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Third Prince Elmer

— *Entrance Exam - Preparation Arc* —

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IV. Entrance Exam - Preparation Arc

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Table of Contents

[Third Prince Elmer](#)

[4-1 Meal and Siblings](#)

[4-2 Chabo and Examination](#)

[4-3 Shopping and Truth](#)

[4-4 Magic and Sweets](#)

[4-5 Retainer and Delight](#)

4-1 Meal and Siblings

“Entrance exam?”

“That is correct. Would you like to take the entrance exam of the school we mentioned previously?”

I want to go to school. I nodded to Matthias as we once again came over to the Imperial Capital.

The place we’ll stay at is of course, the West Vern House’s Villa in the Imperial Capital.

As one would expect, it is smaller than the main residence, I think. I feel like my senses greatly dulled. I was guided to a room which is bigger than any house I ever saw and after spending some time inside the room, I was called for dinner.

I reached the dining room through a hallway with an atmosphere somehow resembling the main residence’s. Other than Matthias beside me, there isn’t anyone around me yet.

No, I haven’t encountered other people in the mansion aside from the servants.

Matthias pulled out my seat and then the both of us waited for the meal.

“Pardon me for making you wait.”

There was a dish placed in front of me and then, I realized it! My hand that I’ve stretched out to take the spoon stopped.

Wait a moment.

I turned my head with a *gigigi* sound similar to a broken doll.

I don’t want to look, but I want to confirm it.

“Is something the matter?”

The person standing behind me is unmistakably, Richard-san.

“It’s nothing...”

I looked ahead immediately again and calmed myself.

He should've seen me off but why is he here!? Is he a twin?

Didn't Matthias taught me about it before? Don't think about it, I'll just be defeated if I think about Richard-san.

However, my thoughts were interrupted when I noticed the entrance another person.

"Welcome home, Matthias."

I was startled the moment I saw that scene, then I stared thoroughly at Matthias who's sitting beside me.

"Please stop it."

The woman I've never seen before is hugging Matthias! M-m-ma... Matthias is involved with a woman!!

I think I'm not supposed to look and should just continue eating, but I can't take my eyes off them.

"Really, please stop. That appearance, there might be something a little more..."

"I just came back from an evening party so there's nothing I can do about it, don't you think so?"

Is she his girlfriend? She's in this house so could that mean she's a live-in partner!?

They're extremely close so perhaps they're married, and I just wasn't told about it.

I continued observing them quietly. She's beautiful, and I feel like she looks a little similar to Lucsher-san. Even her clothes is similar to Lucsher, too...

No way! I didn't realized what I should have been aware of.

"I'm sorry, it doesn't seem like I'm as hungry as I thought."

I, whose appetite completely faded from the realization that Matthias has an Oedipus Complex, slowly stood from my seat.

[Note: Oedipus Complex (マザコン mazacon – mother complex) from the Greek story Oedipus Rex, about how Oedipus killed his father then married his mother

and even had children with her. Psych101 says this is natural for young boys, just as Electra Complex (father complex) happens to young girls, during their phallic stage.]

I'll just return to my room today. It seems like it would be better to reassess several things.

Matthias stood stock still from being unable to stop El who didn't even made eye contact with him.

"Could it be that I'm now hated by El because of Elder Brother!? He must have thought that I still like Elder Brother even though I'm matured enough. Ah, how could you do this..."

"Isn't it fine? Even so, he's really beautiful. I'm satisfied."

When the woman carelessly pulled her hair, it slipped. What came into view is the real hair color. Red hair completely identical to Matthias, moreover it's a beautiful long hair.

"You better not! Please stop thinking about making a pass on El!"

The situation is just a bit of serious.

And then, the day of the entrance exam came.

To go to the academy, Matthias and I walked through the town. I was asked if I wanted a carriage to the academy but I declined because I wanted to personally see the town.

"El-sama, shall we buy the essentials you'll need in the academy on the way home after the entrance exam? If you want to go home it's fine, but there's no loss in looking at the Imperial Capital's shops just once."

I want to see the shops by all means. In contrast to Matthias' smile, I showed an awkward smile as I said this.

"I don't know whether I'll pass the entrance exam..."

It's just before the exam. I wasn't able to sleep properly last night due to nervousness. It's been a while since I've taken a test so my legs are shaking. I won't be able to face the people in the West Vern House if I fail. Moreover, he asked me to go shopping with the assumption that I'll pass.

I know you don't mean any harm, but please stop pressuring me further!

"What are you saying? El-sama is a genius."

Matthias said that with no worries whatsoever so I was taken aback.

"But Leon said I'm stupid..."

And then after that no one spoke to me about studying anymore. It's as if the word 'study' became a taboo in front of me.

I'm sure everyone gave up on me.

"Leont did? Is it alright for me to hear about that story in detail?"

Matthias stopped walking and asked me that with a pleasant smile.

I expected it to be the same as the smile a while ago but there's clearly no laughter in Matthias' eyes. I forgot about my nervousness from before and nodded at him.

"Has it become clear to you now?"

"I, I got it."

Matthias asked me for the confirmation in front of the school. Since then, he had by far explained to me that I'm not stupid until we arrived here, and that I somehow misunderstood Leont's words.

In the end, I still didn't understand what that 'stupid!' meant. Even if I disregard Matthias' compliments it seems that I'll be fine in the entrance exam. Needless to say, I felt relief the same time I felt an urge to kill Leont when I heard that.

"I will come back to pick you up. El-sama, please work hard. Or rather, there is no need for El-sama to work hard. Being relaxed is the best way... however..."

"I'll do my best!"

If I'll continue listening to him, at this rate I'll be late for the exam.

I waved slightly to Matthias and set foot inside the academy.

It's so spacious that I can't think of it as a school. I don't know where it's class hours or a holiday but there's no one around at all.

Therefore, I got lost again. Though I entered the building, I don't know the location of the staff room.

I should have more than enough time but since I've lost my way, I don't have time to be easygoing.

What should I do?

Calm down. It's a school so there should be somebody somewhere.

Moreover... my guide might happen to be a kid in the same class, so I can perhaps have my first friend.

I know I'm just escaping reality from this situation that had me driven to the corner.

While I wandered around aimlessly, I heard a clattering sound.

... I'm saved! Wait for me! The person who will become my first friend!

I faced towards that metallic clacking sound and started running.

4-2 Chabo and Examination

When I ran towards the source of the sound, it lead me outside to the back of the building and into the deserted courtyard.

Well, I don't really care since I'll likely reach the faculty room as long as I meet that person.

"It's a large... Japanese Bantam...!!"

<Note: Bantam (Chabo in Japanese) is a breed of chicken with squirrel-like tails as their main feature. Japanese bantams are said to be true bantams, and not a miniature of large fowl.> What was there was a chicken. It's shaking its foot violently so the metal shackles create a loud sound every time it did that.

It's a chicken we raised in elementary school. Is the size big because this is a different world? I let out those words because I've seen a bantam before.

I've seen a bantam dozens of times so I felt that their cuteness diminish a little.

The bantam began to struggle more violently when a person it doesn't recognize came by.

Its foot might be injured by the metal shackle if it continue to struggle. I feel sorry for it.

I thought that it may feel reassured if I pat it so I approached slowly.

However I stopped after taking several steps. Even if I approach it, it may just feel afraid even more. What should I do to calm it down?

While I was lost in thought, Chabo-kun continued to strum the... metal shackles.

The Chabo-kun that should have been far away started to head to my direction.

It expanded its wings as it stared straight at me.

Is this the result of my feelings of wanting to be friends being transmitted, that it will come to me after tearing off its chains? Or could it be...? No, it's not good to think badly of others just from the first meeting.

Should I flee back to the building? Or should I call for help? Those are the two choices I can think of at that instant. Unfortunately, there's no one I could ask for help in this place and I think it will just catch up to me even if I escape to my back.

If going backwards is useless then there's only one path left.

I shove my hand to my bag and took out a flask made of leather. It scattered some water on my left hand when I roughly opened the cover due o my impatience. And then I crouched down without taking my eyes off the sight in front of me.

I wonder how much distance is necessary...

“Make it in time...!”

Before I can even finish talking, Chabo-kun had long ago started to charge into the place where I am.

When I felt no pain on my body, I opened my eyes which I closed just before that and then confirmed the situation.

To my delight, Chabo-kun seemed to have acted more than what I expected. Did the speed decrease because of its large body?

Chabo-kun was now squatting close to me obediently.

With that opportunity, I went up its back and clung to it. I was wrapped up in soft and airy feathers. I buried my face on it. Though it slightly stinks, it's soft and fluffy and comfortable.

While I'm enjoying its softness, Chabo-kun seemed to have finally realized that he's carrying his target on his back, and suddenly began to struggle madly.

The flask that had fallen over was hit by Chabo-kun's legs and got kicked farther. There might not even be a drop of water left in it. Instead, it had been used a while ago to form ice in the ground like a skating rink. That's why struggling too much will sweep it off its feet. It slipped on ice a while ago and failed to attack me. It was not possible for it to stop so suddenly while running that fast.

I held on to its neck tightly so I won't be thrown off.

“You can continue struggling. But I won’t say you’ll be any different from yakitori after this.”

<Note: Yakitori (literally grilled chicken) – chicken barbecue; grilled chicken in a skewer.>

I don’t know whether the message was transmitted, but the tone of the tone is important.

Yakitori. If the chicken is this big, it will be a long skewer. It will be covered fully in sweet and salty sauce and then roast carefully in an open fire until it’s brown...

I seemed to have put too much strength on my arms while I was preoccupied with my delusions. Chabo-kun had become completely limp as if he hadn’t raged so violently before.

“Hey! If this goes on you’ll really become a yakitori...”

I stopped reluctantly. This chicken is not mine but probably owned by the principal.

Then, Chabo-kun seemed to recover its vigor suddenly and started to tremble slightly. It’s as if it understood my words.

“Can you understand what I’m saying?”

It turned its neck forcefully towards me who’s sitting on it’s back, when it heard that and assessed me using its big round eye.

Even so, seeing from how it never talk since a while a go, it doesn’t seem like it can speak.

“Then, I want you to tell me where the faculty room is.”

I have only one companion who can understand me, and whom I can ask. I’ve just realized it but I think I’m already late. I wanted it to tell me since just directing me to the right direction will be enough.

It sprang up so the feather on its body arched. Chabo-kun is swinging its body.

What’s going on!?

Suddenly, dust storms began to fly left and right and from the gap left, my eyes caught sight of the landscape flowing behind.

The wind that hit against cheeks hurt.

I've forgotten that Chabo-kun's shackles came off. Is he going to send me to the faculty room himself?

What a nice Chabo! I was utterly and deeply moved.

It must have lose its mind based on its aggressive stance from before. I'm sure of it. On the other hand, I who even thought of making it into a yakitori for an instant, became ashamed.

Meanwhile, Chabo-kun hasn't stopped running either. Sometimes, it shakes intensely during a sudden brake, but the impact is absorbed by its body.

I thanked Chabo-kun as it dropped me in front of the door.

It went *hmph hmph* and then lowered it's head.

I wonder if I should I pat it?

"Go back to your original place properly. If I pass the entrance exam, let's play again. See 'ya..."

I won't be able to bear it if I get dropped as a punishment for letting Chabo escape. Well, since Chabo is this obedient, I don't have to worry about anything.

I waited until Chabo-kun's large body which is enough to fill the corridor was out of sight then turned towards the door of the faculty room. I took a deep breath as my heart began to race once more.

Now then, it will be a crucial moment from here on out...

"Well then. Can you use magic? You can go ahead with anything."

The written exam is done. It's something similar to what you would expect from a primary school's entrance exam.

There's just me and the teacher who will proctor the exam. I heard a loud sound outside for a moment, but there's no one watching over me except the teacher who even went somewhere particularly a while ago. In the first place, there's no prolem even if I'm left alone since there's no one I can cheat with.

I finished answering before the time limit and offered to end the exam period.

"I'm sorry, there's still an examination so would you follow me?"

I was preparing to depart when the female teacher who was my exam supervisor called out to me.

Is there a subject I haven't taken yet? I finished my preparations and was guided by the teacher to the next room.

"Sit down there."

The room I was guided to was a dull room. I sat on the chair she indicated.

There's no desk in front of the chair, instead I saw an old man sitting at some distance from me.

"El-kun... was it?"

This feeling... it's like an interview isn't it? I had my hands on my knees and I consciously gave a firm answer.

"Anything is fine, so can you use magic?"

It appears to be a magic exam. I'm troubled on what should I do after being told so suddenly.

Still, I absolutely have to show all my magic here. I can use magic accurately since this isn't the first time I did it.

What should I do?

I looked around the dull room and saw the courtyard from the window to my right. The courtyard is vast and there's a pond in it.

I firmly stared at the window.

The man went patiently silent and I also had my mouth shut.

"You, don't joke around."

I got anxious when he said that with irritation.

"No, I used magic properly. Please look! Outside the window..."

Is it useless after all?

"If you can't use magic, you should have just said so from the beginning! Well, you can go."

"Eh, What... wait...!"

The man said so with a fed-up tone and left.

Now that I thought of it, the pond can't be viewed from the position where the teacher was. I briefly considered that he must have magic for looking through the walls, but he must have felt offended after thinking he's being made fun of.

I'm troubled that I'll fail this exam.

I tried to go to the staff room to let them reconsider my explanation but no one took notice and I was driven out by a female teacher nearby.

"El-sama, how did you do?"

I arrived while walking dejectedly to the academy gates where Matthias came to pick me up.

"It's hopeless... sorry..."

I'd like to apologize for Matthias for now. I think that the results will be based on the ratio of the magic and academic exam scores. I told him the details while being dispirited.

Matthias had a strange expression as I briefly talked about the situation.

"There was a magic exam, but it didn't go well."

I continued talking by myself as Matthias pondered on my words for a while.

"You weren't able to use magic?"

"I froze the whole pond in the courtyard but..."

"Well, the points for the magic exam wouldn't be counted... Wait, excuse me—"

"Really? I'm glad! If that's the case, I may be able to pass!"

I was relieved and cheerful at the same time and began to inadvertently run.

When I looked to my side, Matthias hasn't followed me.

"Matthias! Let's go shopping! Hurry up and come!"

I turned back and called out.

"The pond... Eh!? El-sama!"

"I don't understand what you're saying, please go straight to the point."

What is Matthias saying? My mind danced, but as far as I'm concerned it may be just something trivial.

"Please tell me more about it!"

4-3 Shopping and Truth

“Welcome!”

“This is delicious.”

Various voices of people can be heard everywhere. Matthias and I went together to the Imperial Capital’s shopping district that’s very crowded.

I soaked up the smell of food, the sweet fragrance of flowers and all other aromas in the town blending exquisitely.

There were also several people in the town I went to when I was in the main residence of West Vern family, but the enthusiasm in this place is even more prominent.

“We can stop by here later if you find something you’re interested in. Let’s gather the necessary things first.”

I must have looked around too much since Matthias said that with a wry smile.

We pass through the shopping district and went ahead steadily. The people gradually lessened and I have a feeling that the shops became bigger, too. The place is by no means deserted, rather it’s more appropriate to say the entire street is quiet.

“It is here.”

Matthias stopped in front of a certain shop. It’s obviously a high-class store judging from its appearance. The sign board appears to say it’s a supplier for aristocrats.

The door was opened and we entered, the inside of the store had a lot of goods that took up much space.

When the shop assistant saw Matthias, he told us to wait as he offered us seats and said that he’ll immediately call the manager, but I decided to look around the shop instead.

“Is there anything you find satisfactory?”

I found a brooch of a dragon that resembles Kioran inside a glass case and the salesperson called out to me when I stared at it.

“Please take your time looking at it.”

He said that with a pleasant smile that is evident in his whole face. It was a business smile but I felt like it was born out of training thoroughly.

I got satisfied looking at it and briefly went back to where Matthias was. Matthias was sitting elegantly with his legs crossed and even drinking tea gracefully. There’s a pink drink placed in front of my seat. I hesitated momentarily because of its ominous-looking color but then sat down on my seat and placed the straw in my mouth. A refreshing taste that’s contrary to its appearance filled my mouth. Yes, it’s delicious. I’ll investigate what kind of juice this is so I can offer it in my shop.

I whispered into Matthias’ ear softly.

“If I say so, there’s so much... shadows.”

<Note: ‘there’s so much shadows’ can be an idiom for ‘gloomy’>

How many times was I called out when I was looking around? The number of customers is too small compared to the number of shop assistants. I suppose the aristocrats most likely summon the people from the shop to their houses so there’s no need to particularly visit.

I only said my impressions when I looked around, but Matthias’ face stiffened and then said sorry with a very apologetic expression.

“I didn’t mean that it’s Matthias’ fault particularly.”

That’s true. Therefore I don’t really mind at all. Really, Matthias sometimes give answers that’s out of topic.

“I’m sorry to have kept you waiting. It’s been a long time, Matthias-sama. Also...”

“This is El-sama.”

A middle-aged man who introduced himself as the manager came out from the inner part of the shop. After finishing his greetings, the manager began to display the clothing articles in a row. It appears like I have to choose what I want from

among them. I don't know how to select what's good so Matthias assisted me in that. I was told that I can pick them up and take a look at them so I did so carefully as to not drop them. There's no price tag... I felt nervous and sneaked a look at the person beside me, but Matthias just started purchasing one after another without changing his expression.

"I don't really need them so much."

"Is that so? Ah, please deliver all of these to the estate."

He's not listening to me at all. Rich people's shopping is frightening. In the end, Matthias and the manager started having a long conversation about something. I got bored and decided to take a look outside.

It seems like the talk will take a while so it's alright as long as I don't go too far. I'll come back after looking around for a while.

I opened the heavy door and began walking aimlessly.

I entered a narrow road that extends left and right a short time later, the number of shops suddenly decreased and I can't see any traces of people around.

"It's only this much?!"

I heard the snarl of a dangerous man after turning along the alleys a few times.

I got curious and tried to peek from a hiding spot.

There's a little girl along the wall. Three large, ill-bred men was surrounding that girl.

This is clearly an extortion scene.

<Note: The slang katsuage(カツアゲ) means extortion of money or goods usually done by upperclassmen to lower year students.> There are no people around. The only person who can save that girl is me. What should I do? My heart began beating fast. Should I do it? Can I win?

Our physique are different. I completely lose when it comes to strength. However, magic exists in this world. It's dependent on the other party's reactions, but I may be able to catch them off-guard using magic. I can do this. Those guys will not extort money in a place like this if they're strong in the first

place.

I can help that girl if I succeed and even if I can't, there's still the chance to run away. If I'll lose... that's right. I'll get on Kioran and escape immediately.

A man grabbed the girl's collar and pushed her to the wall. I need to hurry... no one noticed me yet.

First of all, let's summon a medium-sized Kioran... but I don't have my flask right now. If I don't have a core, I can't summon Kioran. The invocation requirement of my summoning magic is that I need to wet my hand before I can do anything.

I slowly retreated from the alley when my back hit something, it looks like this became someone's house at some point.

I suddenly noticed that there is a barrel next to me.

I don't know if it's because it's frequently opened, but I easily lifted the cover of the barrel, then I peeked inside gently.

It's water. It looks like I'm lucky. It's a barrel for collecting rain water.

"I'll borrow it for a bit."

After saying that in a low voice towards the house, I soaked my left hand and then pulled it out. Large drops of water dripped and soaked the ground.

Please help me, I thought, then recalled the appearance of my impertinent dragon through closed lids.

"You called?"

I heard a familiar voice at once. It's like the sound of a heavy thing being dragged along.

Certainly, I called for you. My plan already got ruined since you went out with such a large body more than what I wanted. To begin with, why do you come out only at your own convenience?

I placed everything I wanted to say in a long sigh.

Even though I planned him to be hidden in the street corner, two-thirds of Kioran's body is completely visible.

The men made a commotion when they saw Kioran.

In the middle of it however, the surprise attack seemed to be successful. The girl will be able to run away this way.

“So noisy. Ah, I’ll just eat you.”

The men started to bawl and screamed towards Kioran who idly made such terrifying remark.

Kioran opened his mouth greatly and tried to bite on the men who started running away.

This had become an unexpected development. I thought he can only use his tail for intimidation but Kioran appears to have more impact more than what I’ve imagined.

It looks like he’ll eat them any moment now. Kioran can’t be stopped!

“My... lovely food...”

I instinctively thought of a retort for the words he let out.

<Note: Tsukkomi (突っ込み) – This trope is the Only Sane Man. In Japan, the ‘straight man’ in a comedy show. I used the English contextual word for it which is ‘retort’.> Right then, I realized that the girl I intended to help was sitting down while staring motionlessly at our direction.

Maybe she didn’t have the chance to escape immediately.

“Hey, you there...”

The girl shrieked in fear with a twisted expression when I called out to her, she threw down her belongings and then started running. I watched, dumbfounded, as her back became smaller, but I came into my senses when she disappeared in a corner.

I drew back the hand that I started to stretch midair. She ran away, even though I only intended to ask if she was alright.

“What happened!?”

The girl’s scream was replaced by Matthias’ inquiry, I looked at him as he ran from the direction where I came from.

“I’m not really sure...”

“Your injuries...? No, there doesn’t seem to be any. Who are these men?”

Matthias looked down on the three men who are now laying on the ground after fainting earlier.

“They tried to rob money from a little girl so I thought I’ll threaten them a little.”

“I’ll hand them over to the guard soldiers. Nevertheless, please don’t do unreasonable things again.”

Matthias crouched down and began to observe the men while saying that.

“... their clothes are frozen.”

“They look cold.”

Just as Matthias said, one of the men’s clothes is frozen. It’s fine if it’s midsummer, but the season is still early spring so I’d recommend to avoid this kind of fashion.

“El-sama’s hand is frozen as well.”

“That’s right.”

My hand is frozen just as Matthias said. That’s always the case since I soak my hand in order to use magic. For some reason, my hand stays frozen even if I stop using magic. I moved my hand and small fragments of ice fell lightly to the ground.

“What in the world is that?”

“It’s only because I used magic.”

I wonder why Matthias was asking? He’s mentioning the things he noticed one by one. Even his expression is strange.

“The shopping is cancelled. Let’s go back to the mansion.”

After falling silent for a while, Matthias talked rapidly as he gripped my arm firmly.

“Let’s return for the time being.”

He gave an answer flatly and went towards the estate's direction instead of the shopping district.

Even though I wanted to eat yakitori on the way home...

At that time, I didn't think that everything I believed in for the past eight years will be overturned on that day.

Matthias didn't take me to the house when we arrived, instead he took me near the lake in the vast forest which surrounds the estate.

He asked me to use magic so I decided to show him that I can completely freeze the water in the lake. The surroundings isn't warm and I didn't want to freeze my hand twice this day so I did the same thing as the pond before.

The evidence of my magic, which is an island of ice, buoyantly floated in the huge lake.

"Ice... El-sama... that's why... therefore, that's the reason..."

"What's wrong?"

Matthias had a surprised expression the instant he saw that, but then it turned into delight as if he began to understand something. I, who didn't understand, asked him what he was talking about.

"I've always wondered about it. About the reason for El-sama's hair color."

"This silver color?"

I let him lift a bunch of my hair. The hair that was hit by the sun, reflected light in the water's surface, making it glimmer.

Really, how long did I have to persevere since I was born with this hair just to survive?

"El-sama is tremendously strong. Conversely, that's why all the other colors denied each other. Aristocrats tended to consider pale colors as sign of weakness, but the silver hair is actually an indication for freezing ability!"

<Note: Let's just think of silver as white since that's how it is usually drawn for most character art. White is the presence of all colors, scientifically.> In contrast to Matthias' cheerful expression, I had a pale complexion.

What is he saying?

This is the first time I've been surprised so much since I was born.

Even if Matthias complimented me as the strongest, it seems like it isn't really that true. I deduced that he's exaggerating, but he usually do that so it's something normal.

Various thoughts floated in my mind but quickly disappeared like bubbles.

Even if I'm not the weakest, the alternatives for a cafe isn't really many. Oh, but does that mean I don't have to build a cafe since I'm not really that weak?

The opportunities suddenly opened for me but I can't think of anything. I became confused.

What do I want to do? I want to graduate from school properly this time. Then, if I fulfilled that, what happens after that?

It's been eight years since I've been born in this world. It seems long but short, and short but long. I've experienced various things during that time. How should I live the second time?

"El-sama, are you feeling unwell?"

I was lost in thought and must have shown a serious expression, Matthias appeared worried when he looked at me.

"It's nothing."

I came to my senses and replied with a laugh.

I want to be something. It's not like I'll die any time now. Thinking about it from now on is fine.

Even if a coffee shop might be my last option, I feel like there's also a certain charm in having a job where I can offer people a place where they can relax.

I'll take my time thinking. I'll work hard to become what I want, if in case I find some other things I prefer more.

"Let's go back."

Matthias looked relieved when I said that.

4-4 Magic and Sweets

“What is it?”

“Can you tell me something about your magic?”

The two suns have set and the moon showed up after a while passed.

I was sitting on the sofa while leaning my entire weight on my left elbow when I asked Sora, who took his place on my bed, while looking at him.

I could have asked Matthias, but he always return dramatically long and polite explanations so I chose Sora because he's the easiest to talk to.

“Magic, huh... Did you know that we[Shadows/oretachi] can only use plant[grass/kusa], fire, wind and earth magic?”

He didn't listen to me. Sora didn't stop and continued on talking as if ignoring me was the natural thing to do.

“Even if just a little amount of magical power manifests, anybody can use magic. The type of magic we can use always belong to the four I mentioned without exceptions.”

“I see. Isn't there ice in it?”

“There isn't. But there's water, which isn't counted among them.”

I cannot manipulate water. I attempted to do it several times but it's impossible without turning it into ice first.

“I can only use ice from the beginning but...”

I began to think whether it's strange after all.

In the silence, a drifting cloud concealed the moon and slowly dimmed the room.

I couldn't stand the awkwardness so I began to talk first.

“Is it common?”

“It's absolutely not common. Rather, if that's really true... Ah, you're really incredible. It's still strange though.”

Sora said so while roughly scratching his head.

Is it weird after all? Is it because I already died once? There are a lot of reasons that crossed my mind but I can't identify which caused it particularly.

I changed the topic so he won't realize that my heart is pounding loudly.

"Sora, what's your affinity?"

Attributes seemed like their hereditary. I'm certain that the West Vern family have fire, but how about Sora? Even though we already talked several times, the thought that I didn't really know much about Sora struck me.

"Mine is grass."

<Note: 'kusa' (草) can mean grass or weed, particularly any non-woody plant. Well, think Tang San from DD. Fun fact: Kusa is another term for 'ninja'.> "You can make them bloom?"

The image of Sora enjoying gardening crossed my mind. Several colorful flowers surround Sora. Surprisingly, could it be that he has a hobby that's out of a fairy tale?

"Flowers!? Well, I can do them..."

"I want to see!"

Why was Sora so surprised? Was the idea of grass = flower that strange? Or maybe it's that thing... could it be a bonsai?!

<Note: El was referring to Wabi-kusa bonsai. As mentioned before, kusa is Sora's attribute.> "Uhhh. I don't want to show it too much, so maybe someday..."

"I see... as expected..."

As expected, his hobby is gardening. I looked at him while thinking that, so Sora looked at me curiously.

I feel like I was able to see a new side of him.

Then Sora stood up after chatting a little more. It looks like it's time to return soon.

"You should sleep soon. Well then."

<Note: Sora addressed El as 'okosama'; o(indicates politeness)+ko(child)+sama(honorific for someone of a higher status).> “Good night. Ah...!”

The moment I said good night, Sora disappeared. He said before that entering and leaving via the door is no-good, and just disappears on the spot for some reason. I've thought of asking before how he disappears but I always forgot about it.

Usually, I go to bed this time and sleep quietly. But today it's different.

It doesn't seem like I'll be able to sleep even if I tried to do so a while ago.

Sometime later, I placed a foot on the window like Sora does.

Freezing ability... my magic is different from other people. What will it bring about? I may attract attention and get experimented on. And the fact that I'm different, not just with magic, might be leaked out.

I stretch out a hand reached the tree growing beside the window.

Still, Matthias was happy when he saw my magic. I'm sure Sora, Lucsher-san and Edna-san, too... I have a feeling that they'll accept who I am. Ah, there's Leont, too. I don't know about Cashbar-san, but I get a weird feeling from him...

I held onto the trunk and begun to go down slowly while placing a foot on a branch.

Anyway, I came to the West Vern's and found a place where I can stay. But this and that are different. I do not want to be a burden to the West Vern family.

But just think about it. I'll go to school soon, I believe. What will happen at that time? I'm going to be a transfer student whom those around will keep distance with and because my magic is strange, I won't get a chance to make even one friend.

Isn't it the worst?

When ground became near, the foot I tried to place completely slipped midair. I unconsciously released my hold and fell on ground with *gushari*. Since it rained yesterday, mud stickily stained my clothes.

Let's change clothes when I get back to the room. I'll get scolded by Mathias if

he found out about it. It's not like he really memorized each of my clothes. I only have to wash these clothes so I won't be exposed.

I crouched down on the ground while thinking such things.

Now then, let's do the preparations.

I summoned Kioran using magic when I returned to my room.

A sleepy-looking Kioran appeared before my eyes.

This guy, just what kind of mechanism does he use to appear? He'll come out without permission, and he's still the same Kioran I made from back then even if the water I use is different. I absolutely need to investigate this sometime later.

But, right now...

"It's just for a while okay? Here you go~!"

I grabbed Kioran by the scruff of his neck with my right hand when he lowered his guard, while I thrust my left hand to the bag at same time.

"What are you doing!?"

"It's fine, it's fine. This will end quickly."

My mud-covered hand emerged from the bag. When he saw that hand approaching him, Kioran started twisting his body and attempted to run away.

"That's dirtyyy!!"

"I just collected them so they're fresh, you know?"

Moreover, it can't be dirty because I took it from the spot where no one steps on.

I took my time in covering Kioran with mud until I'm satisfied.

He seemed tired due to struggling violently, but was dumbfounded when he saw his appearance.

"It's impossible after all. Or maybe it's because I applied the mud while he's moving around too much? It seems like it'll work if I covered his whole body with mud. Should I try it one more time?"

I can't use water but I can use ice, so I want to try doing earth magic, too.

There are a lot of restrictions but I can surprisingly do it, and I asked Kioran with a beaming smile.

“Absolutely not!! I’m already angry! I’ll leave!!”

“Sorry~ But I rea~lly want to do it!”

It looks like his pride was utterly damaged. He refused with all his might, and disappeared through the door.

You don’t need to get angry so much. Even I was covered in mud just before.

“Playing with mud is something a kid should experience, you know~?”

I tried to yell just in case, but an answer didn’t come back.

I’ll invite him to go somewhere as an apology this time.

Kioran’s a kid so isn’t it fine to play? It’s like he’s always changing his mind.

“Should I sleep?”

When I got on the bed with clean clothes, I heard a strange sound from the hallway. That’s from the direction where Kioran left.

I thought about whether I should go to see the situation for a while. If I think about Kioran’s personality, the possibility that’s he’s venting his anger is very high. That means, I’ll get caught up in it if I go. Rather, wouldn’t I receive all the backlash because I was the one at fault?

Anyway, I’m scared so I won’t come out from here.

I decided so and fell asleep this time.

“Oi! Where’re there valuables!?”

“Ahead here!”

Assailants composed of ten-odd men entered inside the West Vern House’s estate. They moved around the whole mansion after dividing into groups.

This is different from the main residence, West Fortress, this one is in the Imperial Capital. The Head of the household is not present today, the only people left were two sons and a daughter. Even so, there’s no change in the level of difficulty, but there was a rumor that the physical condition of second son isn’t

really good.

The eldest son has very little information, but there's no one who wouldn't let their guard down in this midnight hour. They also have advantage in numbers. They are professional, and the daughter is a child.

The thieves who have confidence in their skills were running with light steps.

“What's that?”

One of them pointed forward as he raised his voice. Ahead the direction he was pointing at, white eyes floated.

Those two eyes turned and glared to their direction. They instinctively stepped back but the unknown thing merely approached with certainty in big, slow steps.

“I'm in an extremely bad mood right now~ That's why, let's play together, okay~~?”

An innocent child-like voice resounded in the vicinity.

One man was bewildered as he heard his comrades' pained voices one by one.

What's happening!!

However, it only happened in an instant. He became the only one left. Before he was taken down, he caught sight of the mystery assailant momentarily with his eyes that had accustomed to the darkness. It has size of a child's body, except it was transparent. There's no such thing!! As expected, it's imagination... huh...?

“That's right! I'll pile these guys in front of El's room in exchange for his harassment!” The clear voice disappeared into the darkness. Afterwards, the sound of a child's footsteps and the sound of something being dragged resounded in the hallway.

“Even so, I'll forgive you if you give me cookies!” The figure seemed to reconsider after a while. It gradually became cheerful as it thought about the sweet-smelling cookies.

Behind the figure, what was left was a mountain of piled up men.

4-5 Retainer and Delight

Imperial Capital, in a certain room in the West Vern family estate.

Matthias breathed a sigh as he wondered how long he had stayed awake.

Usually, he's already asleep during this time.

However, when every time he starts to ponder about his Master for a moment, he stopped being sleepy.

Matthias gave up forcibly going to sleep and stood up, and poured the water left in the room to the glass.

He cannot understand what his Master is thinking. Do other retainers also think about these kinds of things?

... at the very least, there are no retainers like me among my acquaintances.

Not to mention, Fernando understands every person in his House even if he wasn't Richard's retainer.

I am able to do things so far as long as I make an effort. I even believe I have ability more than the others, moreover, I always meet the expectations of those people around me.

However, what about now? He is constantly surprised at El-sama's every action.

Although he was surprised during the assassination incident, El-sama spent his time in the main residence as a child who seem to be a little precocious, and they spent everyday happily.

That's why, he almost forgot. That is, El-sama's true form. Rather, saying that he never knew it is more correct.

On the way to the Imperial Capital, he incidentally saw El-sama's expression while getting into the carriage.

Matthias drank the contents of the glass quickly.

("Let's enjoy it thoroughly~")

To whom did El-sama mutter those words? The only person who could hear that is me, who's by his side. El-sama was looking at another place, but then he turned towards me.

El-sama had a cruel smile that I haven't seen before, and an insane glint shook his eyes.

The moment I realized that it is something I wasn't supposed to see, it was already too late. I was not able to take my eyes off this El-sama that I just saw for the first time.

("... I won't show you.")

El-sama declared as he suddenly regain back his senses when he noticed me.

What is he saying! I was interested but it's impossible to ask him. Because that expression he had, it told everything.

As expected, El-sama is still a part of the royal family. He was born with the power of a ruler. He stand above everything and if it's for the sake of protecting his precious people, he has both gentleness and the ability to use cruelty as a means to achieve that.

It is likely that I have caught a glimpse of that part of him.

And then, the incident at the shop. Certainly, I deployed more Shadows in the town that day. Of course, they all had the ability to completely erase their presence, even those posing as vendors or passerby. Still, El-sama noticed them at once. He must have confirmed which of the people are Shadows that time when he walked around the store's interior, that is what I naturally thought.

It's not only that. I was bothered at that time when El-sama – who should've only passed by the people without stopping – stood still for a long time in front of a commoner salesperson that is not under my patronage. I had that person investigated and it turned out that it was a spy from another country.

I am sure that being aware of the Shadows' presence must be irritating. I issued an order to have them just silently watch until El-sama's life is exposed to danger. But is that really alright?

"Matthias-sama, may I?" I heard the voice of the maid as she knocked.

“Excuse me for intruding. Some thieves entered not long ago, how would you like to settle this?”

“Do it as usual.”

“Understood.”

She understood Matthias’ intentions by just those short exchange of words, thus the excellent maid calmly left.

The number of assailants in the residence stationed in the Imperial Capital is remarkably big compared to the main residence’s. As a matter of fact, he doesn’t really understand them.

However, it was true that there were many of them who actually entered the building aiming at us and the treasures. What do we do then?

If they’re thieves, the housemaids or the butlers subdue them. If it is an assassin, it should be taken care of by the one being targeted. There is a rule that you have to take care of it yourself if something ever happens to you.

That is only possible to enforce due to the abilities of everyone including my younger sister. On that subject, I hardly meet that child even though we live in the same house.

Will the thieves visit his room this time?

Since they’re just a thieves, it’s likely that he won’t meet them unless he goes outside.

Therefore... not really... a big deal...?

At that moment, Matthias remembered his Master who had occupied his mind until a while ago.

Matthias left the room without paying attention to the glass which he knocked over when he forcefully stood up.

During that time, he never encountered the thieves. Even so, the possibility that El-sama suffered harm isn’t high. In addition, El-sama can use magic. He understood that in his mind, in spite that, his brisk walk had turned into a full run before he knew it. He had never been as irritated at the pointless size of this mansion until now.

Matthias was at lost for words as he finally arrived in front of El-sama's room.

Several men are piled up.

When I hastily looked at the men, I grasped that they were taken down with the same method El-sama used when he rescued the girl from those ruffians at that time. They merely lose their consciousness. However, the men's faces were warped with terror, as if they've seen something terribly frightening and fainted with one blow.

I have no doubt that El-sama did this.

After that, Matthias quietly opened the door of his Master's room. The light had been put out and he could hear a sleeping person's regular breathing.

After making sure that his Master is safe, Matthias ignored the men and walked along the hallway.

Not much time passed since the maid came to inform him of the thieves' trespassing. It shows that the combat had been finished at surprising speed.

...El-sama is safe above all else.

Nevertheless, Matthias' heart didn't clear up for some reason as he walked absentmindedly along the hallway lit up by orange lights.

Matthias sighed after walking for a while.

Countless rose petals are scattered below his feet. Something with a deep red color was left behind and there were completely burnt out ashes, too.

"Elder Brother most probably took care of them."

I was lost in thought while looking at the rooms to my left and right that were completely exposed, due to the fact that the doors that were originally there disappeared. The door and the wall have been hollowed out neatly. The things that were damaged appeared like they were already cleared up by maids.

The one holding the position of West Vern House's next head isn't just for show. Few people only know of his true strength since my Elder Brother is a moody person, so doesn't have much opportunities to showcase his power in public. Perhaps those thieves today must have thought that way.

Even if I belong to the number one family in terms of strength, my Elder Brother is the most cruel of us when he's displeased. Though I don't understand what his standards are, the treatment for those who aren't good looking are especially tragic.

Even so, I would like it very much if he stopped destroying the things around him.

Still, this will improve the butlers' repairing skills.

Matthias gave up on the thought of sleep and went back to his room to work.

"Good morning."

I welcomed the morning without sleeping at all. The thieves and the room was taken care of as if nothing really happened out of the ordinary.

"El-sama, have you changed your clothes...?"

El-sama is wearing different pajamas from the one I chose for him yesterday. I don't know whether he disliked the one I chose or he was had taken an interest in clothes, but such thing was unprecedented.

"It became dirty from that."

From that... those yesterday's thieves? I knew that he didn't get any injuries from the incident yesterday. Did he meant that it was sullied when it was touched by those people?

"Thank you very much for your hard work last night."

"Uh-uh, Matthias can really see through everything."

El-sama said those words while chuckling. I felt a slight sense of dread knowing the fact that this kid with an innocent smile took down those thieves yesterday.

"That's not true, El-sama."

El-sama is strong so he'll be alright even if I am not with him.

"That reminds me, the academy admission permit arrived some time ago."

There's no reason for him not to pass, but I reported it just in case.

"Yes, of course."

“I’m glad! Thanks, Matthias!”

“I did nothing at all...”

El-sama accomplished everything by himself.

“That’s wrong. It because of you that I passed, and I’m always saved because Matthias did a lot of things for me. I am truly grateful to Matthias. Thank you.”

As I thought, I’m such a failure of a retainer. My Master’s little actions always make me alternate between sorrow and joy.

Just El-sama’s few words is enough to make me feel this much happiness.

“I will follow El-sama throughout my whole life.”

I am blessed with the joy that was never in my life before, except it came as something more than I expect.

Then Matthias remembered something that had always bothered him.

I don’t know why El-sama wants to learn how to cook but he must have planned to travel in the future so he’s training to be independent, at any rate he intended to be someone who can stand in his own two feet.

That’s right. I should also learn how to cook. A retainer must always walk on the path chosen by his Master, so it is absolutely necessary for me to do my own preparations, too.