

THE ACADEMY IS DOOMED

The Academy is Doomed

#C71 - Read The Academy is Doomed C71

Chapter 71

Reinbelt, seeing Amon speaking with such gravity, urgently shouted.

“Disciple! What nonsense are you spouting...?”

Before Amon could protest at being called a disciple yet again, the others interjected like thunderbolts.

“Who’s this disciple of Reinbelt, huh?”

“He hasn’t even formally accepted you as his master yet!”

Even before he had to defend himself, loyal retainers stepped forward to chastise the rogue.

Amon, the king in name, shivered with exhilaration.

‘So this is the taste of power.’

As he savored the ecstasy of power, Amon stretched a hand out toward the clamor.

“Elders, please calm yourselves.”

“.....”

“Now, let’s hear your terms again. If you wish to take me as your disciple, there must be a condition tempting enough to entice me, wouldn’t you agree?”

At Amon’s gentle tone, Reinbelt confidently declared,

“I know of an incredible spot where wild mountain herbs grow...”

“Disqualified.”

Reinbelt’s chance to accompany Amon was gone!

Next, Demonic Heart burst into hearty laughter and spoke up.

“Hahaha! If we’re talking about my Dark Swordsmanship, it’s the very technique that produced ‘Redmane,’ the greatest swordsman of all time! Surely, everyone here is aware of that, aren’t they!?”

With desperation, Demonic Heart managed to spew out the long statement without losing his dentures even once!

Furthermore, despite the audacious mention of “the greatest swordsman in history,” the other knights, proud as they were, could only grind their teeth in silent frustration.

And at the mention of Redmane, Amon’s eyes widened.

‘Redmane? The legendary hero Redmane? Wasn’t that just a tale of heroism?’

The legendary swordsman who served as a loyalist to the 4th Emperor of the Empire and subdued the continent with a single sword during the era of warlords!

‘And the legend also says he slew a dragon....’

As if reading Amon’s thoughts, Demonic Heart continued speaking.

“Hahaha! And as everyone knows, Redmane achieved the remarkable feat of slaying a dragon all by himself! Isn’t that the ultimate proof of the strongest swordsmanship? Am I wrong? Hm? Hm?”

Feeling like he had seized victory, Demonic Heart bragged on, while someone muttered under their breath.

“It was just a newly matured dragon, though....”

“What! Does a dragon look like a toy to you!?”

As Demonic Heart bellowed in rage, Amon shut his eyes tightly.

He could see it now.

The vision of himself becoming a great swordsman and ruling the continent.

And also his image as a ‘dragon slayer,’ exacting satisfying revenge on Caselag, who might have ruined his family estate!

If he achieved such skills, not even the Emperor would dare block his rise to power.

“Huff...!”

Just as Amon was about to shout “Accepted,” a thought struck him, and he frowned.

‘Wait, hold on a second.’

How did the Redmane legend end again?

“Um, Elder?”

“Hahaha! What is it, disciple?”

“In the legend of Redmane, didn’t he end up succumbing to madness and taking his own life?”

At that, Reinbelt, unable to hold back, jabbed a finger at Demonic Heart and shouted,

“Good point! The deeper you delve into Dark Swordsmanship, the more its insidious madness takes root deep in your bones! That crazy old man there even pulled out all his teeth with his own hands and had to resort to dentures!”

Amon immediately declared,

“Disqualified!”

What use was success if you went insane!?

At that moment, the silently observing Marquis Pid cleared his throat and spoke up.

“Ahem, there’s no need for me to go into detail about the Pid family, is there?”

“Oh, ohhh...!”

A family where every member had reached the level of Sword Master!

In other words, there was no doubting the excellence of their swordsmanship.

And how about the prospects of success?

‘They have enough wealth to stockpile chocolates just to snack on!’

In short, choosing the Pid family meant achieving mastery in swordsmanship, career advancement, and wealth all in one!

So just as Amon was about to shout “Accepted,” he stopped himself.

‘Wait, there could be an unexpected trap here too.’

Thus, in a polite tone, Amon said,

“It’s certainly tempting.”

“Haha, indeed. Become my disciple. I’ll help you grow into greatness.”

“But let me hear what the last elder has to say as well.”

“...What!?”

As Amon took a step back, Marquis Pid hastily added,

“You’d better decide now.”

“Excuse me? And why is that?”

“Urgh....”

For some reason, Marquis Pid looked flustered and hesitated, before gritting his teeth.

With the expression of a man spilling his lifeblood, he exclaimed,

“Fine! Then I will permit you to marry my only daughter, Sloth!”

The offer of marriage to his cherished and beloved only daughter, Sloth!

At the Marquis’s trump card, Amon roared,

“Disqualified! Disquaaaalified!”

“What!?”

Leaving the stunned Marquis behind, Amon turned his eyes toward the last remaining contender, Diana.

Leisurely stroking her cat, Diana glanced at Amon and spoke.

“Hmm? My turn?”

“Y-yes, that’s right.”

“Hmm.”

The cat, still angry from being knocked off earlier, was clawing and snapping its teeth aggressively, but Diana, as expected of a Grand Sword Master, effortlessly dodged and kept petting it.

Smiling faintly, Diana spoke.

“Do you remember what you said earlier?”

“...What? What did I say?”

“Yes. You said you liked power, money, and so on.”

“...!”

Diana continued,

“My family...surely you’ve heard of it?”

“...Excuse me?”

“The Pendorean family.”

“Pe-Pend...!”

Amon’s eyes widened in shock, as if they would split open.

The Pendorean Ducal House!

A prestigious family that had served the imperial household since the time of the Empire’s seventh emperor!

‘And a family so esteemed for their dedication and loyalty that rumors claim they might soon be elevated to the rank of Grand Duchy and govern an entire principality...!’

With a serene smile, Diana spoke.

“Well, of course, I’m old enough to have stepped back from active affairs and handed the estate over to my son...but surely there’s no need for me to elaborate on the advantages of being my disciple?”

Amon, as if enchanted, nodded.

Even though Diana had stepped back from the forefront of power, as the grand matriarch of the Pendorean family, her influence must be colossal.

In fact, it was said that her son, the current family head, still consulted her for all major decisions concerning the family.

“What do you think? Will you become my disciple?”

“.....”

“Well, if you don’t want to, there’s nothing I can do. The choice is yours.”

With an air of indifference, Diana even took a casual step back!

Seeing her composure, Reinbelt continued shouting about mountain herbs, Marquis Pid kept yelling about a marriage with Sloth, and Demonic Heart was flustered over his dislodged dentures!

Watching this, Diana discarded her mask of composure and dealt the final blow.

“Fine, fine. If you become my disciple, I’ll give you a mountain. You can gather all the mountain herbs you want.”

An overwhelming display of wealth that directly targeted Reinbelt!

Reinbelt collapsed in a heap.

“And marriage? Oh, right, I happen to have a granddaughter of marriageable age. If you’re interested, I can arrange a marriage with her.”

A critical hit aimed at Marquis Pid!

Marquis Pid clutched his neck in despair.

“And... hmm, do you have any interest in going mad?”

“No.”

“Then that’s settled.”

Demonic Heart didn’t even make it as a contender!

With the competition utterly crushed, Diana extended her hand.

“Well, what do you say? Will you become my disciple?”

Her voice was warm, motherly, and gentle. Overcome with emotion, Amon wept as he clasped her hand.

“It would be my greatest honor, Master.”

“Hohoho. I, too, am grateful to the heavens for granting me such a disciple.”

Smiling gently, Diana stood and said,

“Now then, kneel down...”

Amon was already kneeling.

“V-Very well. Then let us perform the oath between master and disciple.”

“Yes, Master!”

“Hohoho! It’s still too early to call me Master.”

“If I don’t call you Master, what else would I call you?”

It was a sight he had seen somewhere before, causing Reinbelt to clutch the back of his neck.

Diana drew her sword, pointing it at Amon as she spoke.

“Do you swear to dedicate yourself to the sword as the disciple of Diana Pendorean?”

“Of course!”

“And do you vow to eliminate the enemies of the Pendorean family and serve as a loyal subject of the Empire?”

“The enemies of the family are my enemies, and I shall become the mule that carries the burden of the Empire!”

Smiling with satisfaction, Diana Pendorean flipped the sword she held, extending the hilt toward Amon.

“With this, you are now my disciple and are henceforth under the name of the Pendorean family.”

“A-Aah...!”

“As proof of this, I bestow this sword upon you.”

Amon, with tears streaming down his face, humbly accepted the sword.

“Thank you, Master!”

“Hohoho, yes. It’s a fine sword, so use it well.”

At the moment Diana gently patted Amon on the shoulder—

“Hey, Diana, you old hag.”

“...Old hag?”

“N-No, Diana. Isn't there something missing in the oath between master and disciple? The most important part of the Pendorean family's pledge?”

As Reinbelt stubbornly interrupted until the very end, Diana scoffed.

“Hmph, you mean the part about striking down the enemies of the Empire?”

“Exactly.”

“An outdated and old custom. It's been quite a while since that clause was last enforced.”

“W-What...?”

“Strike down the enemies of the Empire? Where are such enemies these days? After the Great War, hasn't the entire continent been under the Empire's authority with a solemn peace treaty for a century?”

“...Guh!”

Having failed in his final interference, Reinbelt scratched his head irritably.

Diana, who had snorted at him, turned to Amon with a warm smile.

“Now then, disciple. Let us go. There is much to teach you.”

“Yes, Master!”

“By the way, you said you were a teacher at the Amonis Academy, didn't you? Do you plan to continue?”

“I'm quitting! Oh, but I would like to bring along the students I was teaching, if that's alright....”

“Hohoho, very well. Let's arrange it in due time. In any case, let us go quickly. I also want to introduce you to my granddaughter.”

“Yes, Master!”

As the two walked off, brimming with camaraderie and confidence, they opened the door to the private chamber—only to find themselves face to face with an entering middle-aged man.

“...Hm?”

The man, who had just stepped into the room, widened his eyes.

“Diana?”

“...Y-Your Majesty?!”

It was the current Emperor of the Amonis Empire, Amonis XVIII. Diana was so startled that she immediately fell to her knees.

The Pendorean family, the Empire’s foremost loyalists! Hastily kneeling, Diana spoke.

“Y-Your Majesty, what brings you here...?”

“Hahaha. With a gathering of the Empire’s Four Great Knights, how could I not show my face even once?”

“I heard you were unwell...I am deeply concerned that this might strain your health.”

As she said, the Emperor had been bedridden following the failure of the Velslime wasteland project.

But the Emperor quickly helped Diana to her feet, saying, “Hahaha. If you humble yourself, it only makes me feel more unworthy. Please, rise.”

“Y-Yes, Your Majesty.”

The Emperor, smiling warmly, suddenly turned his gaze.

“But...”

The Emperor’s smile vanished, and he looked down at Amon, who was kneeling stiffly next to Diana, his expression hardening.

“May I ask why you are in the company of... this damned fellow?”

“Damned fellow?” Diana was taken aback by the harsh words, but she quickly responded.

“Forgive my late introduction. This is Amon Drake, whom I have recently taken as my disciple....”

At that moment, the Emperor muttered.

“Disciple.”

“...Pardon? Yes, that’s correct, Your Majesty.”

“The damned scion of the Drake family, a disciple of Diana Pendorean?”

“Yes? That’s...The damned scion of the Drake family?”

Tilting her head in confusion, Diana looked at the Emperor, who now had a face flushed red with anger and was clutching his neck, swaying unsteadily.

“Y-Your Majesty?!”

“A disciple... That damned scion of the Drake family, as Diana Pendorean’s disciple...
urgh....”

“Your Majesty!? S-Someone, anyone! His Majesty has...!”

The Emperor collapsed, and the sight threw the entire assembly of the Empire’s Four Great Knights into utter chaos.

Meanwhile—

“.....”

Amon knelt silently, his eyes closed.

Once again, reality had struck.

“I’ve failed again.”

A single transparent tear rolled down Amon’s cheek.

Chapter 72

After the emperor collapsed from his allergic reaction to the Drake family, a lot had happened.

‘Disciple.’

‘Yes, Master Diana.’

‘No, Amon Drake. Return the sword.’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

Diana cleared her throat and took back the sword, speaking in a stern voice.

'I intended to make you my disciple, but there is a deeply rooted tradition that must be followed to become a member of our Pendorean family. Without undergoing that process, I cannot officially accept you as my disciple.'

'...What is it?'

'You must cut down an enemy of the empire.'

Earlier, she had dismissed such traditions as outdated, even scolding Reinbelt for bringing them up, saying there were no enemies of the empire anymore.

But now, it was clear she was using this as an excuse. As a family devoted to the empire, Pendorean could not easily accept him as her disciple, given how the emperor detested him.

'So, Amon Drake.'

'What now.'

Amon's tone was already curt.

But Diana ignored it and extended her finger, pointing somewhere uncertain.

'Now, go forth! Destroy an enemy of the empire! Only then can you officially become a member of the Pendorean family.'

As stated earlier, there were no enemies of the empire. It was an impossible task.

Currently, Amon was back at the academy, slumped in despair.

"My life is doomed."

As long as the emperor kept a sharp eye on him, any hope of advancement seemed impossible.

'I thought my only solution was to nurture talented disciples and benefit from their success, but seeing how things went with the Pid family, even that seems unlikely.'

How had they become so lazy in just a few weeks?

While they weren't as bad as Brestle, who seemed to regress to the Stone Age after only a short absence, one should always aim higher, not lower.

'...Those kids are going to face hell when they return to the academy. I'll give them the full Amon hell experience.'

There was only about a week left until the summer vacation ended. Before that time, Sloth had promised to return the students to the academy. Escape from Amon's full course of hell was not an option for them.

"Ah, I can't wait to see them writhe in pain and despair..."

Amon's eyes gleamed maliciously as he got to his feet.

With a week remaining, it was time to start planning the contents of the hellish training.

'Well, the academy is gradually normalizing. Vice-Principal Brestle is back, Senior Sloth and the students will return soon, and Kai...'

Now that he thought about it, Kai was the only one who hadn't responded to his messages.

'But it's fine. He's my junior. Once he's back, I'll crush him completely.'

While he showed minimal courtesy to seniors, there was no need to extend the same to juniors!

As Amon contemplated his plans, an inexplicable sense of unease gnawed at him.

'What is it? This strange anxiety...'

Had he left his wallet at the Pid estate?

'No, I have it. Then why...?'

Feeling unsettled, Amon glanced at his desk, where a letter he had hastily tossed into a corner seemed to emanate dark energy.

'...Ah!'

It was a letter from Marion!

[When you return, you're dead, you son of a b***h.]

The letter was drenched in hatred, resentment, and fury—a veritable curse in written form!

Staring at the ominous aura rising from the letter, Amon muttered to himself.

"I almost forgot. That could've been disastrous."

To quell Marion's colossal anger, he would need the finest liquor from across the continent.

With that in mind, Amon hurried out to the city of Amur to purchase various bottles of alcohol—preferably ones with fancy names but low price tags.

“Hehe, ten bottles should be enough to appease Marion.”

Pleased with his foresight, Amon returned to the academy, arms laden with bottles.

Clunk—!

Just as he arrived, he noticed a courier placing something in the mailbox and leaving.

Curious, Amon opened the mailbox, suspecting it might be a letter from Kai. But his breath caught.

“Urk...!”

The letter practically radiated palpable malice.

‘Another one from Marion?!’

Hurriedly, he opened it.

[You've grown exceedingly disrespectful of your senior's authority, haven't you? Since my tasks at the Mage Tower are nearing completion, I'll make sure to thoroughly discipline you when I return. You'll understand why I was called the “Crimson Flame Demon” during the Great War.]

The letter was steeped in fury.

‘I'm screwed!’

Amon instinctively knew the situation was dire.

Marion was generally mild-mannered, quick to forgive and let things slide.

‘For Marion to be this angry, there can only be one reason.’

Mages value asceticism as a virtue! And at the Mage Tower, the sacred ground for mages, alcohol was undoubtedly forbidden.

‘Our dear senior Marion must've been furious from the lack of alcohol!’

Feeling a pang of sympathy for his senior, Amon muttered.

“There’s a saying about taking the first hit early.”

He looked over the bottles he had brought back from Amur. This should be more than enough to pacify Marion’s fiery wrath.

“...Well then, let’s go!”

Amon decided his next destination would be Ignis Tower, where Marion was stationed.

“Hey, Marion.”

“Grr...What is it, Tower Master?”

“Ahem, calm down. It’s just alcohol. Can’t you live without it?”

“Did you just call it just alcohol!?”

Marion’s outburst made the Tower Master flinch and step back.

Marion then launched into a long speech.

“What is alcohol?! There’s an ancient saying that it’s like drinking the moon steeped in cold flames!”

“Wait! That’s a dangerous—”

“Silence! Furthermore, alcohol fosters positivity and camaraderie, drawing out the spirit of humankind...”

Listening to Marion extol the virtues of alcohol, the Tower Master thought to himself.

‘This man, who embodies all the downsides of alcohol, is lecturing on its virtues...?’

Despite being a war hero from the Great War and a viscount, Marion had squandered his lands and wealth drinking. His arguments carried no weight.

Desperate to stop Marion, the Tower Master waved his hands.

“All right, fine. But more importantly, you have a guest.”

“Alcohol...Huh? A guest?”

“A junior of yours from the academy, I think? His name is Amon...”

Before the sentence finished, Marion bolted from the room, his eyebrows practically flying off his face.

It was hard to believe he'd been so sullen just moments ago due to his lack of alcohol.

Amon sat in the reception room of the Mage Tower.

'Huh. So this is the Mage Tower. My first time here...'

The Mage Tower, a sanctuary for scholars exploring the depths of magic.

The tower itself was independent of any political power, remaining neutral while focusing solely on unraveling the mysteries of magic.

Among the many Mage Towers, some leaned towards certain affiliations. Ignis Tower, where Amon was, was known for its pro-empire stance.

This explained why Marion, who belonged here, had been a war hero for the empire.

'Hopefully, this will go smoothly...'

Just as that thought crossed his mind—

BAM!

The door burst open as if to be torn from its hinges. Marion stormed in, eyes scanning the room.

The moment he spotted Amon—

"Ha, hahaha, junior."

"Senior!"

Amon stood up, as if genuinely pleased to see him. Marion also smiled broadly as though he, too, was overjoyed at the reunion.

But Marion's smile was laced with murderous intent.

"So, you drank the treasured liquor I'd been saving?"

"Senior, it's a misunderstanding."

Amon reached out, trying to explain.

"That letter was just a desperate measure to get a response from you. I didn't touch the 'All-Night Party' you had hidden in your room."

"How do you know it was called All-Night Party?"

“...Oh no!”

In truth, Amon had indeed drunk it.

Feeling mentally drained after the academy-wide exodus, he'd stolen a sip.

“...I didn't finish it.”

“But you drank it.”

“I left half.”

“But only half is left.”

As Marion started to let out a creeping killing intent while nitpicking words, Amon hastily pulled something out from his arms.

“Senior! That's not important right now! Look at this!”

A large wooden club!

Seeing it, Marion grinned widely.

“Are you asking me to hit you with that? Feels hefty, should be satisfying to—”

Marion couldn't finish his sentence.

Suddenly, Amon pulled the handle of the wooden club.

And with that, a pleasant aroma filled the room.

“T-This is...!”

Amon nodded vigorously.

“Yes! It's alcohol!”

“What!?”

Marion's pupils shook.

The Tower of Magic, revered as the sacred place of abstinence! Smuggling alcohol inside was unheard of. To bypass the stringent inspections at the entrance, Amon had hollowed out the wooden club to hide the alcohol within.

“Fufufu, I passed it off as a self-defense club and smuggled in this alcohol.”

“T-That’s...”

“Senior.”

With a sorrowful voice, Amon brought the wooden club exuding the smell of alcohol closer to Marion.

“How much suffering you must have endured. You’ve grown so gaunt since I last saw you.”

“Ugh...”

“Here, take a big, refreshing drink.”

Amon’s soft voice, like spring snow melting away all the resentment.

At that moment, as Marion’s fury seemed to ebb away—

‘But drinking my “All-Night Party” without permission is unforgivable.’

A man’s vengeance doesn’t lose its edge, even after decades!

‘But sweet revenge requires a drink. Let’s take a sip first.’

Marion reignited his waning anger and flashed a fake smile.

“Junior, it seems you’re the only one who truly cares about me...”

Marion smiled warmly and reached out his hand.

“Well then, I’ll gladly accept your sentiment—”

Just as Marion was about to take the drink, Amon suddenly withdrew his hand.

Marion’s eyes narrowed.

“What are you doing?”

“Before you take a drink.”

“Huh?”

“Promise me one thing.”

“What? What promise?”

With a sly grin, Amon spoke.

“You’ll pretend I never drank the All-Night Party, okay?”

“...!”

Marion’s eyes widened in shock.

‘This brat...’

Marion trembled with anger while Amon wore a smug smile.

“Will you accept my apology?”

“Grrr...”

“Should I close the cap?”

“Y-You wouldn’t dare...”

Marion began pulling at his own hair in frustration.

“Fine...Pretend it never happened, please.”

“Hahaha! Excellent! Then I too will apologize for the past!”

“Please, just let me accept your apology...”

Ever the quick learner, Marion understood the situation.

With a wide smile, Amon said,

“Great! We’re adults, aren’t we? Let’s forget the past and focus on the present!”

“Ugh...”

“Here! Take it!”

Marion, scrambling, grabbed the bottle and started chugging it down.

Seeing this, Amon nodded contentedly.

It was at that very moment—

Click!

The door opened, and the Master of the Tower stepped in.

“Marion, is your guest by any chance from the Drake family—”

Mid-sentence, the Tower Master froze upon seeing Marion guzzling down the alcohol.

And Marion, who had been happily sucking on the bottle, stiffened as well.

“ ... ”

“Gulp! T-T-Tower Master...?”

“ ... ”

With a blank expression, the Tower Master stared at Marion for a moment before breaking into a smile.

“Marion Rumdom.”

“ ... ”

“You look...utterly delighted.”

The Tower Master spoke in a tone laced with icy rage, then turned sharply.

“Follow me. You too, guest.”

As the Tower Master walked off, Marion, his face crumpled in despair, muttered,

“Hiccup!”

Chapter 73

Magic is a dangerous and uncertain concept.

Nevertheless, it has been established as an ‘academic discipline’ through the grueling efforts of past magicians who have since passed and the present talents who sacrificed greatly.

Because of this, magicians strive for asceticism.

Since magic is a perilous field of study, it must be handled in a calm and stable state.

But

“Drinking alcohol?”

“.....”

“In this sacred magic tower, no less?”

At the sharp rebuke of the Tower Lord, Marion hesitated and scratched his head.

Pointing at Amon, he said,

“He told me to drink it!”

The treacherous drunkard strikes again!

Amon gasped and vehemently shook his head.

“Senior Marion drank it on his own!”

“What!? You’re the one who gave it to me!”

“When did I ever do that!?”

As the two bickered childishly like children, the Tower Lord raised a single finger.

From the tip of the Tower Lord’s finger, a blue flame burst forth.

It was Hellfire, an 8th-circle offensive spell.

“Go on, keep talking.”

“.....”

“.....”

“I prefer silence. I hope you’ll respect my preference.”

When silence descended, the Tower Lord extinguished the Hellfire and turned his gaze to Marion.

“Marion Rumdom.”

“.....”

“Do you think such discourtesy can be tolerated, even though you’re no longer part of the Tower but were once a magician affiliated with it?”

“.....”

“Answer.”

“No, sir.”

“Good that you understand. And yet you still did it?”

Marion cast a sidelong glance at Amon.

He wanted to pin the blame on him again, saying, “He told me to drink it,” but seeing the Tower Lord forming hand signs as if ready to cast Hellfire again, he quickly changed his answer.

“I apologize, Tower Lord.”

“Correct.”

Now, the Tower Lord turned his gaze to Amon.

“Amon Drake.”

“Yes, Tower Lord.”

“Were you unaware that drinking is forbidden in the Tower?”

Faced with the sharp words of the Tower Lord, Amon immediately adopted an extremely humble demeanor, bowing low and speaking respectfully.

“I deeply apologize. I cannot express how sorry I am for this lapse that has brought shame to the Tower. I promise this will never happen again.”

Marion whipped his head around to glare at Amon, as if he'd just been slapped in the face.

Seeing the same guy who smuggled alcohol inside a hollowed-out wooden club now acting this apologetically made Marion's blood boil.

But since Amon's apology was sufficiently polite, the Tower Lord nodded, apparently satisfied.

“Very well. Since you're not well-acquainted with the rules of the Tower, I'll let it slide this one time. But this must not happen again. Understood?”

Having no intention of ever setting foot in the Tower again, Amon answered immediately.

“I understand, Tower Lord!”

“Good, good.”

With his pardon secured, Amon began to slink away.

“Then I’ll be taking my leave now.”

His purpose for coming here had been to pacify Marion’s wrath.

And since that goal was achieved, there was no reason to remain any longer.

‘Besides, the Tower’s just another madhouse.’

A Tower Lord who used Hellfire for intimidation!

This implied he was at least an 8th-circle grand magician, and if Amon had that kind of power, he’d be living in a grand mansion, lording over others.

Yet the man was devoted to “studying magic” and spouting ascetic ideals. How pathetic.

‘Look at those shabby robes. No way I’m ending up like that.’

Amon was about to hurry out of the Tower when Marion spoke.

“I was about to leave soon as well, so wait a moment. There’s something you need to hear.”

“But—”

“If you leave with me, the Warp Circle fare is free.”

“I’ll wait.”

The steep cost of using the Warp Circle to get here had already left emotional scars on Amon, so Marion’s persuasion was more than enough.

“So, what is it I need to hear?”

What could there be for him to learn in the Tower?

Amon tilted his head in confusion, but the Tower Lord fixed him with a steady gaze and said,

“You, are you really from the Drake family?”

“Yes? I am, but...my father is Kaim Drake.”

“.....Kaim Drake, you say.”

Hearing his father's name, Amon narrowed his eyes.

'Come to think of it, Father was quite the accomplished magician.'

The magical theories his father claimed were "basic knowledge" were regarded as "high-level theories" by others.

The fact that the Tower Lord of the illustrious Ignis Tower would mention his father by name brightened Amon's mood.

'The famous Ignis Tower's Tower Lord knows my father's name... That must mean he's been keeping an eye on him!'

Could it be that the Tower Lord intended to recruit his father?

'This is definitely a good sign! My father's career path is about to open up!'

Of course, his father would have to wear those shabby Tower robes, but as his son, Amon was certain he'd reap the benefits of the name recognition.

'Besides, Ignis Tower is pro-Empire but operates independently. It's unlikely they'd abandon recruiting my father just to appease the Emperor!'

Feeling assured, Amon eagerly awaited the Tower Lord's next words.

"I see. Then..."

'Yes! You want to recruit my father, right? Just say it!'

"Let's get to the main point."

'...Huh?'

"First, regarding the current state of the continent..."

'Wait! What about my father's career?'

Amon wanted to interject, but by then the Tower Lord was already immersed in discussing the state of the continent, his face grave with contemplation.

Though Amon clamped his mouth shut, that was the moment he should have spoken up.

Because at that moment, the Tower Lord was thinking about Amon's father.

Kaim Drake...Wasn't it around last year? The man who suddenly appeared, submitted improvements to the Mana Enhancement Magic Circle to the academic world, and then vanished.

That's right! The very magic circle Amon had critiqued Marion about!

The same circle Marion had tried to claim as his own contribution, only to be rebuked by the Tower Lord, who pointed out it was an idea someone else had already proposed.

That "someone" was none other than Amon's father, Kaim Drake.

'It was a theory deserving of a top-tier medal, but when I reported it to the Imperial Court, they simply asked me to keep quiet.'

The reason? The Imperial Court's fraught history with the Drake family!

Because of that, Kaim Drake had received no recognition or reward and was left empty-handed.

If Kaim Drake's theory had been about anything other than the "insignificant" Mana Enhancement Magic Circle, the Imperial Court might have ignored their grudge and awarded him, but for something so minor, they didn't want to risk tarnishing their pride.

'Such a pity. Truly a pity. So this young man is the son of Kaim Drake.'

The Tower Lord couldn't give Amon any formal recognition because of the Court's stance, but he found himself favorably inclined toward the young man.

So he decided to extend a significant courtesy to him.

"Ahem! As I was saying, it would be good for you to be familiar with the current state of the continent. This is the consensus reached by many magicians and scholars after lengthy discussions, so you'd do well to remember it."

While it was a gesture of goodwill, Amon wasn't particularly interested.

'I don't really care.'

If Amon were a merchant, he might have considered profiting from the chaotic state of affairs, but that wasn't the case.

'Besides, I don't even have the resources to pull that off. Selling gold might earn me a bit of money, but big companies like Gold Road Trading would already have the market locked down. Why bother...?'

Unless he wanted to become a street vendor, entering the business world was out of the question.

But the Tower Lord, feeling pleased with his “courtesy,” was visibly enthusiastic.

Amon forced a smile and said,
“.....Thank you!”

“Haha, I knew you’d be interested. Come, have a seat.”

The Tower Lord burst into hearty laughter and gestured for him to sit.

Watching this, Marion frowned.

‘The cold-hearted Tower Lord is laughing like that? Why?’

Unaware of the context, Marion harbored doubts but decided to ignore them.

Once Amon sat down, the Tower Lord began his lengthy explanation.

“Phew, my head...”After hearing so much in such a short time, Amon’s head throbbed.

As he tapped his forehead lightly, Marion spoke.

“I’m about ready to leave. Are you?”

“Hold on. If I use the Warp Circle now, I’ll definitely throw up.”

“Hmm. That might happen. Alright, take your time.”

While waiting in the lounge, Marion glanced at Amon and asked,
“So, what do you think?”

“.....About what I just heard?”

“What else would I mean?”

“Hmm.”

Amon recalled the Tower Lord’s discussion of the continent’s state.

To be honest, most of it had little to do with him, so he’d nodded along without much thought.

But there were a few points he couldn’t ignore.

'It seems the repercussions of this incident are serious...'

The Emperor's sudden illness!

The disastrous failure of the Velslime Wasteland Development Project!

The unprecedented calamity where the Empire's elite forces were utterly annihilated by a meteor that fell without warning!

'An entire legion wiped out, the heavy armored cavalry obliterated, an entire mage tower's worth of magicians gone, and several battalions erased...Even for a massive empire, this is no trivial loss.'

The Empire's active military forces had been drastically reduced.

The real issue lay in the fact that, while the continent might appear peaceful on the surface, it wasn't entirely so underneath.

'It's been only a few years since the Great War ended. Sure, the Empire orchestrated a continent-wide non-aggression pact lasting a century, but if the linchpin—the Empire—starts to waver...'

Amon clicked his tongue.

Ultimately, the main point was this:

"Bottom line is, spies might start sneaking into the Empire, right?"

"Exactly. Among the possible targets, educational institutions might be a primary focus. The Imperial Palace is nearly impossible for spies to infiltrate, and the military and knight orders, already on high alert from recent events, will undoubtedly tighten their security. That leaves state institutions."

"Hm... That does make sense. Among them, educational institutions would be the most likely targets."

They're perfect grounds for either brainwashing or crushing budding talents!

Moreover, since these institutions naturally gather information from various regions, they'd be a prime playground for spies to operate.

That was why the Tower Master thought it crucial for Amon to be aware of the situation, though there was a bit of a hitch.

"By the way, senior."

“Yeah?”

“Honestly, do you think any spies would even bother with our academy?”

“.....”

“If I were a spy, I wouldn’t even glance back at it and would find somewhere else instead.”

“Honestly, I think so too.”

Total number of students: three. Total faculty, including the management team and janitors: seven.

Even with two incoming students, the ratio was still abysmal.

That’s why Amon thought:

“Well... I guess we’re fine, then?”

Marion chuckled softly.

“Yeah, probably. There are far better places for espionage.”

“Exactly, exactly.”

“Anyway, how’s your head now?”

“Oh, it’s fine now. Let’s head out.”

Amon and Marion stepped into the warp magic circle together.

And at that very moment—

The principal, Anar’el, was grinning brightly as she faced a middle-aged man.

“You’re hired, Professor Phais!”

At Anar’el’s words, the middle-aged man, Phais, gave a sly smile and replied:

“Thank you, Principal!”

Phais had officially been hired by Amonis Academy!

Chapter 74

After arriving in Amur via the warp magic circle, Amon headed towards the academy and thought to himself.

'Phew, I somehow managed to catch those who tried to escape. I couldn't let them run away and stay alone in this hellish place.'

A wicked mindset that says, "I can't be the only one to die!"

Of course, the others weren't thinking at all about escaping from the academy, but because Amon had such thoughts, it showed in his actions, like the thief who flinches at his own shadow.

'By the way, I wonder if Kai has returned by now? He might have even returned to the academy when I went to the mage tower.'

What if he hasn't returned?

'I'll have to give him a proper scolding. How could a newbie not even send a message during their break?'

He would show the eloquence that used to make the boys under him weep when he was a young alley boss!

Thinking that, he opened the main gate and entered.

Marion had rushed off to have a drink, so he could report that to the principal as well.

While heading toward the principal's office, he noticed something.

'...Hm?'

Amon furrowed his brow at the sight of an unfamiliar figure loitering in the hallway.

'Who is that? They look like someone I don't know.'

At first, he thought it might be Kai since it was about time for him to return.

But the person's back was plump and soft-looking, and no matter how much he thought about it, it didn't seem like Kai.

That wasn't to say Amon's eyes were so bad that he'd mistake someone for Kai just because they'd gained weight!

So he quickly approached and spoke.

"Excuse me, who are you...?"

“Ah! Senior!”

It was Kai, and Amon’s eyes weren’t that bad!

The young man, who had once been a handsome figure, was now much rounder, and Amon’s mouth hung open in surprise.

“Kai!”

“Yes?”

“Did something good happen during your break? You look so much healthier. I almost didn’t recognize you.”

Amon’s thoughtfulness, never speaking any mean words, showed in that moment!

Kai, on the inside, thought.

‘...Something good?’

That couldn’t be true.

Kai, the new teacher at Amonis Academy, was actually the Crown Prince of the Empire, ‘Kaiyas Amonis.’

But what was the internal situation in the Imperial family?

‘His Majesty, Father, is bedridden, and I couldn’t even rest or take a break, handling state affairs. Now that I’ve finally managed to return, and you’re asking me if something good happened?’

The reason he hadn’t responded to Amon’s letter or even shown his face was because of that.

Because of this, he had even vented his stress through overeating, which led to his fiancée teasing him with, ‘Your highness, may I ask if that belly and chin are for your political pocket?’ But now his complexion has improved?

Kai’s face quickly soured.

“Ha. Ha. Ha. It’s nothing. I’ve just gained some weight.”

“No, no. You look just fine now.”

“.....”

“Before, you were too skinny, it was kind of hard to look at. But now, it’s good.”

Amon, filled with jealousy towards the handsome guy, spoke.

“But you seem busy? I didn’t hear from you during your break, and you didn’t reply either.”

“Ah...”

Now that he thought about it, he did see Amon’s letter.

[What are you doing? Playing?]

But he had been so busy that he didn’t even think of replying and had pushed the letter aside.

Kai chuckled awkwardly and said.

“Yes, I was really busy with family matters...”

“So the academy’s work doesn’t matter?”

“.....”

Kai sighed deeply at Amon’s sharp probing.

“There’s just been a lot going on. It was tough, really.”

“...Ah, yes.”

“Well, it’s good to have you back. If you had run off, I would have chased you to the ends of hell to bring you back.”

“.....”

Since Amon was on his way to report to the principal about his and Marion’s return, he quickly moved his steps, and Kai followed him.

“Hm? Where are you going?”

“I need to report my return to the principal. How about you?”

“Ah, I just got back, so I was about to see the principal. Let’s go together.”

When they arrived in front of the principal’s office, Amon noticed a middle-aged man leaving, greeting Anar’el.

“Ah. Well, I’ll take my leave now.”

“Yes! I look forward to working with you!”

The man left, and Amon tilted his head.

“Hmm? Who is that?”

The middle-aged man blinked in surprise.

“Ah, I’m sorry. I’m Phais, the new teacher hired today.”

“...A new teacher?”

Amon glanced sideways at Kai.

Kai had just become a new teacher, and now another one?

‘...Wait a minute.’

At that moment, Amon recalled something he had heard earlier.

‘Come to think of it, the continent’s situation was said to be unstable. There was talk about spies from other kingdoms possibly entering the Empire...?’

He stared at Phais, a suspicious thought forming.

Noticing Phais’ plump physique, Amon glanced at Kai.

‘He looks like Kai.’

If Kai had known, his expression would have instantly stiffened at Amon’s rude thought!

Nevertheless, Amon smiled softly and said.

“I’m Amon Drake. I look forward to working with you, Teacher Phais.”

“I also look forward to working with you, Senior.”

“...Hmm.”

Amon was satisfied with Phais’ respectful tone, immediately addressing him as ‘Senior.’

“Well then, I have something to report to the principal, so I’ll take my leave...”

Amon and Kai entered the principal’s office, where Anar’el greeted them warmly.

“Teacher Amon! You’ve returned. Did you manage to resolve the matter?”

“Yes, senior Marion also returned. Though he’s off to Amur for a drink now.”

“Really.”

Anar’el sighed as if regretful, and Kai, who overheard, thought to himself.

‘Marion Rumdom, 3-point deduction in teacher evaluation.’

Amon gave Kai a side glance before speaking.

“As you can see, Kai also made it back.”

“Yes, yes. Everyone’s back safely.”

“But...”

“What?”

Amon approached Anar’el and lowered his voice.

“Another new teacher? How long has it been since we hired Kai?”

At Amon’s inquiry, Anar’el sighed deeply.

“Sigh, Teacher Amon. The academy is a place of learning. If someone knocks on the academy’s door seeking to learn, it’s only natural to welcome them, isn’t it? Anyone can come here to seek education, not just students.”

Anar’el fiddled with an apple as she spoke.

“Also, Teacher Phais is an excellent person. He’s been teaching in the Osran Kingdom for many years, and his enthusiasm for education is remarkable.”

She then continued, caressing a watermelon as she spoke.

“Plus, he has great character, so I can safely entrust him with the students...”

“Did you receive fruit as a bribe?”

Anar’el’s ears twitched.

“W-What are you talking about?”

“.....”

Under Amon's piercing gaze, Anar'el finally dropped her ears and confessed the truth.

"It's a premium fruit gift set worth 5 gold per basket."

"....."

Anar'el stole a glance at Amon, worried.

Even though she had emphasized that it was '5 gold,' Amon's expression didn't change.

Shivering with anxiety, Anar'el offered him a banana.

"W-Would you like a banana?"

"Thank you."

Amon accepted the banana and peeled it, glancing at Kai.

"Kai, go out. I have something to discuss with the principal."

"Ah, yes. I understand."

After Kai left, Amon sighed deeply and spoke with a serious expression.

"Principal."

"Yes..."

"I heard something from the Ignis Mage Tower."

"What is it?"

"It's about the current unstable situation on the continent."

"Huh? The situation on the continent?"

Nodding, he continued speaking.

"You must be aware that the current Emperor is bedridden. You probably also know that the empire's military strength has suffered significant losses. Because of that, after the Great War, the kingdoms that signed the mutual non-aggression pact under the Empire's leadership are starting to get uneasy."

"Is that so..."

“As a result, many kingdoms are likely to send spies to monitor the Empire’s movements, and the most probable target for these spies is the Academy.”

“What... what did you say?”

The naive elf, who was not well-versed in politics and human affairs, widened his eyes in disbelief.

At that moment, Amon, who had peeled the banana, took a big bite and snapped back.

“But ta-da! They’ve sent spies disguised as teachers, and now you’re peeling the skin and feeding them to us!”

“Hii, hiiik!”

Anar’el, whose ears were twitching nervously, hastily responded.

“B-but it hasn’t been confirmed that they are spies...”

As Anar’el was speaking, she quickly closed her mouth.

The new teacher had years of teaching experience in another kingdom!

He had come to this dying academy and had been hired as a teacher!

And he even offered a fruit gift set worth ‘five gold’!

“That...that’s impossible...”

While the poor elf, who hadn’t seen much of the world, trembled in fear, Amon muttered.

“Just like this banana! The Empire will have its skin completely peeled off and be devoured by foreign forces!”

“Hiiik!”

Seeing Anar’el arch her back in fear as though the fruit gift set she had received as a bribe was terrifying, Amon thought to himself.

‘Hm, I should stop teasing her.’

After all, it hadn’t been confirmed that the new teacher was a spy. So Amon continued speaking.

“Well, I’m just saying we should be cautious, as there’s a possibility. Also, I’d appreciate it if you could be careful about hastily accepting new teachers.”

“I... I'll keep that in mind...”

“Anyway, since I mentioned it earlier, I'll be keeping a close eye on the new teacher for a while. It doesn't hurt to be careful.”

“Y-yes! Please, I'm counting on you, teacher Amon.”

Nodding, Amon took another banana from the basket and put it in his pocket.

'It really does taste amazing, considering it's a gift set worth 5 gold.'

After leaving the headmaster's office, Amon's eyes widened.

“Hm?”

“Thank you for your hard work!”

Kai was nowhere to be found, but the new teacher, Phais, had been standing outside all this time.

“Were you...waiting for me?”

“Yes, that's right. I wanted to get accustomed to this place and hear about it from you, senior. If it's a bother, you can refuse, of course.”

Amon awkwardly smiled at Phais' eager behavior.

Phais, who was middle-aged, appeared much older than Amon and even looked older than his own father, Baron Kaim.

So Amon spoke politely.

“Hahaha, refuse? It's not a problem. Since it's summer break, I don't have much to do for now.”

“No, no. Still, I'm taking up your time. I really appreciate it.”

“No problem... Oh, and feel free to speak comfortably. I heard you have much more experience than me.”

At that moment, Phais politely bowed and said.

“No, no. Your time here is much longer than mine, isn't it, senior Amon? So, please don't worry about age or experience.”

“...!”

Amon's eyes trembled slightly.

What a clear expression of respect from a senior!

'Moreover, although it's uncomfortable to have an older new teacher, I can feel that he's sincere.'

He could sense Phais' passion to do his best in this group.

It would be a burden to show discomfort toward such a person.

Amon cleared his throat and said.

"Ahem! Understood. I'm counting on you."

"Yes, senior Amon!"

"Then let me introduce myself again. I'm Amon Drake."

At Amon's words, Phais smiled warmly.

"Yes, I'm Phais Piden. I'm looking forward to working with you, senior Amon. By the way, are you free today?"

"Eh? Oh, yes. I was planning to rest today."

"I see."

Phais smiled cheerfully.

"In that case, I'd like to hear more about the academy, and since we've finally met like this, I'd like to treat you to a drink. Would that be okay?"

Phais' suggestion to treat a colleague to a drink seemed a bit out of place for a teacher, but when Amon saw him subtly shaking his thick wallet, he cleared his throat.

"Well, I suppose I shouldn't be so formal. I'll accept just this once."

"Hahaha! Don't worry about it!"

"I know a good place. Let's go."

Amon and Phais walked off, both smiling brightly.

And behind Amon, Phais wore a sly grin.

'That was easy!'

A little while later, Amon and Phais arrived at a tavern.

"Waaah! Kill him! Kill him!"

In the center of the tavern, there was a steel cage, and inside, two strong men were fighting each other to the death!

Seeing such a violent sight with familiarity, Amon murmured.

"Wow, it's hot today too."

Meanwhile, Phais' face had turned pale.

"T-this place?"

"I come here often. The drinks and snacks are pretty good. So, come on, teacher Phais."

"..."

Amon, smiling brightly, rested his chin on the table and said.

"Why are you still standing? Hurry and sit down."

With that one sentence, Phais immediately realized.

'This won't be easy.'

Chapter 75

Phais sat down with a nervous demeanor.

At that moment, Amon was smiling contentedly, staring directly at Phais.

'Hmm, looks like someone I actually like has arrived.'

Until now, none of the fellow teachers had impressed him.

Marion, the drunkard who always handled the backstabbing; Sloth, the embodiment of laziness; and Kai, the newbie who for some reason just rubbed him the wrong way.

Then there were the executives, Anar'el and Brestle, who were so bad that he didn't even need to point out their flaws.

'But this one is different. He buys me a drink from the very first meeting?'

Amon completely let his guard down just because someone bought him a drink!

Of course, it wasn't just because of the drink; there was a very specific reason for it.

With Amon staring intently, Phais awkwardly smiled.

"U-uh, senior? Why are you looking at me like that...?"

"Hahaha, no, nothing. It's nothing."

Amon smiled widely.

'Look at this! He's much older than me, but his attitude is so respectful. We're meeting for the first time, and he's already treating me with respect and even buying me a drink! His impression is kind, and you can tell right away he's someone you can trust!'

Amon had a lot to say about the impressions he had of the other teachers, especially in terms of their appearance.

Marion, without a doubt, was the scheming drunkard, Sloth was a representative of lazy people who ruined their own potential, and Kai, well, he just didn't sit right with Amon.

And Anar'el and Brestle were fine as long as they kept their mouths shut—excellent elves and dark elves, but they had no intention of keeping quiet!

But look at Phais!

He's kind-hearted, respectful, and even buys drinks!

That's why, based on first impressions alone, he could easily be considered top-notch.

'And his teaching experience is long too. Finally, someone trustworthy has arrived as a colleague.'

Although Phais referred to him as "senior," Amon could view him as an adult he could rely on, someone much older than him!

So while Amon grinned happily, Phais, who was being stared at with a smile, felt a lot of pressure.

'T-this guy... Why does he keep staring at me like that?'

His eyes flickered nervously.

'D-did he figure out that I'm a spy sent by the Kingdom of Mardel?'

When Phais revealed his identity to Anar'el, he had mentioned that he had worked as a teacher for many years in the Kingdom of Osran, but his true identity was shockingly that of a spy from the Kingdom of Mardel!

In other words, he had never actually worked as a teacher!

But Amon, who was unaware of this, was smiling away.

'Hahaha, so you've been a teacher for over ten years. You must know how to handle students, right? These days, students have become lazier...'

'Damn it, judging by the look in his eyes, it seems like this guy really has figured out my true identity.'

'It looks like I'll be getting a lot of lessons from him.'

'Should I eliminate him? No, I can't cause a scene on the first day.'

The two were having completely different thoughts!

Phais sighed lightly and looked around.

Even now, the intimidating scene in the center of the tavern, where rough-looking men were fighting each other, was unsettling.

Even someone who had been a spy for a long time like Phais was feeling his nerves tingling at the sight.

'It looks like he's trying to pressure me into revealing my identity, but I have no choice.'

Phais took a deep breath and his eyes gleamed.

He decided to make the first move before Amon could attack.

"Huh, things have been crazy lately, haven't they?"

Amon, who had been munching on the basic snacks, tilted his head.

"Eh? Oh, yeah, I suppose so."

"Recently, the situation on the continent has been quite chaotic too."

At those words, Amon swallowed the snack and narrowed his eyes, nodding slowly.

“...Yeah? I guess so.”

Seeing Amon’s reaction, Phais smiled faintly.

‘Hah, how about that? Is he rattled?’

A criminal doesn’t announce that they are one.

No, they don’t even mention the word “criminal” because they don’t want to draw suspicion.

Sometimes, some lunatics who want attention shout “I’m a criminal!” but someone like Phais, who had lived as a spy for so long, would never make such a mistake.

Therefore, those who openly say “I’m a criminal” can be divided into two categories:

Criminals seeking attention or people who have nothing to do with crime.

‘So, which one do you think I am?’

Phais was smiling triumphantly, but Amon was deep in thought with a serious expression.

‘Maybe he’s an older person trying to talk about politics. Ugh, this is so tiresome. I shouldn’t have followed him just because he bought me a drink.’

‘Hahaha, kid. Look at that expression.’

‘His gaze... It looks like he’s preparing to talk about the kingdom’s policies.’

As Phais moved his chair closer, leaning in to whisper, Amon sat with a pensive look on his face.

“Yeah, there are some ominous rumors going around, you should be careful.”

“Eh? What are you talking about?”

“Did I mention that I’m from the Kingdom of Osran?”

“I’ve heard that from the headmaster.”

“Ah, I see. Actually, I recently defected to the Amonis Empire.”

“Eh? Defected?”

Amon swallowed another snack, and Phais continued.

“Yes, indeed. The situation in the Kingdom of Osran is quite serious internally...”

Hearing the words “serious situation,” Amon’s face turned serious as well.

Seeing this, a faint smile appeared at the corner of Phais’ lips.

‘How’s that? Does it make you crazy? The Kingdom of Osran is in turmoil, so it’s probably good information, right? I bet your butt is itching now.’

‘Oh, so he really is talking about politics.’

‘But I’m actually from the Kingdom of Mardel! A completely different country from Osran!’

At this point, Phais thought that Amon’s mind was in turmoil.

Why was he talking about the situation in Osran? What was so serious? Wait, is he really from Osran? More importantly, who exactly is he?

‘...That’s what he’s probably thinking!’

However, Amon remained silent and chewed on the snacks, his face hardening.

‘Damn, if I had known he’d talk about politics, I wouldn’t have come.’

Just then, Amon suddenly narrowed his eyes and looked at Phais.

‘But this guy... bringing up this topic out of the blue seems suspicious... Could he be a spy sent from another kingdom? The way he’s casually bringing it up, he seems like he’s trying to act nonchalant.’

Amon was quick to grasp the essence of things!

‘Well, since we’re here, I might as well drink a couple more shots and leave. The vacation is almost over, and I’ll just say I remembered something I need to prepare for.’

As he thought that, the waiter brought the ordered drink to the table.

“Here’s the Amor People you ordered.”

“Ugh...!”

Amor People!

It was one of the top four fine wines from the commercial city of Amor!

Not only was the taste exquisite, but it was incredibly expensive—truly a luxury drink that Amon, who prioritized efficiency, could never have dreamed of!

Amon hurriedly opened the bottle and spoke.

“Ah, you must have gone through a lot to end up defecting... Here, let me pour you a drink. Let’s have a good one!”

At Amon’s sudden change in attitude, Phais was slightly taken aback but then smiled knowingly.

‘Hahaha, kid. He doesn’t know which side I’m on, but he’s determined to dig for information. I see what he’s up to.’

‘Expensive drink! Expensive drink!’

‘But I won’t make it easy for him. I’ll carefully mix truth and lies to create even more confusion.’

‘This is going to be delicious!’

Amon and Phais clinked glasses and toasted, both smiling widely with completely different thoughts in mind.

“Ugh, so these young people these days...”

“...Hmm, you’ve finished it all already.”

“Hey! Another bottle of Amor People, please.”

“Ugh! Back in my day...”

Before Amon could even raise his hand, the waiter swiftly came over, bringing another bottle of Amor People and said,

“I’ll take away the empty bottles!”

“Ah, yes. Thank you.”

The waiter collected the empty bottles scattered on the table, carrying them away lightly.

Even with the bottles being cleared away, there were already six empty ones.

If you count the newly delivered bottle, they had already downed seven bottles.

And because of all the alcohol, even the highly trained Phais couldn't maintain his composure.

"Ugh! You sure drink strong stuff, don't you?"

"Really? I guess it's because the drink is so good."

Just as Phais said, the Amor People had certainly lived up to its price.

And it tasted even better when someone else was buying the expensive drink!

Grinning widely, Amon drank greedily and then said,

"Well, now that we've finished this, how about we move to another place?"

"Another place...?"

"Of course! You said you'd pay for the first round, so I'll pay for the second round."

At those words, Phais instinctively wanted to gag and quickly covered his mouth.

'He's going to drink more? Does he really mean it?'

It was dangerous.

Amon had been talking about various things over drinks, but the more he drank, the more it felt like he was just rambling without a filter.

They almost started talking about first loves too!

'C-could this be a test to see if I can hold my liquor?'

'The drink's running out...'

'He's trying to get me drunk and extract information from me.'

'It's good, but I think I prefer cheaper alcohol.'

Phais set his face in determination.

'Right, I can't back down here. He'll be drunk soon, and I can either get information or feed him lies.'

Phais nodded firmly.

"Good idea! Let's go!"

“Yeah! Alright, let’s drink to our hearts’ content today!”

Saying that, Amon jumped up and left the tavern.

Phais, who was about to follow, froze in shock when he looked at the bill.

The cost of the drinks was nearly half of his entire allowance.

They moved to a different, shabby, and quiet tavern.

After getting expensive drinks in the first round, Amon, considering his wallet, chose a very cheap tavern for the second round.

‘It’s not because I’m trying to save money, okay?!’

He had three gold bars given to him by Caselag, but one was left at his estate, one was for the dragon lord and his younger sister’s tuition fees, and the remaining one was for ‘emergency funds,’ so he couldn’t waste money carelessly!

‘It’s not because I’m trying to save money, I swear!’

He felt a little guilty, but oh well!

Anyway, Amon was laughing and having a good time, with an arm around a middle-aged drunkard he met at the tavern.

“Puhahaha! No wonder I didn’t see you around, so you were here all along?”

“Don’t even start! You suddenly told me not to come in and pushed me away, I don’t know what that was about!”

“You didn’t make a mess of the place again, did you?”

“Hey! You know I have good drinking habits!”

“Well, yeah!”

The two of them were making such claims, but considering they were tap dancing on the table, their words didn’t seem very convincing.

And Phais was watching them with disdain, thinking they were pathetic.

The alcohol from the first round had made Amon completely sober, so he could be rather calm now.

'What a pathetic bunch. But, well, it's good for me.'

Amon, who had been drinking heavily with the drunkard, was now completely wasted, and his earlier composure seemed like a lie.

'In this situation, it's perfect to subtly extract some information.'

Phais cleared his throat and spoke to them.

"Ahem! Anyway, I'm looking forward to working with both of you in the future."

The drunkard, who had been swaying his hips, responded.

"I should be the one asking! You've been in the teaching profession for more than ten years, so you're even more of a senior than me!"

Phais tilted his head at the drunkard's words.

'That drunkard is also a teacher?'

He had just assumed he was a drinking buddy of Amon, but it seemed he was also a teacher.

'Hmm... I see.'

Phais, who had a smile of triumph, slowly spoke.

"But you two, do you know about this?"

"About what?"

"This is actually a pretty important matter..."

As Phais set the mood, the two drunkards, with exaggerated faces typical of drunk people, sat up and prepared to listen, and Phais continued.

"I'm from the Osran Kingdom, and I've come here to seek asylum."

"Uuuh, you said that already! Uuuh!"

At Amon's jeer, Phais gritted his teeth but forced a smile and continued.

"The reason I sought asylum is because there was a huge mess in the Osran Kingdom."

"Uuuh, you said that already! Uuuh!"

“...Ugh, the mess was because of spies.”

“Spies...!”

“Yes, that’s why I’m telling you both to be careful. Do you happen to know anything about it?”

At this point, the two drunkards were expected to share any information they knew about the ‘spy games’ between nations.

That was the question Phais had thrown out...

Bang—!

Suddenly, Amon slammed the table and shouted.

“Spies! I know who it is!”

“What, what?!”

“I’ve suspected it from the beginning!”

“Eh?”

Could there already be a hidden spy? Phais hadn’t heard anything about that.

Caught off guard by the sudden outburst, Phais was stunned as Amon smacked the table again and shouted.

“Kai! That bastard is the spy!”

A sudden accusation! But Amon’s theory, while drunk, was as simple as can be.

There’s a spy? The spy is a suspicious person? Someone who hasn’t been in contact lately and no one knows what he’s been up to?

It must be Kai, right?

Even the middle-aged drunkard, smelling of alcohol, slammed the table and shouted.

“Kai, the spy! I knew it when he stopped letting me drink!”

Caught off guard by the sudden finger-pointing, Phais looked confused.

But it didn’t last long, and he thought this might not be so bad.

'Hmph, is this an internal conflict?'

While thinking this, the middle-aged drunkard yelled angrily.

"A spy threatening the empire! I can't forgive him!"

"Really, you're awesome! Senior, you're a real man!"

"I'll burn him alive! This is Marion Rumdom talking!"

At the mention of that name, Phais blinked in surprise.

"Marion Rumdom?"

The hero of the Great War.

One of the figures that spies from many countries had to be cautious of, a battle mage who burned enemies of the empire to death.

"The Devil of Crimson Flames...?"

As Phais muttered that name absentmindedly.

"What did you just say?"

The middle-aged drunkard, Marion, was now glaring at Phais.

Chapter 76

In response to that sharp gaze, Phais felt as if he had been drenched in cold water—or rather, scalded by a fiery storm.

'Why on earth is the "Devil of Crimson Flame" working as a teacher?'

The "Devil of Crimson Flame," Marion Rumdom, was a Class-1 danger.

The story of him single-handedly annihilating an enemy knight order during the Great War was widely known.

Faced with such a war hero glaring directly at him, Phais instinctively gulped down dryly.

'Danger...No, wait. Don't tell me!?'

Could Amon have suspected him as a "spy" and arranged for him to face the "Devil of Crimson Flame"?

That thought sent shivers down Phais' spine.

'Damn it, pretending to be drunk just to pull this kind of trick! What a despicable bastard!'

Still glaring resentfully at Amon, who kept pounding on the table and shouting, 'Kai is the spy, that bastard! Let's kill him on the spot!' Phais bit his lips tightly.

'Since things have come to this, there's no other way.'

It was truly a last resort.

Hurriedly folding his hands together, Phais gritted his teeth.

Then, he began rubbing them together at an incredible speed.

Sasasasasak-!

Simultaneously, Phais spoke in a coquettish voice.

"Ah-ha! How could I not recognize the great Marion Rumdom, the war hero of the Grand Amonis Empire? If I didn't recognize him, I'd have to gouge out my own eyes and throw them away! Marion Rumdom achieved countless feats during the Great War! Even a backwater native of the Osran Kingdom like myself is well-acquainted with his illustrious deeds! Ah-ha!"

A level of flattery that seemed to melt brains!

Moreover, Marion, whose brain was already half-melted by the alcohol, immediately burst into a wide grin at the desperate flattery.

"Isn't that so?"

"Absolutely! To think I would meet you in person—it's an honor that spans three generations!"

"Gahahaha! Let's just keep it at two generations of honor, shall we?"

Watching Phais lower himself so obsequiously, as if ready to lick Marion's shoes, Amon pouted his lips.

'So jealous!'

Amon, who could never hope to rise in rank due to offending the imperial bloodline, was consumed with envy!

Noticing Amon's envious gaze, Phais kept rubbing his hands together with a triumphant smile.

'Hehehe, how does it feel? Bet you never thought I'd get away with it this easily.'

'If I achieve great feats, I'll have people flattering me like that too, won't I?'

'Not just anyone can be a spy, you know!'

While Phais smirked slyly, Marion, in his good mood, put an arm around his shoulders and handed him a drink.

"Gahahaha! I like you, lad! Here, drink up! It's on me!"

".....!"

Drink more? For a moment, Phais felt a wave of nausea rising.

The shock of the drink prices had sobered him up once, and facing the Devil of Crimson Flame had completely dissipated his buzz—but that was just his feeling. The total amount of alcohol in his body hadn't changed at all.

'But now he wants me to drink more? Just one more sip and I feel like I'll throw up...'

Whether he knew this or not, Marion grinned and brought the drink to Phais' lips himself, as if intending to personally feed him.

"Glug-glug-glug! Drink up! Come on now!"

It was Marion's way of showing friendliness, but inwardly, Phais thought:

'Are these bastards doing this on purpose because they suspect I'm a spy?'

No! As mentioned, it was just friendliness!

And to raise the atmosphere, the youngest of the trio, Amon, clapped his hands and shouted:

"Aha-! If you can't drink it in one shot, you won't be able to marry~!"

'I'm already married, you idiot! I've got two kids back home!'

"Who's the one who can't drink properly→!"

Mixing in the Empire's local dialect, Amon tried to make Phais drink, his antics lighting a fire in Phais' eyes.

'I swear, I'll kill that bastard when I get back.'

Secretly sharpening a knife for Amon in his mind, Phais brought the glass to his lips.

'Well, for the sake of appearances, I can at least take one sip...'

The moment he swallowed one sip.

The potent liquor, with its signature scent of pure alcohol, stung his nasal cavity and triggered a natural bodily reaction.

"Puhgueueeeet!"

"Uwaaah!"

Amon and Marion jumped back in shock.

Practically thrown out of the bar, Amon and Marion supported a wobbly Phais between them.

"You should've said something earlier, man."

Amon chimed in awkwardly.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to force you to drink—I just got carried away with the mood..."

"Right. Truly, I apologize."

As Amon and Marion apologized in turn, Phais, struggling to calm his queasy stomach, muttered:

"It's fine...It's been so long since I drank that I made a grave mistake. I feel like I've ruined the mood instead. My apologies."

Of course, it wasn't fine.

Phais said that only to maintain their camaraderie.

'I can't afford to sour our relationship here. In times like these, I just need to accept their apology gracefully.'

Though he wanted nothing more than to rip them apart, years of being a spy had taught him to wear many faces.

And Amon and Marion took his words of humility at face value!

“Right, right. Just make sure to let us know next time.”

“You gave us quite the scare with the sudden vomiting.”

“Sigh, cleaning up after that ruined all the expensive drinks we had.”

“Tell me about it! That bar’s owner gave us such dirty looks we had to clean it up ourselves!”

As they grumbled, Phais ground his teeth.

“Haha, I’ll make sure to be careful next time.”

“Good, good. As long as it doesn’t happen again.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

As they approached the academy building, Phais let out a sigh of relief inwardly.

‘Damn, this day feels endless. I need to rest soon.’

Just as he thought that and passed through the academy gates.

“Senior!”

A plump young man hurried over, catching Phais’ narrowed gaze.

‘That guy...?’

It was the young man who had been with Amon earlier.

‘Ah, right. They mentioned a new teacher who arrived a bit before me. His name was... Kai, wasn’t it?’

Yes, Kai.

He was definitely the one Amon had accused of being a “spy” at the bar earlier.

‘Hmm, a spy, huh... He doesn’t seem like one to me.’

Years of this line of work had sharpened Phais’ intuition.

To his eyes, Kai’s every action seemed refined and dignified, befitting someone of noble lineage—a “young scion of the upper class,” so to speak.

‘A marquis family? No, he’s probably the son of a duke at least...’

Smirking at the thought, Phais shook his head.

'Well, Amon must've been joking earlier at the bar about him being a spy. I was hoping for some internal strife, but I'd better let go of that idea...'

Before he could finish his thought.

'...Huh?'

A sudden tremor on both sides of his body!

Startled, Phais turned his head to see Amon and Marion trembling violently as they supported him.

'What the hell is happening to these guys all of a sudden?'

Despite the earlier shock, the alcohol in their systems hadn't dissipated.

At the peak of their drunken stupor, Marion suddenly shoved Phais aside, pointed at Kai, and bellowed:

"You scoundrel! Do you know your crime!?"

Kai froze mid-step, startled by the unexpected outburst.

"Huh? What?"

"You! Why did you come to this academy!?"

"What are you talking about all of a sudden...?"

While it was unmistakably drunken nonsense, Kai, having grown up in the imperial palace surrounded by the finest, was baffled by Marion's raw and unfiltered drunkenness.

Watching the scene, Phais narrowed his eyes.

'Well, well...'

Could internal strife actually happen?

As he watched the situation unfold with keen interest, Amon, too, tried to point at Kai, pushing Phais aside in the process.

Realizing what was happening, Phais subtly tried to distance himself from Amon.

But then—

Bwoooong-!

The ground suddenly seemed to rush toward him, and Phais widened his eyes.

‘...What’s going on?’

That was the last thing Phais saw.

Thud! Splat-!

Unable to resist Amon’s push, Phais fell face-first to the ground like a corpse experiencing rigor mortis.

Amon, oblivious to his strength, stood frozen, pointing at Kai.

As silence stretched, Amon muttered with a pale face.

“Damn it...”

Phais snapped back to reality, startled, and quickly sat up.

“Heuk! The secret base is to the east...!”

Realizing what he had just blurted out, he clamped his mouth shut and scanned his surroundings frantically.

‘W-where am I?’

Soon, he noticed Amon dozing off at his bedside, head bobbing. Phais squinted at him suspiciously.

‘This guy...did he ambush me out of nowhere?’

Though the details were fuzzy, he clearly remembered Amon slamming him into the ground with full force.

(Of course, Amon had merely lost control of his strength while letting go of Phais, but from Phais’ perspective, the incident seemed intentional.)

‘So, he must have figured out my identity. If that’s the case, I have no choice.’

Crack.

As he flexed his knuckles, Phais’ hand crept toward Amon’s neck.

Using his technique, it would be a trivial matter to crush the carotid artery of the unsuspecting man who had dozed off while keeping watch.

'Heheh, falling asleep on the job as a spy? Works for me. Well, farewell. This ends with you gone and me escaping this place immediately.'

But just as he sinisterly chuckled and touched Amon's nape—

Snap!

A noise like brittle straw breaking echoed from his hand. Phais' eyes widened.

'...What?'

Somehow, Amon had grabbed his wrist in his sleep. The next thing he felt was a searing pain radiating up his arm.

"Gah—!"

"Huh?"

"Aaaargh!"

"Whoa!?"

Amon, jolted awake by Phais' piercing scream, blinked to see the latter writhing on the bed, clutching his broken hand.

"What the heck is this!?"

"Argh, my hand! My haaaand!"

"W-wait right here!"

Panic-stricken, Amon scrambled out of the room.

Moments later, he returned, already assuming his signature apology pose: bowing with his head pressed firmly to the ground.

Meanwhile, a visibly fatigued Anar'el was tending to Phais' hand with healing magic.

"Mr. Amon."

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Did Mr. Phais do something wrong to you?"

“N-no, ma’am...”

“Then is it something I did wrong? You woke me up last night for healing magic, and now you’re doing this again this morning.”

“S-so sorry!”

“Ahh...”

Letting out a deep sigh, Anar’el removed her glowing hand. A master of warp magic who made even teleportation look easy, her healing magic had swiftly restored Phais’ mangled hand to perfect condition.

“Mr. Phais? Amon didn’t mean any harm.”

“Y-yeah.”

“Quiet, please!”

Chastising Amon sharply, Anar’el then gently held Phais’ hand.

“Anyway, I apologize on his behalf, Mr. Phais.”

“....”

“Please, don’t hold a grudge.”

Phais simply stared blankly at the ceiling.

‘...Looks like my identity hasn’t been exposed.’

That meant he could remain in this place and continue his mission.

After piecing his thoughts together, Phais let out a deep sigh and dropped his head.

“Phew, Headmistress.”

“Yes, Mr. Phais! I’ll make sure to reprimand Amon properly—”

“I resign.”

Anar’el’s perky ears drooped flat.

Chapter 77

Torture, threats, persuasion—all the training in the world couldn't change the fact that even a spy would cherish their own life.

To be exact, a spy could willingly throw their life away for the success of a mission, but dying a meaningless death like yesterday? Even a spy would refuse that.

'A spy is human, after all!'

Living with Amon, however, felt like even ten lives wouldn't be enough!

That's why Phais had resolved to quit. When he suddenly announced his resignation, Anar'el's face turned pale as she grabbed his hand.

"P-Phais, resigning? Surely you're joking? Right? Right?"

Anar'el was serious, and for a good reason.

Amon! Sloth! Marion! Kai! A team of teachers as formidable as they were troublesome!

Among them, Phais had stood as a trustworthy pillar for a long time in the academy, and Anar'el could not afford to let him go easily.

However, despite her desperate pleas, Phais smiled cheerfully and said, "I'm serious, Principal."

"Is it because of Amon?"

Realizing the attention had turned to him, Amon, who had been slowly raising his head, slammed it back onto the floor.

When Anar'el asked this, Phais responded in a curt tone, as if it was obvious:

"Of course."

"Ah, I see..."

"Staying with someone as dangerous as him, I'd need ten lives to survive!"

"D-dangerous? Amon was just a bit drunk last night, but normally, he's so calm and refined..."

As Anar'el continued to speak, her voice grew quieter, as if her conscience pricked at her. Even though she trusted Amon, she knew full well that "refined" wasn't exactly his strong suit.

At that, Phais gave a sardonic smile and said, “Principal, if someone asked you to step into a cage with a supposedly calm tiger, would you? One misstep and you’d lose your head.”

“...”

Anar’el fell silent.

But then Amon, who had been listening quietly, suddenly raised his head and exclaimed:

“Hey, that’s too much! Treating me like a dangerous animal—”

“I’ll report you to the knights for assault.”

“I’m sorry!”

Amon’s head hit the floor again.

Having swiftly silenced Amon, Phais turned to Anar’el.

“So, Principal.”

“...”

“Please bring me the resignation forms.”

“...Fine.”

Anar’el, realizing she couldn’t change his mind, left the room with a heavy heart. When she returned a moment later, she held the resignation forms in her hand.

“Here you go.”

“Thank you. Then...”

Phais began filling out the forms without hesitation. But then, mid-writing, his quill froze.

“Huh?”

He stared at the resignation form for a long moment, his brow furrowed.

“Principal.”

“What now?”

Anar'el's voice had grown curt, treating him as if he were already an outsider.

Phais hesitated before continuing. "By the way, how much is the penalty for breaching the contract? I recall seeing a clause about it when I signed."

Hearing this, Amon, still with his head on the floor, slyly lifted it and added, "Yeah, yeah. What's the penalty fee these days?"

It was the same clause that had tightly bound him in the past.

"Hmm, since you're resigning right after signing the contract..."

After some thought, Anar'el finally stated the amount.

Hearing it, Amon's face twisted in dismay. "Wow, it's gone way up. It wasn't even half that when I signed."

"Well, the academy has officially reopened, and Phais hasn't even completed the minimum term of employment."

"Fair point..."

As Anar'el and Amon murmured amongst themselves, Phais' face grew increasingly grave.

'Wait, how much did I spend on drinks last night?'

He calculated quickly: the funds he'd brought, the money spent on drinks, and now the penalty fee.

Phais' face turned pale.

'I don't have enough money to pay the penalty fee!'

And what did that mean?

'I can't quit?'

While running away in the dead of night—a spy's long-time friend—was an option, it was a last resort. He couldn't recklessly burn through his fake identities, especially when the Empire had such vast resources.

'Fortunately, I'm not too far short. If that's the case...'

Should he try negotiating the penalty fee?

'No, no. It's clearly my fault. And what kind of spy would file a lawsuit while undercover? That'd only reveal my identity.'

After organizing his thoughts, Phais hesitantly spoke.

"Principal?"

"Yes?"

"Could you...perhaps reduce the penalty fee a little?"

Anar'el looked at him incredulously. "Do you think this is some market where you can haggle? Reduce it?"

"..."

"Not one coin! Absolutely not!"

Her ears stood upright, showcasing her firm resolve.

'Where does the principal of this dying academy gets...'

Though part of him wanted to tear her apart, Phais' eyes flicked to Amon, who was now kneeling and watching the scene intently.

'Wait a minute.'

When their eyes met, Phais shuddered.

'Is this guy deliberately trying to keep me from paying the penalty fee by making me spend all that money on drinks?'

The amount left was just barely less than what he needed.

'In other words, he knows how much money I have. Which means... could it be...'

Had Amon figured out he was a spy? Was he deliberately keeping him tied to the academy to uncover his true intentions?

'This cunning bastard!'

Meanwhile, Amon stared at Phais sympathetically.

'Poor guy. He can't even escape this hell because of the penalty fee.'

Feeling a sense of camaraderie, Amon clicked his tongue and shook his head in pity.

Seeing this, Phais' body trembled with rage.

'What a terrifying person. To have such schemes at such a young age...'

'But my legs are going numb from kneeling so long...'

'Dangerous. This guy could be a future threat to our kingdom!'

Breaking the silence, Amon spoke casually.

"So, are you going to resign?"

"W-what?"

"If you are, let's get on with it. If not, let's discuss work."

"..."

Phais clenched his teeth.

'I can't! You made me blow my money!'

Forcing himself to smile, Phais awkwardly said:

"Haha...Unfortunately, I can't afford the penalty fee."

"Oh, really?"

Beaming, Anar'el snatched the resignation forms back. "Then you'll keep working with us for now!"

"Haha...I suppose so."

Amon, rubbing his numbed legs, stood up energetically.

"So, what subject will you be teaching?"

"...I'm capable of teaching most non-magical subjects. Advanced-level courses might be a bit difficult, though."

As a spy, he'd been trained in a variety of fields, so this was only natural.

Amon leaned over to whisper in Anar'el's ear.

"How about science?"

“Hehe, that tickles!”

“Just listen! Kai’s about to formally take over math, and if Phais handles science, our academy will have all the basics covered!”

“Oh, you’re right!”

Anar’el nodded eagerly.

The Empire’s Ministry of Education required schools to offer these core subjects: swordsmanship, magic, history, math, and science.

“With all the basics covered, we can start spending the budget on recruiting new students!”

“Yes! Only academies with the basics covered can distribute promotional flyers.”

“Exactly. We’ll pull some strings to attract students...”

Under Amon’s persuasive words, Anar’el’s eyes began to sparkle.

“New students...”

“That’s right. Imagine it: you, standing tall on the podium, addressing a sea of students!”

Anar’el gently closed her eyes.

As if envisioning the scene, her eyelashes fluttered with emotion before she abruptly opened her eyes wide and spoke.

“Alright! Let’s do it!”

“Your decision is indeed wise, Headmaster!”

Thus, the academy would soon be on the fast track to revival.

‘Then the dragon who enrolled will surely be satisfied, and my younger sister won’t have to worry about going hungry once she gets their diploma!’

Feeling unusually optimistic, Amon couldn’t help but beam with a broad smile. Of course, there was one thing that still weighed on his mind.

‘However, since the first impression was a bit of a misstep, there’s a chance that Teacher Phais might try to escape as soon as he gathers the penalty fees. I’ll have to make up for it by improving the academy’s image so he doesn’t want to leave.’

With the warmest, most trustworthy smile he could muster, Amon looked at Phais. His intention was to reassure Phais, but the effect was the opposite.

'Th-that sinister smile! He must have just whispered with the headmaster about my treatment here.'

'Ah, Teacher Phais is smiling back at me. Smiling!'

'To think I have to force a smile to appease the one who holds my life in their hands. Such humiliation...'

Anyway, with the conversation wrapped up for now, Anar'el and Amon stood up.

"Well then, Teacher Phais, we'll be going now! Rest well!"

"Teacher Phais! See you again!"

The two left the room to discuss the academy's promotional plans. Left alone, Phais quietly pulled the blanket over his face. A man's tears must never be seen by others!

"...Sniff!"

Soon, the pillowcase covering Phais' face began to dampen.

Fortunately or unfortunately, Phais was an optimistic man. Perhaps after crying his heart out, he felt a little lighter.

'...Haa, it's come to this. There's no helping it. The penalty fee isn't that much short of being covered. If I work for just a month or two, I can make up the difference.'

And during those one or two months, he would dedicate himself to the original purpose of his infiltration.

'Though Amonis Academy has declined, it still has a long and storied history. Surely there's some useful information to be gleaned.'

From a different perspective, it was as if he had returned to the starting point.

'Yes, yes. Let's think of it that way. But why does my stomach churn so much?'

Surely, it wasn't because of last night's drinking!

Having calmed his emotions, Phais left his room and ran into a certain young man.

"Oh, good morning, Teacher Phais."

“Ah, good to see you, Teacher Kai.”

“Hahaha! No need for formalities. You’re much older than I am.”

Kai’s hearty laughter made his double chin jiggle uncontrollably. The stress of managing state affairs in the emperor’s stead had led him to overeat repeatedly.

Looking at Kai’s quivering jawline, Phais fell into thought.

‘Come to think of it, this guy...other teachers were suspicious of him being a spy, right?’

In other words, he was both a comrade and a rival.

With that in mind, Phais curled his lips into a sly smile.

‘But he’s young. If he really is a spy, he’s probably still inexperienced.’

Having made his judgment, Phais leaned slightly toward Kai and spoke.

“Um, Teacher Kai?”

“Yes?”

Leaning in subtly, Phais continued.

“Excuse me, but where are you from?”

Thus, Phais, the spy from the Kingdom of Mardel, took his first step in uncovering secrets about the empire by probing none other than the imperial crown prince!

Chapter 78

Phais suddenly asked Kai a question, which made him tilt his head in confusion.

‘Where am I from?’

Where could the crown prince of the empire be from? Of course, he was from the empire.

Most of his childhood had been spent receiving education within the imperial palace. Once he grew older, he had no time to spare, learning statecraft to inherit the throne.

Now, with a little leisure time on his hands, he was at this academy trying to understand a man named Amon. The key point, however, was that he was a true imperial citizen who hadn’t set a foot outside the empire since birth.

“Uh...well, I’m from the empire,” he replied.

At that answer, Phais narrowed his eyes.

‘He says he’s from the empire? Most spies infiltrating another country wouldn’t identify themselves as citizens of the infiltrated nation. Against a real citizen, cracks in their facade would quickly emerge. Usually, they claim to be from an allied or neutral country instead...’

The thought that Kai might not be a spy briefly crossed his mind, but then he remembered the hostility Amon and Marion had displayed toward him. That couldn’t be a coincidence.

Unbeknownst to Phais, Amon’s hostility stemmed from two simple reasons: Kai’s self-imposed ban on drinking and a general sense of dislike. But how could Phais know that?

Thus, Phais couldn’t jump to conclusions.

‘Hmm, I’ll need to probe further.’

Phais straightforwardly asked, “Then, one thing I’ve always been curious about...His Majesty, Emperor Amonis XVIII, is renowned as a wise and virtuous ruler, isn’t he?”

Kai’s expression became peculiar at the question.

Hearing someone praise his father as a ‘wise and virtuous ruler’ right to his face was naturally awkward.

As an emperor, his father might be wise, but as a father, things were... different.

‘Kai, your teacher says you’ve been inattentive in class lately. No allowance for you this month.’

‘What? Father! Why—’

‘Hahaha! What are you looking at?’

‘...Nothing.’

Ah, childhood memories.

Phais, however, interpreted Kai’s change in expression differently.

‘Oh? Look at that. His expression shifted quite a bit.’

This reaction further solidified Phais' suspicion that Kai might be a spy.

After all, if you were from a rival nation, it would feel unsettling to hear compliments about a potential enemy's leader.

'Haha, still so inexperienced. He can't even hide his emotions properly.'

Phais decided to press further.

"I'm from the backwater kingdom of Osran, so I've only heard bits and pieces about His Majesty. Having recently defected here, there's a lot I don't know. Could you tell me about the Emperor's achievements? As someone from the empire, you must know a lot about them, right?"

"Uh..." Kai scratched his cheek awkwardly before replying.

"Well..."

"Yes, go ahead."

"This might take a while. Are you sure you're okay with that?"

"...Excuse me?"

As he mentioned earlier, it did feel odd to hear praise about his father, the Emperor, in person.

However, as the crown prince, he believed his father's achievements deserved respect!

There were tens, no, hundreds of reasons why the Emperor was hailed as a wise and virtuous ruler!

Several hours later, Kai sat slouched in a decrepit garden chair, giving an extensive speech to Phais about the achievements of Amonis XVIII.

That's right—several hours straight!

"And what is the significance of His Majesty's decision, you ask? It was the first step toward ending the Great War early!"

"Oh! So that's why the war ended so swiftly..."

"Exactly! Thanks to His Majesty, the continent was freed from ten years of conflict. Ultimately, it was the beginning of..."

"The Battle of the Kaef Plateau!"

“Ah! You know about the Battle of the Kaef Plateau!”

Phais nodded enthusiastically as Kai spat out his words with fervor, showering the Emperor with praise.

Despite his outward enthusiasm, Phais’ inner thoughts were roiling.

‘This is so long! Why is this story so long?!’

Kai seemed almost desperate to extol the Emperor’s virtues.

And as Kai’s monologue dragged on, Phais’ suspicions about him grew just as lengthy.

‘Suspicious. Very suspicious. No matter how loyal one might be, would someone praise their Emperor nonstop for hours like this?’

Kai’s full name was Kai Stro.

The Stro family? Even as a spy, Phais had never heard of such a family.

‘A nobody’s family showing such exaggerated loyalty to the Emperor? It’s not like he’s from one of the prominent lineages, like the Pendorean’s.’

The implication was clear.

‘It must be one of two things. He’s either a fool mindlessly obsessed with the Emperor or a spy deliberately flaunting his loyalty for others to see.’

Phais concluded that Kai was the latter.

By now, Kai seemed to have run out of material, grasping for straws.

“And, uh, what else was there...?”

Realizing his own awkwardness, Kai let out a sheepish laugh and said, “Haha, maybe that’s enough about His Majesty’s achievements?”

Phais, who had been listening intently, smiled faintly.

“Haha, of course. I’ve learned so much.”

“Don’t mention it. But wow, look at the time. May I excuse myself?”

“Of course. Sorry for taking up so much of your time.”

“Oh no, it’s nothing.”

Kai quickly stood up and left the area.

Left alone, Phais crossed his arms and smirked.

‘Hah, deliberately showcasing such overt loyalty...’

The purpose, no doubt, was to deflect suspicion.

‘Haha, he might be a rookie spy just thrown into his first mission. And still so inexperienced...’

Thinking of Kai as a rival, Phais smirked maliciously.

‘He’ll be easy to handle. As long as I keep an eye on that brute Amon!’

Kai, now striding briskly, wore a cold expression.

‘So, a spy has infiltrated the academy.’

Though Kai respected the Emperor as a crown prince, even he wouldn’t sing his praises for hours on end.

And the reason Kai was sure Phais was a spy?

The fact that Phais listened to the tedious, long-winded story for hours without complaint wasn’t mere politeness or an attempt to save face.

‘He kept chiming in at just the right moments, smoothly transitioning the conversation. It felt like I was being entertained. His subtle prompts to keep the story going...’

Kai chuckled to himself.

‘That’s the speech technique of southern kingdom spies...was it Rifen? No, judging by the accent, he’s probably from the kingdom of Mardel.’

As he turned into an alleyway, Kai muttered to himself.

“Investigate the Osran Kingdom and the Piden family.”

No sooner had he spoken than the presence on the other side of the wall disappeared.

Moments later—

Whoosh!

A document was thrown over the wall.

It bore the seal of the crown prince's intelligence network.

Upon reviewing the document, Kai smirked coldly.

"Hah, as expected."

The Piden family of the Osran Kingdom was on the verge of ruin.

Though they had one surviving heir, the heir was a woman.

Phais Piden? The name belonged to a third son who had already been declared dead.

'A spy dares to infiltrate Amonis Empire's academy?'

Although Kai was aware of the precarious state of the empire due to the failed Velslime Wasteland reclamation project, he hadn't expected a spy to sneak in here.

'He must be eliminated immediately.'

In the Amonis Academy library, Phais furrowed his brows in frustration.

'How much longer do I have to search before I find some hidden document?'

For a historic institution, the academy didn't seem to have any hidden mechanisms or secret treasures.

'Hmph, I guess I'll have to extract information from people. But avoiding that brute Amon's eyes won't be easy...'

As Phais clicked his tongue and stepped out of the library—

"What brings you to the library?"

"...!"

Phais flinched at the voice beside him.

"K-Kai?"

"I asked what brings you to the library."

"Well, isn't it obvious? To learn about the academy's history, of course! Hahaha."

"Is that so? Impressive enthusiasm. But how did you know about this secluded part of the library? Did you get lost by any chance?"

“...”

Kai smiled, while Phais laughed awkwardly and stepped back.

His instincts as a spy were screaming.

‘This is dangerous.’

Phais glanced around, looking for an escape route, but armored knights from the Goliath Order were already blocking the way.

Kai’s grin widened.

“I won’t waste words. Come quietly.”

Escape was impossible.

Realizing this, Phais bit down on the poison hidden in his molar.

Crunch!

The poison coursed through his body instantly.

As his face turned black, Phais crumpled to the ground, muttering:

“Glory...to the Kingdom of Mardel...”

Even in his final moments, the resolve to sow confusion by betraying another kingdom’s information!

As soon as Phais collapsed to the floor—

“Poison Cure.”

The poisonous energy was swiftly dispelled by Kai’s detoxification spell!

Phais opened his mouth in shock.

“W-What...?!”

Kai’s voice, tinged with amusement, whispered into Phais’ ears as he stood dumbfounded.

“Don’t bother with any more tricks. Just come quietly.”

“Grr...Damn it...”

“Hoho, today’s going to be quite the long day.”

With that, Phais was dragged away by the knights.

“Hahahaha!”

“Ohohohoho!”

Amon and Anareel burst into laughter.

To the point where Anar’el’s eyes welled with tears.

“Finally! Finally, the day has come for our academy to reclaim its glory!”

Amon clenched his fist and muttered determinedly.

“At last, my road to success...”

“What did you say?”

“Oh, nothing! I meant, the day for the academy’s revival is here!”

“Isn’t it?”

“Of course it is! Hahahaha!”

“Hahahahaha!”

The two were so overwhelmed with emotion that they embraced each other, bouncing with joy.

“Well then, shall we get started?”

“Huhu, indeed, Principal. I’ll make sure this reaches the entire continent.”

“Oh my! I was planning to use warp magic to do just that!”

“Well, we can split the work and do it together, can’t we?”

“That’s true.”

“Hahaha!”

“Ohohohoho!”

Just as the two were about to leave the principal's office, their arms laden with stacks of papers—

“Principal! Senior Amon!”

Kai called out, opening the door and stepping inside.

Startled, Anar'el almost dropped her stack of flyers, but Amon quickly caught them, preventing any mishap.

“Kai! Can't you knock before entering? Do you think the principal's office is your bedroom?”

When Amon scolded him, Kai bowed his head apologetically.

“I-I'm sorry. I had urgent news to deliver...”

“News, you say?”

When Amon asked, Kai smiled broadly and announced:

“Teacher Phais Piden was a spy who infiltrated the academy!”

At those words, Amon and Anar'el froze in place.

“W-What?”

“I handed him over to the Goliath Knights. He confessed almost immediately.”

“...”

Amon looked down at the stack of papers in his arms.

[Enrollment Announcement for Amonis Academy!]

[Complete Imperial Standard Curriculum: Swordsmanship, Magic, History, Mathematics, Science!]

[Register by Imperial Year XXX, Month X, Day X for a 10% Discount! First 50 Applicants Only!]

[Raise Your Head and Look to Amonis Academy!]

Amon stared blankly at the promotional flyers in his hands. His jaw trembled as he muttered:

“K-Kai, please, tell me this is some kind of joke.”

“Why would I joke about something like this? It’s true.”

“L-Look behind you. Do you see that?”

“Oh, by the way, what’s with all those papers stacked up like a mountain?”

“Those are promotional flyers I had printed with extra money.”

“...Promotional flyers?”

Amon stiffly turned his neck, only to realize Anar’el, who should have been beside him, was nowhere to be found.

When he shifted his gaze slightly downward, he saw Anar’el had already fainted, foaming at the mouth.

Realizing the situation, Kai spoke up.

“Wait, hold on, don’t tell me...”

“...”

“You were about to officially distribute these promotional flyers because you’ve finally filled all the teaching positions in the Imperial standard curriculum?”

“...”

“But now a teaching spot’s open because a spy got caught?”

Kai kindly summarized the situation, stabbing Amon’s chest with verbal daggers.

Amon closed his eyes as a stiff sensation was climbing the back of his neck.

‘Ah, this feeling... Oh, right.’

Finally, overwhelmed by the sheer mental shock, Amon collapsed, scattering the stack of promotional flyers around him.

Chapter 79

This is Amur, the commercial city.

Sir Tomart, the commander of the Goliath Knights stationed here, pressed his temples with fatigue and sighed.

“Ha, damn it. What kind of catastrophe is this all of a sudden?”

A report about a spy infiltrating Amonis Academy.

The report came with substantial evidence, leaving the knights with no choice but to act.

And the person they apprehended, named Phais, turned out to indeed be a spy after investigation.

Thanks to this, the previously peaceful Amur was in utter chaos as imperial investigators came and went.

‘The only advantage of this place was its quietness. Damn it, what rotten luck.’

A knight’s duty is combat.

But perhaps because he’d stayed too long in peaceful Amur, Sir Tomart, who had once burned with passion when he was first knighted, now hated anything noisy or troublesome.

Moreover, after the Great War ended, he had been rotting in this place for quite some time, making any chance of career advancement slim.

And what does that mean?

“Loyalty! Commander, we have the results of the investigation.”

A rookie approached nervously, holding a document, but Sir Tomart replied dismissively without even looking.

“Hand it over to the vice-commander.”

By now, he had sunk into laziness, and in the worst way possible.

“But sir, the investigator insisted that you personally confirm it...”

“Oh, for fu—”

Sir Tomart suppressed a curse, grabbed a booklet from his desk, and flung it.

Thunk!

The rookie staggered back after being struck by the booklet, and Tomart spoke coldly.

“Hey.”

“...Yes!”

“Hey.”

“Yes!”

“I told you to give it to the vice-commander.”

“...”

“Does the commander’s word mean nothing to you?”

“...I’ll deliver it to the vice-commander.”

“Before you leave, pick that up and hand it back.”

The rookie, who now had a cut near his eye, sluggishly picked up the booklet and placed it back on the desk.

“Now get lost.”

“Yes, sir. Loyalty.”

As the door closed, Sir Tomart grumbled irritably.

“Damn it, as if I wasn’t annoyed enough already. Who’s this lousy punk?”

He picked up the booklet he had thrown.

It was a business prospectus distributed by the Gold Road Trading Company.

After skimming through it for a while, he frowned and muttered.

“Ha, there’s blood on it now. Does nothing go right today?”

Tomart tossed the booklet into the trash can and stood up.

‘Damn it, I feel awful. I need a drink.’

A knight commander going out for a drink in broad daylight was the epitome of a fallen knight.

Soon, he left the knights’ building and ambled toward the bustling streets.

“Hmm?”

He narrowed his eyes as he spotted a somewhat familiar face.

'That woman is...?'

At first, he almost didn't recognize her, but it was definitely the daughter of the Marquis Pid, who worked at Amonis Academy.

'Whenever she's here, she always looks disheveled... but today, she's surprisingly well-dressed.'

At the academy, Sloth often looked messy, living as if permanently inside a sleeping bag.

However, at her family's estate, the maids kept such a close watch on her that not a single hair was out of place.

In any case, as the start of the academy term was approaching, Sloth had just returned to Amur with her students.

"Teacher, I want that one."

"Oh? Should I call Amon?"

"I'm sorry!"

Sloth, cutting off Boris's gluttony with just the mention of "Amon," glanced around.

"Come to think of it, the sword I was planning to buy last time...Hm?"

As she scanned her surroundings, she saw a familiar face approaching her.

It was Sir Tomart, the commander of the Goliath Knights stationed in this area.

As she saw him approach with a sly smile, Sloth let out a small sigh.

When he finally came close, Tomart raised his hand and spoke.

"Who do we have here? Isn't this Lady Pid?"

"Oh, yes. It's been a while, Sir Tomart."

"Hahaha! Indeed. But are you returning from somewhere? You seem all dressed up today."

Tomart's gaze slid up and down her figure, making Sloth's brow shoot up.

But whether he noticed or not, Tomart was busy ogling her attire.

'As expected of someone who trains in swordsmanship, her outfit is sharp.'

When his gaze reached her face, however, he saw her openly displeased expression.

Even so, Tomart just smirked, and Sloth, her face hardened, asked coldly, "What's so funny?"

"Hahaha! It's just that I'm delighted to run into the lovely Lady Pid by chance."

"..."

"By the way, how is the marquis doing?"

"..."

Sloth pressed her lips together tightly.

When she didn't reply, Tomart chuckled smugly.

'Heh, as if someone practically disowned by the Pid family would know how the marquis is doing.'

This was why Tomart dared to act rudely toward Sloth, the discarded child of the Pid family.

As long as he didn't cross the line too much, the Pid family wouldn't hold him accountable for his behavior.

Trusting in this, Tomart had always mocked, ridiculed, and subtly harassed Sloth whenever they crossed paths.

Back when Amon had pitted his students against the knights, Tomart's sensitivity to the "Pid family crest" had stemmed from this context.

'Heh, this is perfect timing. I was already in a foul mood.'

Tomart, notorious for his bad temper, always found amusement in teasing Sloth.

At his worst, he had reduced her to tears, forcing her to flee.

Since he was already in a sour mood, he decided to thoroughly enjoy himself today.

"Hehe, fine, fine. Let's drop the family talk."

“ ... ”

“Have you been keeping up with your swordsmanship training? Last I checked, you were at an intermediate level of Sword Expert.”

“ ... ”

“Hm, I’ve always been curious—doesn’t the Pid family only send out members who’ve reached the level of Sword Master? Oh, perhaps you’re receiving special treatment because of your work at the academy.”

Tomart, grinning, rattled off comments that were sure to prick Sloth’s pride.

Meanwhile, Sloth tilted her head back slightly and gazed absently at the sky.

Noticing this, Boris nervously tugged at her sleeve.

“Teacher, let’s just go somewhere else.”

The perceptive student urged her to move, but Tomart interjected with a laugh.

“Haha! Is this one of your students, Lady Pid?”

“Yes? Yes.”

“Well, he looks bright. Haha, learning under such an excellent teacher, he’s bound to...”

At that moment, Boris went pale and frantically shook Sloth’s sleeve.

“T-Teacher! Let’s go somewhere else now!”

Tomart laughed at Boris.

“You little brat, don’t interrupt when adults are—”

Then Raymond, who had been quietly observing from behind Sloth, exclaimed.

“Wow!”

Startled, Tomart instinctively looked toward Raymond.

However, since Raymond was standing behind Sloth, what Tomart first saw was...

Swoosh—!

Sloth swinging her fist at his jaw.

“Gah...!?”

Raymond cheered again as spit and blood mixed with a flying tooth.

“You’re amazing, Teacher!”

Tomart collapsed, clutching his mouth, but blood poured between his fingers no matter how hard he pressed.

As he sat trembling on the ground, Sloth looked down at him and spoke.

“You’ve crossed the line one too many times, Sir Tomart.”

“Huff, huff...! D-Do you have any idea what will happen if the Pid family finds out about this!?”

“...?”

Sloth tilted her head, puzzled.

The misunderstanding about her estrangement had already been cleared up ages ago.

‘Does he still think I’ve been disowned by my family?’

With that thought, Sloth kicked Tomart squarely in the face.

“Gahhh!”

As he let out a high-pitched scream and rolled to the ground, Sloth coolly said,

“Chloe.”

“Yes, Teacher.”

“Head back to the academy with the others.”

“Understood.”

The students scurried toward the direction of the academy, and Sloth, glancing back at Tomart with an expression of disbelief, turned away.

“And you said, ‘If the family finds out,’ right?”

“Ugh...”

“They already know.”

“What...?”

At those words, Sloth walked off, leaving Tomart glaring daggers at her with clenched teeth.

‘That wretched woman...!’

However, he couldn’t follow her.

The sudden strike had left him utterly defeated and drained of resolve.

‘How dare she use such cowardly tactics!’

A desperate attempt at rationalizing his humiliation.

Eventually, Tomart steadied himself and staggered to his feet. His bloodshot eyes gleamed with fury.

‘Fine, I’ll throw that insolent woman in jail. Attacking the commander of the knights with such underhanded means? Unforgivable!’

Shaking with anger, he began stumbling back toward the knights’ headquarters.

Thud!

Suddenly, a man charged at him like a tiger, planting a kick squarely into his chest and landing a solid slap across his face.

“Gah! W-who!?”

Looking up at the man gripping his collar and slapping him senseless, Tomart shuddered.

The man’s bloodshot eyes and contorted, demonic face sent chills down his spine.

“W-who are...?”

“Who am I? Whooooo?”

“W-what are you doing!?”

The man slapped Tomart again and shouted,

“I’m Sloth’s older brother, you filthy wretch!”

“What!? Wait, what!?”

Lanslow, one of the Thirteen Swords of the Pid Marquisate and Sloth’s youngest older brother, had coincidentally accompanied her to Amur for personal business.

The problem? Lanslow was so petrified at the sight of his sister that he'd trailed behind at a considerable distance, effectively looking like he was stalking her.
The greater problem? He'd witnessed Sloth being insulted and had been so furious that he froze on the spot, unable to act.

But once Sloth had moved far enough away, his rage finally propelled him into action.

"Sniff, sniff! I'm so sorry, Sloth! Your pathetic brother should have stepped in earlier!"

Just as he was ranting, Lanslow suddenly burst into tears.

Tomart, seeing the bizarre scene, instinctively realized,
'He's insane.'

The madman's eyes suddenly flashed, and he grinned eerily.

"Well then, let's die together."

"Wait a—"

Tomart didn't get to finish.

Crash!

He was slammed to the ground, crumpling like an overripe tomato.

Twitch, twitch—

Shivering and convulsing, Tomart lay sprawled as Lanslow looked down at him, clicking his tongue.

"Hmph, and he calls himself a knight. Barely clinging to life, huh?"

Scoffing, Lanslow grabbed the back of Tomart's collar, dragging his limp body behind him.

"By the way, wasn't this the headquarters of the knights' order I was supposed to command?"

Following numerous complaints from the knights, Tomart was dismissed as commander.

Effective today, Lanslow had been appointed as the new commander of the Goliath Knights.

Dragging the "former" Tomart along, Lanslow walked on with purpose.

Meanwhile, Sloth strolled down the academy's corridors.

'Hmm, it's been quite a while.'

Having returned refreshed from a long break at her family estate, her usual sense of fatigue was entirely absent.

With a cheerful heart, Sloth held something tightly in her arms. She had brought chocolates, as promised to Amon.

'But first, I should report my return to the principal.'

Soon, she arrived at the principal's office and knocked on the door.

"It's Sloth. May I come in?"

"..."

"Huh?"

Puzzled by the prolonged silence, Sloth tilted her head in confusion.

Carefully opening the door, she peeked inside—and gasped in shock.

Both Anar'el and Amon were staring blankly at a mountain of discarded flyers, their expressions akin to corpses.

Chapter 80

Amon was meditating with his eyes closed.

'Yeah, it's not like I spent my own money on the flyers anyway. It was made using the academy's operating funds. Sure, we paid extra to have the printing shop drop all other orders and even covered the penalties for canceling their other jobs...but yeah, it wasn't my money, right?'

A desperate attempt at mental consolation!

However, as always, there were cracks in such self-consolation.

'But since the promotional flyers turned into trash, we can't even distribute them. That means it's impossible to revive the academy, and even if the dragon and my sister enroll, there won't be much merit. My dream is dead, huh?'

A single clear tear rolled down Amon's cheek as reality set in.

"Ugh...sniff..."

Only after eating a piece of the chocolate Sloth had brought him did Amon regain his composure and stand up.

‘Alright, let’s just accept it. This is just how my life is.’

Today was the first day of the new semester.

Of course, with only three students, it wasn’t an event grand enough for a major ceremony, but it was still the beginning of a new term.

Amon headed to the auditorium for the opening ceremony.

Inside the auditorium where the ceremony was held, Amon stood on the stage and scanned his colleagues.

Marion, as usual, was swaying drunkenly, and Sloth—her pristine appearance from the previous day seemingly an illusion—was yawning incessantly with a disheveled look.

Brestle, still uncomfortable in the civilized attire, kept fidgeting with her clothes uneasily.

‘Ha, truly a group to be embarrassed about wherever you go.’

Kai, as always, stood at attention with an insane, relaxed grin.

‘And that guy I just don’t like.’

As Amon took in his comrades with a smile of resignation, a question suddenly arose in his mind.

Among the otherwise stellar faculty members, one unexpected figure stood on stage.

“Huh? Sir Reinbelt?”

“What.”

His brusque response betrayed lingering resentment from the mentor selection trials.

Amon ignored it and continued.

“You’re the front gate guard, so why are you on stage?”

It wasn’t Amon’s lack of manners that made him ask such a thing.

It wasn’t that he didn’t consider the gate guard a real person, but this ceremony was supposed to be exclusively for the teaching staff.

To his question, Reinbelt snorted and replied.

“Got promoted.”

“Promoted?”

“Because of the recent spy incident, it seems the principal has been thinking a lot. So now I’m the head of security as well as the front gate guard.”

“What about the other guards?”

“There aren’t any.”

A title that brought only more responsibilities with no real support!

In any case, it meant that as a ‘head,’ Reinbelt was now allowed to stand with the teaching staff on stage.

“My salary increased too.”

“How much?”

“Three silver.”

“I see.”

As Amon sighed deeply, Sloth let out a drawn-out yawn and licked her lips.

“By the way, where’s the principal? The students are all here, and it feels like we’ve been standing here for an hour.”

“She just arrived, senior.”

“Why am I so tired?”

“Is there ever a time when you’re not?”

“Hmm.”

Despite Sloth’s complaint, everyone had indeed gathered, yet Anar’el was nowhere in sight.

By the time Marion, who was wobbling from his drunkenness, collapsed onto the floor, the auditorium door suddenly opened, and a group of people poured in.

‘Huh? What’s that...?’

Amon’s eyes widened at the sight.

Each of them was holding a musical instrument—lutes, trumpets, even a wheeled organ!

The group of musicians, larger than the combined number of students and teachers, left everyone in shock. Both faculty and students murmured in confusion.

“Who are they?”

“Aren’t they the traveling band staying in Amur these past few days?”

Exactly!

Their identity was a nomadic orchestra traveling from city to city, performing music.

As the band members, carrying their instruments, took their places, their faces betrayed surprise at the nearly empty auditorium.

“What the...only three students?”

“There aren’t even many teachers...are we in the right place?”

Both the academy members and the musicians were equally stunned.

Click-clack-click-clack—

With the sound of heels striking the floor, Anar’el appeared and crossed the auditorium, heading toward the stage.

The orchestra scrambled to start playing.

Ba-ba-da-ba-baam!

Anar’el’s grand and dignified entrance!

Watching the scene, everyone in the academy had the same thought.

‘Did she seriously hire a full band for the opening ceremony? For three students?’

It was a spectacle one might expect for hundreds of students!

Amon’s cheek twitched uncontrollably.

‘That idiotic elf has lost her mind.’

While the expressions of the faculty members on stage were grim, Anar’el, maintaining her composure as principal, ascended the stage.

Once the students' dazed gazes focused on her, she spoke solemnly.

"Let us begin the opening ceremony."

The orchestra's soft music swelled to a crescendo.

After the ceremony, Anar'el was sniffing in her office.

A large bump adorned her head, and Amon stood with a clenched fist, suggesting the preceding events were not hard to imagine.

"Principal."

"Yes...sniff."

"Did you really have to bring in an orchestra? There were only three students in that huge auditorium."

Amon's frustration was palpable, and Anar'el defended herself indignantly.

"Whenever there was an event before, we always hired an orchestra!"

"..."

"This time, I even considered the academy's situation and hired a traveling band."

The thought of that decision being the result of consideration nearly brought tears to Amon's eyes.

"I see. So traveling bands are cheaper?"

"Of course. They charge about half as much as regular bands stationed in one place, even if their skills aren't as polished."

There was so much Amon wanted to say, but he chose to speak calmly.

"I see. So how much did it cost?"

"Thirty gold!"

A new, shiny bump sprouted on Anar'el's head.

As Amon chewed raw chamomile leaves for mental stability, he spoke.

"Principal, please, I beg you. It's been only a few days since you threw all the promotional flyers into the trash. And now you've wasted money like this again?"

“Sniff...it hurts.”

“We always hired orchestras for events’? That was when there were plenty of students! But now, there aren’t! Even the musicians looked shocked. It was embarrassing!”

“But...”

“Silence!”

“Eek!”

After scolding Anar’el for her foolishness, Amon sighed and continued.

“Anyway, what’s important now is what I mentioned before—about the new students.”

“Sniff. Yes, the child of your acquaintance and your sister, right?”

“Yes, but they were supposed to arrive in time for the opening ceremony...”

Amon clicked his tongue.

“There’s been no word, even after the ceremony ended.”

Attending the ceremony would allow them to start classes the next day without issue.

While arriving a bit late wouldn’t cause major problems, it would disrupt the flow.

‘And if they’re paying tuition, it’s better to get the most out of it.’

The money wasted on the flyers and the orchestra was painful but ultimately part of the academy’s operating costs—not his own money.

But tuition was a different matter.

‘That’s my money.’

Amon glared toward the direction where his domain likely lay.

‘My little sister, Ami, you promised you’d make it to the opening ceremony.’

But what could he do if they hadn’t arrived?

With a sigh, Amon turned to leave.

“Anyway, I just wanted to inform you that they should be here soon. I’ll take my leave.”

Just as he said that—

Bam!

The door slammed open, and Reinbelt entered with a pale face, shouting.

“Principal! A dragon has come to the academy!”

Anar’el jumped in place.

“A d-dragon!? Reinbelt, what kind of joke is this?”

“It’s no joke! A dragon has come...to enroll.”

“Enroll!?”

Reinbelt nodded and turned to Amon.

“And they claim to be your acquaintance...”

The words had barely left his mouth when silence fell.

Anar’el, frozen like a statue, slowly turned her head to Amon.

“...Mr. Amon?”

“Yes!”

“The ‘acquaintance’s child’ you mentioned...”

“Yes! That’s right! It’s a dragon!”

Having withheld the truth just to see Anar’el’s shocked reaction, Amon smirked triumphantly.

Recalling the time Anar’el insisted elves were related to goats, Amon grinned, even as her headbutt to his chin left him writhing on the floor.

“Reinbelt.”

As Reinbelt poked Amon’s twitching body, Anar’el turned to him with a trembling voice.

“Please escort them to the principal’s office.”

“Yes, understood.”

After Reinbelt left, Anar'el rummaged through her pocket and took out a handful of the 'chamomile leaves that help calm the mind' she always carried with her.

"Sniff!"

She chewed and swallowed the chamomile leaves along with her tears.

Anar'el was flustered.

Even a young dragon was still a dragon.

She had assumed that a dragon seeking admission would be unbearably arrogant, but the dragon before her was the complete opposite—polite and courteous.

"Hm, I see. Understood."

'Huh?'

"However, I heard that the admission fee was to be covered by this person named Amon."

'Oh my!'

Shock, astonishment, and deep emotion.

Overwhelmed, Anar'el covered her mouth and nodded her head vigorously.

"Y-yes. Mr. Amon said he would cover it."

"I thought so. I look forward to working with you."

"Yes, I look forward to working with you too! By the way, your name is...?"

The dragon smiled faintly.

The dragon, with an androgynous appearance that made it hard to tell if they were a boy or girl, had strikingly bright golden hair.

"Oh, my apologies for the late introduction. I am Rustianel of the Gold Dragon lineage, a descendant of the Amaranth bloodline. Elder Caselag is a distant relative of our bloodline, and my interest in the human world led me to enroll here through Mr. Amon."

"I see. I see!"

Moved by the dragon's polite demeanor, Anar'el's eyes glistened with tears.

'It's all about connections!'

Smiling brightly, Anar'el glanced downward.

Amon, who had been knocked out by her headbutt, had fallen fast asleep. Nudging him with her foot, Anar'el spoke.

"Mr. Amon."

"Ugh..."

"Mr. Amon, wake up. The dragon is here."

"The dragon... ah!"

Startled, Amon sprang up and looked at Rustianel.

"Ah, I'm Amon Drake. Pleased to meet you."

"I am Rustianel. By the way, I heard you agreed to cover the admission fee."

"Ah!"

Nodding, Amon hurriedly pulled out his pocket.

Inside was a hefty collection of gold coins, converted from the gold bar he had received.

"Of course, if a dragon is enrolling, it's only natural that I handle it!"

Amon handed a handful of gold coins to Anar'el.

"Here, Principal! This is Rustianel's admission fee!"

"Confirmed and received!"

Thus, the dragon's enrollment was finalized!

Anar'el beamed with satisfaction.

'Hehe, a dragon enrolling in our academy... the academy's revival is just around the corner!'

Amon also grinned.

'I get to look good in front of a dragon and keep the leftover money for myself!'

As both Anar'el and Amon smiled for entirely different reasons, Rustianel interjected.

“By the way, Mr. Amon.”

“Yes, Rustianel?”

“Aren't these gold coins what Elder Caselag gave me for my admission fee?”

Amon flinched at Rustianel's question.

“Well, yes, that's true.”

“Then aren't they mine?”

“Well...”

Amon had hoped to pocket the remaining gold, but things were taking an unexpected turn.

‘A dragon trying to reclaim such a measly amount of gold...’

Annoyed and disappointed, Amon hurriedly said:

“Well, there are many expenses to consider during your time at the academy.”

“Expenses?”

“Yes. Textbooks, meals, clothing...”

Anar'el interrupted.

“Textbook fees are included in the admission fee!”

‘This damned elf!’

Grinding his teeth, Amon forced a smile.

“Ah, anyway, I'll also take care of meals and clothing. So how about I hold on to this gold for you?”

“Meals and clothing?”

Rustianel furrowed their delicate brows.

“I don't need meals as a dragon. And I can create clothing with magic.”

“ ... ”

“So hand it over. It’s mine anyway, isn’t it?”

Ultimately, Amon had no choice but to hand over the pouch of gold coins, defeated in logic. He hesitantly asked:

“What are you planning to use the gold for...?”

Before he could finish speaking—

Crunch, munch!

Rustianel began chewing on the gold coins.

Stunned by the shocking sight, Amon froze mid-sentence with his mouth agape. Rustianel, having finished munching on the coins, licked their lips and remarked:

“The purity of this gold is low.”

“ ... ”

“Is there more? Elder Caselag mentioned giving two gold bars.”

“ ... ”

Amon trembled, barely managing to speak.

“Y-you... you just said...”

“Yes?”

“You just said you don’t need food...”

Rustianel tilted their head innocently.

“I don’t need it, but that doesn’t mean I won’t eat.”

“What...?”

“Especially gold. It’s delicious.”

Oblivious to Amon’s distress, Anar’el chimed in.

“Is gold tasty?”

“Yes. It’s sweet and nutty.”

“Oh my! I must try it someday!”

“No, no. Gold only suits the taste of Gold Dragons. I’ve heard other dragons collect gold but don’t eat it.”

“I see!”

Anyway, muttering to themselves, Rustianel turned their gaze back to Amon.

“Mr. Amon.”

“...”

The gold-eating dragon held out their hand.

“Hand over the rest of the gold.”

At those words, Amon collapsed to the ground, as if all strength had left him.