The Genius Son-in-law of the Swordmaster Household—Blessed by Authority

Chapter 1 : Choice (1)

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There are three powers that exist in the world.

First is the 'Eye of Providence', which allows one to acquire all the knowledge in the world, as long as one's mana permits.

Second is the 'Dimensional Store', which enables one to trade everyday items in this world for the artifacts once used by heroes of another realm and gods of the heavens.

Lastly, there is the 'Authority of Projection', which allows one to duplicate and command anything in the world, limited only by the user's mana.

Even obtaining just one of these three would elevate a person to transcendence and allow them to become a god.

And the swordmaster Ian Greysel was destined to obtain all three powers.

* * *

"Happy birthday, Ian!"

My 29th birthday, celebrated at humanity's final stronghold.

"You can think of me as your girlfriend for today!"

That was the line the family head said to celebrate my birthday.

"Huh...?"

"Y-You don't have to refuse!"

"No, wait...."

I looked around the room.

"What is all this...?"

Returning from a military meeting, I found the room completely decorated like a party venue.

"... How is it?"

On the table were various dishes, from the ceiling hung colorful balloons, and on the walls sparkled decorations and posters with messages celebrating my birthday.

Every single thing was something you couldn't get anywhere nowadays.

"Don't tell me... You ignored the priest's warning and used your power, didn't you?"

The Authority of Projection.

The power to duplicate anything that exists in the world, store it, and manifest it at will, as long as one's mana allows.

It was one of the many abilities held by Head Yuria Hisperion.

"Um, yeah."

"No...!"

My expression scrunched up involuntarily.

"The priest said, didn't he? You absolutely must not use your powers until your dantian and mana circuits have fully healed!"

"A-Ah... Just this much once in a while is fine!"

The head pouted and twisted her hair with her finger.

"All you do is nag the moment you come in... I worked hard to put this together..."

"......."

"It's your birthday, not any other day. If I don't do this, who will?"

"....."

I appreciated the thought, but just for my birthday, there was no need for her to push herself like this.

Haaa.

I let out a silent sigh.

There was much I wanted to say, but she probably wouldn't listen right now anyway.

We'd only end up upsetting each other.

"... Anyway... Thank you. Really, there's no one like you, head."

For now, I had no choice but to gratefully accept the gift she'd prepared.

Once her mood improved, I'd find an opening to gently warn her not to waste her strength unnecessarily.

"Yeah. Hehe."

Finally, she smiled again.

"Sit, sit! I just made everything! We have to eat before it gets cold, that's when it's good!"

She excitedly led the way to the table.

"Hurry! Hurry!"

"Ah, wait."

Now that I looked closer, she was even wearing high heels.

Even though the Head had lost a leg a few years ago and couldn't walk properly without crutches, there she was, hopping along in high heels, looking like she might trip at any moment.

"Head! Slowly, please take it slow! Where are your crutches?"

"I won't fall! And I won't use crutches today."

"....."

Stubborn about unnecessary things again.

Sheesh.

I bit back the urge to nag her and followed her to the table.

"It's been so long since we had real food! You must be tired of all that sand bread! Hurry and eat!"

"...?"

Now that I looked, all the dishes were placed on my side.

There was only a single set of fork, knife, and plate.

"... Head. Don't tell me you want me to eat all this by myself?"

"N-No, I'm fine! I'm full!"

"...."

"I already ate before you came...!"

She was lying.

I could tell from her face alone.

She looked paler than usual.

She must not have eaten anything since yesterday.

After all, food was so scarce here that even maggots were considered precious rations.

And she'd just exhausted herself using her powers beyond her limit.

She must be tired and hungry, yet she was pretending for my sake, trying to let me eat my fill.

But above all...

"Heheee..."

She was staring at the food she made with glazed eyes, drooling a little—it was clear she was starving.

Seriously.

If she was going to lie, she could at least make it believable.

— Swish, swish.

I served some steak and salad onto a plate and handed it to her.

"Huh? What are you doing? I told you I'm full."

"I can't eat alone when you're watching me. Please, at least eat a little with me."

"... Th-then, I'll just taste a bit?"

— Smirking.

I wondered if she realized what kind of expression she was making.

Watching her chew blissfully on her own cooking made me smile too.

"... Ah."

The meal ended quickly.

"There really wasn't enough for two..."

"I'm full, though?"

"... Liar. You ate less than me."

"....."

"Wait here! I'll make more right now!"

"N-no! Please stop!"

I hurriedly stopped her as, with her only hand, she attempted to manifest her power again.

Even the dishes just now, she must have forced her ruined dantian to its limit, wringing out her mana painfully.

If she pushed herself any further, the Head might end up bedridden for days.

"Right now, your health comes first."

Knowing she wouldn't fall for my "I'm full" lie, I came up with another excuse.

"Once you're completely healed, we can both eat until we burst."

"... But still."

The Head drooped her eyebrows, still looking disappointed.

"Sheesh, really..."

I wondered if maybe being away from sunlight for so long was affecting her.

She became dispirited so easily these days.

If only this wretched underground life would end, maybe she could regain a little bit of her old, dignified self.

"I'll be going out on reconnaissance soon anyway, so I shouldn't eat too much. Really, this is just right."

"....."

"It was the perfect amount, enough to leave me feeling good."

"... Hmm."

"It was really delicious. Thank you."

"Hehe. Hehehe."

Only after hearing my thanks did she smile.

"All right. Now for the next course!"

"Huh? There's a next course?"

"Of course! Did you think I would end the loyal retainer's birthday—something that comes just once a year—with just this?"

"....."

Her confident expression was making me feel uneasy.

What on earth had she prepared?

"First!"

She pointed at the bed.

"Lie down over there!"

"... Huh? What are you going to do?"

"Just lie down first!"

"....."

I didn't know what she intended, but since she was giving orders, I obeyed.

— Thud!

"Not on your back, on your stomach."

"..... O-okay."

— Flop.

"And close your eyes. Don't look this way."

"....."

Following her words, I buried my face in the bed and closed my eyes.

Soon, I heard her hopping over on her single leg, high heel clicking.

Imagining her teetering like that made me anxious that she might fall.

— Plop.

Fortunately, she didn't fall and managed to reach the bed.

I was just starting to wonder what sort of next course this could be, when—

— Slide.

"... Uh!?"

The Head climbed onto my back.

"W-wait!?"

"W-watch out! Don't move or I'll fall!"

"W-what are you doing!?"

"Fufu. The next present is a massage."

"A massage!?"

What head of a famous house ever personally gave their loyal retainer a birthday massage?

"T-this is too embarrassing!"

"Urgh! I-I told you to stay still, right? I'm embarrassed too, you know! So just bear with it!"

"... Ugh!"

I wanted badly to protest further, but I didn't want to shame my master.

"... Then, I'll accept this as an honor."

"Hehe. Good. Enjoy this rare treat."

— Press, press.

"....."

She started kneading my trapezius with her elbow.

"H-how is it?"

'Hmm....'

It was just ticklish.

She, too, had once been a swordswoman of the greatest level until three years ago, so she did know the proper acupressure points. However, her strength wasn't enough to stimulate my rock-hard muscles.

"It's, uh, very nice!"

But I couldn't possibly complain about a massage from the Head herself.

"See? I know where you get knots and everything."

— Press, press.

Her touch traveled from my shoulders down my back to my waist.

"Haa...."

Maybe she was using up a lot of strength, because as she leaned harder into my broad back, her breathing grew more labored.

"... Don't overdo it."

"Overdo it? Don't underestimate me, okay?"

"... I'm sorry."

I blurted it out without thinking and regretted it.

Just three years ago, she had been famed as the world's best swordswoman, yet I had unconsciously treated her as weak.

I had slighted my own Head's honor.

— Slide.

As I was lost in self-reproach, suddenly her breathing grew closer.

"... Uh!"

And almost at the same time, I felt her chest press against my back.

"...!"

I froze, body tense, but didn't let it show.

It had to be an accident.

I didn't want to make things awkward by calling attention to it.

How could I dare be so disrespectful as to act like it meant something?

I should just quietly let it pass—

— Slide.

"... Gasp!"

Her distinct warmth was unmistakably upon my back.

No mistake.

She was lying flat on top of me.

'What is this...'

Just then, as I tried to wriggle free—

"Stay still, please."

She whispered in a trembling voice.

"....."

Whether this was a master's command or just a personal request, I didn't know.

Whatever it was, I couldn't refuse her words.

"Ian."

She called my name.

"... Yes, head."

"Thank you, always. ... For not abandoning me... for always protecting me."

"A-abandon you... Never."

"... You'll stay by my side from now on, right?"

"....."

I couldn't answer that.

"... You know,"

When I still couldn't reply, the Head went on.

"There are so many places I want to go with you, Ian."

Her clear, gentle voice lingered in my ears.

"There's a lake in the southern desert. The night sky you see there is really beautiful. The sky's reflection on the waters feels like floating in space. I want to show it to you someday, Ian."

"....."

That place had been turned into a poisonous swamp by the demons. There was no beautiful desert or lake left in this world.

"When I was much younger, by chance I discovered a hidden restaurant in the capital of the Loderun Empire. It was so good. I wonder if it's still there? I'd like to go back with you one day."

The imperial capital, too, had been reduced to ruins by the demons. There was no more empire or kingdom left in the world. Humanity's only stronghold was probably here.

"How about you, Ian? Is there anywhere you'd like to go with me?"

"....."

Of course.

There were plenty of places I wanted to show the Head, things I wished to share with her.

"There's a beautiful maple forest in the southeastern part of the continent. In the fall, it's perfect for walks."

That, too, had been trampled by titanic giants, leaving only rotten wasteland.

"In the cold northern mountains, there's a hot spring only I know about. A soak in the hot waters in winter feels amazing. Once you recover, head, I'd love to take you there."

That place had also been reduced to a field of molten lava...

"That would be wonderful."

There was no need to tell her—someone who still smiled while dreaming of a world that no longer existed.

"Ian."

The Head whispered in a low voice.

"Yes, head."

"... Let's run away."

"....."

"To hell with defending the stronghold or preserving humanity, let's sneak out of this fortress together, just the two of us."

"....."

"If we look, I'm sure there's somewhere we can live together. The world's huge."

"....."

"I'd be fine with a forest, or a cave, or the cold polar regions... anywhere is fine. With my powers, I can build us a warm house as many times as we want..."

"....."

"Once we find a place and build a home, then... let's have a party every day, like today. Eat delicious food every day, I'll keep giving you massages..."

"....."

"If there's anything else you want, just say the word. For you, Ian, I'd do anything."

"....."

"No matter how I dress it up, this is all I am now... covered in sores, full of scars, missing limbs... But as soon as my dantian heals, I can fix all this in no time!"

"....."

"Picture it. A few years... no, a few months from now, a much prettier me, all yours alone. Doesn't that excite you...?"

"....."

"... Ah, let's even have a child. A baby who looks like both of us... I'm sure it would be incredibly cute."

"...!!"

"What color hair would our baby have? Your gray hair, maybe? Or blond like me?"

"... Head."

"And what about eyes? Imagine—maybe a daughter with your dark eyes, or a son with red eyes like mine."

"... Head!"

".... Head, what even is that anymore."

"... Head..."

Holding my hand tightly with her one remaining hand, she whispered.

"... Call me by my name."

"... Yuria."

"Yes."

It felt, at last, like the time had come.

I'd always thought there may come a day when Yuria said these words to me.

Outwardly, we had kept up appearances as head of house and retainer, but by now, after years of living and fighting together, we were not simply master and servant.

With the fall of the once-great swordsmanship house, her title as head had become virtually meaningless.

We both knew that even now, our relationship as head and retainer was but a formality.

Of course, I had considered how I would answer if she ever asked.

"... There is nowhere to run."

The demons' goal was the extinction of humanity.

And to entirely corrupt the world into a demonic realm.

Lastly, to seize every last "Divine Authority" hidden in the world.

Demons and fiends would pursue her anywhere to take her Authority of Projection.

No matter where we hid, they'd scour every corner and find us.

Then they'd cut open her heart and steal her power.

Running away would only result in that miserable end.

"... That's why we must stand and fight here."

The final stronghold of humanity. The Andras Fortress.

Until humanity regains enough strength to strike back.

Only by holding back the endless waves of demons pouring forth from the gates to the demon realm here could humanity, and she, survive.

— BOOM!!!

"Enemy attack!!!"

As the entire fortress shook, a soldier outside shouted the alert.

The demons surrounding the fortress had finally begun their assault.

"... I must go now."

"N-no...!"

"Head."

"Don't go!"

Yuria wrapped her arms around me, holding me tightly.

But I had to go.

I forced myself to pry her away.

"Yuria..."

"Aa-ahh!"

Yuria was crying.

Tears fell thick and fast from her red eyes.

"If you go now, you'll die! You'll die, I know it...!"

"... Yuria."

I wanted to reassure her that it wouldn't happen...

But she was right.

I would die.

Outside, closing in on Andras Fortress, were the seven peaks of the demon realm, the Grand Dukes of the Seven Deadly Sins.

My mission was to stand at the very front with the last heroes of humanity and cut down at least two demon grand dukes.

'Even so...'

Throwing myself into enemy lines to die was the only chance that humanity and she might survive.

'If I can just cut down two grand dukes of the demon realm.'

It was an objective so difficult that survival was in no way guaranteed—but if I succeeded, it would give humanity tremendous hope.

By killing two grand dukes, the balance of power in the demon realm would collapse, and those greedy monsters would start devouring each other before bothering with humanity.

That would buy at least six months of time for mankind.

'If, in that time, Yuria recovers her dantian with her Authority of Projection and her god-given swordsmanship...'

Humanity would have a real chance to counterattack.

According to the priest, her dantian was nearly healed.

About four months. If we could buy that much time, she would recover enough to gather aura again.

Once her dantian recovered, she could restore her lost limbs and broken mana circuits in an instant using her Authority of Projection.

I knelt on one knee and met her eyes as she sat on the bed.

"... You have to keep getting your treatment even if I'm not here."

"W-why are you saying this now...?"

"... As long as you're alive... mankind can start over, because you hold the power of miracles."

"I told you not to go! Huh!? Tell me you're not going! Please!"

"... Listen to the priest. There will be many hard days ahead, so be strong."

"Tell me you're not going! Please...! Please! Stay by my side!"

Thank you for caring for me all this time.

"... I'm sorry."

The battle had already begun.

The sooner I rushed to the front lines, the better chance she'd be safe.

"Ian!!!"

Yuria tried to grab my sleeve, but I ruthlessly dodged her touch and stood up.

"N-no, don't go! Ian! No! You'll die! Ian!!!"

"....."

Clenching my teeth, I turned away.

And I forced my leaden legs to move toward the battlefield.

— Flop!

"Ah, ahhh! Ian! Ian!!!"

"....."

Hearing her collapse behind me, I glanced back—and instantly regretted it.

"Ian...!! Don't abandon me...! Don't leave me alone...!"

She was desperately crawling after me, dragging her broken limbs.

The last image I had of her was wretched in the extreme.

I had never wanted to part this way.

"....."

Swallowing the sobs that threatened to break free, I shut my eyes tightly and turned my back.

"Head... It has been my honor to serve you. Please, preserve your life!"

And I gave a final farewell, not as her comrade, family, or lover, but as her retainer.

I hoped dying as a retainer would at least hurt her a little less.

"Ian...! No! Ian!! Aaaahhhhh!!!"

— THUD!

I closed and locked the door so she couldn't follow.

"Ian...!!! Ian!!!!"

Ignoring the screams echoing from the room, I walked away.

Her desperate cries faded behind me.

Her crawling after me kept dancing before my eyes.

My heart felt like it was being torn from my chest, but I couldn't stop walking.

"I have to go."

To the battlefield.

For her sake.

It was time to lay down my life for the hope of humanity.

Fuck. It's the first chapter, and it's making me sad already.

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