and the others who must be still at the desert as they walked toward the portal.

It was when they had walked onward for about three steps after entering the portal; they immediately felt the air that touched their nose and lips was different. They both automatically crumpled their faces.

"... Uuu."

Nainiae promptly used air cleansing magic to handle the stench. She closed the teleportation portal and started to look around the Karuta Desert which was covered in black sand.

"Starting with the air, the place is definitely different."

Compared to the mountain where Andal was, the air at the desert that was polluted by the epidemic was insufferable. Riley shook his head and looked to place where the portal had just closed. He muttered,

"I want to go back."

Nainiae figured that Priesia's cleansing prayer must not be over yet. She looked around the area.

"It looks like Priesia and Reitri Merchant Group have already left."

“They sure are diligent to an unnecessary extent.”

Riley checked the ground, wondering if there were any carriage tracks left. However, it seems the wind had erased all traces of the tracks. The sands were only showing their even flatness on the ground.

‘I thought abduction would be incredibly easy, yet…’

Riley was facing a problem – starting with finding the target of the abduction. Not sure about what to do, Riley turned to look at Nainiae while scratching his head.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes?”

“Can you do it now?”

Riley looked at Nainiae’s right eye and asked. Nainiae touched the right side of her face. The look on her face indicated she was not certain.

“I am not sure?”

Riley asked her to try it and thought about Priesia.

“Try it.”

In the process, it seemed his thoughts got tangled up and made him remember the Priestess from his past life. Riley crumpled his face, and Nainiae also crumpled her face like Riley. She appeared to be suffering.

“Is it not working?”

“No. Please wait…”

It seemed that she didn’t cringe because of the pain. Nainiae ground her teeth lightly so that Riley wouldn’t notice. She relaxed her face and said,

“I think I can.”

She took a deep breath and looked at Riley again while gathering strength in her right eye. She soon found where Priesia was and turned her head to the side.

“It’s that direction. It appears to be pretty far too.”

“It looks like the eye worked?”

“I know. It worked this time.”

Nainiae had a question mark on her face. She wondered why it worked this time when it hadn't worked the last time. She touched her face around her eye and immediately prepared a teleportation magic.

"Ah, wait."

Feeling Riley's hand on her shoulder, Nainiae stopped using magic. Wondering what this was about, she tilted her head to the side.

"We are literally going to abduct her. I thought maybe showing up in the open suddenly might pose a problem."

Riley held his chin to think. He started to think if it would be all right to show themselves to Priesia and the others by arriving there through teleportation.

"If they ask why we returned when we said we were going to see the doctor, what do we say to them?"

Riley asked. Nainiae pondered about the response and asked what Riley thought of her idea.

"How about saying that the doctor has been infected with the poison and needs Ms. Priesia? Won't that work?"

Since that actually was the situation, there was no reason for anyone, even those who didn't really know what was actually happening, to think the response was odd.

"What if the Priestess is still in middle of the prayer?"

"Prayer?"

"From what I've heard, while she is sending the prayer, she will lose her consciousness and will be unaware of what's happening in her surroundings. If she already started the prayer and if we show up out of the blue and then take her away, then that's literally..."

The act would be no different from what the Kabal Mercenaries, who had ambushed Priesia and Nara, did.

"In that case, what do we do? As I thought, instead of abducting her, wouldn't it be better to just be honest and ask for her help?"

"No. This is not that kind of problem. If we tell her that way, she will bring up the divine message and what not and say 'As I thought, I should have gone with you.' She will nag at me that way, so... Abducting her is the right answer."

"Um..."

"The problem is that we need to wait until the prayer is over."

Riley felt like he had fallen into a trap. With his arms crossed, he couldn't feel more ickier about the situation. He thought it was such a bother to think about it anymore. For the last time, he asked,

"Can you use the surveillance magic to check the situation at Priesia's location?"

"Ah, yes."

"Try it."

Nainiae canceled the teleportation magic. Instead, she used the surveillance magic. She created a large mirror in the front and started to show the scenery around where Priesia was.

"... As I thought."

Riley looked at the mirror and confirmed the scene. He muttered,

"It has already begun."

The scenery shown in the mirror was that of some ruined desert town. Nara, Rorona and other mercenaries were surrounding Priesia.

"What would you like to do?"

Surrounded by the mercenaries, surrounded by light, the Priestess was standing there, motionless. She had just closed her eyes gently and continued to pray.

"..."

Through the mirror, Riley confirmed that the sand near Priesia was not black. As if he had seen enough, he took his gaze off from there and said,

"Let's go back."

"Pardon?"

"Let's go back to the cave. Did they say the desert cleansing will take about four days?"

"Yes, about that long."

"Andal is a lizard who is said to have lived for thousands or tens of thousands years. Couldn't he hang in there for just four days? If he can't, I can just use time magic."

Riley thought about the time magic that had slowed the speed of deterioration from an illness. It was a spell that he already had used on Nainiae before. Riley yawned big enough to make his mouth to tear off.

“It will just be exhausting to think any more. Four days later… Let’s just decide to bring her with us during the early morning of the day the cleansing concludes. That will give us least amount of trouble afterwards.”

Riley made a definite decision before pondering on it some more. Riley said they should head back to the cave. Nainiae, who was looking at the mirror, nodded as if she understood. She prepared a dimensional portal to return to the cave.

*

Four days later.

“… What are you doing?”

Through the mirror that Nainiae made, Riley was looking at the scenery in the desert. He found that the sand had regained its original color. Surprised, Riley opened his eyes big.

“Huh? The color returned?”

“Yes. It looks like Ms. Priesia’s prayer definitely worked.”

It seemed like her four days of prayer didn’t go to waste. The desert had regained its former self. Nainiae clapped in joy and opened the dimensional space.

“Young Master, here.”

“What’s this?”

“It’s a mask.”

“A mask?”

Nainiae smiled refreshingly and added that he will need it when he abducts the Priestess in the morning.

“When did you prepare this?”

Riley broke out in cold sweat at the back of his head and asked. Nainiae said with a proud look on her face,

“I made it while you were taking naps during the day. As for the fabric, I borrowed them from teacher’s guardians. I made it so that it closely resembles that thing from your past life. How is it?”

She leaned her head toward Riley, expecting praise. Riley stroked her head and stuttered,

“Y… You did well.”

Holding the mask that Nainiae had made, Riley looked at the mirror that she had made with her surveillance magic. He noticed

something that was not there before and tilted his head to the side.

“Um? Who is that bastard?”

Besides Reitri Merchant Group, Two from the Nara’s mercenary group and the Priestess... there was one other human there who didn’t seem to belong to any of those groups.

From the tip of the head to the feet, the entire body was under a hood. Even at first glance, the individual looked suspicious. It was as if this person was proudly showing of their suspicious appearance by keeping their identity tightly hidden. The individual was having a conversation with Reitri.

“I am not sure? I just made the surveillance mirror, so I don’t know about the situation in detail.”

Through the mirror, they could see what was happening there, but they could not hear through the mirror, so they didn’t know what Reitri and this hooded individual were talking about. Riley noticed Reitri’s expression.

“Judging from the look on Reitri’s face, the hooded individual does not appear to be an uninvited guest.”

Soon afterwards, the hooded guest lowered his head to Reitri and started to walk.

It looked like the hooded guest might have been a vagrant. It was

very early in the morning, yet the guest was already leaving. Riley shrugged and muttered,

“It’s probably nothing.”

Riley turned away from the mirror and fiddled with the mask. Having noticed this, Nainiae put away the mirror she had brought up and asked,

“Are you going to go now?”

It was roughly a little after 1 am. Nara and Rorona looked like they were exhausted from guarding Priesia for four days while she prayed. They were zonked out. It was certain that now was the best time for the job.

“…”

Having heard Nainiae’s question, Riley fiddled with the mask and pondered about it for a moment. He looked at Nainiae.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes.”

“Can’t you go there by yourself?”

“…”

Riley pulled on the mask and avoided her gaze as he casually asked. Soon, it seemed Nainiae understood what he meant. With disappointed look on her face, she lowered her head.

“… Yes.”

“That’s right. With a Seven Circles mage going there to abduct the Priestess, having one more person tag along could just get in your way. Get it done quietly by yourself.”

“I’ll come back…”

She lowered her head and put on the mask she knitted with cotton strings. She opened a portal that connected to Karuta Desert and entered the portal.

<… Ugh.>

As Nainiae entered the portal, she briefly turned her head back to look at Riley before she disappeared. Riley felt guilty for some reason and he heard the summoned spirit’s sigh.

<Why didn’t you just go with her…>

“…”

Half due to it being such a bother and the other half due to feeling guilty about it, Riley avoided Heliona's gaze and headed back to the bed in the corner of the cave.

Chapter 167 - Abduction (2)

“… Wake me up when she returns.”

Riley hit his back and moaned like an old man who was hurting. He was about to go lie down on the bed. Heliona stared at Riley, thinking what a fool he was. She casually turned her head.

<Um?>

Just now, she felt a presence from the dimensional portal and Nainiae walked in with a gloomy face.

“I’m back.”

“…?”

Riley had his hand on the bed. He just needed to turn and lie down. With surprised look on his face, he turned his head.

“What?”

He looked at the portal; he then looked at the girl in white getup and the maid girl under the mask who followed behind.

‘What the… How could she come back so soon…’

Nainiae found Riley who was about to lie down on the bed. She showed Priesia, the one she abducted.

“Young Master, first, as you requested, I abducted… her.”

Perhaps it was to do the abduction right. Priesia had blind on her eyes, and her hands were tied by a rope. Nainiae pointed them out as if she was showing them off with pride. Nainiae took off her mask. She looked like she was expecting praise from Riley.

“Ah, you don’t have to worry about sounds. I put a sound-proof spell on her, so she should not be able to hear us.”

Nainiae explained that she completely blocked Priesia’s vision and hearing. Nainiae pointed at Priesia who was shaking in fear. Priesia carefully said,

“W… Who are you? What happened? I don’t know why you are doing this all of sudden, but I am a Priestess. If you do anything careless to me…”

Riley looked at Priesia. Dumbfounded, Riley turned to look at Nainiae.

‘Weren’t you guys friends?’

It seemed Nainiae was clueless about her abducted friend shaking in fear. Instead, Nainiae was like a puppy waiting for her master to praise her.

“First… untie this.”

Riley pointed at Priesia’s wrist and plummeted at the bed.

“Excuse me… I don’t know why you brought me here, but if you need my help, then why don’t we slowly talk about it…”

Although Priesia was currently abducted and could not see or hear, she was trying to negotiate with the kidnappers. Finding it to be ridiculous, Riley approached Nainiae.

“You were not discovered?”

“There were a few guards watching her, but I didn’t want to resort to violence, so… I handled it by making them fall asleep. It was easy afterwards.”

Nainiae shrugged her shoulders and said it was nothing. Riley looked like he was impressed. He looked at her and said,

“It must have been. It didn’t even take a minute?”

“I thought you would be waiting, so…”

Riley was impressed because he thought the process and end result would have been just as efficient even if the setting was the Holy Temple or the guards were skilled holy knights.

‘The Nobles always talked about mages, and now… I really understand why. If a skilled mage can handle something like this by herself without leaving any trace… I can definitely understand why they would obsess over having one.’

The nobles had panicked big time during the Astroa incident and when the Magic Tower collapsed. Riley had just experienced firsthand why the nobles cared so much about mages. Riley directed his gaze at Priesia.

“Now, then.”

Riley used his right hand to point at his ear and his left hand to his neck. It seemed Nainiae understood what he was trying to ask. She cast two different magic at once.

“Ah, ah.”

After seeing Nainiae using the magic, Riley checked that his voice had changed. He walked to Priesia and said,

“Can you hear me?”

“… You are?”

In fear, Priesia was shriveling. Having heard the voice, she carefully turned her face to where Riley was standing.

“In this situation, my identify is not important. What’s important is that you have been abducted and you are a Priestess.”

“You are saying that you abducted me knowing that I’m a Priestess.”

“That’s right.”

Priesia muttered in weary voice. She put strength in her shoulders and asked,

“What do you want?”

“Miss, it looks like we understand each other. Instead of saying things like ‘save me’ or ‘spare my life,’ I like that you are going straight to the point. I like that.”

“…”

Listening to the belittling voice, Priesia bit her lips and warned Riley.

“I’ll tell you this first. If you are after money, then you are making a big mistake.”

Riley was about to wear the mask that Nainiae gave him earlier. However, having heard what Priesia just said, he stared at her face

for a moment as if he was dumbfounded. Soon, he figured out what it was about and said,

“Are you talking about reward placed on you at Solia, Ansyrium and other places? There is no need to worry. I am not interested in money.”

Riley covered his head with the mask and put his hand on the blind on Priesia’s eyes.

“… Ah?”

“Hold still.”

Someone’s hand touched her face and her shoulders flinched because of that. Priesia was petrified after hearing the threatening words from Riley.

“Open your eyes.”

Although the blind was removed, Priesia was still choking in fear and had her eyes closed. She slowly opened her eyes.

“This place is…”

Priesia finally realized that she was no longer in the desert with sand wind. Instead, she was in a dark cave. Priesia looked at Riley who was wearing a mask.

“H… How?”

Only a moment ago, Priesia was inside Reitri Merchant Group’s carriage in middle of the desert. Now, she was inside a gigantic cave. Priesia could not understand how this was possible. She vacantly muttered,

“It had only been a while?”

“Nothing good will come from knowing where this place is or how you got here. Priestess, you just need to do what we ask. If you do, we will send you back safely.”

Riley figured it would be best to get the job done before Priesia rolls her brain some more. Riley pushed Priesia’s shoulders from the back to go to a different place.

“Here.”

“Oh my…”

They stopped in front of large red scales.

“This is?”

Priesia looked up the sleeping red dragon. It seemed she was overwhelmed by the size. She vacantly had her mouth open.

Meanwhile, Riley went straight to the point.

“Priestess, I would like you to heal this rascal’s illness?”

Having heard Riley, she looked back and forth between the mask and the red scales. Confused, Priesia said,

“W… what is this…”

“He’s a friend of mine.”

“…”

“Since you asked, I’m just telling you. He is a friend.”

“Friend…. You say? A red dragon is your friend?”

With a look of disbelief, Priesia stared at Riley. Riley shrugged and said that was the case.

“Nonsense.”

Priesia shook her head and said it was nonsense. Annoyed, Riley sighed. Instead of explaining more, he skipped it and said again,

“We don’t want anything of substance from you. This lizard is struggling due to an illness. We just want you to give him a shot of

your holy power.”

Riley pushed Priesia’s back once again and showed Andal’s arm to Priesia. His arm was infected with the epidemic.

“The part that’s stained in black... You have seen it before, right?”

“That is?”

Priesia confirmed that the dragon’s arm that Riley pointed at was stained in black color. She narrowed her eyes.

“It is the same bastard as the one you cleansed in Karuta Desert.”

Having heard what Riley said, she thought about the black sand at the desert. She carefully observed the dragon’s arm and asked carefully,

“May I observe it... from up close?”

“All right. It’s not like we are kidnappers. We are asking you for a favor, so we can accommodate that much.”

She was allowed to do so right away. Priesia was not certain if the masked man was a good guy or a bad guy. Priesia tilted her head to the side and carefully walked to the red dragon’s arm.

‘This color, this stench… It really is the epidemic. He is infected just like how it was with the sand in Karuta Desert.’

She leaned her face toward the arm and cringed due to the stench. Priesia looked at Riley under the mask.

“This dragon… Why are you healing him?”

“Um?”

“By any chance… Are you healing him with the intention of doing horrible things later?”

Priesia asked while glaring at him. Riley also furrowed his brows and glared at Priesia.

“Why are you asking such a question?”

“…”

She didn’t answer.

‘By any chance… Is it because of the divine message?’

Riley remembered the divine message that he heard from Priesia during last spring at the Solia Castle and crumpled his face.

‘Well, as the divine message said, a dragon did cause havoc at Solia last time, so… her concern is warranted, but…’

Riley had once blocked the dragon’s breath that was shot by the dragon with black eyes that was summoned by Rebethra during the battle at the Lower Solia. Thinking about it, Riley cringed.

“Even if I told you that I am not healing him with bad intentions in mind, it doesn’t look like you will believe me anyway? So what should I tell you?”

“That is…”

“I just don’t like seeing my source of freeload… No, I just don’t like to see my dear friend in pain. It’s such a bother. That’s all. I have no other motives. Because that’s all there is to it, I don’t have anything else to say to you.”

Riley shrugged as he said that. Priesia’s eyes had been staring at Riley. Now, her eye colors started to change slowly.

‘Um?’

From her original dark brown eye color, her iris color was changing to the color of golden light. Riley realized what Priesia was trying to do. Intrigued, Riley thought,

‘Is it the power of the Priestess?’

Her golden eyes… They were the eyes that were said to be able to tell if the person she was facing was telling the truth or was lying.

“I’ll ask again. Do you really… have no bad intentions toward this dragon once he has healed?”

Having heard the question, Riley felt there was no need to be concerned about it. He just shrugged and said,

“That’s right.”

In silence, Priesia gazed upon Riley’s eyes that could be seen through the mask’s opening. She suddenly closed her eyes and sighed.

“Ugh…”

Priesia placed her hand at Andal’s arm and started to use her holy power.

“Honestly, I have a mountain of questions, but…”

Riley was impressed. He thought Priesia was a Priestess for a good reason.

“First, I’ll grant your request.”

As soon as she started to use her holy power, Andal's scales, which were stained with black because of the epidemic, started to regain its color rapidly.

"As a Priestess, I cannot just ignore a being who is suffering from illness."

Andal's scales were stained with black on the claws, arm and the shoulder. Now, the parts completely recovered and regained their original color.

<... It worked!>

"I'm so glad."

Heliona and Nainiae were in a corner so that Priesia could not see them. In secret, they were watching Andal's arm being cleansed. After seeing the result, they both sighed in relief, but then they suddenly opened their eyes big.

"Ah?"

The red dragon, who was asleep, opened his eyes.

<... Uu, Uum?>

"Oh?"

The dragon’s eyeball still looked unfocused as if he was still not quite awake. Facing the eyeball, Riley placed a hand at his waist and leaned his face at it.

“You sure were a bother. Are you awake?”

Chapter 168 - Abduction (3)

It looked like Andal was awake. He was trying to move his body, and Priesia hurriedly took her hand off from his arm. She took steps back to move away from Andal.

“Excuse me, was that enough?”

Priesia figured that she won’t be harmed since she was the one who healed Andal and she also used her eyes earlier to confirm Riley’s intention. However… Perhaps because of the atmosphere that was unique to dragons, she could not help but to get scared from seeing the dragon move.

“If it is done, then may I go back now…”

It seemed Andal could not care less about Priesia who was cowering at the corner. Andal turned his head and looked at the boy under the mask. Andal vacantly blinked his eyes and said,

<… Riley?>

“….?”

Priesia was overwhelmed by Andal’s humungous size. She was shriveling. However, after hearing what Andal just said, she floated a question mark on her face.

“…”

Riley was petrified.

‘No.’

Looking at Andal who just muttered his name, Riley said ‘no’ inside. He strained his eyes and started to flinch his facial muscles.

<Hey, it is not too late. Hurry up and correct this.>

Using a method that was closer to telepathy, Riley delivered his thought directly to Andal’s head while carefully glancing at what Priesia was up to.

“Just now, what did you say?”

Although Riley sent Andal a message, he was still tilting his head around as if he was clueless. Wondering what this was about, Andal said,

<Riley, you… Just what are you babbling about…>

Again… Again… Riley’s name was tossed out from the red lizard’s mouth. Riley’s face, which was hidden under the mask, flinched once again.

<Andal, please.>

Riley felt like he knew why this red dragon had failed the amusement tour as a human being so many times. As if he was pleading for Andal to figure this out, Riley desperately called his name.

<What's with that thing you have on top of your face? Is it a new mask?>

"..."

Riley understood that Andal just woke up, so he could be confused with the dream state and the awakened state. However... Instead of the response that Riley hoped for, Andal asked about the mask, which was not even close to what Riley wanted. Having observed this far, Riley was certain now that this dragon failed amusement tours as a human being so many times because he lacked the quick sense.

'They said that one can make it half way by doing absolutely nothing, and...'

Riley was thinking that it would not have come to this if Andal didn't do anything at all. Riley sighed.

"Just now, what are you talking about? Riley? Who are you talking about?"

Andal was tilting his head around, but it was Priesia who had even more puzzled look on the face. She took a step forward and asked Andal.

<Um?>

Having heard the voice from the back, Andal found Priesia. Andal lightly flinched his shoulder and stared at Riley, trying to ask what was this human doing in his cave. Andal asked,

<Riley, did you bring this human here?>

As if Andal was putting the very last nail to the coffin, he mentioned Riley's name once again. With confused look on her face, Priesia went back and forth between the red scaled dragon and the masked man.

"By any chance..."

Priesia was staring at Riley. Feeling the gaze, Riley looked hopeless. He sighed.

"..."

Of all beings, Riley never thought he would be betrayed by the friend he saved. Feeling like he just got smacked on the back of his head, Riley just maintained silence. He then casually moved his gaze because of a presence he felt from the back.

“E… Excuse me!”

Nainiae had been watching the situation in secret. It seemed like she decided she should not let this go on anymore. Nainiae showed herself.

‘Nainiae.’

She was not in her usual maid dress. She was wearing shady getup of a kidnapper. She was even wearing the mask. Watching her walking in… Riley was so impressed. He muttered inside,

‘As I thought, you are the only…’

“Young Master. No, that’s not right… That is…”

Riley was about to think ‘As I thought, you are the only one I can count on, Nainiae.’ However, after listening to Nainiae hurriedly changing her words, Riley could not take it anymore. He lowered his head to the floor.

It looked as if he got smacked on the back of his head twice in a row. He felt like the head was so heavy that he could not keep it up anymore.

“…”

Priesia looked at the mask man, Riley to be exact, and carefully asked,

“By any chance, are you Young Master Riley?”

It was the right answer.

*

“See! As I thought, it was as the divine message said, right?”

Thanks to Andal who lacked quick sense, and thanks to Nainiae who also lacked quick sense, Riley’s identity was found out by Priesia in the end. Riley hung the mask on the top of his head as if it was a mask. He looked annoyed.

“Ah, yes… Yes… It was as the divine message said.”

“See. I told you that you might need me.”

“Ah, yes.”

Priesia thought that she finally proved Riley wrong for once. She placed her fist at her waist. Full of confidence, she lifted her shoulders.

“Well… Regardless of how things turned out, isn’t this a good

thing?”

Andal had transformed to his human form. Looking at Riley who appeared to be uncomfortable about this, Andal scratched his hair and mumbled.

“It... it worked out well.”

Was it because she wanted to make Riley feel better? Nainiae, the one who made a mistake earlier, clapped and smiled awkwardly.

“Anyway, I am indebted to you, Priestess. I’ll repay you for this kindness later in anyway I can.”

It seemed even a dragon had to show respect to a Priestess. Andal spoke to Priesia in respectful tone. Priesia lowered her head and responded,

“About expressing your gratitude, I think you should do that to Young Master Riley. His method was not magnificent, but still, thanks to him, you got to receive the treatment.”

Even though Priesia was praising him, Riley was digging his ears as if he was annoyed. He then sighed big again.

“I’m sorry, Young Master.”

Nainiae was quietly standing behind Riley. Ashamed, Nainiae

lowered her head.

'The divine message or whatnot doesn't really matter.'

Riley thought about Priesia boasting how she was right all along about the divine message and how they should have just followed it. Riley thought about all the bothersome things that were lying ahead and clicked his tongue.

'That's not the problem after being found out.'

Now, there was a possibility that Priesia would pester him about some divine message again. This was the reason why he was sighing since a while ago.

"By the way, why did you kidnap me? If you just told me about it honestly, I would have helped."

"Ah, yes."

"Now that I think about it, when I told you about a divine message during the last spring... It was about a dragon, right? You were so angry at me back then. Was it because you are acquainted with Mr. Andal?"

"Yes, yes."

"Excuse me, Young Master? Are you listening?"

“Yes…”

No matter what Priesia said, Riley kept on saying ‘yes.’

Wharrururururuk

Suddenly, a flame burned up in front of his eyes. He blinked and looked at Andal.

“What the… What are you doing?”

“It looked like your mind had ran away from the host. That’s why.”

“Ha, you dumbass bastard.”

“That’s my line.”

“Huh? Is that how you talk to the man who saved your life?”

“I think you know very well how many times I cleaned after the shit that you pooped out. Isn’t what you did for me already well deserved?”

Andal and Riley was glaring and growling at each other. Meanwhile, Priesia was between them. She didn’t know what to

do, so she started to glance around.

“First, please have some tea.”

Inside Andal’s cave, Priesia was sitting at a round table. Nainiae came and offered Priesia tea from behind, and Priesia asked her by whispering to her ear,

“Excuse me. Is this all right?”

“Um? What is?”

“I’m talking about Young Master Riley. He is picking fights with a dragon like that. I am concerned about him getting into a big trouble later.”

Priesia looked pale. Nainiae looked at Riley and Andal. They looked like they were about to eat each other alive. Nainiae shrugged and said,

“They are always like this.”

“A… always like this?”

Nainiae responded like it was nothing. With look of disbelief, Priesia stared at Riley.

“To start with, I thought it was so ridiculous to hear that you almost died because of a human. I was speechless? Seriously. Did you fight him while picking on your nose or something?”

“Ha! Look who is talking. I’ve heard that you received facial modification by a human? I wonder what was the Lazy-Sword Young Master doing at that time? How come he got face stumped on without being able to do a thing about it? Why don’t you tell me that you got hit while yawning, why don’t you?”

With violent eyes, Andal was exuding deadly aura. He was daring Riley to say one more word. Checking up on Andal’s mood, Priesia bit her lips.

“Is it really all right for them to act like that toward each other?”

Nainiae lifted the tea pot away from the cup and looked at Riley and Andal like Priesia. She shrugged her shoulders once again.

“They are friends.”

“Friends?”

“You heard him earlier, right?”

Earlier, when Riley was wearing the mask, he called Andal as ‘my friend.’ Priesia remembered this, but she still couldn’t believe it. She asked,

“A human and dragon are?”

“At first, I was shocked too, but… Now, I don’t find it all that surprising.”

“…”

The atmosphere turned deadlier by the minute. Now, Andal’s magic and Riley’s sword flashed by once. Holding her breath, Priesia brought the tea to her lips.

“So? You are saying you are going to hunt that bastard down and kill him?”

“That’s right. It won’t end with just a desert, so I must.”

She didn’t know when they stopped fighting. The deadly atmosphere left the scene somehow. Instead, they were having a conversation in serious mood. Priesia had a sip of tea in her mouth as she filled her face with question marks.

“What if you get poisoned again when you go there again? Are you going to rely on me again? I am sorry, but I don’t want to do something like this twice? I think the back of my head will go numb again if I did.”

Just now, Andal was saying he was going to go meet the purple

human that he encountered before. Riley mumbled that he won't save Andal for the second time.

"Hmp! An illness like that... I can be completely healed if I shed my skin once. The situation was not so dire that I would have resorted to getting help from you."

"You are a rascal who takes one hundred years to shed skin. What nonsense..."

"Uk..."

"Well. If you are bent on hunting that bastard down, then I won't object to it."

Riley leaned on the chair's back support and crossed his legs. Andal enjoyed the tea that Nainiae poured. He then turned his head to look at where Priesia was sitting.

"Priestess. What do you think?"

"Ah, yes?"

She was surprised. She asked back.

"I'm talking about that human bastard who is spreading the epidemic as he strolls around. Have you ever seen him? From Nainiae, I've heard that you cleansed the Karuta Desert."

Andal was asking if Priesia met the human who drenched the desert with epidemic. Priesia carefully shook her head and said,

“No. I have never encountered in to him. It is just that… I had thought that I might have to chase him or I might run into him eventually. After all, there was the divine message.”

Priesia said she heard about the issue from Goddess Irenetsa. She looked at Riley and Nainiae.

“That is why I asked you to allow me to follow you.”

“Why? Did that high and mighty goddess tell you that you will have higher probability of running into that human only if you follow us?”

Riley fired right back at Priesia. She shriveled her shoulders. She was being passive and said her reason was not something like that. Priesia added,

“Of the… beings I could trust, Young Master and Nainiae were the ones who I thought were the safest to be with.”

Riley was not liking the part about the trust. He ground his teeth and shook his head as if he was so sick of this.

“I guess. I don’t know about Riley, but my pupil is trustworthy.

Priestess, you made the right choice.”

“Pupil?”

“Nainiae is my pupil.”

Priesia was tilting her head to the side, and Andal explained that he was Nainiae’s teacher. Andal shrugged and took a proud stance.

“Really?”

“… Yes.”

Surprised, Priesia looked at Nainiae. Nainiae was holding the tea pot while standing behind Riley, and she nodded lightly at Priesia.

“That explains things. At times, I wondered if Nainiae was a dragon… So, you were Mr. Andal’s pupil.”

With his chin supported by his right hand, Riley watched the conversation that went off the tangent. He yawned big enough to stretch his mouth out and turned to look at Nainiae who was standing behind her.

“What time is it?”

“It’s about three in the morning.”

“No way…”

Riley crumpled his face. He took the hand off from his chin and got up.

“I had enough. I’m going to sleep.”

“Hey. I’m not done talking.”

“Go hunt him down or don’t hunt him down. Do whatever you want.”

Riley wished Andal good fortune, went straight to the bed that was prepared at the corner of the cave and closed his eyes.

“Ugh… I don’t know about that rascal, but Priestess, I think I’ll need your help on hunting down that human. I think the holy power will be the key… However, none of my kind knows how to handle holy power.”

“I see. Holy power…”

“I already received help from you, so I’m ashamed, but it looks like you will have to help me again. Epidemic and poison were not all of his abilities. That bastard…”

Using their voices as lullaby, Riley covered himself in blanket

and went straight to sleep.

*

“… Riley, get up.”

It felt like somebody was tapping at his back with a foot. Riley cringed and struggled as he opened his eyes.

“What is it?”

He narrowly opened his eyes and looked up the sky. The sky was still littered with twinkling stars. Looking at the stars, Riley let out his frustration.

“Is this a joke? It’s still night time.”

“To be precise, it is early morning. Get up.”

Andal brought the tip of his boots at Riley’s back once again.

“There is a saying that early birds get the worms.”

“There is also a saying that outside of the blanket is dangerous.”

Now, even Priesia was urging Riley to get up quickly. It looked like Riley had enough. He crumpled his face and waved his hand to

tell them to get lost.

"... Um?"

Shortly after he woke up, Riley closed his eyes again to go back to sleep. However, he noticed something strange, so he opened his eyes.

"Wait. Stars?"

He went to sleep at the cave. So, how come he can see the stars? That question was answered surprisingly easily.

"What is this?"

Riley opened the eyes again. He finally noticed the stars in the night sky and forest around him and realized what happened.

"... Why are we outside?

Chapter 169 - Abduction (4)

Riley realized that had he just woken up outside when he went to sleep inside the cave. As if he was struck by lightning, Riley started to look around.

“Nainiae? Nainiae!”

Riley promptly looked for his maid and he found Nainiae who had her head lowered on her back. Riley got up from the ground where he was lying down.

“What happened?”

“Young Master, the thing is…”

Nainiae was having a hard time lifting her face. Instead of her, Andal walked and came next to Riley. Andal snorted loudly and explained the situation instead.

“What do you mean what happened? Isn’t it obvious? We dragged you here while you were sleeping.”

“What?”

Riley looked like he was not quite awake yet. He stared at Andal, and Andal added,

“We are near the border.”

“What?”

Riley asked again.

“Are you deaf? Are you not quite awake yet? I said we are at the border. Don’t make me repeat myself.”

Riley remembered that Andal’s cave and the Solia’s border were quite far apart. Still unable to believe it, he shook his head and denied the reality.

“Ah, I see. Am I still inside a dream?”

“Tsk…”

Andal clicked his tongue and shook his head as if he pitied the fool.

“Well, I closed my eyes in the cave. There is no way I would be opening my eyes at the Solia’s border. It is impossible unless I’m dreaming.”

Afterwards, Riley closed his eyes again. Watching this, Nainiae looked anxious. It seemed she was not sure what to do. She carefully corrected what had Riley said earlier.

“Young Master, this is not the Solia’s border.”

“Um?”

“This is Ansyrium’s border.”

Nainiae was saying that this was not Solia’s border but instead the Ansyrium’s border, which was located even further away from the cave than the Solia’s border. Riley had a dumbfounded look on his face for a moment. He then smiled slowly and said,

“Ansyrium?”

“… Yes.”

Nainiae responded in rat’s tail size voice. Riley looked around the forest and found fruit that were known to be found only at the Ansyrium’s region. Riley muttered,

“I see. This place really is Ansyrium.”

Looking at the fruits, Riley appeared to be amused. He scratched the back of his head and said,

“For a dream, it is constructed pretty well in detail?”

Nainiae watched Riley still insisting on the belief that this must

be a dream. She looked even more ashamed than earlier. Nainiae lowered her head and apologized.

“I’m sorry, Young Master. I tried hard to recommend that it would be better for us to resolve this without you, but... My teacher is stubborn and I couldn’t change his mind by myself.”

Listening to her tearful voice, Riley forced himself to acknowledge that this situation was in fact not a dream. He couldn’t look more annoyed when he raised his upper body.

“Ugh...”

With a frustrated look on his face, Riley looked at the backs of Andal and Priesia who were having a conversation. He buried his face in his palms and mumbled,

“That son of a bitch. I should have just left him to die.”

Riley poured out curses at Andal and got up. Watching him, Nainiae tumbled and quickly came next to Riley to dust off the dirt on his back.

“So? Did you find that bastard?”

It seemed resenting Andal was not enough for Riley. He decided to add one more individual to the list. He asked Nainiae with a cold gaze and she shook her head with the look of a sinner on her face.

“No, not yet.”

Riley crumpled his face further and glared at the back of Andal who was walking in the front.

“Someone like him is a majestic existence? Majestic my ass. He is more like a foolish existence.”

At this point, Riley had three choices.

First, he could leave Andal and Priesia be and escape this place with Nainiae back to the mansion. Second, he could help Andal and Priesia and assist in hunting down the purple human named Epidemic. Third, ...

“Nainiae, you have blanket in the dimensional space, right?”

“A blanket? I’m not sure?”

It was such a strange question to ask at the moment. Nainiae checked what she had in the dimensional space and carefully nodded.

“I think there is one, but... Why would you want a blanket all of a sudden?”

“Just bring it out.”

Having heard Riley's order, Nainiae opened the dimensional space and brought out a blanket. She held it in her two arms and waited for the next order.

"Lay it."

"Lay it? On the ground?"

"Wide. Lay it down wide."

Having heard Riley's order about making the blanket as wide as possible on the ground, Nainiae wondered if it would be all right to do this. As ordered, she waved the blanket in the air to have it spread wide. She then had the blanket lay on the ground.

"Is this good?"

Riley nodded to say that it was enough. He haphazardly dusted off his lower body and bent down.

"Young Master?"

The option that Riley chose was the third option. The third option was, 'Let's sleep first.'

*

There was a man who had his skin saturated in pitch black color. He was screaming in pain as he dug the tunnel.

“Ugh. Ugh…”

He was screaming in pain because of the fire.

“… Uuuk!”

Wharururururu, wharururururururu…

Red flame grabbed onto his black body and it was eating away his body.

“No. Not here. It must not happen here.”

The man with pitch black skin mumbled.

If anyone saw the man, some might have asked if his skin turned dark because it was burned by the flame. However, that was not how it happened.

It was the poison.

Because of the special characteristic of his body, his skin was saturated to pitch black color. Even from a distance, he was

exuding a horrendous stench that made one's face crumple on its own.

"Kuk."

Bubble bubble...

It seemed the poison in his body and the flame on his arm collided. Black colored smoke started to come off from him.

"Fuck... I thought he could. I thought that dragon could definitely finish me off."

He mumbled as he dug into the ground with bare hands.

"Why? Why?"

He must have dug very deep. It was a dark underground place, but the fire on his arm was taking on the role of a torch. It was clearly revealing his anxious face.

"I cannot let this be. I cannot lose consciousness here..."

It appeared that there was poison in even his sweat. When his sweat dropped to the ground, the sweat made bubbling up sound and caused black smoke.

“… Uuuuk. Uuuuk.”

The man looked at the ground which had turned black. He ground his teeth and shook his head.

He thought he might faint if he didn’t.

“Just a little deeper. I need to go down further.”

The man mumbled.

“Until that dragon returns, I need to hold out as long as I can. Before the bastards… Before they find me…”

The man was currently exhausted from having gone through two different battles.

First one was against a man named Kabal with ridiculous strength.

The second battle was against a dragon named Andal, one of the beings who were known as gods of magic.

His body was drenched in pitch black color. His getup was in shambles, and his frame was… It looked extremely weak. It looked like he would fall over if someone blew a breath toward him.

“Just a little further…”

He looked desperate. As if he was running from something, he was digging. He was moving further down, deep below.

“Please. I don’t want to kill.”

Could it be that his voice was heard? Like the saving grace of a god… Someone’s voice could be heard from his back.

“… Epidemic.”

“…?!”

Having heard the voice calling his name, the man flinched his shoulders and turned around to look.

There was not supposed to be anything there. However, for some reason, there was a horizontal tear in the space. It was exuding a shady purple aura.

“You bastard…”

Epidemic had deadly intent showing on his face.

“You bastard. Why are you here?”

“Um, what an excessive greeting.”

Someone suddenly peeked out their face through the purple space. The face twisted up the tip of the mouth and acted as if he was being welcomed very generously. The face said,

“You even have a candle light for me.”

This someone looked at the fire that was still stuck on the man’s arm and called it a candle light.

Afterwards, he pulled out the shoulders, upper body and lower body from the purple space.

“Can I blow this candle light?”

Glaring at the man, Epidemic called him by his name.

“… Rebethra.”

Although he was called by his name, Rebethra merely shrugged his shoulders. He didn’t say anything in response.

“I think I expressed my intention clearly ten years ago? I don’t want to talk to you guys. I don’t want to join you guys either. Have I not made it clear?”

Despite the deadly intent directed at him, Rebethra laughed it off. He shrugged again and said,

“The position, the power… You are the best match. What can I do? The Great One said you are a talent that may or may not come in thousand, no, ten thousand years.”

“Match or whatever. An ability like this… I never wanted an epidemic. Tell this to that one you worship. This crap… Take it back immediately.”

Epidemic grabbed on to his arm as if he was about to tear it off. He was glaring at Rebethra with eyes full of resentment.

“Hm?”

Thinking it could not be helped; Rebethra put on a bitter look on his face and shook his head.

“It’s is unfortunate. It is so regrettable.”

“Ugh. Ugh…”

It seemed Epidemic was at his limit. He was looking at Rebethra, but now, Epidemic lowered his head and started to breath with difficulty.

‘Fuck. Here… Here is…’

Rebethra looked at Epidemic with pity. Rebethra extended his right hand toward Epidemic and said,

“I see. Our life long wish is a heavy burden. If you hate it that much… I do not intend to force it on you. However…”

Epidemic felt power coming from the front. He strained his eyes wide open and glared at Rebethra.

“We are in a bit of a hurry, so…”

“Kuk. You bastard… Bastard!”

“As the Left Leg who is in charge of the stench, I’ll need you to do your part that’s befitting of the title.”

“Uu…. Uuu! Why… Why!!”

Epidemic raised his arm forward to stop Rebethra. He walked a few steps toward Rebethra, but he was suddenly on his knees.

“Stop. Stop…”

His mind was fading slowly. Epidemic desperately extended his arm out and said stop. However, Rebethra’s hand continued to glow with purple light.

“It would be a waste if you didn’t obliterate a city at least.”

“… Stop this.”

“I’ll leave the rest to you. If you lose your mind and run amok, even the Great One won’t be able to handle it. You had been holding it in well so far. It probably will be all right to run around all excited once.”

“Don’t…”

“While at it, I hope you take around three dragons with you.”

Rebethra was trying to disappear in the space that was open behind him. Epidemic shouted at him. His voice was loud enough to make one wonder if he had torn his neck in the process.

“… Stoooopppp!!”

Epidemic lost consciousness after that.

*

“… It’s here.”

Lying on top of the blanket that was held by Nainiae, Riley was

being dragged like a fish inside a net. Andal looked at this and clicked his tongue. Andal continued,

“Last time, I lost him in this spot.”

Andal was leading the way and he stopped here. It was entrance of an underground tunnel at a nameless forest.

“Here?”

The tunnel was big enough for just one person to barely pass through. It seemed the epidemic man went through here. The corners of the entrance were rotten black.

“It seems to be the right place.”

Priesia carefully looked at the rotten parts of the tunnel. She used her holy power to cleanse the parts and looked at Andal.

“Will you be going in right away?”

“I should.”

Having heard her question, Andal swung his arm and started to expand the tunnel’s size.

“While I was fighting him, I placed a flame on him. It probably

didn’t get extinguished yet, but… it is probably better to not give him much time to recover.”

Nainiae dragged Riley all the way here on the blanket and stood behind Andal. With look of disbelief, Nainiae asked,

“You had your flame attached on him?”

“Yes.”

“He is that powerful? You had your flame attached to him, yet we need to be in such a hurry?”

Andal nodded and said,

“Also…”

Andal was remembering what the pitch black skinned human said in desperate voice.

‘Please, kill me.’

Andal remembered that the man was begging Andal to kill him.

Chapter 170 - Epidemic Man

Andal checked if there were any other people around. He nodded to say it was all right and took a step forward.

“I’ll lead the way.”

Because of his magic, the tunnel was now widened. Andal took a step in. Priesia, Nainiae followed with Riley who was being dragged by Nainiae on the blanket. Andal checked them in that order and said,

“Please stay right behind me, Priestess. I would like you to defend us and cleanse the epidemic. Nainiae, you...”

Andal looked at Riley who was snoring on the blanket. Andal ground his teeth and said,

“You tend to Riley.”

Earlier, when they were still at the cave, Nainiae proposed it would be better to resolve this by themselves without Riley. Andal thought about this and felt regret inside. He sighed as he went down the tunnel.

“A bastard like him is a friend... Ugh.”

Having heard his voice, Nainiae flinched. She looked at Riley

who was being dragged along with the blanket and whispered,

“Young Master, it is downhill from here.”

Because Riley was lying on the blanket, Nainiae warned that his body might get tilted. Nainiae carefully pulled the blanket and walked into the crater.

“Do you know how long it has been?”

Andal was leading the way. Priesia asked how long it has been since Andal met the epidemic man. Andal tilted his head to the side and thought about the time. He said,

“I think it’s been about a week.”

Having heard him, Nainiae asked,

“If it has been that long, then he must have turned to ashes by your flame by now… Isn’t that right?”

Nainiae was well aware of the flame that Andal controlled. She thought the epidemic man must have died, so she asked. Andal shook his head and said,

“No. that bastard is probably alive. I am certain of it.”

As if the dead pitch black soil in the tunnel was the proof, Andal looked at the tunnel and shared more information about the man he met.

“I used wind magic to chop off his head. I used ice magic to shatter his entire body. I burned his body with flame magic. Despite all that, he was fine. I don’t know what kind of trickery he is using, but no matter how many times I killed him, he kept coming back to life. He continued to generate epidemic.”

With looks of disbelief on their faces, Nainiae and Priesia asked,

“Kept on coming back…”

“… to life?”

Andal nodded and said,

“That’s right. He was one odd fella. He didn’t have an ounce of fighting spirit in his eyes, yet… He kept provoking me by saying ‘kill me’ over and over.”

Andal’s explanation was identical to the rumor that Nainiae heard from Reitri. She put her fist below her chin and started to think hard.

“What’s funny is that, although I killed him as he requested… he kept on coming back to life and spewing out epidemic.”

Andal was thinking about the man who kept coming back to life and charging at him. Unlike the usual, the look on Andal's face was serious and heavy.

"Really?"

Priesia asked and Andal nodded as he said,

"I can bet my heart."

Andal added that he never managed to find a way to kill the epidemic man and got infected in the end by the poison. Andal turned to look at Priesia.

"I utilized all methods that I could carry out, but the bastard still didn't die. That's why I think the answer lies in the holy power."

Andal mumbled that Priesia might be able to cleanse that man as well since she successfully cleansed the rotten land of the Karuta Desert. Andal turned his head because he smelled the stench from the front.

"... Is it the bastard?"

He could smell the stench before, but the smell suddenly became much stronger. This was why.

“Ah, ugh… What’s this smell?”

As a proof of this sudden change, Riley cringed his face big time and got up from the blanket. He started to let out his frustration.

“Ms. Priesia, please be ready.”

It seemed Andal found no reason to tease Riley who was expressing his annoyance from the back. Instead, with a serious face, Andal told Priesia to get ready.

“Ah, yes.”

Dragons were said to be without equals among all other beings, yet a dragon was asking her to be ready with a serious face.

Priesia thought that things probably won’t go smoothly. She gulped, gathered her two hands, assumed a prayer position and started to gather the holy power.

“… Uu.”

The tunnel they were going down was very long. They could not see the end of it.

They speculated that it was dug by the epidemic man himself. In this narrow tunnel, a beast-like voice echoed through.

‘What was that?’

Nainiae was creeped out by the voice from deep inside the tunnel. She stiffened her shoulders and looked to the front.

“…”

Riley also thought the roar sounded unusual. He stopped yawning and started to stare at the front.

“That is…”

The cry was getting closer. Andal had a light sphere floating, and he sent it to the front.

A man with pitch-black skin made an appearance.

“Huuuu… Huuu…”

He looked like an extremely agitated beast. He was exuding purple light from his eyes. There was a flame burning on the man’s right arm. It appeared to be the flame Andal had cast.

“Kuuu. Uuuuu!”

“As I thought… He was still alive.”

The epidemic man was glaring toward Andal. With his eyes facing the man, Andal turned his own eyes red and started to raise up mana.

“This time, I’ll definitely end your life.”

The epidemic man looked at the light sphere. Mistaking it as an enemy, the man swung his right hand.

“Kuuuaaaa!”

Other than being able to exude light, the light sphere didn’t have a solid physical presence, so the man’s arm just swung through empty air. The problem was that the man’s arm struck the tunnel’s wall.

“…?”

It seemed the arm swing carried incredible strength. Along with explosive sound, the ceiling above the man crumbled down and crushed him.

“What was that?”

It was such a thoughtless behavior. It was hard to assume that it was done by a human being, so Andal cringed and muttered. Meanwhile, from the pile of rubbles where the man just got buried, black smokes started to come out at an explosive rate.

“Kuk. Is it the epidemic? Priestess!”

“… Yes!”

Priesia was shocked to see the black smoke rushing toward them. She quickly raised her hand to the front and used the holy power.

“Mr. Andal, please take a step back.”

The smoke was spreading faster than she hoped, so she pulled Andal back. She put strength in her hand that was now saturated in golden light and gritted her teeth.

‘It worked. I’m certain of it… Although it was heavier than any epidemic I had seen so far, it is not overwhelming.’

Priesia cleansed all of the smoke and said,

“It’s done.”

“From now on, we will approach the bastard from a distance. When I give you the signal, please get close and deal a blow to him. Can you do it?”

“… Yes.”

“Okay.”

Priesia had used her holy power countless times in the past. However, it was a little different this time.

It was not to save someone. This time, it was to kill someone.

“Please be ready.”

Andal was planning on using blink, a close range teleportation magic, to get close to the man and fall back. Now, he glanced at what the man was up to. The epidemic man was buried under the rubbles.

“Kuuuuuu....”

Under the rubbles, he was generating smoke. He fiddled with his fingers, and then...

“... Kuuuuaaaa!”

Along with a beastly roar, he jumped out of the rubbles.

“Now!”

Sensing that now was the chance, Andal held Priesia by the waist and used blink to close the distance at an instant.

“Kurrrr!”

“…”

It seemed the man had lost his mind. Unlike the last time Andal met him, the purple human wasn’t even saying things about wanting to be killed. Andal cringed.

‘His condition is a little weird?’

Unlike before, Andal could not see the man’s eyes. There was just purple light being poured out from where his eyes would be. Facing the man, Andal thought something was off. Meanwhile, Priestess put her hand toward the epidemic man.

“That’s enough!”

It seemed just touching him was enough. Priesia shouted that it was enough. Andal used the blink again and put distance between them and the epidemic man.

“Kuuuuaaak!”

It seemed the man was finding her touch unpleasant. The man swung his arm with all of his might. However, he failed at striking the target.

Andal's blink magic was quicker.

"I'll cleanse him immediately."

With her light touch, she left a mark at the man. She started to pour in her holy power through the mark.

"Kuuu. Kuuuu! Kuuuu..."

Unable to withstand her holy power, the purple human fell on his knees. With both of his hands, he started to scratch the part that was marked by Priesia.

"... Is it working?"

The holy power seemed to be working. The man's pitch-black skin started to regain its original color. Andal mumbled, thinking he saw potential in their current strategy.

"..."

Unlike Andal, Riley was still watching the man with a serious look on his face. Riley even got up all the way from the blanket and stood next to Nainiae.

"Nainiae, give me a sword."

“… Yes.”

Nainiae was watching the man with a serious look on her face as well. She brought out a sword that Riley had used before and handed it to him.

“… It worked! I think it is working!”

It seemed Priesia had no moment to spare to take a look at what Nainiae and Riley were doing. Priesia continued to send her holy power to the man without taking her eyes off from him. Andal carefully nodded.

“That’s good. At this rate…”

“Guu…”

“…?”

“… Guuu. Uuuuu!”

Earlier, due to the holy power, the man faltered and got on his knees. Now, the man shook his body as he got up. Andal furrowed his brows.

“Reverse gravity.”

Andal was not intending to just sit back and watch the man get up. He raised his right hand and used a gravity magic. The man's knee plummeted on the ground again.

"How? It definitely was working?"

The man was being cleansed by the holy power. However, the man was still exuding the epidemic and struggling. Watching the epidemic man, Priesia mumbled in disbelief.

"Hey."

"... Huk!?"

Priesia had no idea when Riley came next to her. Having heard his voice, she flinched her shoulders and then sighed.

"W... What is it?"

"Layer this sword with holy power. You can do it, right?"

"Pardon?"

"Hurry up. There isn't much time."

"However... If I do that, then I'll have to stop pouring the holy power in that man. I cannot do both at the same time."

Priesia shook her head as she broke cold sweat. Riley cringed and warned her,

“In that case, just stop what you are doing. Pour in holy power into the sword first. I won’t ask twice. We don’t have time.”

Priesia panicked. She didn’t know what to do, so she turned to look at Andal.

“…”

Andal was watching his friend. Andal said,

“I’ll buy us time.”

Having heard what Andal said, Priesia bit her lips and withdrew the holy power she was using on the purple human. Instead, she started to layer Riley’s sword with holy power.

“Kuuuu!”

“… Tsk.”

Andal had no idea what kind of monstrous power was being used, but the man was fighting off Andal’s gravity magic. It looked like the man was about to charge in again. Watching this, Andal gritted his teeth and surrounded the bastard with a barrier.

“How long will it take?”

“It’s done!”

“…!!”

When Priesia said her words, Riley opened his eyes big and immediately threw the sword to the front.

It was sword-throw technique that he could use skillfully since his past life.

Wheeec!

The sword was layered with Riley’s mana and Priesia’s holy power. It flew toward the target while scattering golden light, and the sword pierced through both the Andal’s barrier and the man’s throat.

“… Kuk!”

With his neck pierced, the man stopped moving. His body started to twitch as if he was having a seizure.

“… Kuk. Huuuk. Kek. Kuuuurk!”

“As I thought…”

With his neck pierced, the man was on his knees and shaking. Riley looked at the man, clicked his tongue and crumpled his face.

“We need to fall back.”

“We need to fall back.”

Not just Riley, but Nainiae, who was watching the situation from the back, also said they should retreat. Andal and Priesia tilted their heads to the side, wondering why they should.

“Fall back? What do you mean?”

“Isn’t this resolved now?”

Immediately after Priesia asked, the man’s pierced neck… started to regenerate rapidly.

It looked as if the time was flowing in reverse direction. Looking at the flesh rapidly regenerating, Andal cringed just like Riley.

“What is this? Does this mean even the holy power won’t be enough?”

“Holy power is the right answer. No, it was the right answer.”

Nainiae mumbled as she opened a dimensional portal to the back. Riley scratched the back of his head and added,

“Of all places, what are the odds of running into that here.”

Andal had no way of knowing what Riley and Nainiae were talking about. He got frustrated.

“What is it? What are you talking about?”

Nainiae opened a portal that led to Andal’s cave. She explained instead of Riley.

“There is only one way to kill that thing.”

Of the memories from Riley’s past, Nainiae thought of one horrifying instance. She retreated to where the portal was open and continued,

“We are saying that we cannot kill it here. First... Let us retreat. We have no other option at the moment.”

Chapter 171 - Epidemic Man (2)

“We can’t kill him here?”

Priesia had no clue why Nainiae was saying that. Andal saw that the epidemic man’s neck was regenerating rapidly and pulled Priesia’s arm.

“Ah…”

“Let’s ask questions later.”

The epidemic man’s neck was restored to its former state in a blink of an eye. Andal held Priesia’s arm and quickly used Blink.

“… Ah!”

Priesia panicked and shut her eyes because she was pulled back without warning. She screamed.

When Andal and Priesia moved back through Blink magic, the epidemic man swung his arm at where Priesia was standing a moment ago.

“Kuuuuaaaa!”

“…?!”

Initially, the epidemic man was at quite a distance. However, he closed the distance in an instant and swung his arm. Priesia opened her eyes and gasped for air as she watched him.

'How?!'

Priesia couldn't figure out how the man could charge in so quickly. She vacantly had her mouth open. Meanwhile, Andal cringed and muttered,

"Is this bastard really a human? How could he demonstrate such power and speed with physical abilities alone..."

Use of mana could not be felt from the man. Despite this, the epidemic man was showing fearsome physical abilities. Andal broke cold sweat.

"Kuuuu. Uuuuu!"

The man huffed and puffed after realizing that he had missed his target. He turned his head toward where Andal and Priesia had retreated to and opened his mouth.

"Kuuuuaaaa!"

Nainiae was certain the bastard was about to charge in again. She shouted from inside the teleportation portal.

“Teacher, hurry!”

Retreating twice in a row was crumpling Andal’s pride as a dragon. However, he thought that he had no other choice at the moment and listen to Riley and Nainiae.

“… Tsk.”

Andal clicked his tongue and raised a thick wall of fire in front. With Priesia, he used the blink again to fall back to where the portal was.

“Kuuuaaak!”

As if he was incapable of feeling pain, the epidemic man passed through the wall of fire as if it was nothing. Black drool fell from his mouth. The man charged toward Andal and Priesia again.

“Kuk!”

“Ugh. What a bother! If you are going to retreat, then do it in one step!”

Riley saw that the epidemic man was extending his arm toward them from a distance that was too close. Riley was already inside the portal with Nainiae. He injected mana into the blanket he had been lying on and swung it to the front.

“… Kuuuaaak?!”

Along with waving sound, the blanket swung and it slapped the face of the epidemic man who was charging at Andal.

“Kek!”

After being struck by the blanket, the epidemic man was thrown to a wall and got stuck. At the same time, the teleportation portal created by Nainiae disappeared without a trace.

*

In the other world… In the world of Riley’s past life to be precise, due to the advancement of civilization, many people possessed guns or blades that possessed great firepower. However, as for the mana that was spread in abundance everywhere… Instead of being used, only extreme few could even feel the mana.

‘The beings called dragons, the ones who realized the power of mana first and started to use it… do not exist in that era, so…’

Riley, the brave hero who wielded the holy sword, was the only human who could use mana and fight.

‘Instead, there was a different kind of power.’

In his past life, the red skinned humans called the ‘demons’ existed. They were described as an enemy of humanity and said to exist for the sole purpose of destroying humans.

To stop the demons or the red skinned humans, ordinary humans shed tears of blood for a long time.

‘To stop a demons that could not be stopped by weapons, the humans gritted their teeth and opened their eyes to a new power.’

The priestess in Riley’s past life could see the future and had the ability to heal or strengthen people. There was a man who was called the human flamethrower because he could shoot flame from his bare hands. There was a girl who was called ice steps because just walking caused icicles to from along the path. Besides these people, there were many others…

‘They were…’

They possessed super natural powers. They were the espers.

‘That bastard probably… No, it must be one of the powers they had.’

Super natural powers that could be used without mana… It was the kind of power that should not exist in Riley’s current world. However, the purple people who appeared in this world were using such power.

‘Of them all, why this one…’

There was a human who could not control his power and had run amok.

The man possessed such an unusual power that even the brave hero with the holy sword found it difficult to deal with this man. In the end, the man met his horrific end while shedding black tears.

‘To think the epidemic breathe is here…’

Epidemic breathe… It was the name given to him because he spread a horrifying epidemic in all his surroundings. He was unable to control his own power because of two reasons.

‘On top of that…’

First, he was completely overwhelmed by his own epidemic. He was experiencing gruesome pain everyday to the point of begging to be killed.

‘… he is already complete.’

Second, the esper original powers were only the stench and the epidemic, but someone had forced another supernatural power into him.

‘I don’t know who was the bastard that did it, but… He was already awakened. He didn’t just have the power of epidemic.’

The man didn’t even bat an eye when he was caught on Andal’s fire. The sword with holy power pierced through his neck, yet the wound rapidly regenerated. These were the proofs.

‘We might as well drop a nuclear bomb on him.’

Riley thought a nuclear bomb, a weapon from his past life, would be better. The epidemic man was that dangerous. Epidemic breathe was literally called a walking calamity and he had showed himself in this world.

*

Instead of Riley who was no good at conversations, Nainiae, who knew about Riley’s past, explained the human calamity who was called epidemic breathe.

“Epidemic breathe?”

“Yes.”

Of course, Nainiae omitted everything about Riley’s past life. She only explained briefly about the man’s epidemic breathing.

“The fact that he is spreading epidemic is a headache as it is, but

he doesn't have limits on coming back to life?"

"Having unlimited life... That's against the order of the world. There is no way Goddess Irenetsa would ignore this either."

Having heard Priesia, Riley narrowed his eyes and thought about all purple humans he had met so far. Riley mumbled,

"Order of this world huh..."

Being able to raise the dead and control them like puppets, being able to read other people's minds, being able to use monstrous strengths and others... The supernatural powers that had only existed in his past life were being used in this world. It was right to assume that the natural order of this world was already out of balance.

"So, how are you going to hunt him down?"

"I am not sure..."

Having heard Andal's question, Riley crossed his arms and avoided his gaze. As if he was not sure, Riley blurred the end of his sentence.

'If this was before he awakened, we would have been able to end him after pouring in the holy power.'

Riley thought about how the man was drooling as if he had lost his mind. He was roaring like a wild beast and charging in. Frustrated, Riley clicked his tongue.

'In the current situation, the only way to kill him is…'

As far as Riley knew, there was only one way to end the epidemic man.

"… As I thought, I don't know."

Riley, the one who knew the answer, shook his head and said he didn't know.

"You don't know? In that case, how are we supposed to kill this bastard? He keeps coming back to life no matter how many times we kill him."

"Didn't you say he is a walking calamity? If we don't stop him soon, many people will die!"

"He is stuck in an underground tunnel. Maybe he will roam around freely in there. If we are lucky, he might go down deeper by digging some more tunnels."

Riley casually muttered. Priesia tightened her fist and shouted,

"But!"

Andal extended his arm out to gesture Priesia to calm down. Andal asked Riley,

“In the worst case scenario, the opposite could happen and he might run out of the tunnels then…”

“…”

Riley didn’t answer.

“As I thought, this situation won’t end with just one human.”

Because Riley was keeping his silence, Andal judged that the situation must be serious. Priesia was standing next to Andal. He pushed her toward Riley and Nainiae and said,

“It’s fine. From here on out, we will handle it on our own.”

“What do you mean?”

“…”

After being pushed to Riley’s side, Priesia turned to look at Andal and asked. Andal looked at Priesia, took a long pause and said,

“It’s as I said. We will handle it on our own.”

Afterwards, Andal turned his eyes into red flames. He ignited fire from the bottom of his feet and used teleportation.

Wharrururururu!

Andal disappeared after a large flame surging up. Priesia vacantly blinked her eyes and turned her head.

“Where’s Mr. Andal?”

“Others... What I mean is, he probably went to see the other dragons. That’s probably what he meant earlier.”

“Other dragons?”

Nainiae thought about the other dragons she had met before and directed her gaze to Riley who was vacantly staring at empty air.

“Young Master.”

“Nainiae.”

It seemed Nainiae was also thinking what Riley was thinking. They had similar looks on their faces.

“As I thought. You need the sword, right?”

Nainiae whispered quietly so Priesia could not overhear it. Riley nodded and said,

“As I thought, you knew?”

“Your past life… I remember it too.”

Thinking about Riley’s past life that was placed in her head only a while ago, Nainiae asked what Riley was going to do now.

“Are you going to find the sword?”

Because Nainiae had told him about one of the purple humans having his ‘holy sword,’ he thought about it and pondered about what to say to Nainiae.

“That epidemic breathe was not in possession of the sword.”

Riley would have known immediately if his sword was near him.

“It was the same with everyone else. It means the other bastards didn’t have the sword either. In that case…”

So far, Riley had met five purple humans. To complete the Six Parts that they had mentioned, Riley needed information about the remaining part.

“Then it is very likely that the remaining one has the sword.”

Riley was unable to finish the sentence. So, Nainiae, who had her fist touching her lips, mumbled.

“That’s probably how it is.”

Because he was not sure what to do, Riley scratched his head. Wondering if there was any new information, he asked Nainiae,

“What about Reutrina’s side?”

He wondered if any fish had been caught in the net called Reutrina, so he asked. However, Nainiae shook her head. Her answer was, ‘nothing in particular.’

“Tsk. This one’s current location is unknown and there is no clue. It is not like we could go around the world with Nara. How are we supposed to find this one?”

Finding it to be such a bother, Riley messed up his hair. Priesia was trying to sneak up on him, so Riley turned his head toward her.

“Ah, I’m sorry. You were here too?”

“Since a while ago, the two of you have been whispering things to

each other. What were you two talking about?”

“They are secrets. Private matters.”

“Hm…”

Priesia narrowed her eyes and was about to fill her eyes in golden light. Riley crumpled his face and raised his hand.

“That’s enough.”

“You are trying to hide it, so I have no other choice.”

“Are you saying you can pry into other people’s private life because you are a Priestess? Before I sell you to Solia, change your eyes back.”

“Ah, I got it. I got it.”

She succumbed to Riley’s threat. She changed her eye color back to normal. She looked disappointed.

“I don’t find it comfortable to threaten a Priestess either.”

“…”

Despite the words, the look on Riley’s face was telling a complete

different story. Nainiae was peeking at Riley's face from the side. On his behalf, Nainiae asked Priesia,

"Ms. Priesia, what are you going to do now? You got here because we abducted you to heal my teacher, but... The situation now is a little different."

"Um..."

Having heard her question, Priesia pondered about it for a moment. She asked Riley a similar question.

"Young Master Riley, what are you going to do now?"

"Me?"

The question circled around and came to him. He wondered about what to say. It seemed he was still undecided. He shrugged his shoulders and said,

"I haven't make any decision in particular yet."

Earlier, he said he was not sure about how to stop the epidemic breathe. Now, he had no way of finding the holy sword either. Because of this, due to lack of any alternatives, Riley was thinking if he should just return to the mansion.

"Is that so?"

Having heard his answer, Priesia remembered something she had been forgetting. She floated an exclamation mark on her face and said,

“Ah! Now that I think about it…”

Riley was still indecisive about whether he should wonder around or just return to the mansion. Having heard Priesia, Riley looked at her.

“Have you met Mr. Ian?”

“…?”

Riley tilted his head to the side.

“What?”

Chapter 172 - That Rascal is at it Again

In the desert, the Reitri Merchant Group's carriages stopped so that people could rest, but a sudden gust of wind came along with a large dimensional portal that opened.

"Huk!?"

"W... What is this?"

"Call Mr. Reitri now!"

The group was restless since last morning because the Priestess had disappeared all of the sudden and now a portal had appeared. The merchants were packing their luggage and the appearance of the portal was enough to make them panic.

Having heard the merchants, Nara and Rorona, the ones in charge of protecting the merchants, quickly went to the place.

"Please don't panic and go back to what you have been doing."

Nara looked at the outer rim of the round portal and confirmed that it was the gray color that he had seen many times before, so he asked the merchants to calm down.

"Commander, that color is grey, right?"

“Yes. It’s Ms. Nainiae’s magic.”

It seemed they were right. The portal opened in middle of the place where the carriages had gathered. Through the portal, Iphalleta’s maid showed herself first.

“Ms. Nainiae!”

“Ah, Commander.”

Nainiae found Nara as she came out of the portal. It seemed she was glad to see him as well, so she brightened her face, walked over to Nara and Rorona and lowered her head.

“It’s been a while.”

“Although you are saying that, it has only been a few days.”

Nara was looking at the portal which hadn’t close yet. He found that Riley and Priesia followed suit and sighed in relief.

“Ah, Ms. Priesia.”

“Commander!”

“As I thought, the Young Master and Nainiae had taken her.”

After Karuta Desert's cleansing prayer was completed, that morning, Priesia had disappeared without any notice or sign and that threw the group into chaos. Now, Priesia came back and seeing her return made everyone, including other merchants, sigh in relief.

"I'm glad that our guess was correct."

"I was so worried that some outsider might have taken the Priestess like what happened with Kabal."

Nara and Rorona relaxed their shoulders all the way. They seemed relieved to know that Priesia was safe. Priesia looked ashamed. She lowered her head and apologized.

"I'm sorry."

"There is no need for you to apologize."

Nainiae said there was no need for Priesia to apologize. Nara and Rorona looked at Nainiae and asked what had happened.

"Was it something very important that you had to take the Priestess?"

"It would've been better if you had just told us beforehand."

"I am sorry, but it was a situation where we could not tell you

about it.”

Nainiae glanced at Riley and lightly lowered her head.

“What happened?”

Nara took a step back and asked,

“… Pardon?”

“I said, what happened.”

Riley stepped in as much as Nara stepped back. Riley leaned in his flinching face and asked again.

“What do you mean?”

“…”

Frustrated, Riley flinched his facial muscles. He gritted his teeth and asked about what he has just heard from Priesia.

“I’m talking about Ian.”

“Mr. Ian? What about Mr. Ian…”

Nara was stepping back. He was trying to ask back again while being clueless. Rorona quickly butted in and explained the answer that Riley wanted to hear.

“Yes! He was here!”

It was not a perfect answer. However, it seemed it was not the wrong answer either. Riley turned his gaze at Rorona and asked,

“When?”

“A few days ago. It has not been long.”

She said that Ian, the butler of Iphalleta Family and a famous hero among all mercenaries, had visited this place a few days ago. Riley clicked his tongue.

“Ugh.”

A few days ago, when Nainiae and Riley were still in the cave, Riley thought about the scenery of this place that he had seen just before kidnapping Priesia. There was a man who had hid his entire body under the hood. Thinking about this vagrant, Riley asked Nainiae,

“This is… that from that time, right?”

“I think so.”

Nainiae carefully nodded and looked at the orange haired young man who was coming this way.

“The merchants were all getting excited about there being guests. I wondered who came, and I see it was you, Young Master.”

Reitri was scratching the back of his head with awkward look on his face. Riley figured it would be quicker to just ask him. He grabbed Reitri by the shoulder and dragged him to a carriage.

“Uuuhk? Y… Young Master? Wait! What are you doing all of the sudden?”

*

“Ian was here a few days ago?”

Riley borrowed the same carriage he had used the last time. He slammed the desk with his hand and asked Reitri.

“Pardon? Ah, yes… He was here.”

Riley leaned his face all the way to Reitri’s face and asked. Reitri gulped and nodded.

“What did he say was the reason for the visit?”

Last time, his old butler hadn't managed to pass through the teleportation portal. Now, the butler was not at the mansion but instead in the desert. Riley wanted to know why.

"If you are asking why, don't you know about it better than I do? Wait... By any chance, did you two not meet?"

Reitri figured out the gist of the situation based on Riley's reaction. He broke out in a cold sweat and asked. Riley slammed the table again.

"Meet him? How am I supposed to meet him!"

Riley and Nainiae appeared through teleportation and disappeared through teleportation...

There was no way Riley and Nainiae would have run into Ian in the process. Riley let out his frustration and scratched his head big time because the situation was getting convoluted.

"Uuuu. Ian is... again! Again!"

Reitri had absolutely no idea about what to do. He carefully opened his mouth and explained what happened when Ian had come to visit.

"It was about three days ago. The Priestess's cleansing prayer was

not complete at that time. A man who hid himself completely under the hood was walking to our group, so I went to greet him."

Because the cleansing of sand in the desert was not complete yet, the traveler, who was apparently going through this desert regardless, looked suspicious to Reitri. Reitri remembered this.

"There was no food or water in the desert at that moment... Instead, there was just black sand in Karuta Desert at that time, yet there was a traveler. I wondered why, so I checked his face, and..."

Riley was still messing up his hair. He finished the sentence that Reitri could not.

"You are saying it was Ian."

Riley realized that his butler had come all the way to the Karuta Desert, where Reitri Merchant Group was to be precise and then had disappeared. Riley sighed big time and asked again,

"So, did he say why he came?"

Riley was asking why Ian was wondering around the desert while covering himself under the hood. Reitri carefully answered,

"That is, he said he was on his way to meet you, Young Master..."

"..."

Riley figured as much. However, it seemed he was hoping that was not the case. Riley dropped his face immediately. He covered his face with his palm and shook his head.

“Ian… you did it again…”

Riley muttered quietly. Meanwhile, Nainiae knocked on the door to let them know she will be entering the carriage. She entered.

“Young Master.”

“What.”

“I think Mr. Reitri is telling the truth.”

Riley lightly opened the gap between his fingers and looked at Nainiae.

“As you ordered, I just visited the mansion. I asked Ms. Sera and Lady Iris, and… they said Mr. Ian really did leave the mansion to find us…”

Riley closed the gap between his fingers and buried his face in his palm again. He muttered again,

“Ian, you did it again…”

“What do we do?”

Riley lowered his palm a little and pulled the lower part of his eyes. Riley looked at Reitri and asked,

“Ian, that rascal… Do you know where he went?”

“I… I am not sure?”

Reitri tilted his head to the side and pondered about it for a moment. He said he could make a few guesses and said,

“Perhaps he went straight to the Rainfield? I told him that you and Ms. Nainiae went to see the doctor who healed Ms. Nainiae.”

It looked like Riley was feeling trapped. He was about to leave the carriage, but he tilted his head to the side and asked back,

“Rainfield?”

“Yes. Didn’t you say that the doctor who healed Ms. Nainiae was there?”

“Rainfield huh…”

From Iphalleta Mansion, Karuta Desert happened to be along the

path to Rainfield, so Reitri's conjecture could be considered accurate.

"By the way, from Iphalleta Manor to Karuta Desert... How did Mr. Ian know and come to find us by himself?"

Reiri followed Riley and was coming down from the carriage. He thought about Ian who must be walking around the desert by himself. He muttered as if he was impressed. Nara was waiting outside the carriage for the two to come out. Nara said,

"Because he is a mercenary."

"Because he is a mercenary?"

"He is no ordinary mercenary, you know? He used to be called the mercenary hero. Tracking down and catching up to someone by himself... I don't think that is impossible. It is just that..."

Nara glanced at Riley's mood and added,

"Young Master has a Seven Circles mage with him, who can teleport around the world at will. That was the unusual variable."

Riley casually turned and glared at Nara. His gaze was saying 'why don't you go ahead and keep on talking.'

"..."

Nara pursed his lips to indicate he was not going to speak anymore. Riley turned to look at Nainiae and said,

“For now, we have no other choice but to go there, to Rainfield.”

“We could go there first before him and wait. We could also catch up to Mr. Ian who is currently headed there. Which option... would you like to go with?”

Nainiae was aware that Riley was feeling uncomfortable, so she asked as carefully as she could. Riley narrowed his eyes and muttered,

“Will it be very cold there?”

Having heard him, Reitri told him the information he had on Rainfield as a merchant.

“Rainfield is a city where it rains through whole day even during the winter. It will feel colder there because of the rain as usual. However, I was informed that it had not been this cold in 17 years.”

After hearing Reitri’s explanation, Riley thought about how Rainfield must look like, the icy scenery that is drenched in frozen rain everywhere. He was not liking it at all.

“Ian...”

It seemed the answer was decided. Nainiae lowered her head slightly and whispered to Reitri.

“I think I’ll have to be in your debt again.”

“I… It’s all right.”

*

It was at the entrance of the Romella village. There was a girl who was leaning against a large boulder to sit down. She was pouting big time.

“She doesn’t even have much time left, yet she is talking about fate? Who’s fate? Once the time is up, it won’t matter…”

She was wearing a big, round hat to cover her face. The girl had her hair parted in two. She held a sword that was leaning on her shoulder. She was fiddling with the sword and complaining.

“Just wait… I’ll definitely find the brave hero who will save grandmother.”

It seemed Iril was a famous figure in Romella village, enough that everyone passing by greeted her in a friendly way.

“It’s a great morning, Iril. Are you standing watch again today?”

“Hello?”

“Thank you for your hard work.”

“I’m just crunching down and sitting here.”

“I heard that you dragged Hanson along and went up the red mountain? Just what were you thinking? Next time, don’t go there.”

“I won’t give up.”

Each and every one from the village was saying something to her as they passed by. Iril was deflecting them in clear and terse words. However, she narrowed her eyes after noticing a hooded man walking toward the village.

“… Um?”

His way of walking looked suspicious. Also, he was carrying a sword on his waist. Iril grabbed the sword she had in her arms and got up.

‘Let see…’

Fiddling with the sword, she was standing in the path of the man who was walking in. She twisted her eyebrows and the tip of her

lips at the same time and muttered,

“I think this guy is not bad?”

On the traveler’s cape, there was an insignia of Iphalleta.

Chapter 173 - That Rascal is at it Again (2)

“You there…Wait.”

It seemed the traveler had also noticed Iril who was standing in his way to the village. The traveler stopped walking and stared at Iril.

“You…You have a pretty nice sword hanging around your waist. You appear to be a swordsman… Is that right?”

“…”

“Is that right, sir?”

The traveler kept his silence and Iril crumpled her face. Thinking it could not be helped, she asked respectfully but the traveler still kept his mouth shut. There was no response from the man.

“Well, it is fine. I prefer silence over useless chatter.”

With that, Iril shrugged. She brought her left hand toward the sword she was holding in her right hand and drew the sword slowly from the sheath.

“I do have a suggestion though.”

Wheec.

Cutting through the wind, she drew the sword and spun it once. She aimed the sword at the traveler, who was looking at her and said,

“Actually, it is not a suggestion. I insist. If you want to enter the Romella village, you must get my permission.”

“…”

“Ah, don’t worry. I am not asking for money. What I want is…”

She had quite an adorable face but she was using that face to produce a violent look like that of a mountain bandit. She tilted the sword up and down as she explained what she wanted.

“Your swordsmanship skill…Can you show it to me?”

Iril leisurely shrugged her shoulders. The traveler had been silent all this time. Now, he lightly lifted his cape and brought his hand toward the sword on his waist.

“I am sorry but when it comes to the matter of sword, I am not the type who would go easy on someone just because they are a girl. If you take back what you said earlier, I’ll overlook this.”

Using his left hand, he pressed down the hood and hid his face and warned in low voice.

Wheeeee

Iril whistled and asked back,

“You’ll overlook this?”

As if she was amused, she asked back about the warning that the traveler had given. She fiddled with the sword handle, opening and closing the fingers on it and asked,

“As I thought, you must be quite confident about your skills?”

Iril tightly grabbed the sword, changed the leisurely attitude in her eyes and warned the man,

“Your sword, please draw it.”

The girl was blocking the way to the village. Her atmosphere had become sharp like a sword’s edge.

The hooded traveler realized the girl was not bluffing, so he drew his sword.

“How far are you willing to go?”

Taking a stance, the traveler asked. Facing the traveler, Iril

responded naturally as if she heard the same question many times in the past.

“Until I am satisfied.”

With that as the end of the conversation, Iril charged in toward the traveler.

“… Tsk.”

“That Iril, she is at it again.”

There wasn’t a signal to indicate the start of this swordsmanship competition. People of the Romella village, who were walking around the entrance, muttered and gathered around to watch the duel.

“Is Iril at it again?”

“Who is the one fighting Iril?”

“I don’t know? An outsider?”

The girl appeared to be around 15 to 16 years old, and she was wielding a sword and about to clash swords with a traveler under suspicious getup. However…It seemed the villagers were not worried at all. With relaxed faces, they watched the duel while standing behind the girl.

‘Hm. You are just a little girl… It seems you want to show off your swordsmanship because you learned a lot, but unfortunately, I am…’

Laughing at the audacity of the girl who was daring to fight a duel against him, the man under the hood suddenly raised his sword up.

A vertical cut.

It was the most basic move he had learned. It was a simple vertical swing of the sword where the sword was swung downward. However, to the traveler, it was the move he was most confident about and the move also contributed to him earning the title he had.

“Huuuapp!”

Along with energetic shouting, the traveler swung down the sword in powerful swing.

“… Not bad.”

Charging in, the traveler’s sword struck down like lightning to target her head. Iril had her gaze directly fixed at the sword. She lightly mumbled and twisted her head.

“…?!”

It was a close call. The traveler’s sword missed the girl. Iril’s sword was swung from the side and it smoothly made contact with the traveler’s sword.

‘What?!’

The traveler helplessly watched his sword missing the target and the girl’s sword clashed with his sword. The traveler’s eyes looked shocked.

In a split second, the traveler watched his sword being pushed to the side by the girl’s sword. Meanwhile, he could hear the girl muttering.

“With this much power…”

“Kuk!”

Still, as if he was trying to show that he won’t lose in raw strength, the traveler raised his mana. He forced his deflected sword and tilted its angle.

“Huuup.”

The girl was surprised by the traveler’s strength. She opened her eyes big briefly. She then pulled her sword to the back and changed

its angle. With that, she twisted the trajectory of the sword that was coming at her waist.

“As I thought, you do have skill that’s worthy of giving out a warning first…”

It seemed the girl was not confident about a fight of raw strength. She was pushed by the traveler’s sword that came at her from the side. She stepped to the side. She suddenly moved her leg forward, got very close, and pierced into the traveler’s back.

“… You really do have it!”

Her steps were faster than the traveler’s sword swing. She positioned herself behind the traveler in an instant. She used her sword handle to smack her opponent’s elbow.

“Kuuuk?”

Due to the shock from the impact on his elbow, he almost dropped his sword. To chase after the girl behind him, he gritted his teeth, turned his body around and swung his sword.

“It seems you have the tenacity as well!”

Having noticed the traveler trying to catch her, she leaned her leg forward to trip him off. The traveler lightly changed the position of his feet in response. Iril seemed entertained by this. She looked like she was having fun.

“That’s good!”

They were facing each other from the front. Again, the situation looked like there could be another round of sword clash. Iril’s face was littered with sweats. With piercing gaze, she glared at the traveler’s face under the hood.

“Your eyes are worthy as well!”

“I don’t know what you are talking about since the beginning, but!”

The traveler shouted and swung his sword again.

“…this is the end!”

This time, the traveler was bent on getting this girl to surrender. As shown on his cape’s insignia, the traveler started to demonstrate the swordsmanship of Iphalleta House.

“…?!”

The traveler gritted his teeth and swung his sword. Meanwhile, he confirmed that the girl was breaking into a sweat but still had the leisurely look on her face. He unconsciously thought,

‘I’m being stopped?’

The traveler thought it was just luck when the girl bounced off the first attack with such a narrow margin. However, the second, third and even at the seventh attack, the girl's sword deflected them all with narrow margins. Watching her swordsmanship, the traveler was certain now.

'... I am being stopped.'

The ninth move, which was his best technique, was also deflected by the girl. Watching the girl doing all this, the traveler took off his hood.

"You, what are you?"

With the hidden face under the hood now revealed, Iril put her sword away in the sheath and asked back.

"What is your name?"

"..."

The traveler didn't have an answer. To be precise, the young man didn't have an answer. Iril shrugged and introduced herself first.

"My name is Iril. I don't have a family name."

The young man with Iphalleta cape was crumpling his face. After the girl introduced herself, the young man muttered in a low voice,

"... Ryan."

"Pardon?"

It seemed she didn't hear the man because he said it in such a small voice. Iril placed her hand at her ear and leaned her head toward the man. The young man said his name in a louder voice.

"Ryan Fin Iphalle... No. I don't have a family name either."

*

The Reitri Merchant Group's carriages were split into two groups and they were crossing the desert.

"Thanks to Ian, I get to go to Rainfield during winter. I sure have it good. Really good."

Inside the carriage, Nainiae was practicing her knitting. She glanced at Riley who was complaining while sitting next to her. She touched her face around her eye.

"I am sorry, Young Master... If I could use my eye, this would not have happened."

Nainiae had used her right eye when they abducted the Priestess. Since then, Nainiae explained that it would take some time before she could use the eye again.

"It's fine. It is not like this is your fault. It is just... I'll have Ian take responsibility for this."

Don't pester me... Please just leave me be... Riley had complained all the time to Ian. However, he had always cared about Ian. Having noticed this, Nainiae smiled quietly and continued knitting.

'I feel jealous of Mr. Ian.'

She was feeling jealous of Ian who must have served Riley for almost 20 years. She felt a gaze on her, so she turned to look.

"What is it?"

Rorona was sitting next to her and she was the owner of the piercing gaze that was glaring at Nainiae.

"No, it is just... I was just thinking you changed a lot."

Nainiae stopped her knitting and started to look disappointed.

"As I thought, did I change a lot? Is it beyond recognition?"

Having noticed the disappointed look on Nainiae's face, Rorona quickly shook her head and corrected herself.

"I don't mean in a bad way! I mean in a good way! Good! You are blindingly different. It is to the point I am jealous as a woman."

"In a good way?"

Nainiae felt around her face. She was conscious about the side that used to have the scars. Nainiae muttered,

"I am not sure, I don't think much has chang…"

"Doesn't Young Master like it?"

"Young Master?"

Having heard the question, she casually moved her eye to look at Riley. He was still complaining about Ian. Nainiae shook her head as if she was not certain and turned to look at Rorona.

"I'm not sure? I don't think the change to my face was the reason why he was happy… Why do you ask?"

Nainiae's face was full of question marks. Rorona shook her head. She looked like she was giving up. Rorona said,

“I asked for no particular reason.”

“… Young Master is…”

Based on the look on Rorona’s face, Nainiae figured out what Rorona was trying to say. Nainiae said as she started knitting again,

“Young Master is not the kind of person who judges others by their appearances. So, he treats me the same now…like he did when I had scars on my face.”

With mysterious and complicated expression on her face, Nainiae explained Riley’s good point. It looked like Rorona had decided that there was no need to hear more answers about this. Instead, Rorona lightly touched Nainiae’s shoulder to give a quiet encouragement to Nainiae.

‘Is that why?’

Because Riley had been treating her same regardless of the scars on her face… Rorona thought that must be the reason why Nainiae had that look on her face. Rorona smiled lightly.

“… Um?”

The carriage was running along fine. Now, she felt the carriage slowing down. The bodies of the people inside the carriage leaned a little and returned. Rorona looked outside the window and said,

“I think the carriage stopped?”

The scenery outside was not moving, so Riley pulled out his upper body through the window to the outside.

He shouted at Reitri who was driving the carriage and asked why they stopped.

“Did something happen?”

Reitri casually turned his head from the driver’s seat and pointed to the front with his finger. Reitri responded,

“Let’s rest here for a bit before traveling again. The next village is pretty far from here. We need to switch horses too.”

Reitri said he could not keep on using the same horses that they had been using since the desert. He got down from the driver’s seat and stated another reason for why they had stopped.

“Of all villages near the Karuta Desert, this village is the biggest one. Mr. Ian could have visited this place. There is also a good chance that he might be staying here at the moment.”

Having heard Reitri’s explanation, Riley rolled his eyes and found letters at the village’s entrance, which read “Romella.” It looked like Riley was convinced of the plan.

“I see. It would be best for us to rest here before we head out to Rainfield. That Ian… he sure made things bothersome for me…”

Riley was grinding his teeth while thinking about Ian’s face. Reitri smiled awkwardly and said that they should be able to get some information even in the worst case scenario.

“All right. Let’s think of this as fishing.”

Riley decided to go with Reitri’s idea. He got out of the carriage. Riley was about to stretch and yawn. However…

“…?”

He felt a strange sensation in his palm. Riley hardened his face.

Chapter 174 - That Rascal is at it Again (3)

“… Young Master?”

Nainiae had come out of the carriage after Riley to follow him. From the back, she saw that Riley was vacantly petrified. She approached to him and asked carefully,

“Are you hurting somewhere? What is it?”

Nainiae looked concerned. Riley absent-mindedly lowered his right hand and said in quiet voice,

“It’s here…”

Perhaps because the subject wasn’t included in what he had just said, Nainiae tilted her head to the side as if she didn’t understand.

“Pardon?”

“I think it is in this village.”

“By any chance…”

Riley took his gaze off from his palm. He looked at the sign that read ‘Romella’ in front of the village and mumbled. Nainiae seemed to have figured out why Riley stopped. Nainiae asked,

“The sword is?”

“…”

Riley nodded in response.

“Um? Young Master? Did something happen?”

For some reason, Riley and Nainiae were just standing in front of the village. They were not moving from there. Reitri had found them like this. He was organizing the carriages, but he stopped and asked.

“Reitri.”

While staring at the village’s sign, Riley called his name. Reitri decided to leave things to Horai for the moment and responded,

“Yes?”

“Let me ask you for a favor.”

“A… favor?”

Reitri tilted his head to the side and wondered what this was about. He asked,

“If it is about information regarding Mr. Ian, I was going to even if you didn’t ask.”

Having heard the man, Riley shook his head.

“No. Besides Ian, I have one more thing I want to ask you to do for me. You said there is an informant in this place, right?”

“Pardon? Ah, yes… that’s right, but…”

“This might be a vague request, but if it is you, then you should be able to find it on your own.”

Reitri broke out in a cold sweat and said,

“Aren’t you having too much faith in me? Compared to others, I’m pretty new at this…”

*

“… I’m back.”

They were at the Romella village’s pub. Because of Riley’s request, Reitri had been gathering information for the past few days. He looked rather exhausted when he returned to the pub. Reitri sat next to Riley.

“Good work. I’ll treat you.”

Unlike Reitri, it seemed that Riley had a satisfying vacation in Romella village for the past few days. Unlike the look on Reitri’s face, Riley was looking very refreshed.

“Ugh.”

Looking at Riley, Reitri thought to himself why he was not born as a noble. Riley handed him a wine. Reitri relaxed his stuffy face and drank a sip from it.

“So, any progress?”

It seemed Riley was feeling guilty for working Reitri so much. He decided to order the most expensive snack for the drink. Riley asked the waiter for a menu and asked Reitri.

“That is…”

It seemed Reitri was very thirsty. He chugged on the wine and blurred the end of the sentence while avoiding Riley’s gaze.

“I have one useful news, and…”

“What do you mean ‘and’?”

“I have two bad news. What would you like to hear first?”

Reitri said he had useful, not ‘good’, information and two relatively bad news pieces. Riley had been looking calm so far, but now he frowned.

“What?”

“Ugh…”

It seemed Reitri had been expecting this response. Reitri sighed with an uncomfortable look on his face. Riley turned his eyebrows back to the original angle and said,

“It was not like I was not expecting this at all but to think there are two bad news pieces…”

Perhaps due to insufficient sleep, Reitri looked tired. Because of this, Riley couldn’t let out his frustration at Reitri. He thought hard about this for a moment and chose the second option. Riley said,

“Well, they say it is better to just get the beating first… Let’s hear the bad news first. Why are you so concerned about them?”

Reitri took another sip of the wine and started to explain.

He looked anxious. It seemed like he was hoping that Riley would not be infuriated after hearing what he was about to explain.

“First… I would like to tell you first that it seems Mr. Ian … has not been to this village yet.”

As expected, Riley’s face hardened again.

“… What?”

It looked like Reitri was expecting this to happen. The man was about to cry. He was not able to look at Riley in the eyes. Reitri just directed his gaze at the empty glass and continued.

“Maybe Mr. Ian went off to somewhere else on the way. Otherwise, maybe something happened to him… Although we won’t be able to find that out, it seems he has not arrived in Romella village yet. I asked around and people said nobody like that had come here.”

Riley flinched his facial muscles and said,

“Ian, this rascal is really…”

Riley mumbled ‘doing all sorts of things’ inside and waited for Reitri to speak.

“A… Anyway! I intend to keep on searching for more information

about Mr. Ian. Maybe he went straight to Rainfield without stopping by at the Romella village or he didn't come this far yet. Regardless, we probably won't miss him."

Reitri asked Riley to wait a little longer for information about Ian. Now, Reitri started to talk about the other bad news.

"The next one is about the great danger that's about to reach Romella village."

"Danger?"

Riley tilted his head to the side and asked. Reitri nodded and continued.

"Yes. About the epidemic from last time... you remember it, right? This is happening because of that."

Riley thought about the epidemic man, the pitch-black skinned purple human. Riley put on a serious look on his face.

"What about that epidemic?"

"Because of that epidemic, the monsters that had been living at the border started to migrate."

"Migrate?"

“Yes. Because it was an incredibly fearsome epidemic that drenched the entire desert in black. The monsters probably started to move to survive.”

Reitri nodded and started to explain about the great migration of the monsters.

“Perhaps because of the monsters’ migration, Solia and Ansyrium are currently under cease-fire. Well, Ansyrium probably agreed to it because they have their hands full with trying to stop the epidemic that’s coming towards their country.”

It looked like Riley was getting what Reitri was saying. He thought about monsters that must be migrating to avoid the epidemic and asked,

“So, the monsters that are on the great migration are…”

“Yes. The word is that they will show up at the village in a few days. This is accurate information. So, because of the great migration of the monsters, I am afraid it might get more difficult for us to cross paths with Mr. Ian.”

“So that’s why you said it is a bad news.”

Riley turned his head away after hearing Reitri’s explanation. Riley looked around the pub and put up a question mark on his face.

“For a village that is about to be overrun by monsters, the mood here is…”

“… Young Master! Young Master!”

Riley was about to ask something he found curious. However, Nainiae rushed to the table, so Riley flinched his shoulders.

“What is it?”

She brought the food he ordered earlier on a plate. She placed it on the table and said,

“This!”

“This?”

Nainiae pointed at something that was on the plate. Riley and Reitri’s gazes automatically leaned toward the direction.

She was pointing at black liquid inside a clear glass. Its tingling taste was the best, so Riley liked this drink especially. It was the brown sugar beer.

“I just figured this out. The thing called cola that you mentioned… It was the brown sugar beer?”

She had made an entrance out of the blue and the question was also out of the blue. As if he was at a loss for words, Riley had his mouth open vacantly. Reitri tilted his head to the side and wondered what this was about.

“Cola?”

Pointing at the brown sugar beer, Nainiae uttered a word that Reitri had never heard before, so he asked. Riley glared at Nainiae and said,

“No, it’s an inside joke between me and Nainiae.”

Feeling his gaze, Nainiae broke out in a cold sweat and promptly lowered her head to apologize.

“I… I’m sorry.”

Nainiae had a gloomy look on her face. Having noticed this, Reitri smiled awkwardly. He got a piece of the food from the plate, put it in his mouth and said,

“Well, as long as Ms. Nainiae stays here… It looks like I won’t have to worry about the village being in danger because of the monsters migrating.”

Riley waved his hand around to indicate he had enough of that discussion. He had Nainiae sit next to him and asked what he could not earlier.

“Setting aside Nainiae for now, if the information about the village being in danger soon because of the monsters approaching is true… I think the village’s atmosphere feels too peaceful?”

Having heard the question, Reitri nodded as if he was waiting for this. Reitri explained why.

“Ah, yes! It seems there is a reason, although it is a rumor that lacks credibility.”

“What’s the reason and what’s the rumor?”

“I think this is related to the useful information that I will be telling you, so I think it will lead to that.”

Reitri was saying that the useful information he mentioned earlier might be closely related to the reason why the village was so peaceful. He ate another piece of meat and explained,

“Because of the great migration of the monsters, their village could be destroyed soon, yet they are not panicking at all. Why do you think they could afford to be like this?”

Reitri pointed at Nainiae with the fork that he used to pick up the meat and asked. Nainiae seemed to be thinking for a moment. She responded based on the conversation earlier as the hint.

“Because they know the village won’t be destroyed?”

“That’s right.”

Reitri lowered the fork and said that was the answer. Riley furrowed his brows and asked,

“What is this? Did you run your mouth and let everyone know in this village about her identity?”

“No. I didn’t say anything to anyone about you or Ms. Nainiae.”

“In that case?”

Riley looked puzzled.

“In Romella village… At the outer bound of the village to be precise, I heard that a witch lives there.”

“A witch?”

“Yes.”

Reitri nodded, took a moment to calm his breathing and continued.

“They don’t mean in a bad way. They mean in a good way. In

other words...She is a witch who the villagers do not shun away from."

"There are witches like that?"

Riley knew that the title of a witch was never a good one to have in this world. He tilted his head around with puzzled look on his face.

"The news about the monsters' migration has spread among the villagers, but they are feeling safe and continuing their daily lives probably because of that witch. They believe that the witch will protect the village."

"A good witch... That is what you are trying to say?"

"Yes."

Reitri nodded and responded. This time, Nainiae asked Reitri,

"If she is a witch... Does she use magic? What's her Circles?"

Reitri shook his head.

"No. I heard she does not use magic."

"Pardon?"

“What? Why is she called a witch if she cannot use magic?”

Riley had a look on his face. He looked like a seasoned fisherman sitting in front of the fishing pole who just noticed the fishes were nibbling at the bait. Riley asked why she was called a witch.

‘By any chance, is this…?’

Riley wondered if this witch was the last purple human that he had not encountered yet. Reitri said,

“I’m also looking into why she ended up with the title of ‘witch.’ However… the elders who grew up in this village called her by the following title.”

Reitri took a dramatic pause for a moment and said,

“Romella village’s sword witch.”

“Sword…”

“… Witch?”

Riley and Nainiae asked and Reitri nodded, adding

“It seems that she might be… related to the thing that you asked

me to find, Young Master.”

Chapter 175 - The Sword Witch

Riley concluded that he had no reason to hesitate. The next day, he got out of the inn and straight away went to the outer edge of the Romella Village to find the Sword Witch who supposedly lived there.

“I wonder if I will be able to find her quickly.”

Riley got out of the inn, enjoyed the chirping of the birds and stretched and yawned. He looked at the people busily walking around the town and muttered. Nainiae said,

“I wonder too. I feel like we are lacking in information a little.”

Even among the people of the village, they only had rumors about such a person circulating around. Reitri said nobody had actually seen her in person. That was why.

“They said she lives at the outer edge, right? Get me a map.”

Reitri had gone to gather more information about Ian and Riley said that he would go find the Sword Witch. He looked at the map that Nainiae had brought and narrowed his eyes.

“What a bother. The village is really big.”

The size of Romella Village was several times bigger than the

Alieve Village that he had gone to before. Romella Village was more complicated too.

“Where should I start the round?”

To find the witch that was rumored to live at the outer edge of the village, the right answer would be searching the outer edge. However... The problem was that there were many places that could be considered as the outer edge.

“If we are unlucky, this means we might end up going around the entire village. If we pick a place and check the places in clockwise direction...”

With his finger placed on the map, Riley checked out the outer edges of the village. It seemed that he had decided to trust the instincts of a woman. He looked at Nainiae and asked,

“What about you?”

“Certainly... If we think about the possibility of not finding the place despite searching everywhere... That would be a waste of time.”

Nainiae looked at the map that Riley was holding. She held her chin and thought hard about this. She pointed at where they were standing and asked,

“We are here, right?”

“Yes.”

“Is there any change in the sensation on your palm in comparison to when you were at the inn?”

“I wouldn’t be thinking about this problem if that had happened.”

“Hm…”

After hearing what Riley had just said, she wondered if they really had no other choice but to guess. She directed her gaze back to the map.

“In that case, let’s start from the left side, counter clock wise.”

“Left side?”

“Yes, I’m getting a feeling.”

Riley folded the map and looked at the direction.

“Left side…”

The left side of the village had relatively more houses. Beyond the village was the scenery of the Karuta Desert that had regained

its former self.

“Well then. Okay.”

With her opinion under consideration, Riley decided to make the round starting from the left side. He immediately started to walk toward the left side of the village.

“Starting from here?”

After getting to the outer edge on the left side of the village, Riley thought about the number of people and houses he just passed by along the way. He casually looked around the scenery and walked.

“Um?”

To find someone called the Sword Witch, Riley started to go around the village slowly. He looked at the scenery of the village on the side and tilted his head to the side.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes, Young Master.”

“Is there anything… you feel?”

Having heard his question, she wondered if she should tell him or

not. She nodded to confirm it to Riley and also glanced at the scenery of the village.

“Are you talking about the people’s gazes?”

Nainiae asked back and Riley nodded slightly to answer.

“I don’t think we are being watched, but... They seem to be weary... of us? I feel that their gazes are not so kind toward us.”

Riley and Nainiae got to the village only a week ago and now they were lurking around the outer edges of the village. It was obvious why the villagers were weary of them. However... their cautious eyes were a problem.

“Is it because of you?”

Riley put up sleazy face and picked on Nainiae. She pouted and complained.

“I have worn the proper clothing for the occasion?”

To not stand out, instead of the maid dress, she was wearing casual clothing. Riley nodded and pointed at her face.

“I’m saying that if we are drawing attention, it is because of your face.”

“Is there something on my face?”

“…”

Nainiae was acting like she was clueless. Riley shook his head and muttered.

“No, it’s nothing.”

Of the villagers who were staring at Riley and Nainiae, gazes from young men were focused on Nainiae in particular.

‘It could be because of her looks, but if that was the only reason, then there would be no reason for the women to glance in this direction too. There is definitely… something.’

With both of his hands planted solidly in his pockets, Riley lurked around the outer edges of the village. He looked back to see the path he had walked on so far.

“Nainiae, how far have we walked?”

“We didn’t even cover half of the path yet. This place must really be the biggest village in this area.”

Following Riley, Nainiae also looked back at the village. Finding all this walking around to be a bother, he clicked his tongue and started to walk again.

<... Nainiae.>

While walking, Riley used telepathic communication to Nainiae. While looking at the corner of a building that was coming up, he said,

<You see that corner, right?>

<Yes.>

Although she was still not quite used to it, Nainiae was able to use telepathic communication after receiving Riley's memory. She responded with telepathic communication.

<At that corner, try using invisibility magic.>

<Invisibility magic?>

<Just do it.>

While walking, she was already at the building's corner. For now, she decided to do as Riley asked. She carefully moved her fingers to prepare the invisibility magic.

<Is it done?>

<Yes.>

Nainiae figured there must be a reason why Riley had asked her to cast invisibility through telepathic communication. She went right next to him and waited for the next order.

"..."

They waited at the corner. Before long, two villagers came by. They were in shabby clothes.

"Um?"

"What the? Where did they go?"

It seemed the two villagers were tailing Riley and Nainiae. They were looking around to find them.

"Did they sink to the ground? Did they fly up to the sky?"

"Hur... It is not like they are ghosts. How could they suddenly disappear?"

They looked around the area to find Riley and Nainiae. As if they could not afford to let it be like this, they tightened their fists and said,

“Still, this is Romella Village. Let’s keep searching.”

“Right. They are still only outsiders.”

Could they have business with Riley and Nainiae? They were about to move away from the corner to go search for Riley and Nainiae.

“Huh?”

Question marks floated up on their faces.

“What… What is this?”

For some reason, their feet were stuck on the ground. The feet refused to come off the ground.

“That lass called Sword Witch… Did she swallow the entire village in a whole or something?”

From their side, from an empty space, a voice could be heard. The villagers who had been tailing Riley and Nainiae flinched their shoulders.

“Considering how it was like with Princess Reutrina, that won’t be so surprising, right?”

“Don’t jump to a conclusion. We cannot be certain yet if this lass is one of the purple humans or not. It is too early to tell. First…”

The villagers wondered if ghosts were having conversations next to them. They were shaking in fear. The boy and the girl who had been using invisibility magic to stay hidden suddenly revealed themselves.

“I should extract information from these bastards.”

“Huk?!”

There was definitely nothing there. Now, the two outsiders had suddenly showed up from nowhere. The villagers gasped for air.

“W… what are you people?!”

One of the villagers struggled with his legs that wouldn’t come off the ground and shouted. Riley cracked his neck left and right to relax it and said,

“That’s my line.”

Nainiae promptly cast temporary isolation magic and went next to Riley’s back.

“Now that it came to this, you will have to tell me everything you know.”

The villagers were panicking. Riley took a step toward them and called Nainiae.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes.”

After casting the isolation spell, she waved her right hand and cast her third magic. With gray light floating on her hand, Nainiae walked toward the villagers who were shaking in fear.

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“In the end, we didn’t get much.”

From the memory she obtained from the villagers, Riley was able to extract information about the Romella Village’s Sword Witch. With a satisfied look on his face, Riley looked at the villagers below who were asleep. Riley said,

“The information is more or less the same as what we heard from Reitri.”

The fact was that the villagers didn’t know much about the Sword Witch. Riley clicked his tongue and scratched his head.

“To point out the one thing we have learned is that these

bastards are not being controlled by the witch…”

The Sword Witch was rumored to have appeared when the village was in danger from monsters and disappeared after cleaning up all monsters.

Riley muttered out the information he had gotten from the villagers’ memories. He crumpled his face because the most important information that he needed was not there in their memories.

“Of all things, they don’t have information about where she lives?”

Riley complained how nice it would be if they could get a clue at least. Thinking it could not be helped, he turned to look at Nainiae and said,

“It cannot be helped. Let’s go on fishing once more.”

“Pardon?”

Nainiae broke out in a cold sweat and asked back.

“What are you doing? Hurry and cast it.”

“What do you mean?”

“What else? I’m talking about the invisibility magic. Let’s try catching another villager until we get the right bait.”

“Young Master, that is a little…”

Nainiae thought it was poking at her sense of morality. She was about to tell Riley that it did not seem like a good method. However, instead, she suddenly put up a puzzled look on her face. With a question mark on her face, she said,

“Ah! Young Master, how about we just check from above?”

“Above?”

“Instead of walking around the outer edges of the village, we could look at the village from above. We can check if there are any places where the Sword Witch could be or not… As for the bait method, how about we try it after checking from above first?”

Having heard her proposal, Riley looked up at the sky and wiggled his eyebrows, thinking that was a pretty good idea.

“I see. We could observe from above.”

Riley figured Nainiae was going to use fly magic. Riley nodded.

“All right. Let’s take a look from above.”

With Riley's permission, Nainiae nodded and cast invisibility magic and float magic immediately.

"We will be going up."

With float magic, Riley floated up to the sky. He watched the ground that was gradually moving away from him. He then turned his gaze to look around the outer edges of the village.

"Tsk. We should have started this way."

"I'm glad I thought of it now at least."

Nainiae thought about how they walked around the mountain at Andal's place for nothing. She muttered and started to look around like Riley.

"Young Master, over there. At 2'oClock."

"There is one in this direction too."

To be precise, there were four... Riley found old, secluded houses in four different locations on the outer edges of the village. Riley narrowed his eyes.

"Should we say that our search range had been narrowed now?"

“I am not sure? I cannot discount the possibility that searching those places might turn up nothing. It is too early to tell.”

Just like how they started last time in counter clockwise direction. Riley decided to start searching from the remote house on the left side first and pointed his finger at the direction. Nainiae nodded as if she understood and used teleportation magic.

“… The third and fourth houses’ locations… You memorized them, right?”

“Yes, I prepared them.”

In case nothing turned up at the first house, Riley said that they should go to second, third and fourth houses in that order right away. Nainiae nodded and said that she had already finished preparing them.

“Excuse me.”

Knock knock…

Riley knocked at the first door and felt someone’s presence inside. He waited for a response.

‘There is one person inside…. Mana is not particularly high. This person appears to be an ordinary civilian, but…’

However, since purple people weren't related much to mana, Riley didn't ease his suspicion. He glared at the door, and a fragile voice could be heard.

"Yes, who is it?"

Tagak, tagak...

Along with the response, they could hear the sound of a staff being used on the ground. Riley and Nainiae both tilted their heads.

'This sound is?'

Soon, the old door made a creaking sound. A woman in tattered clothing showed herself.

"I am sorry I came to answer the door so late. I don't have the children here now, and I'm alone... What brings you here?"

The woman's eyes were covered in a black blind. She had light purple hair which was held together in a side braid, which was a striking feature. Riley looked at the woman and furrowed his brows.

'A blind woman?'

Chapter 176 - The Sword Witch (2)

From the first impression, the first thing that Riley noticed was the black blind on her eyes and the staff. He then noticed her tattered clothing and pure white skin. Riley tilted his head to the side.

'What is this?'

Riley was not certain. Perhaps it was a sense of déjà vu. Maybe something just felt mysterious. He felt a strange sensation that could not be described in words.

"Excuse me... Everyone?"

The blind woman tilted her head to the side. Because Riley had not responded, she was wondering if she had heard something wrong and mistaken it as people coming to visit her home.

"Ah, the thing is..."

Riley kept silent and just stared at the woman. Instead of him, Nainiae opened her mouth and started to glance around.

She was not sure if she should just ask straight out 'are you the Sword Witch?' or if she should ask indirectly by saying 'do you know about the Sword Witch?'

“If it is a long story, then why don’t you come in? I’m not able to endure the wind from outside for long…”

Riley was sure that the woman couldn’t see because of the blind, yet it looked like the woman was not weary of the visitors. Instead, she was trying to invite the guests in. Panicking, Nainiae started to ramble on.

“Ah, well… That is… Young Master, what would you like to do?”

Nainiae whispered and asked. Riley pondered about it for a moment and took a step forward. He said,

“Well then, we will accept your generosity.”

“Yes, please come in.”

Tagak… tagak…

Perhaps she had difficulties with her vision. The woman with the blind on her eyes used the staff to feel the ground and went back into her home. Riley exchanged a look with Nainiae and followed in.

“Earlier, you said ‘the children are not here.’ So, I presume you do not live here by yourself?”

Having heard Riley’s question, the woman walked toward the

fireplace and sat on the chair nearby. She said,

“Yes, because my eyes are like this... It can’t be helped. My pupil is helping me in daily living.”

The woman looked bitter and sad as she muttered. She was fiddling with her blind. Riley entered the home as he looked around inside and sat at an empty chair. He asked,

“A pupil?”

“Yes... She has a tendency to rush things, but compared to other children of her age, she is a good child.”

The woman was feeling the warmth from the fireplace. It seemed she was thinking about her pupil. There was a faint smile on her face. Nainiae, the one who entered the house after Riley, made a suggestion as she looked around inside,

“Excuse me. If it is all right with you, can I please use the kitchen? If you are uncomfortable with me doing so, then I won’t, but... Since you allowed us to come in, I was wondering if I could make tea for you.”

Having heard Nainiae, the woman with blind on her eyes turned her head toward Nainiae and nodded. It seemed she was pleased with the idea. The woman said,

“Yes, thank you.”

With the woman's permission, Nainiae promptly moved toward the kitchen. She noticed that the kitchen was a mess. She looked around the kitchen in disarray and sighed.

'Should I tidy it up a bit?'

Because she was trained as a maid, she was unable to leave such a mess be. Thinking it could not be helped, Nainiae started to show off her stuff.

'I am sorry, Ms. Willa. I don't have time, so I'll use it for a moment.'

Nainiae apologized inside to Willa, the head maid of the Iphalleta House who must be at the mansion at the moment. She used two telekinesis magic spells at the same time and cleaned up the mess at the kitchen and the living room as she boiled water.

'You didn't have to bother with those.'

Riley watched Nainiae quickly starting the cleanup. He then redirected his gaze at the woman.

"The house looks pretty old. It looks like you had been living here for a long time?"

"..."

The woman was keeping her mouth firmly closed. Having heard Riley's question, she lifted her head which was directed at her laps. She directed her face toward where Riley was and asked back,

"Excuse me, but..."

"...?"

"Where did you come from?"

"..."

Inside, Riley thought, 'you are finally asking me that?' and complained.

"I am thankful for being treated with tea even though I'm just a stranger. Still... I need to ask why you have come to meet an old woman like myself."

Listening to the woman, Riley wondered where she was getting at. He furrowed his eyebrows.

"Old?"

"I should know if... you are here to steal gold jewelries or just here to be a conversing partner to an old woman, don't you think?"

"..."

"Well, I don't think there is anything here that's worth stealing, but still..."

For some reason, the woman was not concerned. She seemed to be assured with lots of margins to spare. Riley stared at the woman and responded as if he was making an excuse.

"If we are thieves, then we wouldn't be sitting with you and talking to you or making tea for you. We would have bounced after packing what we came for."

"Huhu. That makes sense."

In response to Riley's answer, she laughed quietly. Facing Riley, the woman asked again,

"Then can you please tell me?"

The woman was asking where they came from and why they wanted to see her. Nainiae was bringing the tea. Riley glanced at her and sent a message through telepathic communication.

<Nainiae.>

<Yes?>

She tilted her head to the side and responded in telepathic communication,

<After serving the tea, go get Nara.>

<Commander Nara?>

<She might be the one. Let's check.>

Riley asked Nainiae to give a brief summary to Nara and have him comeback with her. Riley gently slid the tea cup toward the woman and said,

"Please have some tea."

"The aroma smells wonderful. It must be the winter herb. It probably was not easy to extract the flavor from it. She must be very skilled."

The tea didn't have a particularly strong smell, yet she figured out what it was. Nainiae looked quite surprised. She looked at the woman.

"The scent… You can smell it?"

"As blind as I am, my sense of smell is quite good."

Having heard the woman, Nainiae thought about Sera, her fellow maid. She sniffed and sniffed, but her gaze ran into Riley's gaze. She tumbled and prepared teleportation magic.

"... First, how about we introduce ourselves?"

The woman felt around the table and grabbed the tea cup. Riley also followed suit and grabbed his tea cup and introduced himself.

"My name is Riley."

He thought about giving a fake name. However, he felt like she might notice, so he decided to tell her his real name. However, he skipped his family name.

"Riley?"

"I believe this is my first time meeting you. Do you know that name?"

"..."

The woman with the blinds shook her head. It seemed that she was thinking hard about something. She said,

"No, this is my first time hearing that name. However, I think it has a great meaning."

She promptly introduced herself.

“My name is Inaril Esodams.”

“Esodams?”

“It is not a nobility’s name. It’s just a name.”

Earlier, the woman had praised Nainiae for her superb tea brewing skills. She realized she could no longer hear Nainiae’s breathing. The woman perked up her ears.

“The young lady who came with you…where did she go?”

“She went to the restroom.”

It seemed Riley had prepared a response. He answered immediately.

Riley asked the next question right away.

“This is a question I didn’t get to finish asking earlier. Have you been living here for a long time? The building is pretty old and the furniture’s are pretty old too. Everything looks very old?”

“Yes, it has been… quite a while.”

Having heard Riley's question, Inaril fiddled with top of the cup. She nodded and said that was the case.

"Ever since I became blind, my sense of time had been fading. It would be difficult for me to tell you how long it has been since I settled in this place."

She added that it had been pretty long since she had settled here. Next, she asked about Riley.

"So, Mr. Riley... Considering how your voice sounds, you must be quite young?"

"Pardon? Ah, yes."

"That young lady earlier... Are you two lovers?"

"What the, that's so out of the blue..."

"Um, what should I say? The atmosphere?"

'You can't even see, so just what atmosphere are you talking about...'

Riley looked dumbfounded. He felt a presence from the rear, so he casually turned his head.

‘… They are back?’

“Um? Wait…”

Riley turned his head around to look, but he casually moved his eyes back because of what Inaril said.

“…?”

“That just now… Perhaps it was just my mood. The young lady who brew me a cup of tea must be a mage. She is quite skilled on top of that…”

Inaril’s blind was directed exactly at Nainiae who had just appeared before Riley.

‘How did she know?’

She talked about the atmosphere between two people. Although she shouldn’t be able to see, she figured out exactly who it was that had just appeared through teleportation. Riley narrowed his eyes and glared at Inaril.

“Are you really blind?”

“Yes, I cannot see.”

Having heard Riley's question, Inaril brought her hand toward the blind on her eyes. She started to slowly untie the blind that was wrapped around her eyes.

"What are you doing all of the sudden..."

The blinds that covered her eyes was untied, and... her face that was hidden underneath was revealed. Riley's mouth opened on its own.

"..."

"Will this be enough as the proof?"

On Inaril's face... On her eyes to be precise, there was a long cut wound. It appeared to be the result of someone cutting across her eyes with a sword.

She showed her scar which went across both of her eyes. She covered her eyes with the blind and said,

"... Sound of the breathing..."

"Pardon?"

"I think another guest came? Am I right?"

Inaril faced toward Nara who had just arrived here by following Nainiae and tilted her head to the side. Nara still had not figured out the situation yet, so he started to whisper to Nainiae.

“W… Who is she?”

“First, can you please check her color?”

“Color?”

Nainiae said she will answer his question later. Inaril had a small smile on her face.

“Huhu…”

It was not that she was laughing to belittle and let it be known that she knew what they were up to. It was a bitter, sad smile. To let them know she heard it all, she added something about Nara.

“Since you are talking about colors, it seems you also brought someone who is a basilisk. I was not trying to hear it, but I ended up hearing it. Because my eyes… are like this…”

Nara looked at Inaril, the woman with blinds who was sitting at front of the fireplace. Nara furrowed his brows, took a step toward her and asked,

“… You, what are you?”

“…”

It was not because it had been found out that he was a basilisk.

“Is the color purple?”

Nara was standing behind Riley. Riley asked Nara as he glared at Inaril. Nara opened and closed his mouth a few times like a fish and said carefully,

“… No.”

‘No?’

“This woman…”

As if he could not believe it, Nara blinked his eyes several times and stared at Inaril. He explained about her color that he tried to observe.

“… does not have any color.”

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It was at the entrance of the Romella Village. There was Iril, a

girl who was wearing a wide and flat hat. She looked back at the young man who was following her. She clicked her tongue.

“Ryan. Stop dragging your feet. Follow me quickly.”

“No, wait. Just what are you trying to do so suddenly? Also, the master is by herself, isn’t she? If it is not something important, won’t it be better for you to go by yourself…”

“Grandmother is all right. On the contrary, it is better to take care of things like this quickly. Grandmother does not have much time left.”

“Um? Not much time left? What do you mean?”

“You don’t need to know.”

“I won’t understand unless you explain properly.”

“There will be a test.”

“A test?”

Iril was leading the way. Having heard what she was saying, Ryan had a puzzled look on his face. He suddenly stopped walking.

“Um? What are you doing? I told you to follow me quickly?”

"..."

Ryan was following Iril to the outside of Romella Village. He had a reason for stopping all of the sudden.

It was because he found someone he knew.

Among mercenaries, this old butler was more famous across the land than Count Stein, his father. The butler was walking toward the Romella Village. Their gazes met and the butler stopped walking.

"... Young Master Ryan?"

Iril floated a question mark on her face.

"Uuuing? What's this? Someone you know?"

The mercenaries called him the mercenary hero.

"Ian..."

The Iphalleta Family's butler was facing Ryan in hooded cape who was on his way out of Romella Village.

Chapter 177 - The Sword Witch (3)

“As I thought… It was you, Young Master Ryan.”

Again, Ian carefully observed the face of the young man who was coming out of Romella Village in front of him. With an intrigued face, Ian started to walk forward.

“Since the incident last time… I figured you would be staying with the Mogared Family?”

The incident on the day of the successorship announcement… Ian was recalling the incident where Ryan was infuriated like lightning in the corridors of Iphalleta Family mansion.

Ryan was looking at Ian. When Ian casually asked, Ryan tightened his fists.

“I was shunned by them. It seems the Morgared House learned about the incident. They were essentially saying they don’t need a hunting dog that has lost his teeth.”

Ryan opened his tightened fists. He looked bitter somewhere. Ryan casually glanced at the sword that was hanging on his waist and asked back,

“What about you? What brings you all the way out here? You aren’t even with Riley? You are alone?”

“Ah, I am…”

Ian agonized over how to respond to this question. He decided to just give a wishy-washy answer. Ian said,

“It just so happens that the Count told me there is an errand that he wanted me to handle near the Romella Village, so I’m currently carrying out a mission.”

“Riley won’t like having you separated from him. Ian, I am surprised that the rascal allowed this.”

Having heard Ryan’s question, Ian flinched his shoulders. Ian avoided Ryan’s gaze and answered as if he was muttering.

“Well, I am also… like you, Young Master Ryan. Perhaps I should also say that I became a hunting dog who lost his teeth? I have been surpassed by a new servant. I am not saying I could never catch up, but… That new servant happens to be so incredibly skilled, so…”

He was rambling on. In addition to him being surpassed by Nainiae, he was also quietly suffering the incident where he didn’t get past the teleportation portal that she made. Ian asked Ryan,

“Who would she be?”

“Ah, this is…”

Thinking that he was late in introducing her, Ryan was going to quickly introduce Iril to Ian. However, his lips were blocked by her arm.

“Hey, Ryan.”

“…?”

Wondering what this was about, Ryan floated a question mark on his face. Iril whispered quietly to Ryan so Ian would not be able to hear it.

“That man… Is he strong?”

“What did you say?”

“That grandpa. I’m asking if he is strong.”

Ian waited for Ryan’s response.

“Is he strong? That is…”

It would be odd for anyone who lived in the Iphalleta Mansion to not know how strong this old butler named Ian was.

In the past, the man used to be called the hero mercenary. There

were even rumors that, besides Count Stein, the only one who was skilled enough to fight Ian would be Ryan, the first born.

Even though Ian didn't learn swordsmanship from the Iphalleta House, the old butler had acquired a solid swordsmanship over his life. He was acknowledged as magnificent by not just mercenaries but the people of the mansion as well.

"..."

Ryan replied with silence, so Iril decided on her own. She tilted the tip of her lips and mumbled in sleazy way,

"He must be pretty strong?"

Intrigued, she looked at Ian. Iril took a step back and said to Ryan,

"All right. Actually, this turned out preety well. Let's do it right away."

"Right away? Do what right away?"

Looking at Iril's smile, Ryan had a bad feeling about this. He waited for her next words.

"This is the second test."

“Second test?”

“…?”

Ian was not able to hear what they were whispering about. Ian furrowed his brows. Iril handed over something that she had been hugging to her chest.

“Here.”

It was long and flat. It was wrapped in bandages. With the object handed to him, Ryan looked at Iril, wondering what this was.

“What’s this?”

“Try fighting with that.”

It was a mysterious object. Ryan stared at it and furrowed his brows as if he still didn’t understand. Watching the man’s reaction, Iril pointed at Ian with her finger and said,

“Against that grandpa.”

Ian flinched his shoulders.

“G… Grandpa?”

Perhaps it was to agitate Ian. Unlike the whispering voices they used earlier, the words could be heard a lot better. Feeling wronged, Ian looked at Iril.

“Excuse me, young lady. I don’t know how you know Young Master Ryan, but… I’m not at the age to be called a grandpa.”

Ian was requesting Iril to correct what he had just heard. However, Iril ignored him and just stared at him. Again, in a barely audible voice, she said to Ryan,

“My grandmother can live only if you pass this test.”

“…”

Having heard her whispers about her grandmother’s life being on the line, Ryan stared at her face from the side. Ryan directed his gaze at the object that was handed to him from Iril.

“Young Master Ryan?”

Ian was looking at Ryan and Iril. Ryan’s eyes were gradually showing animosity and Ian also narrowed his eyes.

“I don’t think I’m old enough to be senile. Young Master Ryan… Your hostility is… directed at me?”

Ryan didn’t answer. He untied the tightly wrapped object and

realized what it was. He gasped for air.

'... A sword?'

It seemed Ian was also surprised. His narrowed eyes suddenly widened.

"That is?"

Ryan held the sword. He felt a solid sensation through his palm. Ryan gulped and said,

"Now that I think about it, when I was at the mansion... I don't recall ever having a duel with you. This turned out well."

Ryan aimed the sword, uncovered from the bandages and continued.

"I wanted to fight a duel against the famous figure who made his name known across the land as the mercenary hero."

Ian was intensely staring at the sword that was aimed at him. He then moved his gaze to look at Ryan who was burning with hostility.

"Young Master Ryan."

“I am no longer a bastard who deserves to be called a young master. Aren’t you already well aware of that?”

“…”

“Your sword…Please draw it.”

Having heard what Ryan had just said, Ian crumpled his face and brought his hand toward the treasured sword he had hanging on his waist.

*

“There is no color?”

Dumbfounded, Riley looked at Inaril who was sitting on the other side. He slowly got up.

“What are you…”

“… There probably isn’t.”

Before Riley could ask Nara, Inaril, the woman with blinds on her eyes who was sitting in front of the fireplace, spoke.

“It is obvious that I do not have a color.”

"..."

Nainiae had been holding her breath and observing the three people in front of her. Having heard what Inaril said, Nainiae carefully walked toward Inaril.

"Excuse me. May I touch your hand for a moment?"

"Yes."

Sitting in her chair, Inaril smiled gently and nodded.

"Of all tea I ever tasted, your tea was among the best with great aroma. How could I not allow you such a simple request?"

Riley didn't understand why Nainiae had asked such a question. Soon, Riley saw the hand that was on the armrest of the chair and furrowed his brows.

'It cannot be...'

The strange feeling that Riley had been sensing ever since he had first met this woman was due to her hand... To be exact, it was because of her skin that was pure white like snow. Riley had just realized this.

"... Ah."

Nainiae carefully touched the top of the woman's hand that was on the armrest. Nainiae was surprised all of the sudden and took the hand back.

"It's cold..."

"C... Cold?"

"..."

Just like Riley from earlier, Nara asked with a puzzled look on his face. Nainiae bit her lips and nodded to respond.

"Wait!"

Nara tumbled and walked toward the fireplace. Just like Nainiae had done earlier, Nara also touched Inaril's hand.

"T... This is?!"

Nara stared at Inaril with an intense gaze and repeatedly opened and closed his mouth like a fish. Inaril could not stand the awkwardness and the silence. She broke the silence first.

"Yes. Mr. Basilisk shouldn't be able to see my color. That's because my body..."

She rested for a moment and continued in serious tone,

“… already died 30 years ago.”

Nara and Nainiae were holding both of Inaril’s hands. Having heard her voice, they mumbled in order,

“30 years ago…”

“… body already died?”

Having hearing Nara and Nainiae, Inaril had a bitter smile on her face. She slowly nodded and explained briefly about how she died.

“By the sword of a very magnificent Hero.”

“A… Hero?”

“…”

Below her blinds, a teardrop rolled down along her face. Having noticed this, Nainiae thought it would be better not to ask any questions. Nainiae shook her head toward Nara.

“… If you really are someone who has already died 30 years ago…”

Riley was not interested in why or how she died. Riley asked in serious voice,

“… then why are you here?”

With a sad look on their faces, Nara and Nainiae watched Inaril cry. They held their breaths and turned to look at Riley.

‘Uuuu. Young Master!’

‘Please!’

Riley didn’t give a damn about the gazes he received from Nainiae and Nara. Riley didn’t take his eyes off from Inaril who was sitting in front of him. He crossed his fingers between his hands and continued the questioning.

“How could you have a conversation with us? Are you a ghost or something?”

“No.”

Riley was no longer talking to her in a respectful tone. Inaril turned her head toward where Riley was. She shook her head.

“In that case, are your eyes drenched in pitch black color?”

Nainiae and Nara's shoulders flinched.

"Y... Young Master?"

"Eyes being drenched in pitch black color? That is..."

Despite Nainiae and Nara's reactions, again, Riley didn't mind them at all. Thinking about a purple human who he had run into before, Riley said,

"A dead person is alive and moving. That's a little strange, don't you think? Even that famous Priestess does not possess the ability to revive the dead."

Feeling the tension, Nainiae and Nara looked at Inaril who was sitting in her chair.

"By any chance, could you show us your eyes...Could it be that you cannot show them to us because of a sword wound?"

Having heard Riley's question, Inaril vacantly opened her mouth. However, somehow, she looked relieved. Inaril said,

"... It is you."

"What?"

Riley crumpled his eyebrows.

“I have a responsibility that I must fulfill even in my death.”

With a smile, Inaril got up.

“It was definitely here…”

She was trying to get to the fireplace and extended her hand toward it. Wondering what she was trying to do, Riley hardened his face.

“Wait! Your hand! Hand!”

There was fire burning in full force in the fireplace, yet Inaril was putting her hand in there. Nara panicked and tried to stop her. However…Inaril’s hand was quicker. Her hand was already inside the flames.

“Uuuuaaa, ak?!”

Inaril was putting her hand into the fire, and Nara tightly closed his eyes. However, even after a while, he couldn’t hear anything. Nara tried opening his eyes a little.

“Excuse me… What are you doing now?”

“… Um?”

Inaril tried opening and closing her hand that she just put inside the fireplace. This time, Inaril furrowed her brows.

“… Huh?”

“I… Isn’t that hot?”

Inaril went back to digging inside the flames with her hand. Nara asked if she was all right. However, he could not hear the response for that question.

“… It’s not here.”

“Pardon?”

“Huh? Why is it not…”

Inaril stopped her words before finishing the sentence. She suddenly turned her head.

“… Iril!”

*

It was at a forest on the outer edge of the Romella Village.

Breaking out in a cold sweat, Ian was pushed back.

"... Kuuuk?!"

With a vacant look on his face, the young man there had no choice but to watch the old butter being pushed back. He had been chasing the swift movements of the girl's arm.

"Gramps. What are you?!"

"Uuuuk...."

"I said what are you!"

Iril the girl swung her sword in a large motion and pushed back the old man once again. She then shouted at the old butler that she was fighting.

"That swordsmanship...Where did you learn it!!"

Chapter 178 - The Sword Witch (4)

The young man was well aware that the old butler possessed formidable muscular strength. Watching the butler being pushed back, the young man had impressed look on his face.

'It may look like the girl is swinging recklessly, but each and every move... They are all flawless without any gaps. They are magnificent.'

It seemed that the girl was not too concerned about the difference in physical size and strength. She was swinging her sword and pushing back the butler. Watching this, Ryan struggled and got up.

'Still, how...'

Earlier, during his duel against the butler, Ryan was being beaten with quite a substantial difference. Remembering this, Ryan turned his gaze toward Ian.

'... How come Ian is using the same swordsmanship as the master?'

He was curious about this.

'Just how?'

A few days ago…

After being kicked out of his own family and being abandoned by the family of the fiancée he was with, what Ryan had decided to search was the sword.

Wondering around aimlessly, he had been helping people or slaying monsters. He was living like a vagrant. The reason why he settled in Romella Village was because he met a girl named Iril and a woman named Inaril.

‘So, did you say your name is Ryan? I heard from Iril that you are from a family that is famous for swordsmanship. In that case, you must have swung swords for a long time.’

Ryan challenged the woman who couldn’t even see because she had a blind on her eyes. Although he challenged her numerous times, the results were all same.

One sided defeat.

It was a shock for him to face defeat from someone who was blinded. Also, what was even shocking was that the sword that the woman swung never once carried mana.

‘How did you do it?’

With just pure swordsmanship techniques, the blind woman maintained perfect victory records. Ryan asked the woman

because he thought the woman seemed to know very well the ‘answer to the sword’ that he had been seeking through his aimless journey.

‘That swordsmanship, please teach me too!’

‘Ryan.’

The woman asked Ryan like this.

‘You have spent countless days with swords, right? I could tell from clashing swords with you.’

‘That’s right.’

‘While you were swinging your sword like that, through those days, how often have you wielded your sword with the heart of wanting to protect someone?’

He asked a question about his heart. The question was like the one that Count Stein, his father, asked before.

‘If you had been swinging your sword with just the intent to win, then I cannot teach you the swordsmanship.’

Having heard her words, Ryan bit his lips.

‘However…’

‘…?’

‘I can teach you the heart you seek.’

She said she could teach him the mindset. Having heard her words, Ryan decided to serve the blind woman of the Romella Village, the one who was called the Sword Witch, as his master. He had been staying here ever since.

“… Gramps, I’ll give you three seconds. Tell me in three seconds where you learned your sword. If you don’t, I really might kill you.”

Listening to the voice from the little girl, who was his senior in swordsmanship, Ryan got a grip from the sidetracking thoughts. He looked at Ian’s side again.

“…”

It seemed he was gasping for air. He calmed his breathing. With intrigued eyes, Ian looked at Iril, the girl who had her sword aimed at him, and finally said,

“Actually, I would like to ask you that question, young lady.”

Ian wiped off the sweat that was flowing below his chin. He asked

what he was curious about.

“How come you are using the same swordsmanship as me?”

With his eyes narrowed, Ian was asking the same question. Wondering what was happening, he looked at Iril.

“…”

The look on her face was exuding more violent atmosphere than ever.

“… Also.”

As if she could not go easy on him anymore, Iril was about to charge in at Ian with deadly intensity. At that moment, Ian said,

“The owner of the sword that Young Master Ryan is holding in his chest right now…”

Iril was about to charge toward Ian, but before she could even take any steps to kick the ground toward him, her legs petrified.

“The owner of the sword… must be dead…”

“…?”

“That’s a sword of a dead person. How come you? How?”

Listening to Ian, Ryan held his breath.

“… Shut up.”

Just like the fireplace at the master’s home that never ceased to burn, Iril looked like she was burning up in intensity. However, after Ian’s mumbling, her intensity froze like a frozen lake during middle of the winter.

“Not dead…”

“Iril?”

Ryan was trying to take a step toward Iril. Iril was holding her sword on her right hand. She swung it widely through the air. She raised her head that she had pulled down a moment ago and shouted.

“My grandmother is!”

Ian opened his eyes wide and strained them to stare at Iril. He confirmed the purple eyes on Iril’s face and tightened his grip on this sword.

‘It’s coming!’

“… not dead!”

It seemed what Ian muttered inside was right. Iril stumped on the ground to charge toward Ian. She was coming at speed that was several levels faster than before.

*

“Iril?”

Riley muttered as he wondered if the woman simply forgot to include the ‘na’ sound in her own name. Inaril shook her head and grabbed her staff for the blind.

“I am sorry. I think I’ll have to save the detailed explanation for later.”

Tagak, tagak…

Feeling the ground with the staff, she was trying to get out of the house. Riley extended his hand out to grab her.

“Hey, wait a min…”

Not just his hand, but his words stopped in the middle. Nara and Nainiae were standing to left and right of Riley. Wondering what that was for, they had question marks on their faces.

“You…”

“Mr. Riley, please follow me too.”

Just now, from Inaril, Riley was able to detect something. He was staring at Inaril’s back. Inaril opened the door and breathed in the air outside. She added in a calm voice,

“The sword I am supposed to give you is missing.”

The sword disappeared…

“By any chance, are you….”

Having heard her words, Nainiae furrowed her eyebrows like Riley. She remembered what the goddess told her in Riley’s dream.

‘When you wake up, please find Mr. Riley’s holy sword. Of the purple people who live in your world, one of them should have it.’

Inaril said she died 30 years ago and the sword that she was supposed to give to Riley was missing.

Riley and Nainiae put together the puzzles in their heads and found answers. They tumbled and headed out to catch up to Inaril who left the house earlier.

“What the… Just what’s happening?”

Nara was the only one who still didn’t understand the situation. Breaking cold sweat, he also left the house and followed after Riley and Nainiae.

“I’ll help!”

Inaril was using the staff to feel the ground as she walked. Nainiae caught up to her and said she will help Inaril. Nainiae then promptly asked,

“The Holy Sword, that is the one that went missing, right?”

“How could you know that?”

Riley was the only one who supposed to know about this, yet Nainiae was also aware of this, so Inaril panicked. She turned to where Nainiae was standing and asked.

“This kid became my accomplice.”

Riley said Nainiae was his accomplice. Nainiae put on dissatisfied look on her face. Meanwhile, Inaril put on a puzzled look on her face.

“An accomplice… You mean more like a help.”

“…?”

“Anyway, hurry up and tell me. Tell me what happened.”

Riley added that it was all right for Inaril to tell Nainiae. Thinking it could not be helped, Inaril sighed and explained why she quickly left the house.

“I have a granddaughter.”

“A granddaughter?”

“I can’t say that she is related to me by blood, but she is as precious as a real granddaughter to me. She is a child who I took in. To be precise, that child found me, but… The important thing is that I think that child, Iril, took the Holy Sword.”

Riley looked at Nainiae and asked,

“Your eye?”

“Not yet.”

“Tsk.”

Riley crumpled his face and clicked his tongue. He looked around and asked Inaril this time.

“About this girl who is your granddaughter, what’s her age?”

“About fifteen to sixteen…”

“What does she look like?”

“She has her hair tied to the back. She has parted bangs to the front. She is probably wearing a round and flat hat. The hat probably looks pretty strange because I made it myself.”

Based on her description, Riley started to look around the village. Inaril shook her head once again and suggested,

“That child… She is quite famous in Romella Village. I think it would be faster to ask the villagers.”

Having heard her words, Nara decided to do so right away. He found a villager who was walking by. He quickly went to the villager and asked,

“Hello, excuse me! By any chance… have you seen a child named Iril?”

“Iril? Why is an outsider asking about Iril?”

The villager was a farmer. He looked at Nara with suspicious gaze. However, he found Inaril behind Nara and asked,

“Do you know Ms. Inaril?”

“Ah, yes! She said she was looking for Ms. Iril.”

Nara nodded, and the farmer muttered that he should have just said so earlier. He pointed at the opposite side of the path he just came from.

“If you are asking about Iril, she was headed to the entrance of the village with some young man. Now that I think about it, I heard he is a new pupil that Ms. Inaril took in recently? He looked strong and appeared to have the good-looking face of someone from a nobility family! Um, um. Now that I think about it, Iril is at the age where she should start thinking about her future!”

Having heard the farmer’s explanation, Riley turned his head toward the direction that the farmer pointed at. He then looked at Nainiae,

“Nainiae.”

“Yes!”

With her response, Nainiae was trying to swing her arm wide. Nara quickly turned to go back to where everyone was.

“Huk! W… Wait! I’ll go with you!”

Nara was aware that Nainiae's movement was a preparation for the teleportation magic. He tumbled and extended his arm out. However...

"..."

Not just Nainiae, but Riley and Inaril were... Along with a burst of light, they were gone.

"Ah..."

"... Huh?"

Nara was extending his hand toward an empty space. He was petrified like that. The farmer, who told Nara the whereabouts of Iril, was also petrified like Nara.

*

"Ugh... Ugh..."

On her hat and shoulders, she was drenched in blood. Iril looked at the ground where the corpse was lying down. Her breathing was rough.

"Iril... You..."

Because it was winter, every time she panted, her breath came out visibly like smoke. Ryan vacantly stared at Iril. Ryan looked like about half of his soul was out of his body. He directed his gaze down to the dead body that was stepped on by Iril's feet.

"..."

The dead body was silent.

"... I am well aware."

It was not certain if Iril had calmed down. She started to mutter in low voice.

"I know at least that grandmother already had died. I..."

"..."

"I know that grandmother is a dead person. I..."

Looking down at the dead body, she tightly held on to the sword. She bit her lips and tried to suppress her fury.

"I wish you could just die, but..."

Iril was huffing and puffing. She slowly moved her eyes and

looked at the old butler who was looking down at the dead body.

"..."

The dead body could not speak human language. To be precise, Ian was looking at the dead body of a monster. With sorrowful eyes, Ian looked at Iril. She opened her mouth.

"If you died, then grandmother would be sad."

The opponent that Iril swung her sword like a lightning earlier was not Ian.

Ian had a long journey here. He then had to duel against Ryan and then Iril right afterwards in a row. Ian was exhausted, and there was a monster behind Ian that was about to ambush him. This was the reason why Iril suddenly gritted her teeth and swung her sword.

"... You are the Hero, aren't you?"

Iril lowered her sword. With bitter look her face, she asked Ian.

"Before I saw your sword, I didn't notice it at all, but... The one who was said to have become a Hero after cutting my grandmother, the Sword Witch... You are that magnificent Hero, aren't you?"

"..."

Ian didn't answer.

"... Please follow me. I'll introduce you to my grandmother."

Iril lowered her head all the way down and muttered that she would introduce Ian to her grandmother. Ryan extended his hand toward her.

"Iril..."

"I am sorry, Ryan. I think we will have to stop the test for a moment."

Thump... Thump... Iril was walking. Her steps were lacking in strength. Watching her walk like this from the back, Ryan saw black mist forming behind Iril. Ryan furrowed his brows.

"... That is?"

While Ryan was vacantly staring at the mist forming behind Iril, Ian, who was looking at Iril with bitter look on his face, suddenly crumpled his face and charged forward.

"...?"

Because of Ian’s sudden movement, Iril put on a question mark on her face, and red liquid was spread on her face once again.

‘Huh?’

An unidentified purple hand made of vapor didn’t pierce through Iril’s heart, its intended target. Instead, it pierced Ian’s heart.

Chapter 179 - The Sword Witch (5)

‘What the…? Why?’

Feeling the blood drops splattered on her face, by the hand encased in purple light that filled a part of her vision…Iril’s thought process came to a sudden halt.

“This…. This is… Why all of the sudden?”

As if it was disappointed about missing its target, the hand fiddled with its fingers. Ian looked at the hand. Having managed to hold on to his consciousness, Ian muttered,

“As I thought, there are still… remnants…”

Blood was gushing out from Ian’s pierced chest. He looked at Iril in front of him and struggled to talk.

“Please… run.”

Ian had a blank look on his face. It seemed that he was unable to comprehend the situation. With a pale blue face, he started to open and close his mouth.

“Ah, ah ah…”

Was it because Iril was not able to get a grip? Ian crumpled his

face to stay conscious despite the pain. He pushed Iril away hard and said,

“The one… that this hand is targeting is… you. So… please… run away… as far as you can…”

Even after being pushed by Ian’s hand, Iril was still petrified as if she hadn’t snapped out of it yet.

“That is… Just what are you…”

“… Young Master Ryan!”

Ian concluded that he could not let this be. He quickly turned his head towards Ryan and shouted. Ryan also had his mouth vacantly open. Having heard the shouting, he flinched his shoulders.

“Take the young lady to safety…”

Even though Ian’s chest had been pierced and was gushing out blood, he was still conscious and thinking hard to make the right decision. Watching this, Ryan realized why Ian was called a hero by the mercenaries. Ryan gritted his teeth and started to move his legs.

“Iril.”

After getting a grip, Ryan came to Iril and started to pull her arm.

“G… Gramps… Gramps!”

Iril started to struggle and extended her hand out desperately towards Ian.

“I… Inaril…”

Ian was holding on to the hand that had pierced his chest. Toward Iril who was being dragged away by Ryan, Ian said with great difficulty,

“To my… To your master… Please deliver this message for me.”

Based on the sword and the response that the girl showed, Ian thought that the master who fell by his sword must be still alive. Ian pulled together his fleeing consciousness and said,

“Please tell her I am sorry.”

Ryan, who was pulling Iril away, looked at the butler’s face.

“Ian…”

Considering the hand that had pierced his chest and the amount of blood loss, Ryan was sure that Ian definitely knew that this was going to be his death. However…Ian could not look more determined.

“… Please tell her that…”

Ian struggled to continue.

“… I adored her.”

The light in the butler’s eyes was growing lifeless. Ryan bit his lips. He nodded and started to pull Iril away again.

“G… Gramps! Let… go! Gramps!”

Iril was being pulled back. She shouted and struggled.

“My grandmother! He is the one who my grandmother longed to meet again for so long! I must bring him to her! I cannot let… I cannot let it be like this!”

“Iril, we must go.”

“Instead of me… That old man needs to be brought to grandmother! Let me go… Let go! Ryan! Ryan!!”

Ryan was born with exceptional muscular strength. With that, he earned the title of Strong-sword at the mansion.

Iril was ahead of Ryan when it came to skills and fine

movements. However, when it came to raw strength, Iril could not win against Ryan.

“We must leave!”

Ryan shouted at Iril. It seemed the purple light hand realized that it missed the target. The hand started to move back.

“… Kuuuhuuk.”

Ian was desperately trying to hold on to the hand. Now, he faltered and got on his knees.

‘Damn it. Just what kind of ability is this? Is it related to dimensions? It takes physical form when it attacks and disappears like smoke when it isn’t attacking? Is that a part of its abilities?’

Back in Ian’s prime, he had run into a few ‘purple humans’ with similar powers. Ian was shaking his eyes to desperately hold on to his consciousness that was becoming fainter.

‘It’s dangerous. I must warn Young Master Ryan… It will close the distance in an instant and target her again.’

The purple space appeared behind Iril in a blink of an eye and the hand jumped out of it. Thinking about this, Ian raised his hand toward Iril and Ryan who were moving further away.

‘If that young lady is Inaril’s… my master’s will… No… If she dies here, the tragedy might repeat.’

To be precise, Ian was trying to reach for them with his arm.

“Huuuk. Huuuk…”

Now, his vision had already gone dark. His body fell to a pool of his own blood.

‘Am I… going to die like this?’

Perhaps it was the weather. Perhaps it was the wind coming into the hole in his chest. Ian thought it was getting cold. Before he died, he thought about Riley.

‘… It’s cold.’

Thinking about Riley who must be on a winter trip with Nainiae, Ian mumbled inside,

‘Young Master, please watch out for… cold.’

He was going to think about the people from the mansion and other mercenaries he had met so far. However…Sadly, his dying wish would not continue to the end.

“… Ian.”

“…”

It was because he could hear a voice.

‘Am I hearing things?’

In the utter darkness, the voice was coming from above. The voice sounded familiar. It was the voice of the youngest son of Count Stein in Iphalleta family.

“What are you doing here?”

Ian could clearly hear the voice. Ian figured the phantom voice before death must be extra special. He smiled and waited for the end.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes.”

“That lass is at the inn, right?”

“Yes, she is probably there.”

The voice of Riley, the Young Master he had missed so much, was

not the only voice Ian was hearing. Now, Ian could also hear Nainiae's voice. Ian was now thinking that the phantom voices were quite generous considering that he was on his way to death. The voices could be heard again through Ian's ears.

"Hurry and take this rascal there. He is still breathing. As long as you take him there, she should be able to save him. He is one tough rascal."

"What about you, Young Master?"

"…"

"…?"

Ian was smiling while facing death. The tilted-up tips of his mouth were bent the other way after sensing something terrifying.

"I will go find the one…"

Ian's consciousness was faint because he was on brink of death. However, the sensation was enough to shock him awake. The deadly intent was so sharp that it felt like just breathing was enough to get one's neck cut.

"…The little bastard who did this to Ian…"

The sound of a sword being drawn… It was barely audible. The

one responsible for the deadly aura said,

"... I'm going to hunt down and beat the shit out of the bastard."

*

At a forest near the Romella Village, a blind woman was tightly holding her staff and running through the grass.

'Iril!'

As soon as she moved to the forest with Riley and Nainiae, she felt the smell of blood. Inaril tumbled and rushed to the direction. Now, she felt an evil energy not so far from here. She was chasing after it.

'Ryan!'

As for the man who was collapsed and bleeding, she had left him to Riley and Nainiae. To find her granddaughter and her pupil, she was rushing through the forest. Inaril quickly turned to the right.

'Someone is targeting me... Who could it be?'

Instead of the energy from her granddaughter or her pupil, Inaril was chasing after the energy from a sword that was similar to her own. She felt a presence that was catching up to her in fearsome speed. Inaril turned her head around.

‘This is?!”

Without any sound, a sword was flying toward her with mana. Inaril detected the sword. She stopped running and swung her staff on her right hand.

“… Kuk.”

Kwang!

Because it contained mana, the sword’s power was as deadly as its speed. When it collided with Inaril’s staff, her body was pushed far back.

“I would like you to explain in detail what happened and what is happening.”

Soon, from the direction that Inaril was facing, a low voice could be heard along with footsteps.

“The thing is, my butler almost died.”

“Mr. Riley.”

Inaril realized it was Riley who threw the sword at her. She mumbled his name.

“Although I don’t like bothersome things, I don’t like my own people being messed with.”

He drew another sword from his waist and aimed it at Inaril. Riley asked a question to Inaril.

“My butler was with your granddaughter and your pupil. How come he is on the ground with a hole in his chest? I would like to definitely find out why.”

“…”

“Did you do it? Is that your specialty?”

Having heard his question, Inaril was going to shake her head, but instead, she quickly twisted her upper body.

“… Well then.”

It was because another sword had been thrown toward her face.

“What is it? You better explain properly.”

Riley had thrown two swords at her to threaten her to speak. The look on the man’s face was cold as ice.

“Mr. Riley, what happened to your butler is very unfortunate. However, it probably wasn’t my pupil or my granddaughter who did it.”

Riley wiggled his eyebrows.

“Are you saying you did it then?”

“Please calm yourself. I was with you the whole time.”

“I’m asking if you had a hand in it.”

“No.”

Inaril shook her head once again and said,

“The purple humans that the Basilisk mentioned…How many of them did you say you have met so far?”

Riley thought about the purple humans he met so far and said,

“Five.”

“In that case, you are one short of all six parts.”

It seemed Inaril was well aware of the purple humans. Riley subdued his deadly aura toward her a little and heeded to what she

had just explained.

“Please follow me. We don’t have the time to do this here right now.”

Inaril started to move. Riley retrieved the swords he had thrown at Inaril and followed her.

“Mr. Riley, of the purple humans you have met so far, how many did you finish off for good...What I mean is, how many did you incinerate?”

Riley said,

“Two.”

The dark mage Hurial who controls corpses and Kabal the mercenary with monstrous strength... Riley had made certain of their deaths. He explained about the other purple humans.

“One bastard ran off. One became a fool. As for the last one, that one cannot be hunted down at the moment. That makes five.”

Having heard his explanation, Inaril, who was pulling her chin and running, said in a low voice,

“That must be the Left Leg, the friend named Epidemic.”

“It looks like you know him well.”

“Yes.”

She paused for a moment and added,

“I am no longer a part of them, but I used to be one of the purple humans in the past.”

Riley and Inaril were running side by side. With piercing gaze, Riley glared at Inaril’s face.

“Six parts… Right Hand, Left Hand, Right Leg, Left Leg, Head, and Heart… The people with special powers who appear to be purple in Basilisks’ eyes were called by those names.”

“In that case…”

“Yes, I was the Right Hand.”

Riley felt a presence in the front. He redirected his gaze to the front.

“Kuruk?”

Along the path that they were running through, there was a monster with the face of hyena. It was lurking around with a flail.

“… I’ll handle this.”

Although she could not see, it seemed that she could detect the smell or roar of beasts. She tightly grabbed the staff. She swung her right hand as soon as she closed the distance.

“Khe, Kuk! Kuuuu…. Kuk!”

The monster revealed its animosity toward the two humans that were running toward it. It swung its flail to smash the Inaril’s head who was charging towards it. However, the flail missed its target. It merely grazed the empty air.

“…?”

While running with Inaril, Riley opened his eyes big after seeing Inaril demonstrating her swordsmanship.

‘It cannot be…’

Thump…

The monster’s head fell.

“This was… my ability as the Right Hand among the purple humans.”

After cutting down the monster, Inaril started to run again. She said in a quiet voice,

“The Blessing of the Sword.”

“…”

“Of course, the place I lived must have been completely different from where you were, so the swordsmanship couldn’t be identical down to the fine movements, but… It is like the blessing that you have.”

Chapter 180 - Salvation (1)

A blessing much like the one he had received in his past life.

Inaril said that she had the Blessing of the Sword. With a look of disbelief, Riley looked at her.

“That cannot be... The Blessing of the Sword can only be possessed by just one person.”

Inaril was dashing forward. Having heard Riley, Inaril pulled her chin and explained briefly why she also possessed the same blessing.

“We each lived in different worlds.”

“...?”

“You are right. One person in the world where you used to live and one person in this world... The Blessing of the Sword can only be possessed by one human.”

Still unable to understand, Riley had a question mark on his face, remaining silent. Inaril added,

“I used to have the blessing...”

Having heard that, Riley realized what she was getting at. Riley

furrowed his brows and looked at her.

“The sword technique I just showed you is… like a memory from when I had the blessing.”

If everything was as she had stated, then after she died, nobody would possess the Blessing of the Sword.

“Considering how your voice sounds, you must have been born into this world not long after I died. It was…as intended by the Black Butterfly.”

It seemed Inaril was aware of the Black Butterfly, the Goddess from Riley’s past life that Nainiae had met in his dreams. Getting a rough idea of what was happening, Riley nodded.

“When you died and I was born, the Blessing of the Sword was returned to me… Is that what you are trying to say?”

Inaril nodded.

“It is a guess, but that’s probably right. Young Master, as you said earlier, the blessing can be possessed by only one person in the world. It is an ability from the World Below.”

The World Below…It looked like Inaril also knew about a few things regarding his past life. Riley casually asked,

“It looks like you know about certain things very well?”

“Yes…it is also the reason why I’m still alive. The one who enable me to move gave me an order along with an explanation that you will come and find me.”

“An order?”

“The Holy Sword…”

Inaril muttered the words ‘Holy Sword’. She paused for a moment and finished what she could not earlier.

“Deliver the Salvation to you. That is the order I was given.”

“Salvation? Were you the one who possessed it? Still, that sword doesn’t exist in this world…”

“The power from your past world is killing the people of this world. There is nothing to be surprised about a sword from your past world existing in this one.”

Inaril stopped walking. She looked around and turned to the right.

“This way!”

Following Inaril, he found what appeared to be a trace of someone having passed through the grass. He found more traces and furrowed his brows.

‘This is…?’

He saw a few trees that were pulled out in a mess. He caught up to Inaril and said,

“About the one you call as your pupil…I don’t know who she is, but I think her situation is quite dire. We should hurry.”

Unlike the path earlier, this area had many obstacles, so Inaril was not able to run as well as before. Riley extended his arm out and held Inaril by her waist.

“Go straight in this direction?”

“Yes, she is continuing to move. She is probably running.”

“From what?”

Being held by Riley, Inaril felt the wind on her face. She said,

“Mr. Riley, you said earlier that three of the purple humans are still alive, right?”

“That’s right.”

“By any chance, is a figure named Rebethra, among them? The man who is in charge of being the Heart.”

Riley thought about the mysterious arm that had come through the dimensional space and had taken the Archbishop away. He confirmed that Rebethra was among the ones who were still alive.

“It is likely to be him.”

“That bastard?”

“He must be after the Salvation.”

She was saying the Salvation, his Holy Sword, was being targeted. Since a while ago, the jolting sensation in his palm refused to stop. Riley looked at his palm and started to pour in mana into his legs.

*

“… Ugh, Ugh!”

Inside the forest, Ryan took a quick look behind him to see that the black space was gradually closing the distance from the back. Ryan gritted his teeth and started to pour in mana into his legs.

“Damn it… Damn it…”

He held Iril on his waist. He thought that running away might be easier if Iril snapped out of it. However, Iril bit her lower lips with tears in her eyes. She was unable to get a grip.

“If I… If I died instead…”

Iril was mumbling that she wished she had died instead of the old butler. Ryan looked at Iril. It seemed that Ryan had reached the limit of his endurance. He hid behind a large tree and gasped for air, panting.

‘Just what is that thing?’

It was not like the chaser had eyes.

It was a black space floating in the air. It occasionally had a hand jumping out of it. This monstrous object was… coming toward their direction. It was precisely targeting Iril.

‘It won’t cut with a sword either.’

Ryan’s sword had passed through the bizarre object. Meanwhile, as it was closing in with a violent intensity, the object tore off and stumped the grass and trees along its path.

‘Am I seeing things? If that’s not the case…I don’t feel any mana

from it, so how could it do all that?'

Leaning on the tree, Ryan was trying to catch his breath. Tranquility came to the forest. Wondering why it was so quiet all of the sudden, he slowly peeked out from the side of the tree.

'What the?'

The black space that was flying through the air to chase them until a moment ago, the black hand... had disappeared without a trace.

'It disappeared?'

Ryan wondered if everything that he had seen so far was just him hallucinating. Also, he thought that maybe he was dreaming. However, he could hear a sound. It sounded like something was being grinded.

"..."

Crunch, crunch...

Holding his breath, he focused on the sound. He realized that the sound was coming from the tree that he was leaning on.

"A squirrel?"

Perhaps it was a bug instead. Ryan thought about what could make such a grinding noise through the tree. He suddenly opened his eyes big and pulled Iril.

Crack!

Soon, the large tree developed a crack. Through the crack, a large purple light hand appeared and chased after Iril.

‘Damn it. I wasn’t hallucinating!’

It killed Ian. It destroyed the tree. It was chasing after them. Ryan realized that the black hand over there was not an illusion and he wasn’t dreaming. He put his hand on the sword on his waist.

Wheeec!

Containing mana, the sword was swung at the black hand which had come very close to them. However, the black hand didn’t stop moving.

“Kuk. Damn it! Iril! We can’t continue like this. It is too much to run while holding onto you! Get a grip and run with me! Or if you are going to have that vacant look on your face…”

Taking a few steps back, he tried to convince Iril to run. However, he found Iril’s enraged face. She was biting her lips. Ryan stopped what he was going to say.

“It’s because of that bastard… isn’t it?”

“…”

“That bastard killed the one who my grandmother was longing for.”

Iril pressed down on her hat with her right hand. She put her hand toward the other sword wrapped in bandages that Ryan had been carrying separately.

“I’ll avenge him…”

“I… Iril?”

“Instead of my grandmother, I will!”

The sword was not tightly wrapped in the bandages. Iril swung the sword in a large motion and unwrapped the bandages. Toward the hand that came right up to her face, she swung the sword toward it.

“Iril, no! That hand won’t!”

As Ryan feared, the sword she swung was unable to make an impact on the black hand, just like the time when Ryan tried it before with his sword. Iril’s swing went through the empty air.

‘Damn it!’

Ryan was watching Iril from the back. Thinking he could not let this continue, he extended his hand toward her.

It was to pull her away from there somehow and protect her from the black hand’s reach.

‘If she dies like this, then I won’t be able to face Ian.’

Ryan thought about Ian’s face just before he died. Ian had begged Ryan to protect Iril. Ryan was able to grab onto Iril and pull her. However…He realized that there was a bigger problem now.

‘What the…’

Another black space had appeared behind Ryan and another black hand jumped out of it.

‘… Is this the end for us?’

More than death itself, Ryan regretted not being able to carry out Ian’s dying wish. Ryan tightly closed his eyes.

‘I feel like I can understand a little about what the master told me.’

Inaril once asked Ryan if he had ever suffered the desperation of not being able to protect someone. Ryan thought about her words. However, he could hear someone's voice.

"... That's not how you use the sword."

"... We will handle it from here."

Ryan suddenly opened his eyes big.

"Uk?!"

Giiiiiiiiiic

Along with the sound of someone's feet dragging on the ground, Ryan and Iril's bodies were spun around once and raised up to the sky.

The woman with blinds pierced Ryan's arm sleeve and Iril's clothes with her staff to hang them on her staff. She swung her arm in a large motion to send them flying to the sky. Afterwards, the woman took a stance.

"M... Master?"

"Grandmother..."

Ryan and Iril saw the woman who had appeared at the scene and sobbed.

"..."

Perhaps because the objects didn't have eyes, the two black hands were unaware of the fact that Iril and Ryan were gone. The hands were charging in. Now, their target had been changed to the blind woman.

'Now there are two.'

Just like the black hands, Inaril could not see. However, she had the senses that allowed her to feel the energies from the hands.

'Salvation...'

Inaril turned her face toward the sword that Iril dropped. She raised her right arm.

Pac!

The sword was under Inaril's feet. With that sound, the sword was stuck on her palm.

"Master! Be careful! Those hands! They are bizarre ones that dematerializes when attacked!"

Ryan shouted as he fell back down to the ground. Inaril nodded as if she understood.

‘Will it work? Like before?’

She placed the staff behind her back. With the sword close to her chest, Inaril seemed to be calm her breathing for a moment. She tried swinging the sword in her hand. It was like a dance.

‘… As I thought, it is not working.’

Cutting through the wind, the sword was swung in clean motions. However, unfortunately, it seemed that it was not possible to stop the black hands that were coming toward her.

“Ah…”

Even his master’s sword was not able to cut the black hands. Feeling like there was nothing left now, Ryan vacantly opened his mouth.

“… Please take it. It seems to be longing for its original owner. The sword is probably wishing that it wasn’t being held by an old woman.”

“….?”

“Grandmother?”

Inaril was saying things that didn’t make much sense. Ryan and Iril floated question marks on their faces.

“… No. It’s not that there is anything wrong with you. This bastard only cares about the blessing. Do you think it cares about the person who wields it? It’s been sitting around and grew fat…It looks like a young master who grew up the wrong way?”

Ryan realized that there was another voice besides his master’s voice in the mix. Ryan flinched his shoulders.

‘Wait. This voice… I have heard it somewhere?’

Ryan had no idea when he showed up. Without any presence, he had just shown up out of the blue next to Inaril. The man haphazardly glanced at the black hands and grabbed hold of the sword that Inaril handed to him.

“That’s an interesting analogy. Still, it must be a treasured sword that has spent a lifetime with you… Why don’t you say something after being reunited with it?”

The black hands, which had trampled over even huge ancient trees, were right in front of his face. However, the boy and the blind woman could not look more leisurely. It was as if they were on a picnic.

“Say something after being reunited with it…”

In a respectful stance, as if she was serving a king or a god, Inaril placed the sword on her two hands and handed it to Riley. Ryan had never seen anyone being so respectful and proper. He moved his gaze.

“… I am so sick of it.”

The one who received the sword from Inaril was the youngest son of the Iphalleta Family who Ryan knew very well.

Chapter 181 - Salvation (2)

‘Riley?’

Riley that Ryan knew was the kind of person who refused to leave the library during the winter and stayed right next to the fireplace and cocoa. However, Riley was in the forest near Romella Village. Ryan couldn’t figure out why Riley was here.

‘Why is he here?’

Before Ryan had the time to think about it some more, Riley tried swinging the sword left to right. He snorted through his nose and looked at its old edge.

“I really am so sick of it.”

It truly had been a long time. He was wielding the sword only after dying and being revived. He peeked a smile and looked at the black hands that were coming toward him.

“Step back for a moment.”

Inaril had taken a knee to the ground in a respectful pose. Having heard his voice from above, she nodded lightly and got up.

“I delivered the sword to the successor.”

“All right. I said I got it.”

Wielding the sword, he swung his shoulder as he responded and Inaril suddenly disappeared as if she had suddenly sunk to the ground.

“… Master.”

“… Grandmother.”

After being thrown to the sky, Iril and Ryan landed on the ground. They were trying to find where Inaril went. They felt a presence behind themselves, so they turned their heads.

“Both of you watch carefully.”

To her granddaughter and the pupil she had taken in not long ago, Inaril told them to watch the boy who was swinging the sword. She turned her face toward the boy and added,

“He is the master of the sword.”

“The master…of the sword?”

“Riley is?”

It looked like her pupil knew who Riley was. Inaril tilted her

head to the side for a moment. However, she was not able to ask him if he knew Riley well.

“Ah.”

Suddenly, flames started to catch onto the bandages that wrapped the sword.

“Flames on the sword…”

Inaril was not able to see this. Instead, Iril watched the bandages burning up in flames. She muttered with a look of disbelief.

Wharurururu

Ryan also vacantly stared at the sword burning up in flames. Now, the bandages were all completely gone. They had become dust. Ryan finally got a grip and looked at Riley.

“The bandages are gone…”

Now, there were just the blade edge and the handle on the sword. Iril observed the sword, snapped out of her shock and looked at Riley.

“… I don’t know who you are trying to please, but…”

After burning away the bandages by setting his sword in flames, Riley swung the sword at the black hand that was almost right in front of his face.

‘W… What the…?’

It was literally in a blink of an eye.

‘What just happened?’

Riley looked like he was still standing in the same spot. His clothes waved lightly in the air. It felt like a sharp light had just swept through the area. That was all that others could feel.

“The arm… is cut off.”

The black hands were unstoppable. So far, it didn’t matter how they swung their swords at it. However, this time, without any sound, a thin line was drawn on the black arm and the cut off part fell to the ground.

‘It’s working!’

Until now, cutting it or trying to deal blunt damage to it only resulted in a sensation of passing through the empty air. This time the black hand had been cut in half by Riley’s sword and fell to the ground.

Iril and Ryan saw a glimmer of hope. With hope in their eyes, they started to follow Riley's movements.

Not as a girl and a young man, but as swordsmen... their desire to witness and remember Riley's movement was more important than everything else.

"..."

Again, Riley swung the sword.

He was trying to cut down the other black hand that was coming from the back.

Whal... whal...

Even after all bandages had burned away, the sword was still burning in white flames. The swing of the sword looked like a flag was flowing through the air. The sword grazed past the second black hand.

"Ah."

It seemed Iril and Ryan were not able to follow his movements again. They just had their mouth open vacantly.

"... Tsk."

Now, both the black hands were on the ground. Riley clicked his tongue big time all of the sudden and quickly turned his body around.

Dragging the tip of his foot on the ground, he made a circle with it and swung the sword at the black space that was still floating next to him.

‘I cut the black hand with Salvation and yet this black space is still here. It means it is not over yet.’

Riley generated a quick, swift and powerful whirlwind with the sword to push the two black spaces near to him. He then promptly moved his legs and moved to where Inaril and others were.

‘If these things were connected to the owners of the hands, there should have been a flinching reaction when the arms were cut off. There was not even the slightest reaction. That means these things do not have the ability to connect the hands to their owners…They must be controlled by someone else.’

Riley was standing in front of Inaril and the other two. He looked at the black spaces which came together to form a bigger space. Riley narrowed his eyes.

‘They combined, but the black space is still smaller than the one I had seen in Lower Solia. It might be possible for more small black spaces to open nearby. It is just that…’

The Holy Sword was already in Riley's possession. It was correct to assume the party responsible for controlling the black spaces and the hands was unable to achieve their initial objective.

'He failed to achieve his objective and yet these things are still here. There are two possibilities.'

They could be staying here to kill Riley who had taken possession of the Holy Sword. The other possibility was that they were here to accomplish a goal separate from the Holy Sword.

'...As I thought!'

Riley felt an energy from behind. He opened his eyes big and turned his head around. Inaril quickly turned her head around the same time.

"Uuuuk?"

"Kiiiaaaak?!"

Inaril quickly tripped off her granddaughter and her pupil to get them to fall over. Inaril twisted her upper body in a large motion.

'Even if I add the other black space that has just appeared in the mix, it would be still smaller than the last time.'

Riley projected that a few more spaces would appear. He cut off

the third black hand with the sword and brought his hand to his waist.

“You are using dirty tricks, Rebethra.”

Having confirmed her pupils’ safety, Inaril faced the black space and spoke. Through the black spaces, a resonating voice could be heard.

<You are the bitch who is using dirty tricks. You dare to betray us after taking the place of the Great One’s Right Hand...>

“... No.”

Inaril pulled her chin. It seemed that she was expecting a response. Toward the man beyond the black space who must be infuriated about now, Inaril said she will rectify his misjudgment.

“I merely chose the right path.”

<You arrogant corpse bitch... Because of you, the position of the Right Hand was vacant for the past decades. I need the position coughed out again.>

“...”

Inaril kept her silence. The one beyond the black space poured out curses at Inaril and used his ability on Iril who was on the

ground with sharpened eyes.

‘Again!’

Another black space was forming in front of them. While on the ground, Iril held her breath and became petrified.

“Ah, by the way, this bastard…”

Whoooooc

Wind blew at Iril’s face.

“… is still not trying to save his own ass yet. He must be confident?”

It was Riley.

<… Uuuk?>

Shooooc

Again, the sword engulfed in white flame was swung. The black hand that charged toward Iril was cut off clean.

“Last time, you poked at my nerves, so I had a hard time for a while. You could not have been the one to yap all that directly…

Who was the runt?”

In an instant, Riley cut off fifth and sixth black hands that appeared shortly afterwards. He predicted where the next black space was going to appear. He quickly turned his head toward the direction.

<H… How?>

After that, Riley neutralized the seventh and eighth spaces with sword throws before they could do anything. Riley gritted his teeth and said,

“About me getting hit that one time… All right! I just need to think of it as stepping on a poo. All I need to do is clean it off. However…”

Riley thought about his precious butler who was lying on the ground, drenched in blood. Riley’s face twitched with deadly intent. He continued to talk to the one beyond the black space.

“I cannot stand my people being messed with.”

It seemed that Riley still had not found out about Ryan being there. Riley was grinding his teeth toward someone beyond the space. Ryan held his breath.

‘Have you ever fought to protect someone?’

Ryan was not sure if Riley was the very definition of that but he was certain that Riley was fighting with the heart to protect someone.

"..."

Iril was also holding her breath.

"I'll make you pay dearly for making a hole in Ian's chest."

Iril was overwhelmed by Riley's deadly aura. However, she was also thinking about the old man who had his chest pierced because of her. This was why she was holding her breath.

"... Ian?"

Having heard Riley's words, Inaril's lips trembled as she said Ian's name.

"Did you just say...Ian?"

Riley was huffing and puffing at the one who was controlling the black hands by opening the black spaces. He turned his head and looked at Inaril.

Below Inaril's blind, a teardrop rolled down. The teardrop followed down along her chin and fell down.

It wet the forehead of Inaril's granddaughter who was vacantly sitting there.

"Ian... why is Ian..."

"Grandmother..."

Not sure what to do, Iril's lips trembled. She thought she should tell Inaril what happened. She held back her own tears.

"Grandmother, the truth is... Because of me... he..."

Because of her, the butler named Ian, the Hero that her grandmother had been looking for, was dead. Iril was going to explain all that. However, Iril heard someone's voice. It sounded like the voice was running out of breath.

"... Young Master!!"

Iril turned her head towards the direction of the voice. There, she found a girl who she had ran into before, recently. Iril opened her eyes big.

'Huh?'

The girl was wearing a maid uniform. It seemed she had gotten there through teleportation. There was a dimensional portal open

which was swirling in shape.

“Red Dragon…Andal?”

“What?”

Ryan knew who that maid was. Surprised, he opened his eyes big. He looked at Iril and tilted his head to the side.

“That big sis… I definitely… She was the one who used magic on Andal’s Mountain…”

Iril was muttering that Nainiae was a dragon. Ryan, still with his eyes open wide, looked at the maid who had just appeared at the scene.

‘Wait, now that I think about it… She is a Seven Circles mage at that age? Something is off?’

The maid girl didn’t notice Iril and Ryan staring at her. She bowed toward the master she served and took one step to the side.

“Mr. Ian is all right.”

“…?!”

Iril’s eyes shook wildly.

“Fortunately, it was not too late.”

After the girl stepped aside, an old man with herbs on his chest was walking forward while being supported by someone.

“Ugh. Ugh… Young Master!”

“Ian…”

It seemed that Riley had been worried all along. With a vacant look on his face, Riley stared at Ian. Sighing in relief, Riley looked angry.

“You really…”

“I… I’m sorry. Again, I ended up…causing problems!”

In a loud voice, Ian shouted his apology. Riley stared at Ian. As if he had seen enough, Riley sighed and shrugged.

“Do you feel like living?”

“… Yes.”

“Then that’s good enough.”

Riley stared at Nainiae. He had a look that questioned why Nainiae had brought Ian here. Nainiae lightly lowered her head and explained,

“That is... Mr. Ian... insisted that he must come here... So, as soon as Ms. Priesia’s treatment was complete, we came here.”

Having heard the explanation, Riley looked at Priesia who was supporting Ian.

“Don’t worry. He made it past the difficult part. Perhaps because his fundamental constitution is so strong, he recovered quickly even with a little bit of prayer.”

Priesia lifted her shoulder and told Riley that he could relax. It seemed that Riley was finally relieved. He sighed and moved his gaze toward Inaril who was standing next to him.

“... Ian?”

Inaril carefully tried calling out his name.

“...”

Ian was looking at Riley. He turned his gaze to the side and looked at the blind woman with light purple hair.

“Master?”

His voice was full of longing.

“I… Is it really you, Ian?”

“The blind… You are still wearing it.”

“Ian…”

They were reunited after several decades. It seemed they were being overcome with emotions. Inaril’s voice was choking as she called out his name.

“… I don’t know what the situation is here, but…”

The emotional reuniting scene continued. At that moment, an emotionless voice could be heard that shattered the mood.

“I would like you to postpone it for a later time.”

It was Riley.

“Nainiae, wrap this up.”

“Yes, Young Master.”

She waved her right hand and formed an isolation barrier. At the same time, she collected the people who were separated in two groups to one safe location. She opened a dimensional space behind her and brought out the swords that Riley had been using.

“Ian is safe, so that’s that.”

There were several dozens of black spaces. Riley was standing in the middle of them. He spun his Holy Sword, the Salvation, fixed his grip on the handle and said to the man who must be listening from beyond the space.

“As for the rest that should be done, they should be done.”

It seemed the sword was responding to the owner’s will. The Holy Sword named the Salvation started to grow the size of the flame on its edges.

Chapter 182 - Salvation (3)

"... Isn't that right?"

Lightly swinging the sword that was on fire, Riley asked. However, no response could be heard from the black space, which only had a cut off arm coming out from it.

"All right. Don't bother responding...For now that is."

Riley causally rolled his eyes and looked at Nainiae. With his glance, he gave her a different order. He then cut off another black hand that was coming from behind.

"We might as well talk face to face, so..."

Although it looked like Riley had his feet planted on the ground, his body slid forward. The group who was watching this opened their eyes wide.

'That is Riley?'

His speed was so incredible that Ryan could barely follow Riley's afterimages. He thought he knew Riley well, but now, Ryan felt like he had just gotten struck by a hammer on his head. He had a vacant look on his face.

'This is unbelievable.'

With the group behind him, Riley was cutting off every black hand that was coming toward them and burned them with the white flames. Before he realized, Nainiae came to stand next to Riley through teleportation. Riley muttered toward Nainiae,

“Will it be possible?”

“I won’t know for certain until I try.”

Having noticed Nainiae suddenly appearing next to Riley, Iril rubbed her eyes and checked where Nainiae was standing only a moment ago.

‘W… When?’

She could only figure that Nainiae must have used magic. Iril thought,

‘As I thought… She is a dragon.’

Nainiae was a beautiful girl, but Iril thought Nainiae must be Andal the dragon who she had run into on Andal’s mountain. She gulped and looked at Riley who was with Nainiae.

‘In that case, who is he?’

The boy appeared to be three to four years older than her. He was

swinging her grandmother's sword. Iril's eyes were gleaming as if she was mesmerized.

'He could be a dragon, or someone who can handle a dragon?'

Ian also looked surprised, not so different from Ryan or Iril. Ian was blinking his eyes. However...He was not sobbing or seriously agitated.

He looked calm.

He narrowed his wide open eyes and watched Riley's movements and Nainiae supporting Riley. That's all he did.

'Young Master..."

Just like how he wrote in his journal once, just like he expected, speculated... the Young Master of a certain Count family that he served was swing the sword in a way that was more magnificent than Ian had ever expected.

'Does that one make the total count 20?'

Riley thought about how many black hands he had cut down so far and mumbled.

There were 27 black spaces.

Initially, there was just one black space with an arm. Now, there had increased to 27.

‘I think it was about this much.’

Riley estimated that the one responsible for these black spaces must be running out. Nainiae was supporting Riley from the back by shooting magic to keep the hands in check. Riley signaled Nainiae with his eyes.

‘I’ll try it.’

Nainiae read Riley’s eyes, lightly nodded and swung her right hand.

“Huh?”

Because Nainiae was speaking in Dragon’s language that she had learned from Andal, as Iril watched Nainiae floating several rounds of flames in the air, she opened her eyes big and said,

“That is…”

It wasn’t the flames that made her mutter. It was the black spaces. They were disappearing one after the other.

“It’s done. All 27 of them…”

Nainiae had a serious look on her face. It seemed that she had just used another magic. Nainiae put forth her right arm toward the direction where Riley was looking at and said,

“I gathered them all.”

<… What?>

Having heard Nainiae, the one beyond the black space realized that something was off. He sounded like he was panicking.

“It looks like you never ran into any mage who could do this.”

Nainiae asked the question to the one beyond the space and started to explain what it was that she had just done.

“It’s dimensional distortion.”

Looking at the black spaces that were coming together, she explained that she compiled all black spaces that were scattered about by folding and opening spaces.

“Well, I guess you would not know about it. Magic did not exist in the world that Young Master came from…”

Even in this world where magic did exist, there probably wasn’t any other human mage who could manipulate space.

<You...>

The scattered spaces started to come together as if they were drawn to each other like magnets.

<You arrogant fools...>

Before the voice had echoed throughout the area because it had come through multiple sources from the scattered spaces. Now, the spaces had been collected into one and the echo had been subdued quite a bit.

<How dare you. You dare to toy with the power bestowed by the great one... This power.... This power is something only I ... can handle.>

Riley didn't give a damn about what the voice said. He just observed the size of the space that was combining. When it completely combined, Riley was certain that the size was identical to the one he had seen in Lower Solia. Riley tightened his grip on the sword.

"Come out."

Riley spoke to the one beyond the space.

"I said come out."

It seemed Riley's provocation worked. The black arms that had been cut off by his sword earlier all twitched around like earth-worms. They also started to combine into one like the black space.

<Even not knowing your place has its limits.>

With lightning sparks, the hands combined into one. It was the same hand that had smacked Riley in Lower Solia last time.

"It is your master who does not know."

The hand in front of him was the one he had seen last time. However, the voice was not. Riley narrowed his eyes and to get information out of him, said

"About the leader of the bastard that you serve... I'm certain I squashed him like a bug before coming here? Is a fox pretending to be the tiger of a cave that's missing its original master?"

Riley thought about the Demon Lord that he had ended by making him fall to the ground after a life long struggle in his past life. He thought about who could be causing this ruckus from the other world.

"I must admit that it was my mistake to not clean up the rest completely. I assumed everything would have been solved if I just killed the Demon Lord."

It seemed the one behind the space was agitated to hear this. The

black hand, which was exuding a violent energy, flinched.

“Now that I think about it, that lass Reutrina… Was her power being able to read people’s mind? I heard that she is the Head? I’m certain?”

At the Duke Philisneon family’s mansion, when Riley was having nightmares during the long winter hibernation, Reutrina had peaked at his memories. Now… Reutrina had become a fool.

“After peaking on my memories… What do you think happened to her?”

<You runt. Just what are you talking about…>

“You know what happened to her, don’t you? I’m sure you checked.”

The black hand stopped moving. Riley took a step forward and continued to ask.

“The bastard who is controlling you all from behind… What’s the bastard’s name? There must be a proper name, right? I’m sure you are not just worshiping this bastard because of the power.”

Riley figured that the Demon Lord that he defeated was not the type to do this kind of thing, so… Riley was certain it could not be the Demon Lord who was behind this. He narrowed his eyes and asked,

“Is it Agara? Wiciel? If not, is it Kiladiac? Nemophila? Is it one of those bastards? If not, then who is it?”

Riley listed the names of demons he knew from his past life. Inaril, who was standing outside the isolation barrier, answered the question.

“The name is Helena.”

Riley opened his eyes big and glared at Inaril.

“… What?”

“Helena is the name of the being who was captured and enticed into six beings from this world to do her bidding as the Six Parts. She granted them the abilities. She is the one who is trying to reveal the world below to this side.”

“…”

Riley was glaring at where Inaril was with a piercing gaze. The one beyond the space started to curse at Inaril with a voice full of fury.

<You bitch… You are just a corpse who betrayed the Six Parts, yet you dare! You dare to utter the great one’s name so carelessly?!>

The black hand was overwhelmed by Riley's deadly aura. However, it quickly turned its direction and extended toward Inaril. However... it was blocked by the isolation barrier that Nainiae engaged. After that, the hand was cut off in half by Riley's sword.

"Young Master, Helena is..."

Nainiae was standing next to Riley to support him. With a concerned look, Nainiae looked at Riley.

'Only the Brave Hero can. This world... please save this world.'

The name of the Priestess who asked Riley to save the world in his past life was none other than Helena.

"Helena..."

Riley pulled his chin and gritted his teeth as he muttered the name. The one beyond the black space thought Riley had let his guard down. The one beyond the space finally revealed himself.

"Now that it has come to this..."

The one who came out from the black space was a handsome young boy with blonde hair.

"I, Rebethra shall judge you all for the great one's sake and wash

away the disgrace created up to this point.”

The boy called himself Rebethra. It was not just Riley and Nainiae who were shocked. Ian and Priesia who were watching this from outside the isolation barrier also opened their eyes big.

“That’s …Rebethra?”

“How come Rebethra is…?”

He was supposed to be an old man with old white hair and long beard who worked as the Archbishop of the Holy Temple. However… for some reason, he was now a handsome boy with blonde hair.

“Really…”

Priesia already had her eyes turned to golden color. She was looking into the area inside the isolation barrier. Having confirmed that this was true, she muttered vacantly.

“That’s…! He is really Rebethra!”

Iril and Ryan were shocked. They turned to look at Priesia who shouted from the back.

‘Why is the Priestess here? Now that I think about it, isn’t Rebethra… the one who is the Archbishop of the Holy Temple?’

Ryan remembered the Archbishop who had come to the mansion as Riley's guest. The situation was unfolding with surprise after surprise. In disbelief, he was not able to close his mouth.

'Riley... just who...'

Riley still didn't notice Ryan. Riley was glaring at Rebethra with a piercing gaze. Rebethra was still walking out of the space. Riley muttered quietly,

"Helena..."

Nainiae watched him mutter. She soon felt the deadly aura that was making her skin feel like it was getting burned. She held her breath.

Riley must be enraged.

Nainiae was well aware what kind of hardship Riley had been subjected to in his past life. Nainiae could tell how Riley must have been feeling. She bit her lips and took a step back.

"Young Master Riley, please excuse me for everything so far. I only intended to take that corpse bitch's right hand, but it seems that now you know our great one's name... So, I have things I would like to ask you."

"..."

"I think I might have to resort to more regrettable actions. Well, if you answer willingly, then I won't have to go that far."

The blonde boy opened his arms wide and walked toward Riley. The boy's refreshing smile felt like it could make anyone who saw it feel at ease and feel safe.

"All right."

However, it didn't seem to work on Riley.

"I now have a few things I would like to ask."

As he said those words, Nainiae, who was standing behind Riley, used telekinesis to place a spare sword on his waist. It was the sword had she brought out of the dimensional space earlier. She lowered her head and asked,

"Shall I step back?"

"No."

Riley took a short breath to maintain his composure and told Nainiae,

“It will end quickly anyway.”

“…”

Rebethra was smiling with his eyes. Now, with narrowly open eyes, he stared at Riley and Nainiae.

“You make sure that bastard doesn’t run off with his ass.”

Concerned that Rebethra might escape, Riley stared at him, even forgetting to blink. Riley quietly said,

“Watch him carefully.”

Nainiae would have swung her sword in fury if she was in Riley’s position. Instead, Riley was calmly trying to get information out of the opponent. Nainiae was impressed. She nodded to respond.

“That bastard’s memory, clues about Helena, reason for looking rejuvenated and everything else… even his soul… I need to shake him down completely.”

“…”

“I’ll make sure he isn’t dead. I’ll be careful so that he will be left barely alive and breathing, so… Have Priesia ready to come too.”

Riley was saying all that while tightly gritting his teeth. Having heard the voice, Nainiae wondered if she should take back her thought about feeling impressed earlier at Riley's composure. She nodded again.

"... Yes.

Chapter 183 - Salvation (4)

After ordering Nainiae to watch the bastard to make sure he does not escape, Riley made the flame on his sword to burn more intensely and said,

“Wow… Your rejuvenated self looks great?”

As the Archbishop of the Holy Temple, Rebethra had eye catching white beard in the past. Remembering this, Riley observed Rebethra who hadn’t just gotten a little younger but had completely reverted to being a child. Riley asked him,

“What’s your secret?”

“It’s thanks to the great one. I was reborn.”

It seemed that he was trying to pay respect to the one he served. He lowered his head a little and praised the being he served. Noticing his response, Riley’s eyebrows flinched.

“Wow… I never knew.”

Rebethra walked toward Riley. Riley was facing him. While suppressing his anger, Riley asked as if he was patronizing Rebethra,

“I never knew that the bitch was… also an expert in plastic

surgery.”

“Plastic… surgery?”

It seemed Rebethra didn’t know what that was. He tilted his head to the side. As if he was trying to say never mind, Riley shook his head and said,

“It’s nothing. Even if you knew what it meant, you will just yell at me saying I spoke ill of your great one or whatever. It would be better for you to not know what it means.”

“…”

Rebethra narrowed his eyes to say that he did not like what Riley just said. Of the two arms he had open wide, he lightly closed his right hand.

“… No. Wait.”

Kwang!

It sounded like something had been shot.

Phang!

Sounds of explosions in the air repeated.

“Did you think I was just sitting around because I didn’t expect you to try pulling off a sneak attack?”

Kwang!

Again, it sounded like something was launched from behind Rebethra.

Phang!

Again, from the sword that Riley swung, what sounded like a balloon pop could be heard repeatedly.

“Tsk…”

Having realized that his surprise attack had failed, Rebethra clicked his tongue. Instead of using one at a time, this time, he used the ability to generate multiple of them to pour down at Riley.

To draw comparison to the magic of this world, it was like a magic arrow, which was a basic magic. However…There were a lot of them and one thing unique was that they were invisible.

“You think increasing the number a bit is going to make a difference?”

Riley asked lightly. Surrounding Riley, the sounds of things being

shot and popping explosions continued.

‘How did he figure it out? Is it not some ordinary senses?’

Rebethra could not understand how Riley noticed his ability, which is supposed to be invisible to naked eyes. Rebethra looked at the sword with white flame that was on Riley’s hand.

‘Is it because of the sword?’

In the past, Inaril, the Right Hand, had this bandage wrapped sword hidden. Now... in Riley’s hand, it was exuding white flame for some reason and showing off how majestic and brilliant the sword looked.

‘When the great one asked me to bring that sword, I wondered why she was so interested in that sword that didn’t seemed to have any significance, but... I see. It was a weapon that was worth worrying about.’

His black spaces and hands... They were things that should have been impossible to cut. However, the sword did. Remembering these, Rebethra glared at the sword and prepared his next ability.

‘Should I try that? Or this?’

Rebethra was rolling his eyes around. Looking at his face, Riley seemed amused. Riley said,

“You seem to have a lot of margins to spare? Are you considering your options?”

“…?!”

“Everything you can do, everything you can use… It would be best for you to try them all.”

Before Rebethra realized, Riley’s voice was coming from his back. Rebethra gasped for air. He saturated his hand with purple light and swung it.

“I might made a mistake, controlling my power, and…”

“Kuk!”

Rebethra’s eyes were opened wide.

“… if you died, then that would be bad for me!”

As he finished speaking, Riley swung his sword. Riley cleanly avoided Rebethra’s purple light hand, and at the same time, he cross cut Rebethra’s shoulder in a long diagonal line.

“Uuuugk?!”

In an instant, his shoulder was cut off clean. Rebethra’s face filled with pain.

‘When did he move to the back?’

He gritted his teeth due to pain. To retrieve the right hand that was cut off, Rebethra quickly extended his left hand.

‘First, I must retrieve the arm! As long as I have it, I can always attach it back and handle the rest!’

He reached for it, but his left hand didn’t reach the right arm.

“I’ll hold on to this.”

From the side, Nainiae was watching Riley and Rebethra’s duel. She moved her lips a few times to use telekinesis.

“Kuk. That lass…”

His cut off arm floated up in the air and was moved away to a distance by Nainiae’s telekinesis. Rebethra’s pain stricken face turned toward Nainiae.

“Well done.”

Riley would not have had any problems even if Nainiae hadn't done this, but to maintain the mood, Riley praised Nainiae and proceeded to his next move.

"Your other arm. I'll cut that one clean off from you as well."

The voice was coming from right in front of his nose. Rebethra cringed and quickly used another ability. He managed to barely dodge the sword with white flame that came at him to cut off his left arm.

'Is it a teleportation?'

It didn't allow him to move long distance like Nainiae. However, regardless, Riley realized Rebethra could teleport a short distance. Finding it to be a bother, he clicked his tongue.

'From the looks of it, this bastard doesn't just have a few tricks?'

Rebethra was using the supernatural powers that were used by espers from Riley's past life. Riley gave a look to Nainiae who was standing behind him. He then started to chase after Rebethra who drew a distance using teleportation.

'First, there is the black space which can be used to hide or reveal one's body. Second, there is the hand of black energy that could be drawn from the black space. Third, he can launch something invisible. The teleportation makes four...'

Thinking about the abilities Rebethra had demonstrated so far, he felt something flying at him again. Riley swung his sword.

Phang!

Phang!

Something invisible collided with Riley's sword and popped with explosive sounds.

'In addition, he probably still has the abilities he had as an old man. Back then, the abilities that he might have possessed are...'

Using the soul like thing of the dark mage who was killed at the Rainfield, Rebethra attached it to the corpse of Astroa. Remembering this, Riley swung his sword and moved in.

"Damn it. If I knew you were such a hindrance... I should have eliminated you back then."

Watching Riley gradually closing the distance, Rebethra muttered quietly as he narrowed his eyes. Amused, Riley laughed through his nose and said,

"That's my line. Why are you telling me that instead?"

Long ago, Riley had seen that Rebethra had placed Priesia, the

Priestess of this world who lacked quick senses, in the front. Since then, Riley had guessed that the old man must have had some ulterior motive at least. However, it seemed the look on Riley's face was saying that he had made a mistake. Riley said,

"Well, I enjoyed all of the expensive gifts you served up to me, but... As I thought, eliminating you would have been the right move. I have become quite complacent compared to the past. I was thinking about getting free gifts by keeping a rotten one alive."

Something invisible came towards Riley again. He cut it and caused yet another explosive sound. Riley swung his sword at Rebethra who was just standing there.

"Hm. I'm sorry, Young Master, but a second time..."

Riley closed the distance in an instant and swung his sword. Rebethra laughed through his nose, formed a visible layer around himself and said that.

However,

"... Kuk?!"

Rebethra was not able to finish the sentence.

'What the? Why is the barrier?!'

Along a diagonal line, Riley's Holy Sword engulfed in flame cut through everything, including the barrier and his chest. Riley glanced at his Holy Sword.

'This rascal... Although it was transported to this world, it is just like the old times?'

Riley was comparing how it was in the past life and this life, and... he concluded that it was the same. As if the sword was responding to his question, the sword expanded the white flame.

'Unlike you, I... I am not sure if I changed or stayed the same.'

The Holy Sword's name was Salvation.

'If you are the same as before...'

In Riley's past life, the Holy Sword existed to hunt down the espers who gave up on being humans and the demons who were called the mortal enemies of humanity. The Holy Sword had two distinct advantages.

'... then you should be able to handle this!'

Riley injected the Salvation with his mana. He then swung the sword at Rebethra who was trying to form another barrier.

"Kuk. Huuurrrk?!"

With Riley's mana, the Salvation exuded blue light. The sword was swung in diagonal direction while waving its white flame in the air.

"H... How?!"

Rebethra was shocked. Along with his barrier, his chest was torn apart.

'... It is the same.'

The first advantage that the Salvation had was that it was an incredibly sturdy sword that could handle being swung while being endowed with Riley's mana.

"How come... why isn't the reflect working?"

The second advantage was that the sword could neutralize the powers of espers and demons from his past life.

"Reflect? Was there an ability like that?"

"...?"

Riley walked toward Rebethra, grabbed him by the collar, cringed one of his eyes and asked,

“Never mind that. Now, spill it out.”

“…”

“You lost, so act like a loser. Just answer the questions that the winner asks.”

Rebethra was glaring at Riley. Rebethra snorted.

“You are laughing?”

“You closed the distance between us. That’s a mistake, Young Master.”

“What?”

“Please go to hell first and wait there. That maid lass, that corpse bitch… I’ll send them all to your side soon, so…”

With those words, Rebethra’s body melted down as if it became molten rubber. After that, as if he was an egg on the verge of hatching, his skin started to protrude all over and shake.

‘Ugh, this bastard is really…’

Watching this, Riley crumpled his face.

“Is self-destruction… the final move that you chose?”

“…”

“Well, I thought you would use some other moves, but you are giving up pretty fast.”

Riley noticed that Rebethra was intending to self-destruct and sacrifice his body in the process. However, Riley didn’t let go of the collar. He merely stared at Rebethra with thinly opened eyes.

“This is it for me too.”

Holding Rebethra with his left hand, Riley lifted his right hand which wielded the Salvation.

“If you won’t spill out the answers willingly, then I have no choice but to force you to.”

‘… What?’

Rebethra was at the brink of explosion. His face was mashed up beyond recognition, but he floated a question mark on his face.

“… Khuuuuk?!”

Along with the sound of a sword piercing the flesh, Rebethra's face turned back to its original handsome form. Rebethra's face was filled in pain.

Tadac Tadac...

A sword had pierced his chest. Rebethra looked at the flame that was burning in full force on the sword. It seemed that he had finally realized it. Rebethra glared at Riley.

'It cannot be?'

"You finally figured it out?"

Riley let go of him from his left hand. He raised up his right hand which wielded the Salvation. Looking at Rebethra who was in the air and had been pierced by the Salvation, Riley said,

"This is the Sword of the World Below that you bastards desperately searched for."

Riley used his left hand to draw the spare sword he had on his waist. He then used the sword to brush the blade edge of the Salvation.

"I'll give you a chance."

The other sword caught white flames just like the Salvation.

Riley used the other sword and poked at Rebethra's chin as he muttered. Riley suddenly threw the sword to the front.

"Are you going to tell me yourself?"

The sword spun in the air as it flew through. Its handle struck the body of a tree, made a blunt noise and started to come back.

"Otherwise..."

The spare sword came flying toward Riley. It had pierced the black hand that was slowly approaching Riley from the back.

"Would you like to have all of your memories drawn and become a fool?"

The giant black hand that was formed from combining all other hands earlier... had been pierced by the spare sword which was burning in white flame. As if the hand had become just a stone, it became stiff. It was not moving as Rebethra wanted.

"..."

"What are you doing?"

Riley's Salvation was piercing his chest as if Rebethra's body was a part of kabab. Rebethra looked at the Salvation and his black hand had been immobilized due to being pierced by the spare

sword. Rebethra started to grind his teeth.

“You bastard…”

“Ah, you are done. You are done, so…”

Riley waved his hand at Rebethra as if he was done with Rebethra. With his eyes saturated with murderous intent, Riley asked Rebethra,

“… Helena.”

“…”

Rebethra’s lips shook.

“Helena. Where is that woman now. What is she up to… What is she eating, who did she meet… Everything you know, everything you can guess, things you don’t know… You will have to tell me everything in detail.”

Chapter 184 - Someone

Riley put his face right in front of Rebethra's and exuded a deadly aura. It seemed that Rebethra was overwhelmed by it. Rebethra's eyes became blurry. He also started to open and close his mouth like a bass.

"The great one... the great one is..."

"The great one?"

Riley noticed something was odd about the way he was talking. Riley narrowed his eyes and asked,

"You keep saying the great one? Looks like she is not a human being?"

"The great one, the great one is..."

Rebethra kept on repeating the same thing. Riley shook Salvation in his right hand and asked again.

"Tell me."

"The great one is..."

"Helena, that lass...Is she still human?"

Riley asked if the Priestess who had made him hold the Holy Sword in his past life was still human. Rebethra's eyes started to roll to the back.

"The..... g.... great... one.... The...."

Riley was not sure if Rebethra had lost it because of his deadly aura. Puzzled, Riley pulled his chin and muttered inside.

'What is this? I didn't send that much deadly aura?'

Riley wondered if he should slap Rebethra to make him get a grip. He was slowly lifting his left hand. However, at that moment, Rebethra's face started to melt down like how it had earlier when he had tried to self-destruct.

"...?"

There was no precursor movement, but suddenly, his face was getting mashed up like clay. Riley turned to look at Nainiae.

"What happened?"

"Young Master. This is... Don't you think it is similar to something you have seen in the past?"

"Something from the past...?"

Nainiae looked at Rebethra and mentioned that it might be similar to something from the past. Riley stared at Rebethra's melting face of and thought of his past.

'Now that I think about it…'

In his past, when one of the followers of Helena had run his mouth carelessly, his face had melted down like this. Riley had seen it happen. Riley raised the intensity of the white flame on the Salvation and turned to look at where Priesia was.

"No, Young Master. This cannot be healed with the Salvation or Ms. Priesia's power."

Rebethra's face, neck and entire body were melting down. Nainiae said this could not be stopped. She used Blink, a short-range teleportation magic and closed in instantly.

"If my calculation is correct, he will melt away completely and disappear in a few seconds. In that case, before that…"

Nainiae stood next to Riley. She paused for a moment and placed her hand above Rebethra's melting head.

"… I'll recover his memories."

Nainiae said she will extract his memories before his body melts

away, before the soul in his body disappears. With her hand above Rebethra's head, she closed his eyes gently and said,

"Young Master, the time magic..."

Riley realized what she was asking for. He placed his hand on Rebethra like Nainiae and used time magic.

Slow magic.

Rebethra's body was melting down rapidly. However, the melting slowed down significantly thanks to his time magic.

'You have about 30 seconds.'

'That's enough.'

It seemed Riley had an extraordinary amount of mana. It looked as if Rebethra's body's melting process came to an almost complete halt. Iril was watching this from the outside of the isolation barrier. She brought her hand toward her mouth to cover it and thought,

'A... As I thought... He is a dragon!'

Iril thought that Riley was also a dragon. She looked like she was asking what they should do when she pulled Inaril's sleeves.

“G... Grandmother...”

“Um? What is it?”

“Grandmother. Do you know those two?”

“I could say I know or not know them.”

“Are those two... dragons?”

Iril whispered and asked. Ian and Priesia were listening to their conversation from the side. Dumfounded, they looked at Iril.

“Dragon?”

“Young Master and Nainiae?”

Ian and Priesia looked at each other and tilted their heads to the sides. They muttered. For a moment, they put looks on their faces as if they thought it was a possibility. However, they soon peeked smiles and shook their heads.

“No, they are not dragons.”

Ian, who had been with Riley since his birth, responded.

“I can guarantee it.”

Priesia, who was with Nainiae when Nainiae had been under the care of the Holy Temple briefly, also responded.

“You can guarantee it? What do you mean…”

“…”

Iril had puzzled look on her face, questioning how that was possible. Instead of Iril, Ryan asked the two.

“You two seem to know those two very well?”

“I am not sure…I don’t think I can claim to know them very well.”

“I can just say that they are not dragons.”

Ian and Priesia strongly claimed that Riley was a human. Unable to accept this, Ryan asked again.

“He is the rascal who sat around and did nothing except take naps. Let alone ever wielding a sword, I have never once seen him do mana training. Yet…How could he do all this?”

Having heard Ryan’s question, Ian looked at his face and said to prove that Riley was a human.

“I have watched Young Master Riley since the time he in Lady Iris’s womb. Young Master Ryan, if you think Young Master Riley is a dragon, then that means Lady Iris must be also a dragon.”

“If Lady Iris is really a dragon, then did we really need to worry about her illness, which would have been trivial to a dragon?”

“That is…”

“She coughed blood after eating the soup that was poisoned by Madam Oruli.”

Ian narrowed his eyes.

“Are you going to say that there are things we don’t know about that as well? As for how Count Stein met Lady Iris… You know about that very well yourself, don’t you?”

Ryan avoided Ian’s gaze. It seemed he was not interested in questioning Ian anymore. Meanwhile, Iril was still not satisfied. Priesia looked at Iril and said,

“I can understand to some extent why you think that Nainiae may be a dragon. I wondered about that myself at first. However… She is not a dragon. She is a human.”

Priesia remembered when she visited Andal at his cave the last

time. Andal the dragon had called Nainiae his pupil. However, she buried this detail and instead, took a roundabout approach.

"Around spring, I spent a few days with Nainiae. Back then, I confirmed that she is a human being."

"How?"

"That is... back then...."

Having heard the question, Priesia turned her eyes to golden color and said,

"It is because I confirmed it with these eyes."

Iril vacantly stared at Priesia's eye color changing to gold. It seemed that Iril had remembered something very important. Staring at Priesia's face, Iril looked shocked.

"By any chance... You..."

Until just a moment ago, things were so chaotic that Iril was not able to check out Priesia's face very well. However, now that she observed Priesia's face in detail, the face was... almost identical to the face she saw on the board recently at the village.

"Are you the Priestess of Solia?"

Because she had disappeared, there was a reward for finding her. Looking at her face, Iril pointed at Priesia with shaking finger. Priesia nodded and said that was the case.

"Yes."

"..."

"So, I can guarantee it. I can put my title as the Priestess on the line to say this. Nainiae is not a dragon. She is a human being. As for Young Master Riley...I am not sure."

Priesia glanced at Ian as she said that. However, it seemed Ian didn't really mind it. With a serious look on his face, he just crossed his arms and watched Riley and Nainiae.

"... I'm sorry, Young Master."

The clothes that Rebethra was wearing only a moment ago were now on the ground. Looking at the clothes, Nainiae apologized to Riley.

"No. It's fine. This is not your fault."

Riley shook his head as he also looked at the ground. The owner of the clothes seemed to have wondered off somewhere. There were just clothes on the ground.

“It is that lass who did it, right?”

Although she was not able to extract all of the bastard’s memory, it seemed Nainiae was able to find out some things. Having heard Riley’s question, Nainiae nodded. She compared the memories from Riley’s past and the memories from Rebethra and said,

“Yes, definitely… It was the method used by that woman, Helena.”

As soon as Rebethra was about to say something, he started to drool from his mouth. Thinking about how it all had happened, he compared it to how the followers of the Priestess from his past life melted away. Riley clicked his tongue.

“The self-destruct earlier was done by Rebethra himself. However, this one was done by Helena… or someone who is helping her. So…”

“So, we could not stop the bastard from melting away, even with the Salvation or Priesia’s healing, because I didn’t pierce the one responsible for the ability.”

Nainiae nodded.

“… Um?”

Riley was going to ask what Nainiae had gained from Rebethra’s memories. However, he felt a gaze from behind, so he slowly

turned around.

‘Ah, there was Ian. I totally forgot.”

Riley then saw Priesia who was standing next to Ian, Iril with vacant look on her face as if she just got up from asleep, Inaril who was wearing the blinds, and…

“…?”

He found Ryan.

Riley had his eyes meet with the big brother who had been chased out of the mansion. Riley’s head became vacant for a moment.

*

“Big Brother, why are you here?”

“I would like you ask you that instead.”

The situation was wrapped up for the most part. Sharing tea at Inaril’s house, they talked about what had happened so far. Of the people gathered here, the people who were feeling the most awkward were Riley and Ryan.

“I thought you would be at the Moregard Family Household?”

“Ian asked me the same question earlier. As for the answer, you can just hear it from Ian.”

Ian was standing near the kitchen and glancing around. Ryan glanced at him and said to Riley,

“I have a mountain of questions. I think staying awake through the night won’t be enough to talk about them all, but…”

Ryan paused for a moment. He then started to glare at Riley with a piercing gaze.

“… I’ll ask you just one thing.”

With eyes that had many emotions mixed in, Ryan looked at his younger brother and asked,

“Are you really…Riley who I know?”

Ryan chose the one question out of the countless questions he wanted to ask. With just one kind of emotion, he stared at Riley.

“…”

Although Ryan was a big brother who was born from a different

mother, still, he was the big brother who Riley had grown up with under the same roof. Riley just stared at Ryan with a steady gaze and said in quiet voice,

"Yes."

Just in case there was not enough explanation, Riley added,

"In the past, present and the future, I am Riley Fin Iphalleta. I'm the youngest son of the Iphalleta Family. I have never lived the life of another person."

Riley said with a serious look on his face and Ryan watched him while leaning on a wall. He stopped leaning and turned.

"... In that case, that's enough."

Ryan was about to leave Inaril's home. Riley was about to ask something like he did earlier. However, he kept it inside and closed his mouth.

"Did that bastard die?"

"Yes, practically speaking."

The rest of the group was having their conversations elsewhere. Riley looked at them and walked toward them as he tuned into their conversation.

“Grandmother, I didn’t know that you were fighting such people.”

“Someday, before I become unable to speak, I was going to tell you. I didn’t know that the day would be today.”

Nainiae and Ian seemed to have decided to focus on their roles as servants. They were in the kitchen, preparing tea and fruits.

Inaril, Iril and Priesia sat around the table so that they all could face each other. They were talking about what they had experienced just now.

“Ah, Young Master.”

Nainiae welcomed him.

“Have you finished…the conversation?”

“Yes, probably.”

There was must left unsaid. However, Riley thought they would have the time later to talk about them slowly. He nodded and Nainiae lifted a tray which contained tea cups. She said,

“Well then… I guess it is Mr. Ian’s turn.”

“W… What are you talking about?”

Having heard her voice, Ian flinched his shoulder and started to glance at Riley.

“…”

“Right.”

Ian looked at his chest where a hole had been created earlier. With a refreshed look on his face, Riley asked,

“Have you told your teacher about your feelings?”

Having heard Riley’s question, Ian flinched his shoulder again. He brushed and started to act like he was busy with something else.

“I don’t know what you are talking about?”

“You had been singing about it, yet…”

“Sing? Who sang about what?”

“Huhuhu…”

Covering her mouth with her fist, Nainiae laughed lightly. However, she suddenly turned her head toward the door.

“Um?”

Since the Rebethra incident, Riley also had widened his senses, just in case. He also felt someone quickly approaching Inaril’s house and looked toward the door.

“Young Master…”

Someone was coming toward Inaril’s home.

Chapter 185 - Someone (2)

“Who is it?”

Inaril was listening in to their conversation. She had felt the presence of someone approaching this way as well. She turned her head toward the door.

“Should I go check?”

Nainiae thought it might be a good idea to see the face of the one who was approaching this way. So, she asked as she moved the mana inside her. Riley shook his head.

“We will know soon enough anyway. There probably is no need for that. Just get other magic ready.”

Nainiae nodded. She hid her body by sticking to the wall. She then prepared the restraint magic that she was planning on using on the guest who was going to arrive here soon.

“…”

“…”

Only until a moment ago, there were warm, friendly conversations going inside Inaril’s home. Now, only silence was left in the place.

Breaking that silence, footsteps could be heard. It seemed to be in a hurry. Soon, the firmly shut door was opened wide. The guest revealed their identity.

The guest was sweating heavily, especially their face.

“Ugh… Ugh…”

The face was familiar. Riley and Nainiae, who had been on full alert, relaxed their faces.

“What the, it was you?”

Riley’s voice had no hostility in it. Inaril realized the one who had come wasn’t anyone bad. She lightly sighed.

“Mr. Nara?”

Priesia was sitting. She muttered the name after discovering the face of the boy who had entered the house.

“Ugh… Oh man. As I thought, you all came back here.”

With his palm on the door, the boy greeted everyone. He took a moment to calm his breathing and entered.

“Come on. You left me behind?”

Nainiae was hiding in the kitchen. She started to pretend that she was busy and picked up the tray that she had placed in the kitchen.

“Who left who behind? It’s just that you were late.”

As if he had done nothing wrong, Riley placed his fist on his waist and acted proud. As if he was trying to say he couldn’t beat Riley, Nara declared surrender. However, he stopped walking in.

“Um?”

Nara realized there were a few more people here in comparison to when he was dragged here the last time. So, he wondered what this was about. He blinked his eyes.

“M… Mr. Ian? Ms. Priesia too?”

“Ugh.”

Riley figured there would be many things to say and hear. Finding it to be a bother, he pointed at an empty seat.

“Sit first. I think there will be much to talk about.”

*

The conversation continued until nightfall. So, Riley and others decided to just sleep at Inaril's place. They made places to sleep on the floor by laying blankets. Everyone was traveling through a dream world of his or her own.

"They sure are sleeping soundly…"

"A lot of stuff happened today."

Nainiae and Riley had left the house for a moment. Nainiae had used a phrase from Riley's past life and shrugged.

"To think thay you would use that phrase."

"Compared to before, I have gotten better at it, right?"

She was asking if her common sense had improved since summer. Riley looked at her and then broke into a smile.

"All right. Yes. You have gotten better."

Having heard the response she wanted to hear, Nainiae also smiled. She started to think about the things she had heard in Inaril's home today.

"My head is a bit overwhelmed because I heard so many things today."

There were the memories she had extracted from Rebethra. In addition to this, she had heard many things from Inaril and Ian. It seemed her brain was overwhelmed because she was trying to organize them all. Nainiae sighed lightly, and Riley said,

“I know. Things are tangled up in a complicated mess.”

Inaril was once called the Right Hand in this world. She said she was already dead and was only waiting for her body to disintegrate. At that moment...Ian just stared at her with a vacant look on his face. Riley was thinking about the Ian from that time.

“What would happen to Ms. Iril when Ms. Inaril’s added lifespan is exhausted?”

Unlike Riley, who was thinking about Ian, Nainiae thought about Iril. She was thinking about the brief conversation she had with Iril on Andal’s mountain last time. It seemed that Nainiae was finding the situation regrettable.

“Well, she could continue living in Romera Village or she could leave this place, one of the two, don’t you think? She probably will inherit her grandmother’s house or something.”

Inaril looked like she was in late 20s to early 30s at most. However, she was older than Ian. Thinking about this, Riley emphasized that Inaril was a grandmother as he muttered.

“She is a grandmother huh…”

In his past life and this life, he had never met anyone he could call grandmother. He shook his head.

“So, how long did she say she had left?”

“She said she had about a week left.”

Those were the number of days remaining for Inaril.

Her body had died a long time ago. To warm her cold skin, she always kept near the fireplace. Even at best, she had a week left.

Because Riley had brought up Inaril, Nainiae brought her hands together and started to fiddle with her thumbs.

“I feel like I am seeing my former self.”

Nainiae felt like she knew how someone who was prepared to die was feeling. Riley scratched his head and asked,

“What is it? Does it bother you?”

“It would be a lie if I said I was not bothered by it.”

Nainiae stopped fiddling with her thumbs. Now, she thought

about Ian, the senior butler who must be snoring inside Inaril's home.

"I'm worried about Mr. Ian too."

"..."

"He must have longed to meet her for a very long time."

Nainiae said in regrettable tone. Riley glanced at her face from the side and asked,

"It does not matter, don't you think? Ian thought she had already died. Despite that, he got to see her face and talk to her again once, so... I think he's got to resolve the feelings that piled up inside?"

Nainiae also glanced at Riley's face from the side and responded in terse words,

"Even so..."

Her response, although short, contained many meanings. Riley put on a perplexed look on his face.

"Hm..."

"What are you going to do?"

Nainiae turned her head to the sky as she asked. Riley said,

“I am not sure…”

He had many things to do.

He also felt like just going back to the mansion. There was the case of the Epidemic, the purple human who they had not resolved yet. There was also the matter of Helena. For reasons unknown to them, Helena had turned her back on humanity.

In his past life and this life, Riley had never gone to school, but… Riley felt like a student who hadn’t done any of his homework although the vacation was almost over.

‘If I really played around all this time, then I wouldn’t feel so wronged about this.’

Instead of playing around and doing nothing, this time, Riley could say he had been running around and working diligently. With a bitter look on his face, he looked at the Holy Sword hanging on his waist.

“The most urgent matter is Epidemic, which is related to the migration of the monsters.”

Thinking about Epidemic, he thought about Helena’s case which

also needed to be handled next.

“At the moment, I’m not sure how I’m going to chase down that Helena lass.”

They had no idea how to get to the world below that Ian and Inaril spoke of, the world that Riley had come from to be exact.

“If we do find a way, are you going to go there?”

Having heard the question, Riley pondered about it for a moment. He looked up to the sky like Nainiae had done earlier and said,

“I should. I will go.”

Toward the night sky, Riley breathed out, making frosts in the process. He then added why he planned to go there.

“I need to go finish the conversations I didn’t get to resolve. I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep soundly unless I do.”

Kiiiiiic

“… Mr. Riley?”

Nainiae and Riley turned their heads toward the sound.

“Ms. Inaril.”

She was coming toward them without the staff. Nainiae quickly went next to her and supported Inaril.

“You are not even using your staff…”

“If I did, that will awake anyone who is asleep.”

Inaril smiled in relief after being supported by Nainiae. Inaril turned her head toward where Riley was and carefully approached him.

“Mr. Riley, you are there, right?”

“Yes.”

Riley stared at her blinds which was facing him. Inaril pulled her chin. It seemed she was hesitant. She carefully opened her mouth.

“I have a favor to ask.”

“A favor?”

Perhaps this could be considered her last will before disintegration. She nodded and said,

“The sword… Would you like to share the sword with me?”

Wondering what this was about, Riley carefully listened to what Inaril said. Dumbfounded, he just stared at her.

“Sword?”

“It is a very simple and personal desire. Mr. Riley, you had lived your life with the blessing of the sword as well. In that case… perhaps you thought about it once at least too?”

Having heard Inaril’s question, Riley thought about his past life in which he had swung the sword quite frequently. He realized what she was asking and peeked a smile.

“Have you ever lost before?”

“At least, when it was a matter of the sword, I have never lost once.”

Inaril responded, full of confidence. She soon shook her head and corrected herself.

“No. I have lost once. It would be right to say I lost on purpose.”

Riley thought about the sword wound on her eyes and the story that Ian had told him back in the mansion. He figured he could

understand what she was talking about. He nodded.

“It was Ian?”

“It is an embarrassing past for an old woman like myself.”

Inaril blushed. She then asked Riley again.

“Will you please grant this request from an old woman?”

Hearing her desperate plea, Riley sighed briefly as he looked toward her house.

‘To simply put, my teacher’s swordsmanship was unmatched in the entire world. Although I am serving Iphalleta House…I am certain that my teacher’s swordsmanship is superior.’

One time, Ian had said those words with pride. Thinking about this, Riley turned to look at Inaril.

“…All right.”

“Young Master.”

Having heard Riley’s response, Nainiae pulled Riley’s sleeves, concerned if this was a good idea.

“Will it be all right?”

Nainiae didn’t think Riley would lose. She was concerned about Inaril.

Inaril didn’t have long to live. Nainiae was concerned about Inaril overexerting herself or getting hurt badly.

“Don’t worry.”

Riley patted Nainiae on the shoulder, telling her she should just focus on being a good referee. Riley added,

“I’ll adjust properly.”

After that, Riley and Inaril moved to an empty space behind the house. They faced each other and extended their hands.

“… Both of you…please do not overdo it.”

From the dimensional space, Nainiae brought out two practice swords that were made of wood. Nainiae handed one each to Riley and Inaril. Nainiae pierced the ground with the Holy Sword in the middle of the empty area and started to count down.

“Three, two…”

With just one more number left, Riley and Inaril each started to take a stance. Their stances were different from the other's.

'The stances are different.'

They both had received the blessing of the sword, so they both could wield the Holy Sword. However, because their ways of holding the wooden swords were different, Nainiae's eyes filled with curiosity.

'I wonder...'

Who would win?

Initially, Nainiae was leaning toward stopping this duel. However, she was a servant of the Iphalleta House after all.

This was a matter of the sword. Even Nainiae could not help but get excited with anticipation. That feeling was ahead of all others inside Nainiae.

Also, this was a duel between two individuals with the blessing of the sword who have never lost a battle. So, she was feeling that way even more.

"... One."

Pang!

With the last number, Nainiae used a simple noise magic to declare the start of the duel. Riley and Inaril both dashed toward each other.

"..."

Pak!

Sounds of wooden swords clashing could be heard. Using this opportunity, someone carefully walked next to Nainiae with his index finger placed on his lips.

"... You are?"

Nainiae looked at the young man next to her and crumpled her brows.

"I'm not here to pick a fight. I just..."

The young man vacantly stared at the duel and whispered.

"I just wanted to watch."

The wooden sword of his younger brother and the wooden sword of his teacher... The young man was diligently chasing after the swords. It was Ryan.

Chapter 186 - Someone (3)

“…”

“…”

The two didn’t say anything. Only their wooden swords clashed with each other and that signaled the start of the duel.

It seemed they were very focused. They didn’t notice that Ryan had come to stand next to Nainiae. They both lightly pulled their wooden swords from the clashed standoff position as they dragged their feet.

‘As I thought.’

Inaril and Riley were dragging their feet in opposite directions from each other. Riley spun his body around once and swung his sword in a diagonal angle.

He didn’t use mana.

He had decided to fight Inaril with pure swordsmanship alone. Inaril’s clothes were making flapping sounds in the air. Her sword was making a sweeping sound through air as well. Riley started to chase these noises with his ears.

‘I think I understand.’

By making decisions based on the visual, sound and intuition, Riley was going to avoid Inaril's sword and deal a blow. However, Riley's sword was not able to strike the target. Instead, it collided with something solid.

It was Inaril's wooden sword.

It seemed she was also surprised by Riley's move. She opened her mouth lightly and then turned her body.

For the third strike, her footing changed.

'He is...'

Inaril muttered inside. She raised her senses to the edge in order to read Riley's next move. Inaril swung her arm.

Pak!

Against an ordinary opponent, she would have dealt a strike well before the third attempt. However...only another blunt collision sound could be heard, much like earlier.

'...Someone who was blessed by the sword.'

'...Someone who was blessed by the sword.'

They both muttered those words inside. It looked like they were declaring that the warm up was over. They both tightened their grips and accelerated their speed.

‘I’ll end it in next five moves.’

‘I’ll end it in next four moves.’

‘No, three moves!’

‘No, two!’

‘I’ll just end it now!’

‘I’ll finish it now!’

The two had a conversation through their swords. They either glared or gritted their teeth and started to swing their swords.

Their swings were so fast that they were invisible. The only thing that others could confirm from their movements was that they could hear the sounds of something being swung through the air. It was to the point of being impossible for them to check what was being swung to where and at what speed.

“Are they really… not using mana?”

“… Yes.”

Ryan was watching their duel. He asked Nainiae who was also vacantly watching the duel. Detection magic sparkled in her eyes; she checked the duel and nodded.

“Not even a little?”

“That’s right. From what I’ve observed, I think so.”

As if she was mesmerized, Nainiae watched the two swing the swords and twist their bodies. She then realized that there were others who had been inside the house, who were watching this by peeking from the window.

‘Is everyone awake?’

Nainiae had soundproof magic placed surround the area so the sounds of the swords won’t leak out. She opened her eyes big and checked who it was.

‘Mr. Ian…’

Of the people who were watching through the window, he had the most serious face. Nainiae bit her lips and focused on their duel again.

‘That woman… She can’t even see. How is she able to endure Young Master’s sword like that?’

‘That man… He said he is not even a dragon. How is he able to endure my grandmother’s sword like that?’

Nara and Iril were watching the duel from the window. They muttered like that inside and gulped.

“…”

Near the chin and the tip of a foot, their swords grazed past them very closely. Again, like snakes, their wooden swords started to get tangled up in strange ways.

Pak!

Pak!

From the next exchange of blows, the wooden swords made a loud cracking sound and spat a piece of wood. The two both tilted their heads to the side to dodge it and started to swing the swords again.

‘As I thought, she is incredible. I think I can understand a little why other people complained so much about my swordsmanship.’

Riley had never had a duel last this long in his entire life. He

thought about how people had said he was ridiculous after facing his swordsmanship. Riley looked at Inaril.

‘You are incredible, but…’

Her way of swinging or the type of footing she used was very different, perhaps because she had lived in a different world from his. However… she was evenly matched in skill.

‘I think it would be good to end it here.’

Before Inaril’s body could be harmed as Nainiae was concerned about, Riley decided to end this duel now. He started to breath a little differently so he could move the mana inside his body.

“Will you be all right? After that…it could be dangerous for you too?”

Because she was blind, her energy sensory was a little ahead of Riley. Having realized the mana movement, Inaril asked Riley. Riley responded,

“Who is worrying about who?”

Riley wrapped his sword in a blue light as he asked back. Inaril also layered her sword with blue light.

“I already died once. However, Young Master, you…”

“Well, I already died once too.”

Riley jokingly said that. He then pulled the wooden sword to his back and charged in.

“… It’s coming.”

“What?”

With a serious look on her face, Nainiae mumbled. Ryan asked while looking at her, wondering what that was about. However, he didn’t get to hear an answer.

Kwang!

Unlike blunt noises so far, it was a more solid collision sound that echoed throughout the area.

“Uuuk?!”

“Kuuuk…”

Ryan and Nainiae’s bodies faltered.

‘Just now, that was?’

Their swords were wrapped in ample amount of mana and they were swung and collided. The collision caused a whirlwind which swept through the area.

Ryan gasped for air and narrowly opened his eyes that he had tightly shut earlier.

The whirlwind still continued.

It was so powerful that Ryan was ashamed of the fact that he was titled ‘Strong Sword.’ He felt like he had finally seen a glimpse of real strong swords. It was at that moment.

“…?!”

Again, two swords of blue light seemed to be drawing two lines across the air, and… Once again, they caused a loud sound of explosion and whirlwind.

‘What is this…’

Ryan was pushed far back. He blocked his face with his arm and narrowed his eyes so he could see what was happening in front of him.

Kwang!

Kwang!

The exchanges of blows were no different from earlier in speed and intensity. In fact, they were significantly faster. Ryan held his breath and strained his eyes.

‘Is this really the height of swordsmanship achieved by human beings?’

If it was Ryan who was performing such moves, then he would have exhausted all of his mana with a single blow of such kind. However… as if Riley and Inaril were snorting at Ryan’s inside question, they were pouring out mana into their weapons and swinging away.

‘She can’t even see, yet…’

From the clash of the swords, Inaril’s old house shook.

‘He is so young, yet…’

From the clash of the swords, the tree branches shook.

‘Is this… a dream?’

Ryan watched the wooden swords crossing the air without finding their targets and occasionally clashing against the opponent’s sword. He vacantly watched such moments continuing. He realized this was not a dream. He was impressed.

‘… This should be about the limit for her.’

Riley still hadn’t realize that there were people watching. He was only fixated on Inaril. He clashed his sword with hers once again and muttered inside,

‘Although it is from a past, as expected of someone who was blessed, I think I would have had to exchange blows for days if there was no handicap.’

Riley was glaring at Inaril who was parrying his sword blows. The handicap that he was thinking about was the time.

He was not thinking about a minute or a second. He was thinking about her lifespan.

‘My body is…’

It seemed that Inaril had also realized this. She cringed her face a little.

Her body was at its limit. The very first symptom that appeared as a response to this was her ivory white skin.

Her skin was as white as it was before the duel. Now, her face was as pale as a corpse. Even Riley furrowed his brows because he felt bad about this.

‘I’m not saying this because she managed to do all this despite being blind. I’m more surprised that she demonstrated such abilities despite having a dead body.’

Riley thought about what Iril had told him. She said that Inaril was always next to the fireplace and keeping watch over the Salvation. Also, she had spent a lot of time covering her cold skin which was due to her dead body. While thinking about these… Riley pushed off Inaril.

‘Um?’

Inaril was pushed to the back. At the same time, Riley had a moment to spare. At that moment, he detected the gazes from various people who were watching them. He moved his eyes toward outside the isolation barrier.

“…”

He found the faces of people who were sticking close to the house’s window. Riley’s eyes ran into Ian’s. Riley hesitated for a moment.

‘He let his guard down!’

It was a split second. However, among skilled swordsmen, a gap in defense like this was huge. Having found this, Inaril thrusted her sword toward Riley, aiming at his neck.

‘… I won!’

Inaril thought she precisely pierced Riley’s gap in defense. She was certain of the victory. At that moment,

“As I thought, you are sharp.”

The tone of his voice sounded like he was thinking that was a close call. He avoided Inaril’s sword with a paper thin margin. He put strength in his arms and bounced away Inaril’s wooden sword from her hands.

“Kuk.”

Inaril lost the sword from her hands. Wondering how it had come to this, her face moved towards Riley.

“How did you do it?”

Inaril was sure that she had won. However, at an instant, Riley shifted his position to the side. She was asking about that.

“At an instant, your movement…”

When she aimed for the gap in his defense, she was not able to read his movement. She muttered in puzzled tone. Riley responded,

“If I was my former self, the game would have been decided by that gap just now, but…”

Riley pierced the ground with the wooden sword he had. He shrugged and added,

“I’m different from who I was from my past life.”

To resolve the curiosity that Inaril had, Riley explained that he had used time magic.

“Time… magic?”

Although it was only for a moment, Riley was able to move so fast that even Inaril’s senses could not follow. It was because Riley had used Acceleration.

“I see. Magic…”

“If you think that was cheating, then you could think that too.”

“… No.”

Inaril shook her head.

“I knew that you were holding out a move for the sake of me who

is an old woman. Also... it is not right to let good abilities or weapons rot away without using them."

Inaril thought about why she was able to aim for the gap in Riley's defense. She then realized that he was being considerate.

"That was magnificent."

Inaril bowed and expressed her gratitude. She looked at her hands. They were shaking. It was due to the reaction from the duel but also because she was overcome with emotions.

"I should be the one to say."

It seemed Riley also learned a few things from the duel against Inaril. Although it was hard to tell, his hands were shaking as well. To calm them down, he tried making fists and releasing them. Riley also lowered his head.

"I have resolved all of my longings. I have nothing left now."

"Is that so?"

Riley lifted his head and asked Inaril who was vacantly standing there.

"You really don't have anything left?"

"..."

Having heard the question, Inaril aimed her face toward Riley. She then lightly smiled and said,

"I have a dead body now but I used to be a human before. It is not like I don't have any regrets left. However...Should I call this a lifelong wish...Something I had wished for a very long time that has been resolved?"

Riley felt like he knew what her wish was. Riley asked as if he was trying to get her to spill the beans.

"You mean losing?"

Inaril nodded.

"Yes. Losing..."

"..."

"...In swordsmanship, to someone."

Riley was quite sympathetic to this.

Since his past life, he also had been wishing he could lose to someone.

“Didn’t you say you had lost once to Ian?”

“That was…”

With a lightened heart, Riley shrugged. To switch the mood, he brought up Ian. Inaril hid her lips with her fist and started to snicker.

“Huhuhu… Yes. That’s right. That’s true.”

Inaril started to explain the other wishes she had that she was afraid that she might leave unfulfilled.

“Perhaps these are not regrets or dying wishes…I do have a few things that I could call my worries.”

Inaril said she was aware that she was not in position to ask for favors, but she asked if she could leave them to Riley. Inaril started to explain what they were.

“First, it is about Iril, my granddaughter. So that she could protect herself, I taught her swordsmanship, but that’s all I taught her, so she probably doesn’t know much about how the world works. I’m worried about that.”

“Since you said ‘first,’ then it sounds like you have another one?”

“Second, it is about Ryan, the last pupil that I took in. I took him in because Iril asked me to, but I have not yet taught him much… You said you two were siblings, right?”

“And?”

“I heard that monsters will swarm Romella Village soon. I don’t know if my body will last until then. I was indebted to many people, so I would like to step in, however…”

“…”

Although Riley was waiting, the answer he wanted to hear was not coming. He slowly moved his eyes and looked at Ian. He was stuck in the window like a cicada.

Chapter 187 - Someone (4)

“You… you said you are Ian’s teacher, right?”

Riley asked as he looked at Ian’s face in the window. Inaril, who was blind, was wondering why Riley was asking. She tilted her head to the side and responded,

“Yes. He was my very first pupil. He is also my hero. I would have been tied to Helena longer, but he saved me. He is my hero.”

Although not by much, she was older than Ian. A long time ago, Inaril had lost her life and she had been living her life since then as a dead body. She said she had taught Ian swordsmanship with the blessing of the sword that she had.

“I couldn’t directly deliver him the blessing of the sword but I taught him my swordsmanship. Just like… my granddaughter.”

She asked Riley,

“Was I wrong to do so?”

Inaril thought Riley must be the senior who had the blessing of the sword before her. So, to confirm, she was asking if it was wrong to do so.

“No.”

Riley shook his head and said,

“It’s not forbidden in particular. It’s your freedom to teach your swordsmanship to anyone you want as much as you want.”

Riley also had once taught someone his swordsmanship.

“It’s not something I should butt in.”

Not just in his past life, but even in this life... he had lightly tossed advice to Sera, the maid from the mansion. Also, recently, he had taught Nainiae, the maid who had been serving him, a few moves through demonstrations.

“What I want to ask you is something different.”

Riley redirected his gaze from Ian. Now, he was looking at Inaril who had her head tilted to the side.

“...”

“...?”

Riley was blurring the end of his sentence and Inaril tilted her head to the side.

“I heard you have about a week left?”

Riley pondered hard about how to say this. In the end, he asked about that.

“… Yes.”

Having heard the response, Riley scratched the back of his head as if he was finding this to be such a bother. He quietly continued.

“I’ll just throw you a straight ball.”

“Pardon?”

“Ian said he wished you could live a little longer.”

“…”

Instead of finding a roundabout way to say it, Riley told her what Ian had said. Inaril’s lips shook lightly.

“He said a week is too short. He has waited several decades for this reunion… He said he doesn’t want to wait again.”

He thought his had teacher died. However, it turned out that she was alive as a corpse. Now, although she was here, Ian was going to have to say goodbye again. Ian wasn’t even sure if there was such a

thing as an afterlife and he was not sure if they could meet again even if there was one. With bitterness...Ian confided in Riley about it. Riley was thinking about the conversation.

"Ian said he has something he wanted to tell you. He said it is something he was not able to tell you before. He said he should definitely tell you now that the opportunity to talk to you has come again. However... he said a week was too short and he complained to me."

Riley had no idea what Ian wanted to tell Inaril. He approached Inaril and extended his arm out.

"My butler said he had a few things to say, so..."

Riley moved his mana as he continued.

"Try living a little longer."

"Mr. Riley?"

Inaril realized Riley was using mana. Inaril appeared to be panicking. She opened her mouth and muttered Riley's name.

"Well, perhaps it is not right to say you should try living a little longer since you already have died? It would feel cold when your hand is held as well."

“Mr. Riley… Even so, this is against the way of the world…”

Of his time magic spells, Riley used slow magic. He was extending the time that Inaril had left in this world little by little. He said to Inaril who was panicking.

“This is just out of a whim.”

“…”

“Gods are like that too, don’t you think? That one who is called Goddess had me born into this world with all of my past life’s memory intact. That’s not supposed to have happen in the first place. So…”

Inaril was stepping back to avoid Riley’s magic. However her back-step was stopped by Nainiae’s hand.

“Even if another thing that is not supposed to happen does happen, it would be all right, don’t you think?”

Because of the duel earlier, Inaril’s skin was pale as a corpse. Now, her skin had regained some vitality. Riley retrieved his hand and said,

“Huuuuaaaaa… Uuuu. It’s been so long since I exercised.”

It was not certain if it was because it was morning now or if it

was because it had been a while since he had exercised and hence he was tired. He yawned big time, enough to tear his mouth. He then gestured to Nainiae to come closer.

"... Let's go back."

"Now?"

"Instead of here, I would like to go sleep on a nice bed."

Riley looked so sleepy that he could fall asleep on the street right now. He was rubbing his sleepy eyes. Nainiae thought that it could not be helped. She prepared a teleportation spell.

"I'll leave the rest to you all."

Inaril was standing there with a blank look on her face. Ryan, Ian and the others were looking at where they were. Nainiae said those words as goodbye toward those people. She then supported Riley and went inside the portal.

*

The year ended.

The winter was almost winding down. The spring had just come around the corner at Iphalleta Mansion. A pretty faced maid came running to the Young Master who was sleeping in.

“… Young Master! Young Master!”

“Ummmm….. Five more minutes…”

“This. Please take a look at this.”

It was his designated maid, Nainiae. By her calling, Riley woke up. He cringed in protest, wondering why she had to wake him up.

“Ugh, what is it…”

“This!”

With a crumpling sound, she handed a paper to Riley. It was full of letters. Nainiae pointed at the part that was written in relatively larger fonts.

[Due to the great migration of monsters which started from Ansyrium’s Epidemic, thousands of monsters swarmed at Romella Village… The monsters were exterminated over night by mercenaries]

It was a newspaper.

“Mercenaries? Are they talking about Nara?”

The newspaper article didn't just have letters. It included drawings as well. Riley checked out the entire article. He found Nara in the drawing. As the representative of the mercenary group, Nara had his spear resting on his shoulder. Riley peeked a smile.

"If you continue to read further, it mentions Ms. Rorona, Mr. Ian…Ms. Iril and Ms. Inaril too. If you look here…"

Although they were not on the drawing, the article included the name of Rorona, who was a fellow mercenary with Nara, and Iril and Inaril who Riley had met in Romella Village.

"Romella Village's Sword Witch, the most dedicated contributor who saved the village… Uncover her mystery? The blindingly bright light that surged from the Romella Village, the missing Priestess was there? Appearance of the former mercenary hero, what is he doing now?"

Riley read the rest of the article and other headlines. He furrowed his brows and looked at Nainiae.

"What is this?"

"It looks like they have done something big."

"Hm…"

Riley now held the entire paper by himself with his own hands.

He started to really read the contents of the newspaper.

"... I don't see Big Bro's name."

"Ah, yes.... I didn't see Young Master Ryan's name there."

Perhaps because they were inside the mansion, concerned about someone listening, Nainiae said it in a quiet voice by whispering it next to Riley's ear. She added,

"Still, if you look at the bottom, there is a mention of someone's exploit. It is brief, but I think it might be about Young Master Ryan."

Having heard her explanation, Riley checked the bottom. He saw the part which read 'mysterious hooded cape.' He shrugged.

"I see."

The newspaper was about people who were still in Romella Village.

It didn't just talk about Iphalleta House's Ryan and Ian. It also mentioned Nara, Rorona and Priesia who were indebted to the Reitri Merchant Group at the moment. Also, the article even mentioned Inaril and Iril who lived in the village.

"Now that I think about it, I forgot to tell Mr. Reitri that we met

Mr. Ian.”

“He is quick at figuring things out. He probably figured that I returned to the mansion right after meeting Ian. I’m sure he promptly directed his attention to find other ways to make money after that.”

“I guess so.”

After reading the entire paper, he folded it and handed it to Nainiae as if he was trying to tell her to take the paper away. Nainiae received the paper and smiled big.

“I’m so glad. They seem to be doing all right.”

“Who?”

“...Mr. Ian and Ms. Inaril”

With the newspaper held against her chest, Nainiae smiled. Riley put up a bitter smile and mumbled,

“Well, if it was anyone who didn’t know about the circumstances for his absence here, they would think that Ian was neglecting his duty and committing total thievery.”

“Ah hahahaha...”

“Let’s just think of this as giving him a winter vacation. When the time is up and when Ian gets to say everything he wanted to say…when he gives her a beautiful sendoff, he will come back.”

Riley closed his eyes again.

“I’m going to get some shuteye for a bit, so wake me up during the dinner time.”

“Are you going to sleep again?”

“Sleeping is the profitable business.”

“I guess that would be true for you, Young Master.”

Nainiae knew that sleeping was closely related to how Riley collected mana. It looked like Nainiae didn’t know what to do. She looked conflicted. She started to glance around.

“…”

It was because a guest had come to see him.

“… Hey.”

In the garden, while waiting for the spring that had not come yet, Riley was trying to take another nap. However, his eyebrows got

twisted after hearing the voice from above.

“Um…”

“Hey.”

Top of Riley’s head was hit by the tip of someone’s foot.

“I know you are not asleep. Get up.”

With veins bulging from his forehead, Andal, the red-haired young man, moved his foot again and kicked Riley’s head once again.

“E… Excuse me, teacher… How about we wait a bit and have the conversation when Young Master is awake?”

Nainiae looked like she didn’t know what to do. She looked at Riley and Andal back and forth.

“Nainiae.”

“Yes…”

Andal called her name. Nainiae responded in a quiet voice.

“When did you change like that?”

“What do you mean… changed?”

“I always told you that you should be proud and hold your head up high as my pupil, yet… Take this to your heart once again. You are my pupil. Therefore, you don’t need to lower your head to anyone, even to the Young Master you serve.”

“No… I have always been like this.”

“Anyway, I need to wake him up. Step aside.”

Andal walked towards Riley to kick his head. Nainiae broke out in a cold sweat and blocked Andal’s path.

“N… Now that I think about it. Is the case with Epidemic resolved? I heard that it is a big problem in Ansyrium. I have not heard anything new since…”

Nainiae was glancing around and wondering what to do to prevent Andal from pestering Riley when he was trying to rest. She flexed her wits and asked Andal about Epidemic.

“I know. I actually came here because of that.”

Concerned that there might be someone around the garden, Nainiae used soundproof magic in secret and started to focus on what Andal had to say,

“I learned that the purple human bastard who spread the epidemic is in Ansyrium, so I went after him. He completely destroyed a city. However… a problem came up.”

“A problem?”

“Yes.”

Having heard what Andal was saying, Riley, who was pretending to be asleep, opened one of his eyes narrowly and looked at Andal.

“An arrogant human came to see us first, and… He asked if we would like to negotiate.”

“Negotiate?”

“Yes, just a human said that.”

He was saying that just one human recognized Andal and the other dragons and came first to talk to them. Finding it hard to believe, Nainiae asked,

“Was it like Mr. Nara…What I’m saying is, was it a being who had a special ability like the Basilisks?”

“No.”

Andal shook his head and said,

“That bastard was human.”

Andal looked at Riley who had Nainiae standing in front of him. Andal added,

“Even that rascal over here, although he looks like he couldn’t possibly be human, he is a human, isn’t he? This bastard that I ran into in Ansyrium had the same feel to him.”

Andal was saying he met someone who was like Riley, someone who was a human but wasn’t like a human. Nainiae hardened the look on her face. Hoping for a more detailed explanation, she narrowed her eyes and asked,

“When he said negotiation, what kind was he talking about?”

“He said he wanted to go fishing with his old friend.”

“Pardon?”

“So, he said that he will hand over Epidemic who we were looking for if we bring him his old pal.”

“About that, by any chance…”

“Ah, Young Master.”

The words were nonsensical, so Nainiae tilted her head to the side. Meanwhile, Riley already had opened his eyes and was actively listening to what Andal was saying. Nainiae looked back at Riley.

“Was it a woman?”

“Woman? No. It was a boy. In human’s age… He appeared to be about twelve years old.”

Riley was thinking it that might have been Helena, so he asked. Having heard the response, he thought about Rebethra when they ran into him in a forest near Romella Village last time.

“A twelve years old boy?”

“The bastard said that his old pal is the most skilled swordsman in the world… Of the humans I know, when it came to someone who is the most skilled swordsman, I could not think of anyone else but you. So…”

Rebethra had once lost his life to Helena. Riley was trying to figure out how he had come back to life. Riley tilted his head to the side and asked,

“Friend?”

If it was Rebethra who Andal met, Riley figured that Rebethra would refer to Riley as a friend. Pondering what this was about, Riley crumpled his eyebrows.

“… Ah, one more thing.”

Riley was thinking hard about something. Andal said he forgot to mention one more thing. He said,

“He said that the most skilled swordsman friend will come and find him if I told that friend the following. So…He told me to make sure to tell you this.”

“What?”

“That day… The words that the Brave Hero said just before he fell from above to the ground… He said he remembers them well.”

“…?”

Having heard what Andal had delivered, Riley furrowed his brows.

Chapter 188 - An Old Friend

“Just now, what did you say?”

“Are you having memory problems? Don’t make me say it twice.”

Andal hated being asked the same question twice. He crumpled his face and let out his frustration. Nainiae, with a serious face, repeated what Andal had said just now.

“That day... The words that the Brave Hero said just before he fell from above to the ground... He said he remembers them well.”

Having heard what Nainiae repeated, Riley thought about his past life. He covered his mouth with his hand and furrowed his brows.

“What’s wrong with him?”

Andal had never seen Riley acting this way. It seemed that Andal was more surprised and dumbfounded than anyone else. He broke out in a cold sweat and looked at Nainiae.

“Nainiae?”

“Yes?”

“You look a bit odd too?”

Wondering if something was up, Andal went back and forth between Riley and Nainiae, tilting his head to the side. Unlike Riley, Nainiae had come back to her senses. She shook her head and said,

"No, it is nothing."

Nainiae remembered the rule about being careful not to mention Riley's past life so easily. She glanced at Riley who had a serious look on his face. She sent a signal.

"..."

Riley's eyes met with Nainiae's. Riley lightly nodded and said to Andal,

"It is just that I think I have heard that line somewhere. I think I heard that line before, but... I cannot remember where from...no matter how much I think about it."

Andal, with a serious look on his face, checked Riley's face and asked,

"Your memory seems to be coming and going lately. It is a bit unstable... By any chance, are you suffering from that illness that old humans are known to suffer often?"

“An illness?”

“D… D… What was it? Dimension?”

“You mean Dementia?”

“Ah, right! Dementia!”

It was a familiar word. Riley and Nainiae peeked a smile and relaxed the heavy atmosphere a little. They started to roll their brains again.

“It is not dementia, so don’t worry.”

Of what the human that Andal had run into in Ansyrium said, Riley was thinking about ‘Brave Hero’ and ‘Fall.’ Riley thought about the conversation he had with a certain someone just before he died in his past life.

‘If you are asking me how it feels, I’m exhausted. Honestly, I’m exhausted.’

Standing above the clouds, the man had blood-like red skin and black horns. Riley remembered the conversation he had with the very last demon that he had fought in his past life. Riley asked Andal,

“By any chance, can you show me how the guy looked like?”

“What? As I thought, you know something?”

Having heard Riley’s request, Andal looked at Riley with suspicious eyes. Thinking it could not be helped, Andal used mirage magic to form the shape of the child he had met in Ansyrium.

“Here. This is how he looks like.”

With piercing gazes, Riley and Nainiae glared at the boy’s face which Andal had formed with mirage magic. They furrowed their brows.

‘It’s different.’

‘It’s different.’

The boy looked young. However, somehow, that belied the true age of the being and it showed on his face. Riley and Nainiae exchanged gazes with each other. It seemed they had confirmed it and were okay with Andal disengaging the mirage magic.

“Anyway, it is not certain if the ‘Old Friend’ that this bastard is talking about is you. However, if you know something, then I would appreciate it if you helped us. You just need to show your face for a moment. As for the rest, ‘We’ will handle it.”

He was talking about the other dragons beside himself who were making their moves concerning this incident. Nainiae checked Riley's mood.

"Is the situation so serious that everyone needs to be involved?"

"Riley said there was no solution, so this is the best we could do. If we let that Epidemic man live, ruining a city or two like Ansyrium or Solia would be the least of our problems."

Throwing the man into the sky or burying the man deep in the ground...Andal said they needed to eradicate that monster using any means necessary. Andal looked at Riley,

"Are you going to come along?"

Having heard the question, Riley asked back,

"If I don't come along, what is going to happen?"

"We would collide with the human we are supposed to negotiate with."

Andal said he was planning on killing the boy who seemed to be hiding the Epidemic man, the purple human that the dragons were chasing after and extract the memories from him. Having heard his plan, Riley sighed big.

“It is not important to know how that bastard figured out our identities and approached us first.”

Watching Riley sigh, Andal lightly lifted his right hand and ignited a fire above it.

“We are superior beings who are beyond this world.”

Pak!

He then squashed the flame. Andal continued,

“Our task is maintaining this world’s balance.”

Balance of the world, our task… Riley watched his friend huffing and puffing all agitated next to him. This time, Riley sighed briefly inside.

‘What if…. What if that bastard who fell and died with me was also reincarnated in this world?’

In Riley’s past life, this being was called the Demon Lord. It was the demon who had finally and barely met his end after Riley went through all sorts of hardships. Riley was thinking about the possibility of the Demon Lord being reincarnated into this world along with himself. Riley supported his chin with his palm and agonized over this.

‘If it really is that bastard, then this is dangerous.’

Riley thought about how it would play out if Andal and his fellow kin members went to fight the bastard. Riley crumpled his eyebrows.

‘It won’t change anything even if Andal brought a few lizards with him. They will all die.’

Nainiae, who had Riley’s memories, seemed to be thinking the same thing. She glanced at Andal to check on his mood. Andal was still huffing and puffing.

‘I already have a headache because of Helena. Why do I need to mind that bastard too now?’

Although Riley could not be certain, since Riley was living in this world with the Blessing of Sword and his memories still intact… Riley could not jump hastily to the conclusion that the Demon Lord from his past life was not in the same situation as Riley.

‘What are you going to do?’

Nainiae glanced at Riley.

“…”

Feeling her gaze, Riley agonized over this briefly. It seemed that

he had found an answer. He messed up his hair and got up.

“I’ll go too.”

“Um?”

“Why are you surprised? I said I’ll go too.”

Riley had agreed to go with Andal so easily, so Andal wondered if he was just hearing things. He dug his ear holes and asked again.

“What did you say?”

“I think I can understand why you said not to ask twice.”

Riley was not interested in repeating himself for the third time. Riley turned back to look at Nainiae and said,

“You stay here.”

“Pardon? However…”

“Stay.”

Riley told Nainiae to stay at the mansion. He placed his hand on her shoulder and explained why.

“One of us needs to stay, isn’t that right? Are you going to go instead of me?”

“That is…”

“No matter how we look at this, it would be best if you stayed here. Use your magic to trick my family for the time being. I’ll be back soon.”

While he was going to be in Ansyrium with Andal, Riley was asking Nainiae to trick his family for the time being by staying at the mansion. He looked at Nainiae. He was asking if Nainiae could handle it well.

“…”

“Um. If it was Ian, he would have said ‘Finally, you have decided to work hard!’ and shed tears of joy.”

Facing Nainiae’s silence, Riley pretended to be preoccupied. He bought up Ian for no reason and muttered. Nainiae had a dissatisfied look on her face. She took a step closer to Riley and raised her hand toward him.

“… Ah, Uk.”

Feeling the sudden pain from above his forehead, Riley cringed.

He stared at Nainiae who was taking a step back.

“You, what was…”

“You asked me, didn’t you?”

Nainiae had taken a strand of Riley’s hair out. Riley was going to argue and ask what that was for, but Nainiae asked him a question instead, so Riley tilted his head to the side.

“I thought we might get found out if I don’t do this properly, so…”

Nainiae dropped the hair to the floor and drew Dragon’s language in the air. The hair she dropped to the floor disappeared, and instead, a doll that looked just like Riley appeared.

“Ms. Sera in particular…She has such great sense of smell, so I think we would be found out even with this, but…”

It was a doll created with magic. It looked just like Riley. Intrigued, Riley stared at the doll. As if he was impressed, he turned to look at Nainiae.

“This is… Me, right?”

“Yes. I tried to make it look exactly like you.”

It seemed the doll could not talk. It just had its mouth vacantly open. It was one unfocused guy. Riley stared at the doll some more and changed the look on his face. In complaining tone, Riley asked,

“By the way, don’t you think this one looks a bit absent minded?”

Having heard his question, Andal and Nainiae responded at the same time.

“No, it is just like you.”

“I think it looks just like you.”

The doll’s face looked like he was about to drool. It seemed that Riley was thinking that this wasn’t right. He shook his head, smiled awkwardly and looked at Nainiae.

“Come on. Still, it is not this much.”

“That is… I made it to look like you as much as possible…”

Nainiae blushed. For some reason, she mumbled while pouting. Andal, who was watching the two from the side, snickered and joined in.

“What do you mean this is not it? It looks identical! The blurry, unfocused look on the face, the gaze that just screams ‘let me sleep’… It’s as if the doll came out of a waffle machine with your

name on it. What's different about this doll in comparison to you?"

Andal looked satisfied. He insisted over and over that the doll that Nainiae made was just like Riley. Riley put a frustrated look on his face.

"…"

"What the, what's that look for?"

Andal put on violent look on his face. He was daring Riley to voice complaints. Andal pointed at Riley with his chin as he asked,

"That look in your eyes, are you saying that my pupil is not skilled?"

"…"

Riley had a dissatisfied look on his face. With his crumpled face, Riley raised his middle finger at Andal.

'Y… Young Master…'

Watching Riley give Andal the finger, Nainiae gasped for air in silence and checked on Andal. Andal just stared at Riley and said,

“… Huuut.”

He smiled as if he was satisfied.

“See. You know whose pupil she is, right?”

“…”

“…?”

Despite the middle finger being aimed at the man, strangely, Andal was all happy. Nainiae wondered why Andal was acting this way. She tilted her head to the side and then remembered what had happened last year.

‘You. Starting today, you are my pupil.’

‘Pardon?’

‘Say it after me. Doctor… No. Teacher.’

‘…’

‘Try it. Teacher.’

‘T… Teacher?’

‘Um! Good! I like the sound of that. Hahaha!’

‘Ah, ah haha…’

During last year’s fall… Nainiae was thinking about the time when Andal had accepted her as his pupil. Back then, Andal had raised his middle finger too. He looked happy. Remembering this, Nainiae looked at Riley.

‘By any chance…. The teacher is… still thinking that joke is…’

‘This runt…’

Riley, the one with the finger, was not expecting Andal to respond this way. Riley looked dumbfounded.

‘What’s this?’

‘Compliment.’

‘Compliment?’

‘The middle finger means compliment?’

“That’s right. I’m complimenting you for your cool acting in the corridor just now.’

Andal still remembered the practical joke that Riley had tossed at him to make fun of him. Riley asked Nainiae with his gaze.

<You didn’t tell him?>

<That is… Yes. I couldn’t.>

<Why not?>

<I was worried that you two might have a fight if I told him.>

<…>

The two were having a conversation in secret so Andal wouldn’t hear it. Andal was still flexing his shoulders. Nainiae and Riley saw Andal and nodded.

<Hey, just…>

<It would be best to leave him out of it, right?>

<… Of course.>

The mood was more eased now in comparison to earlier. Riley and Nainiae both broke into laughter.

“You will… come back soon, right?”

Was it because of the mood?

Unlike earlier, Nainiae’s voice did not sound as worried as before.

Having heard the question, Riley also responded in a voice that was not as worrisome as earlier.

“That’s right.”

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It seemed that Nainiae was satisfied with Riley's answer. She nodded and put away the doll she had made into the dimensional space. She bowed.

"In that case, I'll be waiting."

She believed that he would return. She had no doubt about it. She bowed, ending the conversation and returned to the mansion. Andal was vacantly staring at his pupil. He asked Riley,

"Are you guys scheming something behind my back?"

"Scheme? What scheme?"

"It is just that, just now...I felt something strange...that was unfamiliar to me?"

"Aren't you going to go?"

As if he had enough, Riley packed his personal stuff and looked at Andal. Andal was furrowing his brows, finding all this suspicious. Still, he couldn't help it. He moved his mana and prepared the teleportation spell.

"You guys are really not scheming anything, right?"

“Even if we were, would we tell you?”

“You are meticulous only in instances like these.”

Andal had casted an isolation barrier so that others in the mansion would not notice. From a distance, Nainiae saw them off. Andal waved at her and created a teleportation door.

“Let’s go.”

The area beyond the gate was probably Ansyrium… It was a city that didn’t have a good relationship with Solia, so Riley had never been to the place before.

“You didn’t leave anything behind, did you?”

“There isn’t anything.”

In secret, Nainiae had left him Astroa’s leather bracelet. Riley wore the bracelet, tightened the belt for attaching the spare sword and lastly, he placed Salvation, his Holy Sword, on his waist. Riley walked toward the dimensional gate first.

*

“… Hey.”

From the mansion, Riley arrived in Ansyrium through the dimensional gate. Having heard Andal talking to him from the side, Riley moved his eyes to look at him.

“What?”

“About that sword…”

Andal glanced at the sword that was hanging on Riley’s waist. He said that he had not seen the sword before and asked,

“Where did you get it?”

“What are you going to do by knowing about it?”

“It looks pretty nice, so I asked.”

Andal was quite focused on the Salvation. Riley could understand why. He wiggled his brows and said,

“I picked it up.”

“Picked it up?”

To be precise, he had received the Holy Sword, Salvation, from Inaril who had been keeping it safe all this time.

“Hm.”

Although it was not certain if Andal was simply intrigued about the sword or tempted to have it...Andal kept on fiddling with his chin as he walked the streets of Ansyrium. He carefully asked,

“Riley, if it is all right with you...”

“I won’t let you.”

Riley didn’t even listen to the end of the proposal. He pulled his chin and smiled. Andal looked like a child who didn’t get to buy the toy he wanted. Andal crumpled his face.

“What the...How could you make the decision even before hearing what I had to say first?”

“I can already tell from just looking at your eyes.”

“What’s so obvious?”

“You have the same look you had when you were like this with Nainiae. If you are going to whine, then go find someone else. You claim to be a superior being who is beyond this world, but what nonsense... Considering what you are doing, you are on par with an armed robber.”

“R... robber?”

Riley didn't even look at Andal. He just waved his hand at Andal. Meanwhile, Riley was looking at Ansyrium's scenery. For reasons unknown, the place appeared to be rather empty. Riley found something odd and stiffened his face.

"..."

"Lizard... Lizard... You had been calling me that, now...you are calling me an armed robber? Hey, fine, you rascal. Did I ever ask you to give it to me?"

"Hey, Andal..."

"It's just, Kuhum! Right! I was just going to ask you to let me borrow it for a bit. I thought it was a pretty nice sword, so I was going to compare it to my other swords that are stuck in the depth of my cave, so..."

"Andal."

"Um?"

Riley was looking around the area and called his name. Andal stopped complaining and looked at Riley, wondering what this was about.

"The mood here, is it always like this?"

“The mood…?”

“Presence of people… The place is lacking of people’s presence?”

“Ah ha.”

Having heard the question, Andal also looked around the area. He then explained the strangeness that Riley felt.

“No. Although this place is usually not as lively as Solia, it is not like the place should be devoid of people.”

While listening to Andal’s explanation, Riley quickly looked around the houses and streets he had passed through so far and the overall scenery around him. He thought it was strange that he had not run into a single person so far. Riley had a puzzled look on his face.

“I can see why you are finding this strange. The houses around here… Take a look. What color are they?”

Overall, the city had a dull atmosphere. Riley was observing the city carefully. Having heard Andal’s question, he realized that there were only gray and black colors. Riley muttered,

“By any chance…”

“That’s right.”

Andal nodded and said,

“It’s that bastard.”

Riley realized that Andal was talking about Epidemic, the purple human that they had run into the last time. Riley looked around the city again.

‘According to the merchants, it is a living disaster.’

Thinking about what Reitri had told him, Riley had a look of disbelief. The severity of the epidemic was far more serious than what he had seen in his past life.

‘It was not this serious in my past life.’

While Riley was thinking about this and muttering inside, Andal, who also started to look around the city, continued his explanation.

“I am not surprised that you didn’t notice. The most common color in Ansyrium is gray. However, all black color we are seeing here are…”

“Epidemic… is that what you are trying to say?”

Andal nodded.

“Right.”

“…”

The look on Riley’s face hardened even more.

The epidemic left black stains. Riley realized that what he could observe with his eyes was not all of them.

It seemed the city called Ansyrium had been absolutely devastated by this single individual. Let alone any presence, there wasn’t even any trace of people here.

“It’s all done by that one bastard.”

The Epidemic man didn’t just possess the power of epidemic. He also had immortality. Last time, they were not able to put an end to the man. Thinking about this, Riley crumpled his face.

“I had been wondering why there was no news from Ansyrium lately. Is this the reason?”

Andal nodded. He took a knee to bend his upper body. He picked up a black pebble that was rolling around in the ground. Andal said,

“I am not sure if I should call this a good thing, but that bastard’s trace ends here. I haven’t heard any other side suffering from epidemic.”

It was a repeat of the explanation he had already heard at the mansion. Riley nodded and started to walk again.

They walked and walked…

No matter where they walked, the visuals looked the same. Black colored epidemic drenched the entire city. It didn’t just make the city’s color look dull. A dark aura was circulating around the city.

“While we were investigating, we met that human child with a strange atmosphere. He knew that we are dragons and he had come to talk to us first, saying that he was looking for an old friend.”

Having heard Andal, Riley had an uncomfortable look on his face.

“An old friend huh…”

With the Demon Lord, Riley could not say that their relationship was a positive one. It was closer to being bad blood. Thinking about the demon from his past life, Riley mumbled. It seemed that he was still not sure about this.

‘It is too early to conclude that this bastard really is the Demon

Lord from my past life. I still need to consider the possibility that this is just another trick by Helena.'

While Riley was muttering inside like that, Andal joined his kin members who were already inside Ansyrium, waiting for his arrival. Andal let them know: "we will handle it by ourselves," and continued to walk.

"By the way, how long do we need to walk?"

"We are almost there."

Andal was leading the way. Facing his back, Riley asked toward him. However, he felt someone's gaze on him, so Riley stopped walking. He started to move his eyes around.

'A gaze?'

It was someone other than Andal's kin. Presence of humans, something that they could not feel in the rotten city, could be felt.

"Humans?"

There weren't just one or two. It seemed there were at least 15 of them. Feeling their presence, Riley stopped walking. He slowly turned his body toward where the gazes were coming from.

"Huuuiiic?!"

“H… He saw us?!”

“How?!”

It was inside a rundown building. The windows were all shattered, so winds were blowing right into the building. There were three children in shambles inside. Their eyes met with Riley’s and they tumbled to lower their heads to hide.

“Children?”

Riley realized that the ones staring at them were children in hiding. Andal turned to look at Riley.

“What is it? You stopped all of the sudden?”

Riley was looking at the building with the children. Riley said,

“No, there are children…”

“Children?”

“I saw children.”

Andal followed what Riley did and stared at the building. He shrugged as if he understood something.

“They are abandoned ones.”

The children were in shambles. From how the children looked, Riley thought about the time he had met Nainiae for the first time. As if he could not be sure with just this, he asked Andal,

“Abandoned?”

“What do humans say? Homeless?”

“Homeless?”

“That’s right, the homeless people.”

Andal explained that when the city was destroyed, the children who were abandoned by the higher ups of the Ansyrium city, saying that they were just burdens and the abandoned children were hiding in the buildings.

“Having special abilities or being one of the purple people… It is not like that, right?”

“… We are not.”

It was not Andal’s voice. Another young, frail voice responded to Riley’s question. Riley’s gaze was directed to the place where the voice had come from.

“…?”

The one who responded to Riley’s question was a child in ragged clothing. The child had dark blue hair.

“You are?”

It was hard to tell the child’s gender based on the appearance. The child was a girl who Riley had never seen before. Wondering who this was, Riley furrowed his brows. The dark blue haired child asked,

“Mr. Andal, the red dragon, is this one ‘the greatest swordsman in the world’?”

Andal nodded.

“That’s right. As far as we know… there isn’t anyone in this world who knows how to handle swords better than him.”

“I see.”

Having heard Andal’s explanation, the dark blue haired child looked at Riley who was standing there vacantly. The girl lightly turned her body and started to walk.

“Well then, let’s go.”

The unidentified child who Riley had never seen before started to walk. Riley followed after Andal and asked quietly. Riley was asking for an explanation.

“What is this? Is this the kid?”

“No. She is not the one.”

Andal shook his head and then started to explain about the girl.

“I don’t know the detail either. I just know that she is quite close to the little one who asked us about his ‘Old Friend.’”

Having heard the explanation, Riley applied energy into his eyes to examine the child. He realized he was not sensing any energy from the child. Now, Riley looked like he was finding this even more suspicious.

‘I’m certain there is no mana or special energy coming from the kid?’

The child who was walking in front of them was really just an ordinary child.

“By any chance, have you considered the choice of taking that kid as the hostage and negotiating with the kid who came to talk to you? You said she is quite close to him, right?”

Riley asked in a quiet voice so the girl who was walking in front of them won't be able to hear it. Andal crumpled his face and asked back,

"Do you think we didn't think about that? Some of my kin members said it would be quicker to try a hostage situation. However, we are only guessing that she is close to him. Also... our lord was opposed to the idea."

"Lord? That silver elf?"

"That's right. She concluded that this is not something that could be solved by a hostage situation, although I think her emotions were leading her decision on this matter."

"What emotion?"

"We are supposed to be the ones who maintain the balance. It would be wrong for us to initiate violence. That was her stance. Some of us said that we should not mind such things at the moment and press on instead because the balance will fall if we don't fix this soon. However...They were overruled."

Andal said he was also against the extreme measures. He continued to explain.

"So, I decided to bring you here. After the long discussion, we decided to bring you, a human who is a skilled swordsman and

present you to the little one who recognized us. We are going to make a decision after that."

It seemed they had arrived at where the so-called 'little one' was. The dark blue haired girl who was leading the way lightly lowered her head toward Andal and Riley to show her respect before taking her leave.

"… This place is?"

In front of Riley's eyes, there was a large lake. Nearby, there was a young boy who was vacantly staring at a fishing pole. Riley had his mouth slightly open, but he closed his mouth.

"…"

Andal looked like he realized Riley's mood had changed rapidly. Andal, who was standing next to Riley, said quietly,

"That's the bastard."

"…"

"It is the little one who recognized us first and came to talk to us. He is the one who is suspected of hiding the Epidemic man."

Having heard Andal's explanation, Riley observed the boy who was vacantly sitting on a small wooden chair. Riley confirmed that

the boy's appearance was significantly different from the Demon Lord that he had run into in his past life. However, Riley didn't relax.

'It is that bastard.'

It was because Riley could tell from the atmosphere.

'This bastard was reincarnated in this place too.'

Riley was able to tell that the boy they were facing right now was the Demon Lord, who Riley had barely managed to make him fall in his past life.

"Hey, I brought him."

Riley was keeping his mouth shut. Instead of him, Andal spoke.

"…?"

The boy finally turned his head and looked at Andal and Riley.

"Ah, you are here."

Perhaps he was sleepy. His eyes were half closed. When he turned to face Riley and Andal, he blinked his eyes. It seemed that the boy was glad to see Riley.

“Um? You…have the same face that you had in your past life?”

“…?”

The child smiled refreshingly and asked Riley. Andal furrowed his brows, wondering what that was about.

“You…”

Riley took a step toward the boy and asked,

“What is your name?”

Having heard the question, the boy turned his gaze toward the fishing pole again. The boy said in leisurely tone,

“This boy does not have a name.”

The fishing pole that the boy was looking at flinched.

“Still, if I am to borrow the name from my past life…”

The boy kept silent for a long time before finally opening his mouth.

“… Abyss.”

“…”

“Call me that.”

Riley was certain that he was the one.

Chapter 190 - An Old Friend (3)

Abyss.

That was the name of the Demon Lord.

‘Our sky is in danger.’

‘We must not let the demons target our sky.’

‘We will be destroyed if we do not stop Abyss.’

The Demon Lord was trying to take the sky.

People said that the Demon Lord was trying to take the sky because he wanted to slaughter all humans on the surface.

So…

‘Brave Hero, please help us. Only the Brave Hero, the one who can hold the Salvation… is the only human who can defeat Abyss the Demon Lord.’

In middle of a concrete jungle with high rise buildings, there was a white church with a cross. Inside… there was a beautiful girl wearing a white priestess dress. She asked the boy who was sitting on his knees.

‘P… Priestess. People said that Great Demon had killed several tens or hundreds of people in a single breath. How can I slay him? I could never…’

The priestess showed a benevolent smile to the boy. She encouraged the young boy who was born with the blessing which allowed him to wield the Holy Sword.

‘You can do it.’

‘… Priestess.’

‘You can.’

In the end, the boy succeeded.

Finally, he defeated the Demon Lord.

‘So… how does it feel to have defeated me?’

When he was young and when he had not wanted to be away from his family, Riley thought he might have been better off if he had just died. Not a day went by without him thinking like this. His battles were that brutal. Literally, he was coughing blood, shedding tears of blood and fought in battles that seemed to have no end. In the end…

‘If you insist on asking…’

In the sky, the Brave Hero had defeated the Demon Lord. Riley responded to the Demon Lord’s question.

‘I’m exhausted.’

Ever since he held the Holy Sword, ever since many people had pleaded with him to defeat the Demon Lord, the Brave Hero had never been honest with how he had truly felt. For the first time, at that moment, he mumbled honestly.

‘I said I’m exhausted. Honestly, I’m exhausted.’

The Demon Lord met his end by Riley’s Holy Sword. Soon, the Great Demon was going to fall to the ground and disintegrate. To the demon, Riley mumbled honestly.

‘Finally…’

The Brave Hero fell along with the Demon Lord. The Brave Hero closed his eyes. It seemed that he had shaken off all burdens from his shoulders. He looked so peaceful.

‘Ah… It is finally over.’

*

“Well, there is no need for you to be so wary.”

It seemed that the boy had felt Riley‘s glare on him. The young boy was staring at the fishing rod and vacantly reminiscing about his past life. The young boy mumbled,

“It has not been very long since I realized that you were also born into this world”

The boy who had introduced himself as Abyss pointed to an empty wooden chair next to him and then glanced at Riley.

“Why don’t you sit down?”

Riley was standing there with a blank look on his face. Abyss asked if he would like to sit down. After that, Abyss looked at Andal who was standing next to Riley. He then nodded his chin once.

“Ah, you there…It is fine if you want to leave.”

“What?”

Having heard Abyss, Andal furrowed his brows.

“Hey, I don’t know what’s going on here, but if Riley is the old friend that you wanted to meet, then…”

Andal suppressed his anger as much as possible. He then walked to where Abyss was sitting as he asked,

"... isn't it about time you tell us what we want to know?"

Abyss felt Andal's deadly aura. Abyss was still sitting in the chair as he looked right into Andal's eyes. Soon, as if Abyss was finding it to be such a bother, he scratched his hair and mumbled,

"If you are talking about what you lizards want..."

Abyss said 'lizards.' That made a vein to pop on Andal's forehead. It seemed that Andal could not take it anymore. He was trying to use magic to attack Abyss. At that moment, Abyss lifted his right hand.

"What?"

With that hand, Abyss opened his index finger and pointed at something. Andal was infuriated and was walking toward Abyss, but he flinched and stopped moving.

"I already handled it."

Having heard what he had just said, Andal asked back,

"You handled it?"

Andal turned his head toward where the boy was pointing to with his finger. Andal had a look of disbelief.

“It cannot be…”

“… She was suffering so much, so…”

Abyss was pointing to the girl with the dark blue hair who had led the way for Andal and Riley to this place.

“I took her under my wings.”

“You took her under your wings?”

“In the process, her memory became blurry, but it is actually a good thing.”

It seemed Abyss had confirmed that fishes were biting. Abyss strained his eyes and carefully held the fishing rod. He was checking for opportunities.

“That rascal is… excessively kind and innocent like a certain someone.”

It looked like he felt something on the fishing rod. Abyss wiggled his brows and pulled the rod with all of his strength. However, the fishing hook had nothing on it.

“… Ugh.”

Abyss saw the fishing hook dangling in the air. He crumpled his face. He then clicked his tongue before swinging the fishing rod to send the hook back into the lake.

‘There is no bait on it?’

Without any bait attached to it, Abyss was fishing with just the bare fish hook. Riley wondered what Abyss was up to. It was when Riley was furrowing his brow. Abyss looked disappointed because he hadn’t caught anything. He continued mumbling what he couldn’t earlier.

“Her physical pain is over, but it looks like she won’t be able to overcome the guilt of having killed people… So… it turned out well for her.”

*

During the last winter, at Ansyrium…

‘It’s the Epidemic!’

‘Run!’

‘Don’t breathe!’

‘We must get away! If you get infected, you will die!’

‘It’s a human, but… like a clay… all wobbly…’

‘Uuuaaaaak!’

‘S… Save me! Please!’

The boy with sleepy eyes saw the people who were bumping into his shoulders and running away screaming. He then saw the human with black skin who was screaming at him.

‘Did some crazy lunatic perform a forbidden experiment again? Anyway, it looks like this city called Ansyrium is not a great place to live… It’s so noisy all the time as if there is going to be no tomorrow. Let alone peace, I don’t think I can even dream of an ordinary life here.’

As if he was finding all this to be such a bother, Abyss scratched his hair. As if he was disinterested, he just walked past the black monster. It was at that moment.

‘… Kuuuaaak!’

‘Ah, ahah…’

‘Hup…. Huk…’

From the back, Abyss could hear the black skinned human's scream. Also, he could hear the whimpering of the children on the street who were covering each other and shaking.

'... Um?'

They were all something he had seen, felt and experienced in his past life. So, Abyss was going to walk past them all quietly. However, he lost his mind for a moment and stopped.

'Ku... Kek... Ku...'

'Huhuk... Please save us.'

'Uuuuuaaaang... Mommy....'

The human with black skin looked like it had lost its mind. It was drooling and there were frightened children next to the monster. Abyss watched them vacantly.

"...Definitely."

Abyss muttered.

"I feel like I'm watching that person..."

It seemed like this one was not wishing to hurt the children. The

body was flinching. As much as it could, the monster was suppressing the body and epidemic which were out of control. Abyss was staring at them with an intrigued look. He was thinking about the Brave Hero who had killed him in his past life.

"All right."

Abyss was just going to leave. However, in this place, at Ansyrium where the city had been destroyed by being drenched in epidemic... Abyss decided to show mercy to the black monster that was crying out loudly, enough for its vocal chords to burst.

*

"... Are you expecting us to believe that?"

Andal kept quiet and listened to Abyss's story. Finding it all to be ridiculous, he snorted and asked. Abyss was looking at the lake. He smiled nonchalantly and responded,

"You are free to believe it or not, child of lizards."

"What? Lizard? Child?"

The tone of his words was that of an adult to a child. Now, as if that was not enough of belittlement, Abyss was smiling widely. Andal tightened both of his fists and started to move his mana.

“Hey, pip-squeak…Say that again.”

It looked like Andal was going to stuff flames into the kid’s mouth if he didn’t take it back. Andal was grinding his teeth big time. Riley took a step forward and stopped Andal.

“Wait.”

“Hey, Riley, step aside. I don’t care if I’m going to get scolded by my lord. I must correct how that runt runs his mouth.”

“Ugh…”

Riley raised his left arm to block Andal. Riley looked at the child with the dark blue hair. The child was looking this way from the back. Riley asked,

“Abyss…Did you say that was your name? Do you have any proof that this is the purple human that Andal and others have been chasing? The child’s body frame is completely different from what I remember”

Abyss was looking at his fishing rod. He turned to look at Riley. He then smile slightly as if he found this amusing.

“You must know me. Why are you acting like you don’t?”

“…”

“Ah, because I’m a human now and my face is different? Well, you are exactly as you were, but I am the only one whose appearance changed. I can see why you are disappointed. Of course.”

“Just shut it and answer the question.”

Now, Riley furrowed his brows like Andal and insisted on Abyss answering the question. With a bitter look on his face, Abyss shook his head. He looked at the child with the dark blue hair and said,

“Take her with you and then you will know. If it is the children of lizards, they should be able to handle something like looking into a human’s mind… Well, they won’t be as good at it as ‘Us,’ but…”

Abyss’s had mumbled ‘Us’ in the end. Riley realized that he was indirectly talking about their past life, the existences which were at power with super natural powers to be exact. Riley quietly clicked his tongue.

“… Tsk.”

Now, it was more than certain that the Great Demon Abyss, the one who Riley had battled against with his life on the line, had been reincarnated into this world as a human boy.

“What are you doing?”

Abyss looked at Andal who was standing next to Riley. Abyss moved his chin and asked.

“Aren’t you going to take her?”

Abyss had his gaze directed to the child with dark blue hair who was vacantly staring in their direction. The girl, who used to be one of the purple humans and was named Epidemic.

“Although her memories have been erased, that’s just a matter of the mind. The memories should still be preserved within her. A human being’s brain is surprisingly magnificent, so there should not be a problem.”

“…”

Abyss’s proposal was so out of the blue. Andal was getting nervous. He slowly moved his eyes and checked Riley’s intent.

‘Will it be all right?’

‘Take her.’

‘What about you?’

‘I think I’ll have to talk to this bastard for a bit.’

Andal had never seen Riley acting like this. So, Andal carefully observed his face from the side. Soon, Andal nodded and turned around first.

‘Contact me if anything happens.’

‘Just worry about yourself.’

With Andal gone, now only Abyss and Riley were left at the lake-side. Riley slowly moved his legs, walking to stand next to the boy.

“I find this so-called fishing to be quite fun.”

Abyss glanced at Riley. He asked if Riley would like to fish together and handed him an unused fishing rod.

“Would you like to try?”

“…”

Riley didn’t say a word. He just stared at the fishing rod. Abyss lightly sighed. He put down the fishing rod and said,

“Fishing and your existence… I came to learn about them only recently.”

“In that case, as I thought…”

“That’s right. I’m just like you, although it was later for me compared to you.”

It seemed like Abyss was trying to tempt the fishes that were swimming in the lake. Holding the fishing rod with both of his hands, he was flickering it.

“After I fell to the ground and became just a splash of ground meat, I opened my eyes as a human in this city.”

Although the place was destroyed now, Abyss said his birth place was Ansyrium before the city became a mess due to the epidemic. He continued.

“The so-called reincarnation, which I only heard about… That’s what happened to me. I was reincarnated not as a demon, but as a human.”

Abyss said he was reincarnated with all of his past life’s memories intact just like Riley. He suddenly twisted the tip of his lips and asked,

“How old do you think I look?”

“I am not sure?”

Riley was sure Abyss must have lived several tens of thousands of years at least in his past life. However, Abyss definitely looked younger. So, Riley asked back.

“12... Perhaps 13... About that age. I was born a few years later than you were. This is the reason why my search for you was delayed. If we were both born around the same time, then I would have found you sooner.”

“You would have tried to find me? Why?”

“Um? I thought the child of red lizards was told about this?”

“By any chance...”

Because he wanted to enjoy fishing with an old friend...Riley remembered what Andal had said before. Riley vacantly opened his eyes.

“I guess you did hear it.”

“...”

“Anyway, In this place, my age is 13 at the most. If you would like, I can even call you Big Bro?”

“Do not make me puke.”

“Huhu…”

As if he was trying to say that now was his turn to hear some answers, Abyss carefully asked,

“So, Riley Fin Iphalleta… Now, instead of being a Brave Hero, I heard you are a Young Master of a count family?”

“You knew?”

“As I said earlier, it has not been long since I learned about you, but you are quite famous it turns out.”

Abyss snickered. He flicked the fishing rod and started to list the nicknames that Riley had.

“The worst talent in Iphalleta Family history. Lazy Sword. Vegetable, Lazy bum, Sloth, Scarecrow, Headache, and others… You have all sorts of fun nicknames. Considering what I know about you from the past, I cannot believe in these nicknames.”

Abyss was holding the fishing rod with both of his hands. He placed his right hand in his outer pocket. He brought out a page of a newspaper and gave it to Riley. He continued.

“… This is?”

“I saw your face in there and knew right away that you were also

in this world.”

The newspaper said ‘The Sword of Solia, the Iphalleta Family Finally Decided the Successor!’ There were drawings in place of where photographs would have been in the modern day newspaper. The drawings had the faces of main figures of the Iphalleta Family.

“Actually, doing this by myself is a little lacking, so…”

Abyss pointed at his own fishing rod with his gaze and said,

“As I said earlier, when I saved that kid who was suffering from the epidemic, I suddenly thought about you, so…”

“…”

“We were reincarnated to the same world with our memories intact just like each other. Since that has happened, we might as well do this once. It would be fine if we did, don’t you think? Our past lives are just that. Past lives.”

“…”

Riley still doubted Abyss. With sleepy eyes, Abyss leisurely asked,

“What do you think? You really won’t try it with me?”

Having heard the question, Riley turned his gaze toward the fishing rod that was not being used. Riley asked,

“Still, I killed you. Is this all right?”

Riley lowered his body and picked up the fishing rod. Abyss held his chin with his right hand and peeked a smile again. He said,

“It hadn’t even been 30 years. In that period of time, you could say such things. Perhaps I was envious. Instead of being angry…I felt sorry.”

“…?”

“At the very last moment, when we were both falling…I saw your eyes. Only after that…After several tens of thousands of years… The one thing I barely managed to realize…”

With a sleepy face, Abyss leisurely continued.

“I realized that I was also exhausted.”

Chapter 191 - An Old Friend (4)

Abyss was focused on fishing. He quietly said that he was also exhausted. Just like Abyss, Riley was holding onto a fishing rod. Puzzled by what Abyss had just said, Riley turned around to look at him.

“You are exhausted?”

“That’s right.”

Abyss flicked the fishing rod and said,

“You killed me, but isn’t that purely due to your abilities being exceptional? Despite having a feeble human being’s body, you still reached such height… I am astonished.”

In Abyss’s past life, Riley hadn’t just cornered him. In the end, Riley had made it so Abyss would meet his end by Riley’s sword. Reminiscing about the Brave Hero he had fought in his past life, Abyss shook his head and went to the main point.

“Anyway… It does not matter if you were the one who killed me or not. I just want to enjoy fishing with someone who can understand me. That’s all.”

In his eyes, it looked like Abyss really didn’t have any intention of fighting Riley. Also, unlike his past life, Abyss looked like he was not interested in killing humans either. The look on Riley’s face

said that somehow he felt like he could understand Abyss. Riley mumbled,

"A Demon Lord is saying that he is exhausted and wants to go fishing with the Brave Hero? If the demon bastards that I had cut down in my past life heard what you have been saying, I think they would faint from the shock."

Abyss was watching the waterline on the lake. He had a hollow laughter.

"Haha. I'm sure they would."

"You told Andal 'the oldest friend.' What was that about?"

"I referred to you as such because I thought we had become close in a way. In our past life, at the very end, we became pretty close, didn't we?"

"What a load of bullcrap..."

"Haha. It turns out there is a saying like this among the humans. Becoming friends after a fight..."

"..."

"The so-called friendship of the humans... I heard that it is something that grows bigger and stronger through bickering... Am

I wrong?”

Abyss saw that Riley’s face was crumpling. He glanced at Riley’s face and asked carefully if what he was saying was incorrect. Riley’s face looked like he was getting a headache. Riley was massaging the temples of his head.

“You used to be a demon. Now you became a human. Did your insides change too? If this was your past life, you would have never said such things.”

“I am not sure? It could be that I’ve changed. Perhaps I didn’t change. Still…I think I have not changed much. Instead of me, you have changed a lot.”

Abyss snickered and said Riley was the one who had changed more. Having heard Abyss, Riley thought about the conversation he had when he had been fighting the Demon Lord in his past life.

‘Oh… A Demon Lord is showing concern for the Brave Hero? Oh my, this is ridiculous. The fact that a Demon Lord is kinder than the Priestess… I wonder who should I bring this up to?’

‘Did you say I am kind?’

‘Ahah… If I knew about this sooner, I would have sided with you instead. Nobody would have tried to trip me off. I wouldn’t have had to be concerned about people’s gazes either.’

‘In that case, why don’t you side with me now?’

It was not exactly just before Riley’s death. The conversation had taken place just before his battle against the Demon Lord. Thinking about the conversation, Riley had a bitter look on his face. He started to laugh but it was hollow.

“In the past, you were the Brave Hero who could not go a day without swinging his sword. Now, I have been hearing that you are living in a Count’s Family and demonstrating the pinnacle of laziness. Honestly… it was hard to believe.”

Having heard Abyss, Riley thought about his second life in this world, starting from the moment of his reincarnation and up to this very moment. The look on Riley’s face seemed to be saying that what Abyss had said was plausible. Riley showed a hollow look on his face.

“Now that you mention it, that’s true. Compared to you… perhaps I have changed more.”

Abyss was looking at Riley’s face from the side. Abyss twisted the tip of his lips, smiling. He then explained his impression of Riley.

“Compared to the past, you seem to be comfortable.”

“What?”

“I’m saying you look well in comparison to your past life.”

It seemed the fishes were biting. Straining his eyes, Abyss pulled the fishing rod. He saw a tiny fish hanging on the hook. Disappointed, he clicked his tongue.

“Hm. It is small.”

Abyss saw the tiny fish that was struggling in the air while hanging from the hook. With just his gaze, Abyss freed the fish from a distance and released it into the water.

Splash

The tiny fish looked as if it had been grabbed by something invisible. It was pulled from the hook, released, and floated in the air. It was set free and returned to the lake.

“You are letting it live?”

“I learned to save the little ones.”

“From who?”

Changing his mind... Riley also thought that Demon Lord had changed a lot in comparison to their past life. He casually asked where Abyss had learned this.

“I learned it from you.”

“From me?”

“That’s right.”

Riley thought Abyss was going to babble on about the order of nature or what not. Instead, Abyss said he learned it from Riley. Riley was not expecting this. He put a question mark on his face.

“So, I have been staying with the children of Ansyrium who were left behind. With your senses, I’m sure you would have noticed them along the way… By any chance… did you not see them?”

Riley had seen the children with ragged appearances who were peeking out of a ruined building. Riley said,

“I did see them.”

“They are the children I’m talking about. After this city named Ansyrium was destroyed by Epidemic, the humans called adults abandoned them… They are the children who have nothing left.”

Abyss checked the fishing hook. He then started fishing again. Abyss started to explain about the children who were left behind.

“I’m staying with the children. Regardless of who I am inside, still, my exterior is similar to these children. Perhaps it would be correct to say I have been protecting them. On a side note,

Epidemic, the child of lizards had been looking for, is one of those children."

With a look of disbelief, Riley stared at Abyss. However, it seemed that Abyss did not really mind it. He continued.

"Although my decision started with seeing Epidemic struggling to not harm the children, fundamentally, the thought of wanting to help these children occurred to me because of you. In the past life, I had seen you desperately trying to save children."

Protect them?

A Demon Lord was?

A Demon Lord protecting human children?

As if that was not ridiculous enough, he was actually living with them?

"Enough with your ridiculous jokes."

With a cold gaze, Riley looked at Abyss. Riley demanded that Abyss should cut the lies and tell him the truth.

"Do you realize who was the one that toyed with the lives of those innocent children who knew nothing... After all this time, what are you saying? Protecting children and living with them?"

In his past life, the children who had been tempted by the demon... came back as monsters that killed humans. They were shedding tears of blood. Riley remembered this. It made Riley tighten his grip.

'Mister... I have a favor to ask. Can I please ask you this one thing?'

'I am sorry, but a request from a monster...'

'We are not monsters.'

'Mister, we are not monsters, really.'

'Hk... Mommy... I want to see mommy.'

'Kill us.'

'Mister. It hurts so much. We are in pain.'

'Hurry.'

Riley was fond of children. He was kind to children. He was like this because of the children from his past. The Priestess from the past had not been able to cleanse them in the end, so the monsters, those children, had to die by Riley's sword.

“You made those children kill their parents with their own hands and tear apart their friends, and yet…after all this time?”

The fishing rod that Riley’s holding, looked like it was about to get crushed. Abyss was looking at Riley. The look on Abyss seemed to be saying that he could not understand why Riley was reacting this way. Abyss furrowed his brows and asked back,

“… What are you talking about?”

“What?”

“I have never done such things. I never ordered such things either.”

“…?”

With a crumpled face, Abyss was saying that he had never done such things or ordered anyone to do such things. Having heard this, with a confused look on his face, Riley crumpled his brows.

“… Explain to me once again.”

“…”

Riley was facing Abyss directly. Riley realized that he was starting to strain his own shoulders.

“Are you saying that we tempted human children, turned them into monsters and used them to kill their parents and friends?”

The Demon Lord was infuriated.

“You may have changed since the reincarnation, but I am well aware that you are not the kind of the man to lie. Explain it to me again.”

Abyss had the look of a young boy and his eyes were half closed as if he was sleepy. However, there was a deadly aura in his eyes now. They alerted Riley’s senses.

“It is true that we had fought humans for a long time due to our differences. However, we ‘demons’ are not so lacking that we would resort to such despicable method.”

Before Riley, Abyss broke the fishing rod that he was holding. With eyes full of deadly aura, Abyss faced Riley and continued.

“… I don’t know about other humans.”

Abyss looked genuinely infuriated. Riley was facing Abyss with crumpled face, but Riley asked, thinking that perhaps it was not the case.

“Did you… really not know about this?”

“Don’t they do things that are worse than this?”

Having heard Riley’s question, Abyss stared at Riley with piercing gaze and asked back.

“I’m asking. Don’t humans often do horrible things that are even more horrendous than what you have just described?”

“That is…”

“Past life or this life… Humans are not all that different it turns out. The abandoned children of this place, Ansyrium… Looking just at them was enough for me to see that. The nobilities or whatever… They are all talk. In the end, they completely ignored the children. Watching their despicable side… They made me puke.”

Abyss’s fishing rod’s handle was completely broken. He picked up the rod and said,

“Ever since I was reincarnated as a human, when I saw humans committing despicable acts for the first time… I absolutely hated the fact that I was reborn a human.”

Solia Magic Tower’s human experiments, the suffering of the slaves of Ansyrium, suffering of commoners, the nobilities who live just fine despite having committed all sorts of evil… Also…

“We demons never do such things.”

Abyss rapidly fired away all disgusting things that he had seen humans do. He then added that demons didn’t do such things.

“We merely let the powers collide and have the winner decide right and wrong. That’s all. Despite our ways, no demon has ever voiced their complaints.”

It was a rough method, but Abyss said that no demon had ever voiced their complaints. He explained why no demons would have felt wronged.

“When we believed that the loser’s side was correct, other strong demons stepped in and helped. Otherwise, they just watched.”

“…”

“What about humans?”

There was no response from Riley. So, Abyss continued on by himself.

“I have been living as a human now. I cannot say that all I have seen so far are the disgusting sides of humans.”

Abyss was infuriated, but it looked like he was regaining his calm a little. He disengaged his deadly aura. He briefly explained the

good things he had noticed in humans.

“Just like there are two sides of a coin, unlike the humans who only do disgusting things, there were other humans who made me smile. It’s just…”

Abyss sighed briefly.

“Well, I’m sure you know better than me when it comes to the humans who do good in this world. You had been living as human longer than I have.”

What Abyss was trying to say was probably that… There are far too few humans who do good in comparison to the humans who do evil or that the good humans are being persecuted by the bad ones.

What about humans…

Abyss had said those words earlier. Riley thought about it. He then asked Abyss the following. The look on Riley’s face could not look more serious.

“You are being honest, right?”

“If you are asking me if my demons and I turned human children into monsters in my past life… I am telling you the truth.”

Abyss nodded and said in stern voice,

“Let me make this clear. In my past life’s tens of thousands of years…I have never done such and I never ordered anyone to do anything like that.”

Riley looked at Abyss’s face. To be precise, Riley glared at Abyss’s eyes. Riley confirmed that he was not lying. Riley said,

“In that case, just who…”

Riley carefully went over what had happened in his past life. Soon, the look on his face stiffened.

‘I am sorry, Brave Hero. It is too late for these children.’

‘Too late? You said that you can definitely save them!’

‘I’m sorry. My cleansing is not enough.’

‘… Then…?’

‘Young Master… You will have to cut down these children.’

‘…’

‘As soon as possible, please hurry. These children…no, before these monsters kill more people.’

‘Monsters? They are children…’

‘You need to harden your heart. Brave Hero, you are the only one who can.’

It seemed that a big fish had bit on the hook. The fishing rod that Riley was holding started to flinch.

Chapter 192 - Six People

“...He was telling the truth.”

Andal brought the child with the dark blue hair and examined her memories that were hidden inside her head. Andal checked the memories that the child was not able to remember. Andal vacantly muttered,

“This kid really is...”

The kid really was the last of the purple humans who Riley and Andal had been searching for, the one with pitch-black skin who was revived numerous times and roared loudly no matter how many times they killed her, the one who infected Andal with the illness.

“Epidemic...”

The red-haired man was staring at the child and saying things that she didn’t know anything about. The child was sitting in the seat quietly, but she tilted her head to the side and as if she was wondering why, asked.

“Are you not feeling well somewhere?”

“...”

“Mr. Andal?”

It seemed he didn’t hear Epidemic’s question. Andal only maintained his silence. He had crumpled his face.

‘Abyss said he had taken her under his wings?’

Andal thought about the little one who had called him ‘a child of lizards’ and what not. Andal was carefully thinking about what he saw in Epidemic’s memories about that little one.

‘It cannot be…’

The little one had abilities that rivaled those of Riley.

‘To think there is another one in existence in this world who is as monstrously powerful as Riley.’

Andal detected an unbelievable amount of mana from Abyss in Epidemic’s memories. Andal muttered with a serious look on his face,

“Should I let our Lord know about this?”

Andal pondered if he should let the Lord of dragons know about what he had just found out. However, Andal casually turned his head after hearing Epidemic’s steps approaching him.

“Excuse me…”

“What is it?”

“… Here.”

What Epidemic had brought was a dish of steaming vegetable soup.

“Soup? Why did you bring this to me?”

Andal had no idea why she had brought him this soup. Andal asked as he tilted his head to the side. Epidemic handed the soup to him as if she was pushing it toward him. She said,

“You couldn’t hear my voice, and you were muttering. I wondered if you were ill, so I decided to bring this to you…”

“You thought I was ill?”

“Do dragons not eat soups like this?”

Epidemic added that this was not a regular vegetable soup but had boiled medical herbs in it. However, her considerations only fanned Andal’s anger. It looked like nothing positive was going to come out of this.

“Do you have any idea how sick I was because of an illness I contracted due to someone? It is like you pass the illness tome and then bring out the medicine… What? Herbal soup? Ugh, you little!”

Andal raised his arm. He was about to strike Epidemic’s head. Ready to endure the pain that was coming, Epidemic closed her eyes tightly.

“…”

“…”

Andal had no idea what had happened to the monster that had poured out the black epidemic. That monster was gone without leaving a trace. She looked like a child who had grown up inside rather early. Having realized this, Andal, who was about to swing his arm at her, lowered his arm. Andal looked like he didn’t feel up it anymore. He had an awkward look on his face.

“Never mind. What good would it do to beat up a powerless human.”

Andal complained inside that he should let out his anger on Riley later instead. Epidemic was cautiously opening her eyes narrowly. Andal asked her something he was curious about.

“Let me ask you one thing.”

“Okay.”

She thought she was about to get beaten. She was relieved to know that it didn’t happen.

“That little one who was sitting in front of the lake. The one you led us to meet. How much do you know… about that kid?”

“Are you talking about Abyss?”

“Yes, that kid.”

Andal stared at her as if he was trying to ask her to explain who Abyss was in detail.

Epidemic hesitated for a moment. She then started to explain carefully.

“He is a good kid. Although he is still very young, he seems to be very grown up, so… Other children and I all follow him as if he is our captain.”

“Hm?”

“He says ‘I’m sleepy’ or ‘I want to sleep’ a lot. He practically has those words always hanging from his mouth. Also, he is always leisurely. I had never seen him get angry once… Somehow, I think he is very carefree.”

She said perhaps Abyss' character was not becoming of his appearance. She compared Abyss to a grandfather who was sitting on a rocking armchair. Epidemic shrugged and continued.

"That's all. Sometimes... What did he say? Cola? He said he wanted to drink cola, which was strange. Other than that, I don't have anything in particular to say about him."

"Cola?"

"Yes. Mr. Red dragon, do you know about it by any chance? This cola that Abyss mentioned?"

"No, I don't know about it well either."

Andal shook his head and said he didn't know. He was thinking about what his friend mumbled often.

Cola...

Riley also often complained and said he wished he could drink it. This was why.

'How many years has it been since you have been working in the pub business?'

'I am not sure. I have not been counting?'

‘You are saying it has been quite long then.’

‘Well, I guess so.’

‘In that case, can you make cola?’

‘What?’

‘I’m talking about cola. Cola.’

A long time ago, Riley, the first human who Andal had become close to, complained about this when he had come to visit Andal’s pub. Andal was thinking about this.

*

Riley had a conversation with Abyss while fishing together. Riley realized that many things he knew from his past life were very wrong in some ways.

“They are different… Did anyone tell you about them?”

“No, not at all.”

“In that case, now we know for certain.”

Of the things that Riley didn't know correctly, there were two biggest ones. First thing was that 'Abyss and demons had no intention of destroying the humans,' and the other thing was that 'Abyss had no choice but to move as someone else intended.'

"I cannot help but feel suspicious of a servant bastard that was closest to me. What about you? It seems like you also have someone you are suspicious of?"

Throughout the conversation, Abyss and Riley compared their past lives. Abyss asked Riley after putting a serious look on his face. Riley nodded and said,

"The Priestess..."

"Priestess? The one who gave you the blessing?"

"The blessing was not the only thing she gave me."

Riley narrowed his eyes and thought about all moments he had encountered the Priestess in his past life. He then continued.

"Anyway, that has a high likelihood of being related to this Helena. Others were probably stirred into it. A few dozen at first... and then a few hundred, a few thousand, tens of thousands... In the end, everyone of them."

Demons are trying to destroy the humans.

Therefore, we must stop them.

It will all work out if the Brave Hero kills the Demon Lord.

That's how it was done.

"In the end, you and I... met our ends side by side like buddies. Someone's plan worked out magnificently."

Riley thought it was Helena who he found the most suspicious. Abyss thought it was his closest subordinate who he found the most suspicious.

"After that, one after the other, the purple humans started to appear in this world."

"Epidemic is one of the examples?"

"Right."

"If what the Goddess that the girl named Nainiae mentioned said is true, then I am more than sure of it now. I was done in by a plot, and you..."

"... It means I was tricked."

Riley and Abyss were watching the water. A fish jumped out and disappeared into the lake.

“Could it be that they made a deal? If the Priestess and my subordinate schemed behind us, then everything fits. I supposed it means one of the two wanted this world.”

For what?

Riley narrowed his eyes.

“Something they wanted so badly that they killed both the Brave Hero and the Demon Lord for... Considering what you have just told me, I think the Goddess of that world may not exist anymore.”

Riley narrowed his eyes. Having heard Abyss, Riley asked with a puzzled look.

“No matter how rotten, she is a Goddess. How could she have died?”

Abyss shrugged. He shook his head and said,

“Humans think that a god is all powerful and invincible, but...”

Abyss looked up to the sky and said,

“… a god is not all that powerful.”

“…”

“As I said earlier, I aimed for the sky… simply because I wanted to meet the Goddess of our past life. It was not to kill all the humans. If I wanted to kill all humans, then it would have been done.”

Riley thought things would not have turned out so wrong if he had listened to the Demon Lord’s story in his past life. Riley asked,

“In that case, why didn’t you tell me when we fought?”

“…”

Abyss thought hard about this for a moment and said,

“I had no moment to spare for the conversation. You did not have the time to spare for it either. You acknowledge it, right?”

Riley could not object to that, so he clicked his tongue.

“… Tsk.”

“Anyhow. Thanks to you, we got to enjoy fishing together while sitting next to each other like this, so… I don’t think you need to

think too badly of what happened. Still…”

Abyss cracked his neck left and right and said,

“To think that I was killed… I cannot just laugh about it.”

Unlike what he said, Abyss was smiling big. He suddenly lowered the tips of his mouth and looked at Riley.

“… Six humans.”

“…?”

“The six people who you find most trust-worthy and dependable. Can you bring them?”

The question was so out of the blue. Riley furrowed his brows as if he was trying to ask Abyss what this was about.

“I have heard that you have been sitting around and doing nothing as a Young Master of a noble family. Still, you would have at least six people you can trust, right?”

“What are you getting…”

“The so-called ‘purple humans’ that you told me about… the people who have a power from the other world…”

Abyss remembered the explanation Riley had given earlier and continued.

“They were called Six Parts… is that right?”

“You…”

Riley thought he could guess what Abyss was trying to say. Riley looked at Abyss as if he was trying to ask Abyss if he was being serious.

“Such petty creatures… It seems that they tried to mimic me. I should show them the real thing.”

Around Abyss’ body, purple energy started to flow.

“Six people.”

Abyss opened his right palm. Above the palm, six seed-like things were formed.

“That’s right. With the six people you bring, we will show these bastards that the six parts we gathered are superior. That will do it.”

Abyss showed the seeds to Riley and made the proposition. He continued as if this was no big deal.

“I don’t care if you refuse this proposition. If that is the case… then I’ll raise the children of Ansyrium, including Epidemic, and head over to the other side. That should be enough.”

Riley still didn’t respond. Abyss asked,

“What will you do?”

“… Ugh.”

Finding this to be ridiculous, Riley broke into laughter.

“Now that we are already fishing, we might as well catch the big one and end it by any means necessary, don’t you think?”

Abyss asked again. Riley was laughing as if he was found this amusing. It seemed that he thought this was not a bad idea. Riley nodded and said,

“All right.”

“I knew you would come along.”

It seemed that Abyss was satisfied with Riley’s answer. Like Riley, Abyss also had a smile on the tip of his lips. Abyss put away the six pieces of purple lights above his hand and started to talk. However…

“Well then, first…”

“…Riley!!”

His voice was blocked by someone loudly shouting from behind.

“Um?”

Riley casually turned his head and found his red-haired friend who was rushing toward him. Riley tilted his head to the side.

“Riley! That little one was right! He really took away the power of that epidemic human!”

Andal came back after checking the inside of Epidemic’s head. As if Riley was trying to say that he had a rough idea of what was going on, he calmed down Andal.

“Ah I see, I’m sure that is the case.”

“What? You already knew? Why are you not surprised at all?”

“It was just a guess, based on the mood.”

“Um?”

Andal furrowed his brows as if he was finding all of this suspicious. He checked Abyss' gaze and called Riley.

"Hey, Riley."

"What is it?"

Andal waved his hand. It seemed that he was trying to say Riley should bring his ear closer to Andal. Thinking it could not be helped, Riley brought his ear close to Andal's mouth.

"What's... cola?"

"What?"

The question was totally unexpected. Riley furrowed his eyebrows as if he was trying to say that the question was too out of the blue.

"I said what's cola."

"... Huhu."

Andal could not look more serious when he asked about cola again. Riley had his mouth open as if he was at a loss for words. Instead of Riley, Abyss responded instead.

“It seems that…”

Abyss was watching Andal as if he was amused by this. Tip of Abyss’ lips wiggled.

“…one of the six parts has already been decided.”

Chapter 193 - Six People (2)

Although it made Riley feel uneasy, he chose to leave Andal with Abyss. Riley returned to the mansion and promptly went to find Nainiae.

“Ah, Young Master!”

“Sera.”

Riley turned his head around in response to the voice that was coming from the rear. He found a maid who was quickly walking toward him. As if he was glad to see the maid, he raised his hand.

“By any chance, do you know where Nainiae went?”

“Nainiae?”

Sera tilted her head to the side and asked why he was asking that.

“She isn’t with you?”

“Huh?”

“I heard that you were taking a nap in the library? Nainiae told me that you said you were sleepy, so she ended up going back to her room.”

“She did?”

Riley asked while floating a question mark on his face. Sera nodded and continued.

“Yes. Still, one thing was very odd… It’s spring now. If it is a nap, I think you would prefer to nap in the garden, but you didn’t? I asked Nainiae why you weren’t napping in the garden and she said you seemed to have an allergy.”

Sera said she thought it was odd that her Young Master, who liked taking a leisurely nap in the garden around spring time, was napping in the library instead.

“Young Master, you don’t actually have allergy, right?”

“Um? Ahah…”

Riley figured out why Nainiae ended up mentioning ‘allergy.’ Riley rubbed his nose with his knuckles and said with a voice that sounded like he might sneeze any moment.

“Until now, I lived while never noticing anything like that, but I suddenly got a really runny nose… It is so difficult to have this happen.”

“Runny nose?”

“Yes. Maybe it is not an allergy but a cold? The season is changing right now. The change in the temperature is quite extreme. My body feels a bit off, so perhaps I was careless…”

“Well. You had an extreme fever during the last winter when you were hibernating. In the end, Nainiae managed to fix it somehow, but still…”

It seemed Sera wanted to go scold Nainiae for not even properly identifying if Riley had a cold or an allergy. The look on her face changed. She looked stern.

“I cannot let this pass. I should have a word with her…”

“Ah, wait. It’s all right. I’ll do it.”

Sera was about to quickly head to the library. Riley hurriedly blocked her path and said he would do it instead. However, in Sera’s eyes, she was burning with desire as the senior maid to go and give advice. The look in her eyes was not about to calm down.

“No. I really cannot let this pass. You are not in a good condition, yet she let you wander around in the corridor by yourself. Instead of nursing you, just where is she and what is she doing? I should go find out and bring this up to her for sure.”

Having heard her stern voice, Riley was now certain that he had just stepped on a landmine. Sera was about to walk away again.

Riley went to block her path again and started to try to convince her otherwise.

"In that case, let's go together."

"Together?"

"That's right. I have been looking for Nainiae as well."

Sera held her chin and pondered on this. She nodded as if she found the idea to be acceptable.

"All right. I would be able to scold her properly with you present, Young Master."

She was even snorting as she vowed a hard scolding. Watching this... Riley apologized to Nainiae inside and walked.

"First, should we go check out the library?"

Based on what Sera had said, Riley wondered if they should visit the library first, so he muttered. Sera tilted her head to the side.

"The library? Didn't you just come from the library?"

Having heard the question, Riley thought about the doll that Nainiae had made to look just like him. Riley flinched a little and

responded as if he didn't know much about it.

"Ah, I think maybe we just missed each other along the way... I was thinking about the possibility that Nainiae may have come back just after I left."

"Hm. Really?"

"..."

As expected, although Riley couldn't quite figure it out, he felt like he could understand why Nainiae was so concerned about Sera's senses. Riley sighed inside in secret and asked Sera,

"In that case, what about you, Sera? Can you guess where Nainiae is?"

"... Huhu."

She smiled confidently as if she was waiting for this question. She raised her index finger and waved it a few times as if she was trying to say that Riley should wait for a moment. She closed her eyes.

Sniff, sniff sniff...

It looked like she was trying to utilize her sense of smell. Watching her sniff with her eyes closed, Riley thought she would

be able to find where Nainiae was right away.

“Um?”

“Did you find her?”

It seemed that Sera had found a strange smell. She cringed and tilted her head to the side. Riley also tilted his head to the side, wondering why she was being like this.

“I found her, but... Something is...”

“Why? What is it?”

Sniff Sniff...

“Um? It is strange?”

Now, Sera tilted her head to the other side and brought her face up close to Riley. She started to smell him.

“Young Master, you are definitely here?”

She looked puzzled. Sera explained why she was thinking like this.

“There are two.”

“Two?”

“Your smell… There are two sources?”

Sera looked confused. Riley realized this was because of the doll that Nainiae had made. He flinched inside.

‘Should I just tell her what really happened?’

It was not going to be possible to hide it forever… Riley wondered if it would be better to just tell her what happened now instead of being found out later and getting scolded. Leaving him behind, Sera started to walk first.

“Do I also have an allergy?”

Sera wondered about that since spring had just come. She tilted her head to the side once again.

“Have you found Nainiae?”

“Ah, yes.”

Riley thought it would be better to talk to Nainiae first instead of telling Sera what really happened. Riley asked where Nainiae was and Sera looked back at Riley.

“Please follow me. She is in the same place. It is probably…”

It seemed Sera was doubting her sense of smell because she could smell two different sources of Riley’s smell. Sera blurred the end of the sentence as if she was not confident.

‘They are in the same place that means…’

Having watched Sera’s response, he concluded that the doll and Nainiae were in the same place.

“Sera, isn’t this the way towards the library?”

“Ah, it is.”

With her eyes closed, she was focusing on her sense of smell as she walked. Sera didn’t realize which direction she was walking towards. After hearing Riley, she nodded in agreement.

“In the end, your guess was correct. It looks like you just missed her, but… why do I sense another source of Young Master’s smell?”

Sera had a puzzled look as if she was trying to figure out a maze. As if she was thinking that she just needed to check, Sera was trying to enter the library first. Riley panicked inside and flinched his face.

“Aaaaaachhhhh!!!”

“… Kiiiaaak?!”

Sera nervously had her hand on the library door’s handle. Having heard the sound of his coughing, Sera screamed from being surprised.

“Y… Young Master? You scared me!”

“How am I supposed to control sneezing?”

Riley coughed loudly so he could let Nainiae inside the library know that he had come back. Riley moved past Sera.

“Let’s go in.”

“Ugh, I thought my liver was going to drop!”

“Ugh, I’m telling you that it was not intentional.”

Riley opened the library door while apologizing to Sera. He found Nainiae hurriedly putting away the doll’s legs. He glanced at Sera who was right behind him.

“Nainiae!!”

Nainiae's shoulders flinched.

"Just where did you go while leaving the Young Master behind!"

Standing next to Riley, Sera was scolding Nainiae in a loud voice. Riley sighed in relief inside.

'Ugh.'

Fortunately, Sera walked into the library a step later than Riley. It seemed that she hadn't seen Nainiae putting away the doll.

"T... That is..."

Nainiae looked at Riley and then at Sera to check their moods. Like a person who had just got asked a very difficult question, Nainiae started to open and close her mouth like a fish.

"I went to the restroom for a moment while Young Master was sleeping on the sofa. In that brief period of time..."

Veins popped out of Sera's forehead.

"So?"

"I... lost track of Young Master."

Riley was sure Nainiae must have been feeling wronged about this. Still, Nainiae looked ashamed and lowered her head.

"..."

Riley felt sorry for Nainiae. He directed his gaze away while whistling.

"And?"

"Pardon?"

"Other than that, didn't you do one more thing wrong? I think it would be best for you if you thought hard about this."

Nainiae discovered that Sera's eyes were burning in flames. The look on Nainiae's face looked like she was asking Riley why Sera was acting this way. Nainiae stared at Riley.

"Ah, the book in such a place..."

Riley was not looking at Nainiae in the eyes. He found a book that was rolling around on the ground. He picked it up and try to act like he was busy with something else.

"... Nainiae!!"

“Uuu… Yes!”

Because of Sera’s shouting, Nainiae stiffened her shoulders and responded.

“Don’t you think you have become careless while Mr. Ian is away?”

“T… That is…”

“You should have done something, even magic!”

“However, Ms. Walla said… She said it is against the rules to use magic while handling maid work, so…”

“Uuuuuuuum?! Are you saying you did the right thing?”

“N… No… That is…”

“You can’t even tell if Young Master has a cold or an allergy?”

“… Pardon? What are you talking about?”

A question mark floated up on Nainiae’s face. Sera was shaking the broom that she was holding. She looked infuriated. Sera quickly walked to Nainiae and extended her hand.

“Come follow me for a bit.”

“Ah… M… Ms. Sera! Wait! What was that about? Young Master has allergy?”

Nainiae’s wrist was grabbed by Sera. As Nainiae was dragged to the outside of the library, she extended her hand out toward Riley.

“Young Master? Young Master!”

“A…. Aaachhhhh!!”

Riley had been avoiding her gaze. He opened his mouth big and coughed out loudly.

“…”

“…”

Nainiae was being dragged away by Sera. It seemed that Nainiae was shocked. She was speechless. Riley, who was avoiding her gaze, also didn’t say anything.

*

“…”

Nainiae returned to the library after being scolded big time by Sera. She pouted all the way out as she sat on the sofa.

“Ah, I said I’m sorry.”

“You could have notified me through Telepathic messaging.”

“It didn’t occur to me.”

“…”

Riley smiled nonchalantly. Nainiae ballooned up her cheek and put on a pissed look.

“Hey. Last time, you thought about floating magic very late while we were climbing Andal’s mountain and that put me through a tough time.”

“…”

“Let’s just say we are even.”

Although Riley was the one who said it, even he thought that was ridiculously shameless. Riley broke out in a cold sweat in the rear of his head.

“… Ugh.”

Nainiae sighed.

It seemed she had been seriously scolded by Sera.

“All right. I know that Ms. Sera… didn’t scold me because she hates me.”

It seemed that she was scolded badly. Although she was saying that, Nainiae was in tears. Riley was feeling awkward about this. He scratched the back of his head.

“Still, I’m glad you came back soon.”

“… You worked hard.”

Nainiae wiped off the tears around her eyes. She looked happy. Riley looked sorry and said Nainiae had worked hard. He then started explaining in detail about what had happened in Asyrium.

“At Ansyrium… Abyss was there?”

“Yes.”

Nainiae was having a hard time believing this and asked. Riley nodded.

“I think it is caused by the fact that he died almost at the same time and through the same method with me in the past life.”

Riley explained to Nainiae about the Demon Lord who had been reborn in this world with his abilities and memories intact just like Riley. He then also explained about the Six Parts that Abyss proposed.

“Six parts?”

“That’s right.”

The plan was that Riley and Abyss will gather Six Parts and send them to the other side where Helena was at, using the same method.

“I wanted to ask for your thoughts on this.”

Nainiae was sitting on the sofa. Riley presented her with a paper that had something written on it. He moved his chin to say she should check it.

“… Um?”

Nainiae looked at the paper and saw the names that were written there.

“Young Master, this is…”

Chapter 194 - Six People (3)

One, two, three, four...

Nainiae confirmed that there were four names. She asked,

“You said you were preparing Six Parts. However, I only see four names here?”

Riley pointed at her.

“First, there is one here.”

Nainiae tilted her head to the side and wondered who the other one was.

“And?”

Riley avoided her gaze and thought about the rascal with red hair who must be bickering with Abyss in Ansyrium right about now.

“There is another... Anyway, what do you think?”

Riley thought that there was no need to tell her about Andal. Instead, he asked Nainiae about the four people whose names were written on the paper.

“I am not sure…”

There were people other than Andal or Nainiae. They were all the people who Riley had met two or three times at least.

“First…”

Nainiae looked at Nara’s name. She had guessed why they wanted to take Nara with them. Nainiae asked,

“The reason for taking commander Nara there is… As I thought, is it because of his eyes?”

Riley nodded.

“There is the eyes thing, but he is also skilled at spear techniques. He has a good sense as well. Once Abyss gives him powers, he will be dashing around just fine. Basing it purely on potential, he is the best among the four as well.”

It seemed that Nainiae agreed with Riley’s assessment. She nodded.

“He certainly is.”

Last summer, when they had run into Nara for the first time, they confirmed Nara’s skills. He was superb, more than enough for Nainiae to nod in agreement.

He was a basilisk. However…

Other than his eyes, his basic physical abilities were not so different from humans. Despite that and despite his age, Nara possessed such talent already. It was the evidence that Nara possessed superior potential.

“I think Ms. Iril is the only one who has as much potential as commander Nara at such a young age”

Iril was the adopted granddaughter of Inaril, who once had the Blessing of the Sword in this world. Iril was slightly ahead of Nara, but… Nara had the eyes of basilisk, which Iril did not have.

“I have no objections.”

Nainiae, someone who once had a duel against Nara, said she had no objections. She moved her gaze to the next name on the paper.

“The next one is…”

Nainiae crumpled her eyebrows.

“Ms. Sera?”

“That’s right. Initially, I was going to send someone else, but I just changed my mind.”

Riley was impressed by Sera's sense of smell when he had run into her after just returning to the mansion. This was the reason why Riley chose Sera as the second person.

"Um..."

It seemed that she was more concerned about Sera than Nara. Nainiae was not able to speak right away. She held her chin and was silent for a long time. She then said,

"Is she going to be all right? I am a little worried."

Compared to others on the list, Nainiae thought Sera was relatively weak. This was the reason.

"Why? I don't think it is a bad idea."

"Still..."

Sera possessed an extra-ordinary sense of smell and other senses. Even Nainiae acknowledged those things in Sera. However, if anyone asked if Sera's dual blades was stronger than Nara's spear...then Sera was not quite at that kind of caliber. This was why.

"Are you that worried about her?"

Having heard Riley's question, Nainiae nodded carefully.

'Well, the other world is quite dangerous."

Nainiae was worried not just because of Sera's skill in swordsmanship but because of the dangers in the other world that she would be going to as per Abyss's proposal, in other words, the world of Riley's past life.

"I am not sure if Ms. Sera would be able to handle that place..."

Nainiae muttered carefully. It seemed that she thought she really could not let this be. She shook her head and asked Riley,

"Young Master, about this person named Abyss... No, the Demon Lord... Is he really trustworthy?"

Nainiae thought about the great demon, who Riley had fought in the end of his past life. She muttered with a concerned look on her face.

"Still, this is the Demon Lord who fought against you in your past life. We need to consider the possibility of this being a trap, and..."

Nainiae mumbled with a voice full of worry. Riley had a carefree look on his face as if he was trying to say that it was going to be all right. Riley suddenly placed his hand above her head.

“You sure worry about all sorts of things.”

“…”

Nainiae looked like she was feeling wronged. She looked up at Riley.

“If you are worried about Sera, then don’t worry about her too much. I picked her because I have a plan. Did you think that I picked her without giving it serious thought?”

Riley added that Nainiae should skip her for now and asked her to check the third name. Nainiae figured that it could not be helped, so she turned her gaze back to the paper.

“Um?”

She checked the third name on the paper and frowned.

“You are going to take Ms. Priesia too?”

“Yes.”

Riley nodded and explained why he was taking the Priestess.

“She is still considered missing, so even if we snatch her up… No.

Even if we kidnap her, I don't think there would be any problem. Also, she has the most selfless personality…where she would volunteer to help if we just explain the situation. Moreover…"

Riley paused for a moment. He added that Priesia was needed to resolve the problem that Nainiae was concerned about earlier.

"As you said, I think there is a need to be certain of what that Abyss bastard is really thinking inside."

Until just a moment ago, Riley and Abyss had sat on the lake-side and fished together. So, doing this to him could look petty. Still, it wasn't bad to have other options prepared.

'Considering that rascal's personality, I think he would flex his shoulders and tell us to go on right ahead to check, but…'

Riley did have the conversation with Abyss face to face, while looking into the man's eyes. Through the conversation, Riley had become certain that Abyss was also feeling exhausted much like himself and Abyss was thinking that 'these runts dared to stab me in the back?'

"If anything happens, Priesia can heal the wounded with her holy power. Also, when it comes to having someone who specializes in healing, it would be hard to find anyone who is superior to her."

Nainiae nodded and said,

“I see… That certainly is the case.”

Nainiae, who was friends with Priesia, carefully thought about this. It seemed that she came to the conclusion that it would be all right. She nodded once again and picked up a pen.

“Well then, first…”

A circle for the first name – Nara.

A triangle for the second name – Sera.

A circle for the third name – Priesia.

“Like this, I suppose?”

Riley looked at the two circles and a triangle that was added to the paper as he scratched his head. Nainiae checked the fourth name.

“Um? Young Master, the fourth name…”

“Ah, I’m sorry… I have not decided on the fourth name. I wanted to get your advice first.”

Riley took back the paper that Nainiae was holding. He placed the paper on the library desk and wrote two more names in the black

space for the fourth name.

"Here."

Ian.

Iril.

"... Um. This is tough."

After seeing the names, it seemed that Nainiae was thinking hard about it. She furrowed her brows.

"There are similarities and differences, so..."

"That's why I'm asking you."

Ian and Iril... They were both similar in that they both had learned their swordsmanship from the same teacher, Inaril.

If they were to consider physical abilities alone, Iril was probably a little superior to Ian. However... If the experiences accumulated were to be factored in, then Ian, who was once called the mercenary hero, could not be ignored.

"This question is worth thinking very hard about."

Nainiae brought out a separate piece of paper and wrote ‘Myself, Commander Nara, Ms. Sera, Ms. Priesia…’ Nainiae furrowed her brows and tilted her head to the side.

“Young Master, may I know who is the remaining one?”

“The remaining one? Why?”

“How should I put this? A good combination… A good match… I want to check that.”

Out of the blue, Nainiae was talking as if she was going to do some fortune telling with tarot cards. Riley was a little frustrated. Thinking that it could not be helped, Riley revealed the name he had been keeping a secret.

“Andal.”

“…”

Her crumpled eyebrows suddenly relaxed.

“Pardon?”

It was as if she had heard it but was acting like she didn’t quite hear it. As if she was denying this, Nainiae’s face looked vacant in a way when she asked.

“It’s Andal. Andal decided to go too.”

“…”

“Andal, you, Nara, Sera, and Priesia… You can think that it is almost a sure thing that these five people will be going.”

Nainiae’s eyebrows started to wiggle.

“M… My teacher is… why…”

“What do you mean why?”

Riley avoided Nainiae’s gaze and said,

“It’s because he caught Abyss’ eyes.”

It seemed Abyss liked the ‘child of lizards’ who his eyes had met. Riley remembered Abyss saying that he must take Andal with him. As if he was trying to say that Nainiae didn’t need to mind it, Riley continued.

“The important one is the sixth person. We need to choose who the last one will be to go to the other world as a part of the Six Parts.”

Nainiae was still in shock. To wake her up, Riley flicked his

finger and left a red mark on Nainiae's forehead. Riley asked again,

"Is it Ian? Is it Iril?"

Actually, Riley was leaning towards Ian who had stuck by Riley like a gum throughout all these long years. Still, he was not able to come to a quick decision.

There was the incident in Romella Village where Ian had almost died. Also, recently, he was reunited with the teacher he had been waiting for a long time, so Riley thought Ian must be happy. Riley did not want to interfere with Ian's happiness.

"I am not sure. I think..."

Andal.

Nainiae.

Nara.

Sera.

Priesia.

...Ian or Iril.

With five parts pretty much set, Nainiae was hesitant about choosing the very last person. It seemed that she had finally decided. She moved the pencil.

“I think this side is better.”

Nainiae moved the pencil and circled the sixth person’s name. Riley looked down on the paper and sighed.

“Ugh…”

Watching Riley sighing, Nainiae snickered and then added in a small voice,

“Young Master, you will be making the final decision.”

She was right.

Riley had to make the final decision.

“Give me the pencil for me for a moment.”

Nainiae handed the pencil to Riley and asked about what’s to come next.

“Well then, what are you going to do?”

With the pencil on the paper, Riley was scribbling something. Having heard Nainiae's question, he had a question mark on his face and asked back,

"What?"

"From now on."

"From now on?"

Nainiae figured that Riley had not thought about it that far yet. Nainiae put her hands behind her back and asked,

"About the idea of paying back Helena with the same Six Parts...I am not opposed to the idea, but the remaining five... No. How are you going to convince the remaining four?"

While talking, Nainiae thought about her teacher. It seemed that she figured that her teacher would definitely go, so she changed the number.

"Convince them? Ah..."

As Nainiae guessed, Riley vacantly opened his mouth and became stiff.

"Don't you think the conversation will stretch out really long? I think this isn't a matter of explaining just a thing or two? Starting

with your past life, there is the story about Helena, and…”

Even if some things were omitted, Nainiae thought there were quite a lot of things to explain. She looked at Riley with a concerned face.

“You are not planning on just taking them to the other world, are you?”

Act first and then handle the rest afterwards…That was Riley’s plan. He fiddled with his hands as if he had just gotten poked by the heart of the matter.

“…”

The answer ‘no’ was not heard from Riley. Nainiae figured that her guess was correct once again. She sighed lightly.

“You will need to talk to Lady Iris and Count Stein before you go so they won’t worry. Once you head over to that world, you don’t know when you will be coming back, right?”

“No. You don’t need to worry about that part. From our frame of mind, we will be back in less than one minute.”

“Um? Is the time frame different there?”

“That’s right.”

Nainiae quickly figured out from hearing Riley's explanation and asked. Riley nodded and summarized the explanation that he had heard from Abyss.

"If we are there for a long time, then we will have a problem, but..."

"By any chance, is it because of the physical age of the body?"

"Right. From this world's time, we will come back before even a minute passes. However, our bodies are not, so...We should handle things quickly over there so we don't end up aging before coming back."

Riley added something on the paper and placed it inside his outer pocket. He then turned around.

"Let's get going for now."

"What are you going to do?"

Riley left the library and Nainiae followed suit behind him in quick steps. Half of her face was filled with worries and the other half was filled with doubts when she asked.

"First, we should start with the one who is closest to us."

Having said he will start working, Riley looked back to see Nainiae who was following him.

“Where’s Sera?”

Chapter 195 - Six People (4)

“She’s probably…”

Not long ago, Nainiae was harshly scolded by Sera thanks to Riley. She shriveled her shoulders and guessed where Sera might be.

“I think she is in the kitchen. It is time to prepare dinner too. Also, Ms. Sera is not exactly the designated maid for Lady Iris today, so…”

Nainiae fiddled with her index finger. Riley was about to look at Nainiae and tell her to bring Sera here. However, Riley shut his mouth.

“It’s fine. I’ll go.”

Nainiae looked anxious about getting scolded by Sera again. On his face, Riley hid the fact that he was feeling sorry as he walked. However, Nainiae tumbled and followed him.

“Just wait in the library.”

“N… No. I still think I should go with you!”

It seemed she had bit her lips and worked up the courage. Nainiae had made up her mind, snorted, and even walked past Riley.

‘You don’t need to pretend to be brave…’

At first, Nainiae marched on without hesitation. However, as she approached the kitchen, her steps slowed down substantially.

“Do you think Ms. Sera is not angry now?”

Nainiae asked carefully. Nainiae was leading the way to the kitchen, but now, she was already walking right next to Riley.

“I’m not sure?”

They said a woman’s heart was like a reed. Riley thought that maybe Sera was not angry anymore. However, he also thought that perhaps she was still angry. While he was thinking this, he heard Sera’s voice.

“… Seriously!”

It looked like Nainiae had also heard the voice. She flinched her shoulders.

“Sera, subdue your anger when using the knife. She is human. She can make a mistake. Why are you being so hard on her?”

Smash!

The sound of a humungous kitchen knife striking the carving board could be heard.

“Do you think the situation does not deserve it?”

The angry voice could be heard from the kitchen, and Nainiae flinched her shoulder in response. She unconsciously bit her lips.

‘Ah, she is still mad.’

It was not certain if Sera knew that her voice was leaking outside the kitchen or not. Again,

Smash!

The sound of the kitchen knife striking the carving board could be heard and Sera’s voice continued.

“Wanting to go to the bathroom… Well, I get it. Nainiae is a woman too. A few times in a month, I’m sure she can also be in a situation where it cannot be helped.”

While biting her lips, Nainiae was eavesdropping on Sera’s words. Having heard it, Nainiae’s face turned completely red.

“I am mad about her not recognizing Young Master’s condition, but what’s making me so angry is not her mistake!”

As for Riley, he was scratching his cheek for no reason regarding the mention of ‘situations where it cannot be helped.’ Having heard the rest, Riley tilted his head to the side.

“She keeps on trying to hide things from me.”

“I’m sure there are circumstances.”

“During the winter, she left me behind and…”

With an edgy voice, Sera coughed out the heated words. All of the sudden, her voice became low and gloomy.

“Sera, that’s enough. Do you think Nainiae did that on purpose? I’m sure she did it because she didn’t want you to worry. If you are that concerned, why don’t you just ask her directly?”

It seemed the head maid Willa was in the kitchen with Sera. When she asked Sera to go talk to Nainiae directly about this, Sera was silent for a while. In the end, she said,

“… No.”

Although Nainiae could not see it, she was certain that Sera shook her head with a gloomy face just now.

‘Ms. Sera.’

Knock...

Knock...

“Ah?”

Nainiae had a gloomy look on her face. Having heard the knocks, she stared at Riley with a surprised look.

“Excuse me.”

“Y...Young Master... Wait!”

Despite Nainiae’s response to his action, Riley didn’t mind it at all. He opened the kitchen door and entered. Nainiae didn’t know what to do. She tumbled around with her feet.

“Oh my... Young Master?”

“Young Master...”

Having noticed Riley who had just entered the kitchen, Willa put a question mark on her face, wondering what brought Riley to this place. As for Sera, she started to fiddle with her hair, wondering if Riley had heard the conversation earlier.

“Sera.”

“…”

“Sera?”

It seemed she was lost in thought about something else. Sera was not able to answer right away. Riley called out her name again.

Willa poked at Sera with her elbow.

“Pardon? Ah, yes! What is it, Young Master?”

“Are you really busy right now?”

“Ah, that is…”

Having heard the question, she glanced at the vegetables that were not fully handled yet. She was about to say that she was busy, but her mouth was blocked by a hand that ambushed her from the side.

“I am a litt…. Uppp!”

“No, it is fine. Do you need to see Sera?”

Willa blocked Sera’s mouth and asked Riley if he had business

with Sera. Riley nodded and turned back.

“Come out.”

Nainiae was hiding in the corridor. She peeked her head out and showed herself.

“…”

“Oh my, Nainiae came with Young Master too.”

Willa clapped her hands together and welcomed Nainiae. Riley shrugged and said it was only obvious.

“She is my maid, so of course she is with me. I have a business with Sera. That…”

Riley pointed at vegetables that needed more work. He said,

“Leave it to her for a moment. Let me borrow Sera for a bit.”

Riley pointed his thumb behind his shoulder toward Nainiae. Willa had a puzzled look, but soon, she slowly smiled.

“Yes, I got it.”

Now that Riley had the head maid’s permission, he figured he

could take Sera from the kitchen to talk. He extended his hand out right away and gestured at Sera to tell her to come closer.

“So that’s how it is. Sera, see me for a second.”

“Ah, yes…”

“Nainiae, you make sure to finish the task.”

“Still, Young Master…”

Nainiae knew why Riley was calling Sera. With her eyes, Nainiae asked Riley if he could explain properly as she looked at her.

“I’ll handle it on my own and explain well, so don’t worry. I’m better at this than you think so, go on.”

Riley turned around and left the kitchen. He then pushed Nainiae’s back into the kitchen. As Nainiae stepped into the kitchen, Sera left the kitchen. They crossed like that.

“…”

“…”

For a brief moment, their eyes met. Leaving behind the awkwardness, they walked away.

*

“… W… What did you say?”

“That’s what happened, so get the stuff ready.”

At the mansion’s library, Sera listened to quite a long explanation from Riley. It seemed that she still couldn’t quite comprehend the situation. She shook her head hard and…

Kwang!

…Slammed the desk with her palm.

“N… No! No! No! Wait!”

“What is it? Is there a part that you didn’t understand?”

“M… Mountain loads of them!”

She looked like she was finding all of this to be complete nonsense. Riley sighed as if he figured that she would react this way. Riley sat down.

“Is that so? What’s the problem?”

“From the first thing to the tenth thing… All of them!”

Sera was saying that she didn’t understand anything. Riley rubbed the gap between his brows and explained again,

“Think of it in a simpler way. Think of it as going on a trip to a different country.”

“There is a limit to calling something a trip!”

Riley couldn’t explain things to her as they really were. So, he borrowed a term from Ian and called his past life as the ‘world below.’ He then said they needed to make a move to stop what was happening in that world.

“This is not a trip, but… How should I say this? This is far more dangerous than a trip…. Anyway! This is not a vacation trip!”

Whatever it was, Sera denied that whatever Riley had explained so far could be considered a trip in the least. Sera checked the paper that she was handed earlier. She shook her head left and right.

“Even Commander Nara and Priestess Priesia have to step in… I see a name I don’t recognize, but this…”

From Riley, Sera had heard what kind of place the ‘world below’ was. She asked with a concerned look on her face,

“Young Master, if the place is that dangerous, won’t it be better to bring someone other than me? If you want someone of high caliber, then there are veteran knights of Solia Castle, or…”

Nainiae name was on the paper, so Sera did want to join.

However, it seemed that Sera was concerned that she might end up only dragging and slowing down Nainiae or Riley. She was hesitant to say that she would come with them.

“Also…”

Sera shriveled her shoulders. Watching this, Riley said in a tone that said everything was fine.

“Why are you getting all scared for? You are one of the few in Iphalleta House who can wield dual swords.”

“Still, Young Master….”

“Even if you really were lacking in comparison to Solia Castle’s veteran knights, you have something that those guys don’t, right?”

Riley decided to point out the good things about Sera. Riley tapped at his own nose with his finger and mentioned them.

“… Your sense of smell.”

“….”

Dumbfounded, Sera avoided Riley’s gaze.

“Also, your intuition.”

Sera could detect danger from around her surroundings and warn them even if nothing was visibly wrong. It was a power that was unique to just Sera. It was something that one could possess only by being born with it. This was one of the reasons why Riley had chosen her as one of the Six Parts.

“Are you still not confident about this?”

It seemed that Sera didn’t want to answer. She had her mouth firmly closed. Riley sighed briefly and said,

“I think I get why Nainiae was worried.”

“Nainiae was…”

Sera thought about the junior maid. She suddenly opened her eyes big and held her breath.

‘Huh? Just now…something…?’

It could be that the ‘intuition’ that Riley mentioned earlier was being utilized. It was something like an instinct of a living person. Sera felt that it was sending her a warning.

“Look.”

In response to Riley’s voice, Sera used all of her might to turn her upper body around.

‘…I’ll be killed!’

She didn’t know why, but she judged that she would be killed if she stood still.

“Kuk?!”

It seemed that Sera’s intuition was right. She leaned far back. Above her face, a sword passed by without any sound.

It really was very close.

If Sera hadn’t bent far enough, even by a few degrees, her nose might have been cut off. Sera had barely been able to see the sword. She directed her gaze to the one who had swung the sword.

‘Y… Young Master?’

It was Riley.

‘Why would Young Master…?’

Having confirmed that it was Riley who had swung the sword at her, Sera could not comprehend why he would do it. She stepped back with a puzzled look on her face.

“See?”

She had no idea when Riley had drawn his sword. He was resting the sword on his shoulder as he watched Sera. Sera was breaking out in a cold sweat. Riley had a look on his face that said he knew this would happen.

“D… Did I do something rude to you, Young Master?”

Sera wondered if it was because she had scolded Nainiae earlier. Riley shook his head and that was not it.

“Just now… You didn’t see it, right?”

“Pardon..?”

“…My sword.”

Having heard the question, Sera realized that she hadn't noticed Riley drawing the sword at all. At the same time, she started to wonder about Riley's abilities.

"Now that I think about it, just now…?"

She had realized that Riley had been hiding his true abilities, but Sera had never thought that it would be to the point where Sera could not even follow them with her eyes.

"How… did you do that just now?"

With her intuition, she was able to recognize the pressure. Without realizing, she had been holding her breath. She didn't know when, but now, she also realized that the pressure that had felt like it was crushing her shoulder was gone.

"Actually, I want to ask you that question."

"Pardon?"

"How did you dodge it?"

Sera floated a question mark on her face and said in a tone that said she didn't really know.

"I… I'm not sure?"

Unlike earlier, where she even forgot to breathe, the mood had become much lighter. Sera stopped stepping back and said carefully,

“...Intuition?”

“Intuition?”

Sera said that she had dodged it by sensing it with her intuition. Riley had a look that said she should have recognized this after all. Riley called her.

“Sera.”

“Yes?”

“Pack the stuff.”

Chapter 196 - Six People (5)

After Riley told Sera ‘I got stuff to tell you, so just come quietly,’ he gave her time to have a brief conversation with Nainiae. Now, he was waiting for her to come back after packing.

“Excuse me, Nainiae… What about preparing for the dinner?”

“The vegetables were handled. I just needed to put final touch, but Ms. Willa asked if I needed time to talk to you. So… I shamelessly accepted the offer.”

It was to give the two the time to resolve emotional problems that they didn’t get to resolve before leaving the mansion.

Awkward mood was flowing in the air.

Riley was waiting inside the library. Having noticed the voices of the two maids outside, he perked up his ears to listen.

“… Excuse me, Ms. Sera.”

“… Excuse me, Nainiae.”

They both called each other at the same time. Riley, who was waiting inside the library for the two to return, peeked a smile without realizing.

“Please go ahead first.”

“No. Ms. Sera, please go first…”

It seemed Sera decided to do as Nainiae said. Riley could hear her sighing briefly.

“I’ve heard from the Young Master. You will be… traveling to a dangerous place?”

“… Yes.”

“I’ve also heard that you are worried about me.”

It seemed Sera was embarrassed. Her voice was a lot quieter than earlier. To hear better, Riley focused on his hearing.

“That is… what is it again? Please do not get me wrong! It is not that being concerned for me is a bad thing! It’s just that…”

Riley smiled because he could imagine Sera’s red face right about now. There was no need for him to check. He was sure of it.

“I’m sorry.”

With tremendous difficulty, Sera managed to bring out those few words.

“I was feeling anxious. That was why. Although we are not related by blood, I thought we had become close. Despite that, you had been trying to do things all by yourself while hiding them from me, so… that’s why I was a little anxious. That’s probably why I was angry.”

Sera said she was not considerate of the fact that Nainiae didn’t tell her out of concern for Sera. Sera also said that she let out frustration out of anxiousness. Sera explained how she really felt and apologized. Sera sounded ashamed for what she had done.

“I’m sorry.”

“There’s no need for apology.”

In front of the library, Nainiae was facing Sera’s apology. Nainiae shook her head and said,

“There is no need for it. I also had been thinking of you as my real big sister.”

Fiddling with the ribbon that Sera gave to Nainiae as a gift last year, Nainiae timidly reduced the volume of her voice. She lowered her head and said she did wrong.

“I should be the one to apologize. I am sorry, Ms. Sera. If I really thought of you as my family… my big sister, then it would have been the right thing to do to tell you about my worries and talk

about it with you, but… I didn't think of it."

"Nainiae…"

"I'm still young, and bigger portions of my life was spent at places like the prison or the Lower Solia, so… I am still not used to the relationships with people. I was afraid."

Nainiae tightly grabbed onto her skirt.

"Young Master already told me about this, but it is hard to correct my thoughts. I had been worrying about things that I didn't need to, and I ended up making the people around me worry…"

Unable to stand it, Sera bit her lips, extended her arms out and tightly held Nainiae's head in her chest.

"It's fine now. Please say no more."

"Ms. Sera…"

"We both have done wrong. We both apologized. We just need to make sure something like this does not happen in the future, right?"

"…"

While being held in Sera's chest, Nainiae seemed happy. She blushed and answered quietly,

"... Yes."

Meanwhile, Riley was secretly listening to the two's conversation. He sighed in relief and buried himself in the sofa. He thought about his mother.

'Those words from Sera... I felt like I have heard that from somewhere. Is it thanks to my mother?'

Thinking about his mother, Riley had a proud look on his face. However, although a long time had passed, Sera and Nainiae weren't coming into the library. So, Riley erased the look from his face and got up from the sofa.

"Hey, that's enough. Could you guys..."

Dulkuk.

"...?!"

"...?!"

"... come in."

Riley opened the library door and glared at two maid who were fully committed to hugging each other. As if the two maids had no idea that Riley was inside the library, they hurriedly let go of each other.

“W… Were you inside?”

“If you were, it would’ve been nice if you told me…”

They were scratching their heads. Watching the two, Riley looked dumbfounded. He said,

“What do you mean? I did tell you that I will be waiting at the library.”

“Ah, you did…”

“It slipped my mind.”

Riley went back and forth between the two maids’ faces. He pondered about if he should change two of the names in the list. After wondering about it for a brief moment, he went back into the library.

“Have you packed everything?”

“You told me to pack lightly, so I did bring just one bag.”

Sera quickly showed the traveling size bag that she had on her back. Sera asked Riley,

“Excuse me, Young Master… I did hear that we will be going on a trip, but did you tell Count Stein or Lady Iris?”

Nainiae responded for Riley.

“No. We will be back very soon, so…”

“Very soon?”

As if she had no idea, Sera tilted her head to the side. Riley packed his stuff and looked at Nainiae.

“Let’s save the detailed explanation for later. First, let’s get to our next destination. You know whose turn it is, right?”

Nainiae nodded.

“Yes.”

“Well then, let’s get over there.”

As if she was already ready for this, Nainiae moved her mana and opened a dimensional portal inside the library. She stepped aside to tell others to go in first.

“Y… Young Master! Wait!”

Riley went it first, and Sera went in second. Nainiae vacantly looked around the library and went through the portal last.

*

They were at the Karuta desert.

The dark sands were purified in this place. The oasis had regained its former appearance as well. When the desert was covered in dark sand, the stream of travelers going across the desert through the oasis had ceased. Now, the people were starting to come back.

“Huuuurrrrr… I just cannot get used to Nainiae’s teleportation. I think my inside feels nauseated a little too…”

Right after Riley, Sera was the one who came after. She covered her mouth to calm her stomach and looked around the desert.

“… This place is?”

There was only one desert that Sera knew, so she carefully muttered,

“Is this place the Karuta desert?”

“That’s right.”

Right at that moment, Nainiae also came through the portal, and the dimensional portal closed behind her.

“Why are we here?”

To avoid being seen by anyone, they came to a place in the desert where people didn’t pass through. He put on the desert hood that he came prepared with and said,

“I have a business here.”

Nainiae gave a desert hood to Sera and added to supplement Riley’s deficient answer.

“Commander Nara and Ms. Priesia are here. That’s why.”

“Ah…”

Sera thought about a news article that said the Karuta desert, which was drenched in black and rotting, was cleansed recently. She nodded and muttered,

“I saw the news article about them stopping the swarm of monsters migrating through Romella Village. So, I was certain that they were over there instead, but… it looks like that is not the

case.”

Before Sera started to mumble, Riley already had started to walk toward oasis nearby. He started to explain why Nara and Priesia were at the desert.

“It’s because Nara is working for Reitri as a mercenary. As for Priesia, that lass still has a reward on her discovery and whatnot, so she is being taken care of by Nara’s mercenary group.”

After cleansing the desert with Priesia, Reitri was the very first one to move his merchant group and dominate the business at the desert. He was currently the merchant with the biggest merchant group in the area.

“Coming to think of it, I think a lot has changed in the past one year.”

“What has?”

“I’m talking about you, Young Master. Even during last year spring, I never dreamed that I would be walking through the desert with you like this.”

Having heard what Sera said, Riley felt the same. With empty look on his face, he said,

“I know.”

By the time they chatted away for a few minutes, the three were able to see a town that surrounded the oasis in the distance.

“Ah, is that the place?”

It had not been long since the desert was recovered. So, the village was small. There were only few guards watching the place.

The three entered the village after going through a rather simple process. They checked out each building to look for the carriage that had Reitri merchant group’s insignia.

“… Young Master, over there.”

Sera found it first. Riley and Nainiae, who were walking around while looking at other places, turned their eyes to where Sera pointed at.

“That carriage over there. Isn’t that Reitri merchant group’s carriage?”

Having heard Sera’s question, Riley looked at the direction carefully. He nodded to indicate that she was right and then started to walk toward the carriage.

“It is.”

At the mansion's library, Riley already had checked the whereabouts of Reitri. Riley was certain that this was the carriage that Reitri rode.

"... Huh? Huh? Stop! Hey, stop him!"

"Look at this runt, seriously... If you filled your stomach, then you should be leaving quietly after paying. Instead, you dare to make a scene? What did you say? It should be free since there was a centipede in the food? Why? Why don't you also ask the boss for psychological damage while at it?"

"What? Did you call me a runt? You little bastard, you dare to talk that way to me?"

"What? Little bastard? Come over here."

"C... Commander! Please don't break anything! If Reitri merchant group has to pay for the damages again, then we really won't be able to..."

"Hey, hey! I said stop him!"

It appeared to be a pub. It was loud there, and many voices could be heard from the direction. After that...

"Uuuhuk?!"

Smash!

A giant was thrown out while smashing the door on the way. He plummeted on the ground.

“Kuk. How… How could a little kid like him have such monstrous strength…”

“You runt. Little kid, little kid… You still dare to call me a little kid? Let’s see how much beating you will be receiving from this little kid.”

Through the inn’s door, a boy wearing a wide fabric clothing rushed out. The clothing was becoming of the desert setting.

“Commander! Please calm down!”

“Come on, Rorona… Did you not see the uncomfortable look on our boss’s face? They are the ones at fault. Why should we just watch and do nothing?”

“Still! I know I said I would like to be on the newspaper again, but I don’t want to be on it like this!”

Riley and Nainiae found the two people who came out of the pub. They were the same as always, and that made Riley and Nainiae peek smiles.

“Do not worry. I’ll adjust it properly so it won’t get on the newspaper.”

“Ugh. Commander, please!”

“I said don’t worry? If anything goes wrong… Huh?”

“…?”

The giant saw that Nara tilted his head to the side and floated a question mark on his face. Giant slowly turned his head and look behind himself.

“Young Master?”

“Ms. Nainiae?”

Behind the giant, Nara and Rorona found the three. It seemed Nara and Rorona were glad to see them. They welcomed Riley’s group.

‘… Now’s my chance!’

The giant was thinking that Nara was letting his guard down. The giant gritted his teeth and promptly turned around.

‘I should bounce!’

It seemed that Sera figured out that the giant did something wrong and was about to take off. Sera casually put her foot forward.

“… Uuuuhuk!?”

The giant was tumbling with his legs to make a run for it from Nara. However, he tripped over Sera’s delicate foot. He fell down once again.

“Y… You lass!”

The giant crumpled his face as if he was trying to say that he will really show what it would be like when he is angry. He brought out a small knife that he had hidden on his waist and swung it at her.

“…”

As if she was staring at a bug, Sera had been looking at the man in silence. She casually moved her legs and smacked the giant’s wrist.

“Kuk!”

By just a kick, the giant lost the knife from his hand. Sera’s next kick came, and the giant ended up making a hand print on the ground. The man screamed.

“Ah, ahhhk! Stop! Stop!”

With the heel of the shoe, she stepped on the man’s hand firmly. She glanced at Riley, and he shrugged to tell her that Sera could do whatever she wanted. Riley went to Nara.

“It’s been a while! I think we saw each other last year?”

“Young Master, by any chance, did you see the newspaper? We were on it.”

“Do you really think I would not have see it?”

Nara was watching Sera neutralizing the giant. He decided to leave the rest to her. Nara stopped huffing and puffing. He relaxed his face and looked at Riley.

“By the way, what brings you all the way here, Young Master? Did you come to see Mr. Reitri?”

“No, not him… I have something to discuss with you.”

“Something to discuss? With me?”

Nara pointed at himself. Riley nodded to say, ‘yes.’ Riley started to look for another person.

“Priesia is with you guys too, right? It would be exhausting to explain twice, so give me some of your time.”

Riley looked for Priesia, and Nara opened his mouth a little.

“Ah, about that…”

Having heard Riley’s question, Nara blurred the end of his sentence. As if he was trying to ask Rorona to answer for him, he kept glancing at Rorona.

“Young Master, Ms. Priesia is currently…”

Chapter 197 - Six People (6)

Riley wondered if it was such a difficult question to answer. It wasn't just Nara who hesitated to respond. Even Rorona, who had a relatively straight-shooter kind of personality, blurred the end of her sentence. She carefully said,

"She can't have a conversation right now."

"She can't?"

Riley furrowed his eyebrows. As if he was trying to say that they should explain in detail, Riley looked inside the pub.

"She is not in here?"

Riley looked for the presence of Holy Power, the kind that people of holy temple possessed which was different from mana. Riley confirmed that the power could not be felt from the pub.

"... She is not here."

Riley muttered. Rorona nodded and glanced at others passing by as she said,

"It's a little uncomfortable to talk about it here, so why don't we go to a different place?"

Rorona said she didn't think she could talk about Priesia out in the open because Priesia had a reward on her discovery. Rorona quickly turned to look at the pub that had its door destroyed. She smiled awkwardly.

"It hadn't been long since we arrived at this oasis. So, we don't know the way around very well yet. I have something I need to go ask Mr. Reitri real quick, so can you please wait here?"

Riley stopped her and ask her a favor.

"Wait. Do not tell Reitri that I'm here."

"Pardon? Why?"

"It's not that I'm trying to hide something. It's just that explaining things multiple times would be such a bother. Just think of it that way."

Rorona tilted her head to the side, wondering what this was about. She nodded as if she understood.

"Okay. I understand."

*

Along with Nara in the front, Rorona led the way to where Priesia was.

“Why is she so far away from everyone? It would be dangerous for her to be by herself. There’s still a reward on her discovery.”

Riley was following Nara and Rorona to where Priesia was when he asked. Nara said,

“That is… Ms. Priesia said she will be all right by herself. We did place guards around, but there probably isn’t anyone right near where she is.”

Riley and Nainiae thought a more detailed explanation was necessary. They tilted their heads to the side.

“You know where she is?”

“Yes.”

Nara nodded and also added the supplementary explanation that he didn’t get to give earlier.

“Since the epidemic drenched the Karuta desert, nobody had been setting foot in this place, but… There happens to be an abandoned holy temple nearby.”

“A holy temple?”

“Yes. Ms. Priesia is currently praying there.”

Nainiae had seen a friend sending up prayers at a holy temple a few times during last year spring. So, Nainiae mumbled as if she understood.

“She had said a few times before that she want to be alone. I wondered if there was something difficult going on with her, but… She said it was not like that. She said it because there was a divine message.”

“When you say a divine message, you mean that?”

“Yes, the one she receives from the Goddess.”

Riley remembered that even the priestess from his past life received divine messages sometimes. So, Riley’s face had become complicated.

“You already knew?”

Having heard what Nainiae said, Nara relaxed his face because he realized there was no need for further explanation. He explained one more time briefly about Priesia’s current situation.

“As I explained earlier, I think Ms. Priesia is praying because of a divine message, although we don’t know what the message is about.”

Nara also said he didn't know how long the prayer would take. He pointed at a ruined building to the front.

"That's the place."

The building was made of marble stones, so it appeared to have been a holy temple in the past. Riley nodded as if it was making sense. He walked toward the place.

"Y… Young Master! Wait!"

"I told you. Ms. Priesia is in middle of a prayer?"

Nara and Rorona both extended their hands toward Riley and told him to wait. Riley furrowed his brows lightly and turned to look at the two.

"Come on. It's not like I said I'm going to go bother her?"

Riley said he will just watch her praying. Nara and Rorona glanced at each other. They looked like they were thinking this could not be helped. They followed Riley.

"Nainiae, go bring Sera. I think she would come find us easily using her sense of smell, but it would be a bother if she ran into Reitri and end up having a long conversation."

Riley was walking into the ruined building, but he ordered

Nainiae who was waiting behind him.

"Yes, I understand."

Nainiae lowered her head after hearing Riley's order. She used the teleport to disappear from the spot, and Riley started to move his eyes around as he quietly entered the building.

'Is it because the building is rundown? Inside is relatively smaller than what I thought from how the building looked from the outside, yet... She is...'

There were rubbles blocking the path like obstacles inside. With his upper body lowered, Riley entered deeper and deeper into the place. Riley momentarily stopped walking after he found light exuding from the inside.

'... praying here.'

In a building that was on the verge of collapsing, Priesia was there all by herself, on her knees and praying. A steady, warm light was coming from her body.

'Her prayer pose and the atmosphere are most definitely different from that Helena lass.'

Riley was not sure if it was because Priesia worshipped a different goddess or if it was because Priesia lived in a different world. Priesia was very different from the priestess from Riley's past life.

Riley sighed all of the sudden.

‘That’s why I should be extra careful. There definitely will be a problem later… I need to think carefully if it is the right choice to pick her or not.’

As the Priestess of this world, Priesia had the eyes that could pierce through to see the truth in the people. She also had the ability to heal the wounded. She definitely was one of the six that Riley needed. However,

‘Um. I was prepared to accept some troubles down the road, but… Now that I’m here to really pick her to be a part of this, I am having a hard time deciding.’

Riley thought about what would happen if he brought her to his past life’s world. He had a rough idea as to what would happen as the result of it. This was why Riley was concerned.

‘To make a rough guess as to what would happen… A collision between her and Helena would be the very first thing that might happen.’

Helena was a priestess just like Priesia. However, Helena had been frequently committing acts that she should not have as a priestess. Considering Priesia’s personality, if Helena and Priesia came to face each other, Riley was certain that Priesia would not just stand still.

‘Also, I am not certain if Priesia can use her Holy Power from this world in the other world. That is a problem as well.’

Priesia was the Priestess who worshipped Goddess Irenetsa. It was not yet known if it was possible for Priesia to use her Holy Power in the world of Riley’s past life. This concern was also worth pondering about.

“Um?”

Riley vacantly rolled his brain as he watched Priesia praying. He suddenly furrowed his brows.

‘What the? Why is she crying all of the sudden?’

Priesia was praying while exuding light from her body, and she was receiving the divine message from the Goddess. However, Priesia suddenly had tears flowing.

<… My child, this will be my very last message to you.>

<Last message… How could it be…>

<Do not be sad. The path you have walked, and the path you will walk… I’ll be blessing all of those moments.>

Priesia was unaware of who was watching. She was pouring out

tears from hearing that this will be the last divine message from the Goddess Irenetsa.

<I'm still lacking in so many ways. Instead of blessings, it would be better if you gave me teachings. Please do not go... I... I...>

Priesia was born as a priestess. She had never even seen the faces of her parents. So, Priesia had been following the Goddess as if she was her mother. What the Goddess said was like saying that this will be the last time they will be seeing each other. So, Priesia was shedding tears, unable to stop.

<When you open your eyes, follow the boy who is watching you from your behind. Also... you only need to light the path he walks with bright light. My child, do not forget. I'll always be standing behind and blessing you.>

<Goddess, wait... Please wait a little bit. Just a little longer... Please allow the prayer to continue for just a little bit longer. Your voice... just a little longer...>

The bright light from Priesia's body was slowly subsiding.

It seemed something sad had happened. With her eyes tightly shut, she was shedding tears of sorrow. Also, she started to tighten her two hands.

"Hu... Huhuk..."

She quietly started to cry. Wondering if she was all right, Nara and Rorona were about to walk over to her. However, they were blocked by Riley's arm. They broke cold sweats.

"Young Master, why..."

"Just let her be."

It was because Riley noticed that the sound of her moaning was similar to when someone lost a precious family.

"Hk... Huuuk..."

She had her hands gathered together and her fingers locked for prayer. Her hands were shaking.

'Her energy... became bigger.'

From the back, Riley was watching Priesia in secret. He also noticed that the energy that Priesia possessed had become significantly more powerful in comparison to just before the prayer ended.

'Did something happen?'

Priesia moaned like that for a long time before getting a grip. With swelled up and reddened eyes, she looked behind her.

“… There, you are there, aren’t you?”

With choked up voice, she asked. Nara and Rorona, who had been waiting for Priesia’s tears to stop, got up.

“Ms. Priesia…”

“… Are you all right?”

Priesia nodded lightly as the response. She then locked her gaze with Riley who was standing behind them. She lowered her head and greeted him.

“I see.”

Riley lifted his right hand to greet her back. He glanced at Nara and then said,

“I have something to tell you, so…”

It looked like Priesia already anticipated this. She kept her mouth closed and waited to show that she was ready.

“…”

“This involves me, doesn’t it?”

“That’s right.”

Rorona, who was standing next to Nara, was not a part of the six parts. However, Riley decided it would be necessary to explain this to her as well. So, Riley had the three sit there and started to explain.

*

“… So, I’ll need you to come with me.”

Similar to how he did it with Sera, he mentioned the ‘world below’ and explained the situation. Riley waited for the two people’s responses.

“As for me…”

As if he was having a hard time understanding this, Nara had been tilting his head to the side. However, he was the one who responded first.

“As for me, if you need my help, I could go to even more dangerous places for you.”

Shrugging his shoulders, Nara quickly said he would go. Riley asked in a tone that questioned if Nara would regret it.

“Will you be all right?”

“… Yes.”

Nara nodded responded.

“You helped me handle what happened after my father’s death. You even enabled me to meet Mr. Ian who I had been idolizing. So… I should repay you for your kindness. Honestly, I don’t have a good head on my shoulder like Mr. Reitri, so I had been pondering about how to repay you…”

Although Nara said he would go without hesitation, it seemed there was something that bothered him. He glanced at Rorona who was sitting next to him. Nara said,

“It is just that I have the contract that I signed with Mr. Reitri. Also… leaving Rorona behind is…”

Nara was blurring the end of his sentence. Rorona sighed all of the sudden instead.

“Ugh. Commander. Just go and come back.”

“Rorona…”

“From Young Master’s explanation, although it would be a long trip for you… the time frame is different, so it would be no different from being gone for a bathroom break in our time, right?”

It seemed Rorona understood Riley's explanation completely in a single breath. She flickered with her index finger as she spoke. She poked Nara's forehead with the index finger and cheered for him.

"Please go to the trip. Just don't die like Isen."

Nara vacantly stared at Rorona who was his fellow mercenary. Nara broke into a suppressed laughter.

"Kuk... All right. I got it."

With confident look on his face, Nara asked,

"You gave me the permission, right?"

"I didn't give you the permission to die."

Now, it became certain that Nara was going to join the group. Riley's gaze was directed at Priesia who was sitting next to Nara and Rorona.

"What about you?"

"I'll go too."

She was crying her eyes out only until a moment ago, so her eyes

were swelled up. Still, she looked determined.

“There was the last divine message from Goddess Irenetsa. If I complete this… This world will become peaceful enough that there would be no need for more divine messages.”

Priesia tightly grabbed onto her skirt. She looked directly at Riley’s face and said once again,

“So… I’ll go. Please allow me to go with you.”

Riley nodded. He looked like he had something he needed to check. Riley asked Priesia,

“Before we go, we need to confirm if you can use your power in the other world.”

Priesia nodded. Instead of a verbal response, she raised her right hand.

“Do not be concerned about that.”

From her right hand, a steady light started to exude.

“It’s already ready.”

Thanks to the divine message she received earlier, Priesia

explained that she would be able to use her power in the other world. She lightly made a fist with her hand.

"... All right."

While looking into Priesia's eyes, Riley nodded. He brought out the paper that had the 'Six Parts' written.

'Next is...'

Andal.

Nainiae.

Sera.

Nara.

Priesia.

'... The last.'

Of the six people, five spots were filled. The remaining one was...

Chapter 198 - Five People And (1)

Now, it became certain that Nara and Priesia would be joining Riley. After that, Riley decided to leave the rest to Rorona. Riley and others joined up with Nainiae and Sera.

“The four on the top of the list are here?”

Riley had the four people standing in front of him. He nodded as if he was liking the picture.

“They are all here.”

“Still, two people… are missing.”

Of the four, Priesia glanced around left and right and then tilted her head to the side as she asked.

“According to what you explained earlier, you are planning a counter strike with six people just like how the Six Parts from the world below came to cause problems in our world, right?”

Riley nodded. He then explained the current situation briefly.

“Of the six, five were gathered.”

“Five?”

Nara was standing far right of the group. He looked at the three people who were standing next to himself and then furrowed his brows.

“One, two, three… four including myself… There are four in total?”

“By any chance, does the six people include you, Young Master?”

As if he was confused, Nara mumbled. It seemed Priesia was also curious about this. She wiggled her eyebrows and asked.

“No. I’m not included.”

Riley started to explain about the one who could not be seen at the moment.

“The one who is not here is waiting at a place we promised to gather at.”

“A place we promised to gather at?”

“Of the six… This one was decided first.”

“First?”

“Even before Nainiae?”

“That’s right.”

It seemed the three people besides Nainiae were surprised. They had their eyes turned big as they stared at Nainiae.

“Nainiae… You knew about this too?”

“… Yes.”

“Do you know who it is?”

“I know, but… Yes… Won’t it be better to save this as the fun subject for later?”

Nainiae scratched her cheek and avoided answering. Riley also broke cold sweat and thought about the ‘red haired young man’ who was having a conversation with Abyss at Ansyrium. Riley was thinking about ‘the red dragon.’

‘I wonder what the two are up to…’

Riley was not sure about Abyss, but Andal was not liking the man, so Riley could only roughly guess that Andal was not going to sit quietly and become a good conversation partner with Abyss.

‘If we sit around longer, the letters ‘Ansyrium’ might disappear from the map. I think I should hurry before that happens.’

Even before something could happen because of Helena, Riley was having useless worries about half of the map needing correction soon because of Andal and Abyss. He folded his thoughts and said,

“Anyway, we will be moving right away to meet the remaining member. You packed your things right? I did say that it would be a brief moment in this world’s time, but we would be spending quite a while in the other side, so…”

Having heard his question, the four all looked at each other. They nodded as if they were ready. They all said at the same time,

“Yes!”

“Anytime.”

“By the way, who is the sixth person?”

“You’ll know that too when you get there.”

Riley looked at Nainiae and signaled with his gaze.

“Well then, I’ll open the dimensional portal…”

Under Riley's order, Nainiae was about to open the dimensional portal to find the sixth part. However, she heard footsteps from behind her. She stopped the spell and narrowed her eyes.

"... Hey!"

The steps were not just one or two people. Not just Nainiae, but everyone else at the spot turned their heads toward where the voice came from.

"Is it those bastards? The ones who picked fights with you?"

"Yes, that's right."

"They said they are from some merchant group. As if interfering with our work was not enough, they broke my Big Bro's arm."

Nainiae saw that they were a group who all wore unique desert fabrics wrapped all around their bodies.

"I don't know which merchant group you all came from, but you cannot meddle with our business spot due collections."

Of the group, a man who appeared to be the leader was holding a large metal club on his shoulder. He tapped his shoulder with the club as he walked to Riley's group.

"Big Bro! Over there. It's the brown-haired lass over there! She is

the one who broke his arm!”

Men who appeared to be subordinates pointed at Sera and started to grind their teeth.

“Oh?”

The man with metal club on his shoulder looked at her. As if he was impressed, he wiggled his brows and said,

“She looks quite innocent? How…”

The man looked at Priesia and then Nainiae. The man’s eyes were filled up with greed. He started to grin big time.

“About this… I was thinking I was unlucky, but it isn’t really the case.”

The man raised the other hand that was not holding the metal club and flickered around his fingers. The subordinates behind him who were on standby all took a step forward with violent looks on their faces.

“Guys.”

“Yes, Big Bro!”

“Let’s let out our frustration today!”

“Huu huu!”

The men behind the one with metal club all started to laugh in creepy way.

“If you can, leave those two men alive as well. They have quite fair faces as too. We just need to sell them to nobilities with strange tastes.”

Letting out their frustration, selling to the nobilities… Riley’s group just vacantly stared at these men saying strange stuff. It was Sera who showed a response first.

“Ugh…”

Sera sighed big and stared at Nainiae with dumbfounded face. Sera said,

“This is why I told you earlier that it would be best to wipe off completely without leaving any dirty feeling behind.”

Earlier today, it was Sera who was left in charge of handling the rest with the giant who Nara had a fight with. Because Nainiae said Riley was looking for her, Sera could not help it but to leave it be without finishing it. Sera was now muttering that it was a mistake.

“I see. The right answer would have been taking care of the rest completely.”

It seemed Nainiae was ashamed. She turned to look at Riley. The look on her face asked what should be done.

“Why are you even asking? The answer is already out, right?”

With his arms crossed, Riley glanced at Nara. As if he was waiting for this, Nara cracked his neck left and right and grabbed his spear.

“Ms. Nainiae. There is no need for you to go easy on them. They only exploit powerless people. They are the scums of the desert.”

In particular, the giant with metal club was infamous for being evil. He was well known even among the mercenaries. The man was most definitely the leader of the desert thieves, and he had a bounty on his head.

“When I saw what the bastard was doing at the pub, I just thought maybe, but… I didn’t know he had someone with a bounty among the group.”

With his spear on his hand, Nara was showing hostility. Riley was thinking hard about something. As if he wanted to tell Nara to wait a moment, Riley pulled Nara’s shoulder.

“… Young Master?”

Nara wondered what that was about. He floated a question mark on his face and looked back at Riley.

“Let’s save your performance for later.”

Riley looked at Nainiae. He narrowed his eyes to tell her not to step in either. Nainiae understood and nodded. She took a step back.

“Young Master, just why…”

Nara carefully asked. Riley looked at Sera and said,

“Sera, you didn’t get to wrap it up. I can leave this to you, right?”

Sera panicked and opened and closed her mouth like a fish. In a tone of voice that lacked confidence, Sera said,

“Excuse me, Young Master. Still… Fighting dozens of such big men would be too much for me, don’t you think? They are all wielding different weapons too… Perhaps if I had someone who will support me…”

Sera had worries on her face when she looked back at Riley. Riley shrugged and said,

“Don’t you remember that you don’t want to make me or Nainiae

worry?”

“T… That was…”

“Try it out, alone.”

Riley narrowed his eyes and told her to try it alone. Thinking it could not be helped, Sera sighed and brought her hands to her waist.

“Y… Young Master. Still, asking Ms. Sera to fight all those bastards by herself is…”

“Those bastards… It’s hard for me to just stand back and watch. Can’t you just let me fight?”

Nainiae and Nara asked if it would be all right if they helped out little bit. Riley watched Sera drawing her swords. He only kept silence.

“Young Master, in that case… how about healing…”

“No.”

Priesia asked if it would be all right if she used her Holy Power at least. However, Riley had a stern look on his face. In the end, Priesia had no choice but to look at the back of Sera while being very concerned.

“It’s just that there is no need for any of them.”

“No need…”

“… for any of them?”

Nainiae and Nara could not understand. They looked confused. Like Riley, they watched the back of Sera.

‘It’s not like… she is going to die from this, right?’

As if Sera could not feel the gazes from the four people behind her, with her piercing gaze, Sera glared at evildoers who were making their way toward her. She was wielding her dual swords.

‘Be calm. Hu… Be calm.’

Her swords were relatively short and thin. When her swords revealed themselves, Nara’s eyebrows bent the wrong way.

‘Dual swords? She uses dual swords?’

Although Nara had not lived long, he had met many people so far and seen all sorts of weapons through his life as a mercenary. With intrigued look on his face, Nara put the spear back over his shoulder.

‘I think she has a pretty good stance. As expected, even though she is a maid, she is from Iphalleta.’

Nara was examining Sera’s stance who appeared to have the basics down. It seemed Nara was not satisfied with doing just that. He checked how many of the thugs were coming.

‘The number of opponents she can handle by herself is roughly… about thirty. I really don’t think she can handle them all without a special weapon?’

Riley did order them to just watch. However, it seemed Nainiae was ready to save her at a moment’s notice if Sera ended up in danger. With serious look on her face, Nainiae had a protection spell ready.

‘Ms. Sera…’

It was when Nainiae was mumbling Sera’s name in her mind. One of the desert thugs who were approaching Sera started to charge in screaming.

“Ha, how arrogant of you to stand alone!”

“It looks like we will have to make you feel the bitter taste!”

“On bed!”

One large man was swinging a hook on a chain. There were others charging in with unique looking axe or blades. There was another one coming with a metal net.

‘I think it would be easy if Ms. Heliona was here.’

Sera was thinking about how she fought the guards who were brainwashed by Reutrina during the last winter. Back then, Sera was protected by Heliona, the summon spirit. As if Sera was whipping herself, she shook her head and fixed her grip on her swords.

‘No, don’t falter here, Sera. Young Master asked me to go with him, didn’t he? If I don’t want to become a burden after going to the other side, then I need to work hard starting now!’

Sera was glaring at the front with her eyes wide. The net was thrown at her first. With her swords on her hands, she twisted her upper body in a large motion.

‘First, one of them.’

She avoided the net by leaning back. She locked her gaze with the thug who was rushing in first. She swung her swords and neutralized him. She then quickly moved her steps.

“You stupid… Uk!”

The thug who was just behind the first one clicked his tongue after watching the man being subdued. However, the second thug was surprised to see his own body falling over to the front. He screamed.

“Kuk!”

“Kuuuaaak!?”

Afterwards, third and fourth thugs fell over or knocked unconscious by Sera’s swords or kicks. The thugs’ leader, the man with metal club, kicked his tongue.

“Fools. You guys can’t even handle a lass with petty tricks.”

The evildoers were feeling anxious after hearing their leader clicking his tongue. It seemed they judged that this was not going to work. Some got out of the frontline and fell back.

‘It looks like this lass knows how to handle sword a bit… Let’s see if you are going to still run around all excited and have fun once I get a hostage.’

Sera was chasing after weapons that surrounded her. However, she saw a few thugs were slipping out of the formation. She started to think hard about this.

‘What should I do?’

She wondered if she should let them head to where Riley's group was. She was hesitant.

'It's not like something would happen if I left them be. There's Nainiae there too. Also, there's Commander Nara and even Young Master. However, if I leave these thugs to get there...'

Sera wondered if that was still considered handling the situation alone if she left these ones to slip away and reach Riley's group.

'However, in this situation, there is no way...'

She had her hands full from just fighting off the surrounding formation. So, she was about to give up on the ones who slipped away. It was at that moment. Sera could feel it.

'I really...'

Sera felt something strange zapping through her left hand.

'No, it will work.'

She felt like she found the answer to the question she was thinking hard about. Sera was holding one of the swords in reverse. She spun it and held it to the front on her left hand.

'I can stop them!'

She was constantly being attacked. She had no moment to catch breath. However, in that situation, she found a brief moment using her ‘feel’ alone. She swung her left arm with all of her strength.

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