

Chapter 12 - Mad Magician Dattol Stein

"Today is yet another day where I am completely exhausted."

"No kidding."

"But, tomorrow will be off."

"Ah, I have to work on a slightly different matter."

"Are you going to search for a pet again?"

"No, it's another job."

I've brought up the topic of tomorrow's free day with Bruno on the way back home after we finished today's hunting, but it seems like he's accepted a solo job. Candy-dono allows us to take other jobs when Twilight of Dawn has no official work. During our time as rookies he's forbidden it because of the danger of overwork, but he lifted the ban for Bruno and me a while ago.

It's been approximately one year since I've joined Twilight of Dawn. It means I've finally lost my status as a rookie.

"What kind of job is it?"

"It's nothing big. I'll be done in half a day."

"I see."

At that time I don't probe into it much further, and on the morning of the next day I spend my time reading a book about magic after sending off Bruno without a care.

"Now then, the new book I borrowed from Bruno...hmm, it is ominous how the pages are so crumpled despite it being a new book...no, it must be my imagination."

In the future I'd terribly regret letting Bruno go by himself.

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"Haa? Bruno has died!?! That is not funny."

Even though he had told me that his job would be over in half a day, Bruno never came back home on that day.

On the next day, as I was looking for him, a young priest called out to me. Once I asked him what kind of business a priest could have with me in the middle of the city, he told me that Bruno had died.

I interrogated him fervently, thinking that he was pulling my leg with a stupid joke, but his answer always remained the same. And then he led me inside a building standing all alone on the grounds of the church's headquarters.

Once we entered a room, I spotted a human figure lying on a crude bed with its whole body covered by a white cloth.

A young magician is next to the bed...and I'm surprised to see that it's Alfred-sama. I also have seen the other man in the room in the past, an elderly man wearing a priest's garb. He's scheduled to become the father-in-law of my sister Nina, and is being treated as demon and schemer in the Kingdom while still being in his fifties.

"Cardinal Hohenheim..."

"Could you confirm his identity before we hand over the remains to his family? Showing him to the bereaved family would be a bit...his face should still be okay, though."

"His face?"

What is this old geezer saying...? Even that priest had been lying around about Bruno having died or some such. It's impossible that Bruno passed away.

Thus I remove the cloth only at the face so as to curse at them for it being someone else.

"Bruno...that is impossible! There is no way that Bruno could have died!"

Why?

He should have left home to finish a simple job that would be done in half a day. And yet, why did Bruno die during such a simple job?

"Bruno! Wake up! Stop kidding around! You occasionally do things like that to startle me! I know that!"

For some reason Bruno doesn't wake up, no matter how much I shake him. The time for mischief is long over!

"I think you should quit it. Take off the rest of the cloth."

Being told so by Cardinal Hohenheim, I remove the cloth covering Bruno's body...



"What the hell is this!?"

Why does Bruno's body have so many deep cuts all over? The wounds are so deep that you can see the intestines and bones. A sharp blade...no, a powerful 『Wind Cutter』?

"Bruno told me that he had accepted a job that would be finished in half a day! So why did it turn out like this?"

Why did Bruno die?

Expressly calling me to this place means...this demon is involved in some way. And Alfred-sama as well?

"So it's Bruno after all, huh? I didn't think we made a mistake, but we had to make sure just in case. We're going to hand back the remains to his family..."

"You damn fiend! Don't put on airs, and answer me!"

Even though a person has been killed in such a gruesome way, and moreover that person being my best friend! No matter how you look at it, this has been no suicide or accident. Bruno was slaughtered! And yet...even if he might become Nina's father-in-law, this guy...!

"You're still so young. Immediately surrendering yourself to your violent emotions, huh? Don't you consider my current social status and your own sister, second son of the Earl Armstrong House?"

"Ugh..."

This guy's son is going to marry Nina...? This horrible demon! Does he intend to torture Nina?

"Did you calm down after becoming terrified?"

"I can't really appreciate how you're treating him, Cardinal Hohenheim."

"Alfred."

"I'm not so close to you that I'd allow you to call me without honorifics, you know...? It sure looks like you don't have any friends, though."

Is Alfred-sama intending to help me out here? Going by the atmosphere, these two don't seem to be on good terms at all.

"His death has been caused by your amateurish, know-it-all judgment, no? He died because of that. It's a terrible misconduct for a priest serving God. And then you shut him, who rages over his best friend's death, up with your status and authority, using his family background against him. You're a truly despicable man."

"Could you tone it down a bit. You're the magician said to be the youngest number one ever, right?"

"I don't feel overly happy to hear this praise out of your mouth."

Cardinal Hohenheim and Alfred-sama continue to glare at each other for a while, but this tense atmosphere is broken apart by the new person entering the room.

"Is this the right place to fight?"

"Candy-dono! Why are you here!?"

I had planned to tell Candy-dono about Bruno's job on his day off and him not having returned in the end after this.

"I also possess my very own information network. Bruno-chan..."

Candy-dono looks very sad after seeing Bruno's corpse.

"This boy is a member of my party. If it's pioneering or construction work using magic, I wouldn't mind him doing it during his day off, but Bruno-chan was killed by a magician. On top of that, a pretty powerful one. Did you possibly use Bruno-chan to assassinate that magician?"

Candy-dono directs his full bloodlust at Cardinal Hohenheim as if to shoot him to death. I'm used to it, but it wouldn't be strange for any amateur to faint from it.

"Indeed, I did."

So this demon can also withstand Candy-dono's bloodlust, huh? Nothing less of a fiend like him.

"A newcomer magician in the upper intermediate level? No matter how you think about it, it'd have been impossible for him to win. You, could you finally give it a rest..."

In the next instant, Candy-dono moved behind Cardinal Hohenheim so fast that I couldn't follow it with my eyes, and quietly pressed a hidden knife against his neck. I couldn't react at all.

"Alfred, don't you think that it'd turn into a major drama if he killed me here? You'd be accused of the crime as well."

"You, who have many influential enemies in the church, are in a room that's locked from the inside while not having brought any guards with you. The clergymen wishing for your death might turn this into an accident or suicide."

"So you say, but don't you think that it's the proper path as a human to save me here?"

Even though that demon hasn't any significant physical strength, he doesn't even twitch at having a knife pressed against his neck. He's a man you cannot be careless with!

"I don't think he'll do anything like that."

"Hoh, why do you think so, leader of Twilight of Dawn?"

"Oh my, for you to even know about such a paltry, little adventurer as me. Anyway, if I really had

tried to kill you, I might have been killed by him."

I see. If Candy-dono had tried to kill that demon for real, it's unimaginable that Alfred-sama would have been unable to prevent it, huh?

"You're an unpleasant man. Because you know this, you're not frightened in the least, right? Because you have no worry that you'd get killed. Do you think that you have some kind of divine protection because you're a priest?"

"Hah, don't be silly. The higher someone serving the church climbs in rank, the less they believe in things like divine protection."

"And yet you became a priest?"

"I became one despite that. I belong to a noble family affiliated with the church for many generations now. Something like God's divine protection doesn't exist, but I believe that the church is necessary to maintain the peace of this country. And yet, everyone believes in divine protection somewhere, deep in their heart. I may not be excluded from that either."

"Hm——m, I don't give a flying damn about your beliefs and thoughts. For starters, there's something we must do now."

"You're right. The state of that corpse is terrible. Returning it to his family like that..."

"Indeed. I'll help as well. You're a nice man since you properly pay attention to such things. Just like the rumors say, Alfred Reinford-san."

"The cardinal over there is the only snob in here. I'm a normal man."

"Humph, don't run your mouth as you please."

Before Candy-dono can say anything further, Alfred-sama suggests to close up the wounds on Bruno's body. He's not only a superb magician, but also a very kind man.

"I'll help as well."

"What are you scheming?"

For that rotten priest to do something that won't bring him any money, hell is going to freeze over.

"Even though you're still a young man, you've quite the shrewd way with your words, Armstrong House's second son."

"I have a name. It is Klimt Christoph von Armstrong!"

"You previously said something very rude and tasteless to him, didn't you? So you just reap what you've sown."

It sounds like Alfred-sama doesn't feel the slightest hint of kindness for him either.

"Good grief, I guess I'm heavily outnumbered in this place, huh...? I requested an underground job of Bruno-dono in absolute secrecy based on my own thoughts. Just as I had expected, he didn't mention it to anyone, and kept the details of his work hidden even from his best friend Klimt-dono. Unfortunately he failed on his mission, but that's my cross to bear. Even though the act in itself was righteous, something like God's divine protection doesn't exist. However, since he failed, I'm the one bearing the heaviest responsibility. That's why it's unthinkable for me to return such a disfigured corpse to Bruno-dono's family. That's all there is to it."

"Cardinal Hohenheim..."

"Klimt-kun, he has some slightly less objectionable parts as well." Alfred-sama says while tapping my shoulder.

Once I hear his gentle voice, it feels like my hostility towards Cardinal Hohenheim melts away for some mysterious reason.

"Anyway, we have to close up these cut wounds. I'll put him into new clothes as well."

"It is a great help that you are here, Candy-dono."

"I'm proficient at sewing, but if possible, I wanted to sew clothes suiting Bruno-chan perfectly."

We begin to close the wounds by sewing the cuts together on Bruno's body after splitting the work areas. Without feeling scared or disgusted at all, I simply focus on that work so as to alleviate Liese-jou's sadness as much as possible.

Since we've split the work among four people, it finishes after around one hour. After cleaning his body, we take off the bloodstained robe, put on new, clean clothes, and Cardinal Hohenheim prepares ice so that the corpse won't decay.

It looks like he feels responsible for Bruno's death in his own way.

"Now then, let's hear it, Cardinal. Three days ago, I told you to wait with this job for a week. So why did you assign such a dangerous job to Bruno-dono despite that? You should have known that he wouldn't be able to kill that 『Cutthroat』 with his abilities. Even if you're a layman when it comes to magic."

After we finished fixing up Bruno's remains, Alfred-sama asks the cardinal about the details. Disregarding his own advice, he calls the cardinal's responsibility into question.

"It's because there would have been more victims after a week. Besides, he was together with Edgar Tretter. I thought they would be able to win against that mass murdered as a duo."

What!? Edgar Tretter accompanied Bruno on that secret mission?

"What happened to him?"

"For better or worse, he has survived. He carried away heavy injuries, but he managed to escape

while barely alive. We immediately gave him healing, but he's probably broken at this point...there's no other choice but to leave him in the custody of the church."

"What do you mean by broken?"

Edgar Tretter! You ran back home by yourself while abandoning Bruno!? What a cowardly man who doesn't hold true to his reputation!

"Klimt-kun, no matter what you're going to say to Edgar Tretter, it'll be very likely pointless. Right, Cardinal Hohenheim?"

"Yes."

Cardinal Hohenheim curtly answers Alfred-sama.

"What are you talking about?"

"You see, even among adventurers you'll occasionally encounter such people. Edgar Tretter barely survived, but his mind has died after receiving too much of a shock."

"It's as the leader of Twilight of Dawn says. His wounds have been fully healed, but his mind is already broken. We'll try to heal him at a remote church in the countryside, but...I think it's going to be a hard endeavor. He'll probably spend the rest of his life like a living corpse."

Edgar Tretter has been the top of the magician class at the prep school, and was called a prodigy as they appear once every ten years. Yet he... Unbelievable!

"Alfred-sama."

"Certainly, he's a 『Talented Magician』, but the murderer is a 『Genius』. Moreover, the murderer is close to fifty years now. It's the period when a magician reaches his full swing. Cardinal Hohenheim, an amateur when it comes to magic, ordered the assassination by Edgar Tretter and Bruno-dono after only adding up the amount of mana. And both of them failed at it. It's your blunder, Cardinal Hohenheim."

"I have nothing to say in my defense. You're right, all of this is my fault. I ended up becoming impatient, because I didn't want more chopped-up victims to appear."

"As a result of that, Bruno-chan died and Edgar Tretter died mentally as well. Why did you panic like that?"

"I'm a corrupt priest rumored to be a plotter or demon on the streets, but I do possess a virtuous mind, at least I'd like to believe so. The idea of letting that murderer do as he pleases for even a day longer made me sick. That's all."

"I see. So you do have some good intentions, so far as it goes."

"You're saying you failed when you hurried in good will...? I understand. Also, I'll explain the circumstances to Klimt-kun since he probably hasn't understood much. I think it'd be unfair to treat

him like an outsider at this point..."

Alfred-sama has decided to give me a full explanation of what has perspired this time.

"Just as you thought, the murderer is an extremely skilled magician. Even the amount of his mana is top class among the high-ranking magicians. His alias in the underworld is Cutthroat, but his true name is Dattol Stein." Alfred-sama continues, "He became conscious of his talent in magic as soon as he reached an age where he understood what was going on around him, and fostered that ability at a good pace. Even at the prep school he was heralded as a prodigy appearing once in a decade. Moreover, he was a true genius. Within less than a year after graduating, he was apparently called the best magician rookie of that time. However, he had a huge flaw... He had a peculiarity making it mostly impossible for him to live normally among normal people. In exchange for having absolutely no interest in women, he got his sexual pleasure out of cutting up flesh. It looks like he realized it when he tore bugs apart with the magic he had just learned in his childhood. I think most people experience something like that. They'll kill bugs as a game during their early childhood."

"Well, it'd have been all fine if it had stopped at that point."

"Yes, most of the people leave it at that. After turning into adults, they reflect on why they had done something so cruel. But, he was different. Gradually he couldn't get any satisfaction out of cutting up bugs, and thus his target changed to animals when he was a prep school fledgling. During his school days, he often helped with the extermination of stray dogs and cats. There was no reason why a superb magician would accept such jobs which didn't yield any good money. No, there was one. It was the ideal way for him to release his pent-up sexual desires. The people of that time didn't realize that, thinking of Dattol Stein as a very nice person..." Alfred-sama explained.

"You investigated well to have found out so much about events from 50 years ago."

"My master looked it up for me."

"Oh my, you have someone you'd call master? Is he a decent guy?"

"Of course I do. But, please find out yourself whether he's a good guy. Dattol Stein, who graduated from the prep school, finally couldn't be satisfied with animals anymore either. He started to actively hunt down large monsters, which also became unsatisfying, resulting in him putting his hands on people at long last. Gradually the frequency of his adventurer party members going missing increased. As might be expected, the adventurer's guild became suspicious of him."

Adventurers who worked together with an excellent magician were regularly killed by monsters. Moreover, Dattol Stein, who was supposed to be such a great magician, couldn't save them nor retrieve their corpses. It's only natural that the guild would consider it unnatural for him to claim something like that.

"And then, one day, Dattol Stein failed in killing one of his party members. While heavily injured, the adventurer managed to escape to the guild, causing everything to come to light. This is how the crimes of the murderer Dattol Stein became publicly known."

"And when did that happen?"

"30 years ago."

"You're saying the adventurer's guild left a mass murderer at large for 30 years? The guards didn't step in or anything?"

"That's the troublesome part about him. A joint investigation by the guild and the guards found out that Dattol Stein had killed more than a hundred adventurers. No matter how excellent he might be as a magician, he shouldn't be able to escape the death penalty for this homicide. However, there was a person who sheltered him in absolute secrecy. Publicly they pretended that Dattol Stein had died. It was Duke Bürger, the younger brother of the previous king. He was the king of the generation before who set up the Duke Bürger House. The brother of the already dead previous king faked Dattol Stein's death, and hid him."

This means, the guild or the guards couldn't do anything.

"Moreover, Dattol Stein was normally living in the Basel Viscounty, a territory in the outskirts of the capital. Since it was outside the guards' jurisdiction, they couldn't arrest him."

Well, nobles are approved by the Kingdom, but it's difficult to meddle with the circumstances of a noble's territory. I can understand as much since my father has told me about this in the past.

"Viscount Basel had taken Duke Bürger's daughter as wife. Also, His Majesty not touching on this matter is..."

"I'll tell him the rest. There's only a few people in the Kingdom who are aware of it, so let me warn you: Don't tell anyone. I won't take any responsibility even if you die."

Just what kind of behind-the-scenes situation could it be for me possibly dying if I were to expose it?

"Duke Bürger is supposed to be the previous king's next youngest brother, but in reality they're twins. There were rumors about them resembling each other closely, but that's only natural. After all, they were twins. And Duke Bürger should have thought the following in his twisted mind: 『Maybe I'll be able to succeed the crown of this country』. Therefore he used the current and previous king's position of not being able to interfere with him easily, and tried to amass his own power. Since a duke can't own any territory, the sources of power are limited to fortune and personal connections. He repeatedly formed marriage relationships with the nobles with territories around the capital, and as for Dattol Stein, he lent him out to nobles he hadn't befriended yet or those who were connected to him through marriage. Dattol Stein is a genius who can skillfully use all magic systems, not only the ones to cut up things. He was very useful for helping in the development and maintenance of a territory."

As a reward for that, Duke Bürger took care of his life necessities while sheltering him, huh?

"On top of that, Duke Bürger accurately dealt with his fetish."

"It'd be one thing if he had only sheltered the criminal, but he even went as far as actively assisting him in releasing his sexual desires."

"He assisted him? Although not quite, he belongs to royalty, doesn't he?"

It's absolutely unthinkable that doing something so retarded would be okay!

"It might be the absolute worst to do as a person. However, when it comes to royalty and nobility, this doesn't seem to apply necessarily."

"What kind of hair-splitting is this supposed to be!?"

There's no way for me to accept such an excuse!

"In short, accepting the small evil for the greater good, I'd say. The fields increased in number, floods diminished, water issues were resolved, and bridges and roads, construction projects desired for many years, were built in the territories of many nobles thanks to Duke Bürger dispatching Dattol Stein for territorial development. It made many residents happier," Cardinal Hohenheim explains.

"But, sacrifices were necessary on a regular basis, right? I can't believe that Dattol Stein changed his way in his current lifestyle."

"Correct. Right now he's killing several people by cutting them up with his 『Wind Cutter』 once per month. Of course there's no way to use the residents of the nobles, who asked for help in their development, as living sacrifices, and thus they're being provided from the slums in the capital and similar places."

Many people who never would miss even if they were gone, live in the slums. It looks like the people of the ducal house are luring such people to their territory with the prospect of work, just to have Dattol Stein chop them up.

"And this has continued for 30 years? That's completely messed up!"

Why have the royals and nobles of the capital...no, His Majesty ignored such inhumane acts?

"Out of pity, I guess."

"Out of pity, you say!?"

"Yes. Duke Bürger is the younger twin brother of the previous king, but there are rumors that he might actually be the elder brother."

"Are those rumors true then?"

"No idea. I can't say either. It's not like I've been present at the birth of the twins. However, it's difficult to prove something like that beyond any doubt."

"A devil's proof, in other words, huh? The nobles, who are unhappy with His Majesty, would likely kick up a fuss while rallying under Duke Bürger's banner behind the scene."

"As a matter of fact, such nobles already exist. It's a complicated issue to determine who was born

first between twins."

At present, the twin born later is regarded as the elder brother in the Helmut Kingdom. The one born second being regarded to be the older twin stems from the idea that he's been deeper in the womb of the mother. In other words, he was made first and that's why he's the elder brother. However, I hear our northern rival, the Holy Urquhart Empire, regards the one born first as the elder brother. They follow the idea that the one born first was completed as human first, and thus is able to come out first.

But, several hundred years ago, the way of thinking between both countries was actually inverted, and nowadays there are still some areas left where one twin is killed upon birth as it's regarded as an ominous omen.

To sum it up, the evaluation criteria is somewhat ambiguous.

"Even if you decide the order of age by the order of their birth, you'll always find some people who'll complain about the decision. Especially when it comes to the children of a king. The birth of twins will inadvertently become a seed of trouble. Accordingly, the king, who fathered them, altered the records to set Duke Bürger as younger brother who was born one year later, and made him into a Duke so as to avoid a conflict over the crown succession."

So these particulars are the reason why the current king finds it hard to talk back to Duke Bürger, his uncle, on various matters.

"Duke Bürger himself probably feels unhappy about this arrangement and harbors ambitions towards the throne. However, he's a Duke. Since he has no territory, he's been building his own faction through personal connections, which he obtained through marriage and the involvement of Dattol Stein, and money which he can earn by lending Dattol Stein. Dattol Stein is a murderer, but he won't lay a hand on the nobles, who receive his help in the development of their territories, and those noble's residents."

"It's because Duke Bürger provides him with all the sacrifices he could need, right?"

"Correct. In the first place, Dattol Stein has no attachment to money, status, or fame. He gets sheltered, and all his necessities are taken care of during the mediated work. So, as long as they prepare sacrifices for him once a month, he'll be satisfied with that."

"For a politician, it's difficult to make a judgment in such a case. He kills several people once a month, but he's still an excellent magician and convenient for developing territories. At least Duke Bürger must be thinking that there's more advantage to keeping him around than the death of several people per month."

"While at it, he can earn good money and build some personal connections, right? So is he attached to the crown after all?"

"Who knows. I don't know his true motives. However, I can say this much: Dattol Stein should die."

Cardinal Hohenheim apparently planned the assassination of Dattol Stein who has been sheltered for more than 30 years by Duke Bürger. And because of that plan, Bruno was killed.

"That's why I told you I'd take up the mission after one week. Taking on a magician of his caliber requires preparation, and I had to handle a request I accepted beforehand. I just wanted you to wait for a bit..."

But Cardinal Hohenheim was unable to wait, sending out Bruno and Edgar Tretter...

"If I had waited, the death toll would have grown by several people again. Luckily I could get in touch with two excellent magicians. Edgar Tretter was even brimming full of confidence. I thought it'd go well."

"It's a bad example for measuring a magician's strength by just adding mana pools together... Dattol Stein is an experienced and very crafty magician. Even I would likely be an even match at most. As for Edgar Tretter...if a young man, no matter in what field he works, is constantly being praised by his surroundings, he'll get carried away and believe that no one in this world can defeat him. The conceit of the young is their downfall. This turned into a fatal situation on this occasion. Cardinal Hohenheim, usually it's the duty of elderly men like you to caution the young people about such things."

"Bruno-dono was composed despite being young. I thought that he'd hold Edgar Tretter back from doing anything reckless."

Bruno, did you accept this mission because you thought it'd be dangerous for Edgar Tretter to take it on by himself?

"Either way, the first assassination attempt failed due your careless mistake, resulting in things having becoming quite tricky for us now."

That makes sense. Dattol Stein should now be aware that someone is targeting him. Of course, the same applies to Duke Bürger who covers for him.

"The unexperienced Bruno-chan and Edgar Tretter failed in the beginning where they could take him by surprise to make the assassination more likely to succeed. If Alfred-san joins up with high-ranking magicians to attempt another assassination, the other side should immediately sniff out the danger and escape. If Alfred-san goes by himself, his chances for success are questionable."

"You're right. I have used various connections to find out that Dattol Stein is repeatedly moving around a huge forest in the Basel Viscounty. He's living in huts that have been built at various places in the forest. He's randomly moving around between them in preparation for potential assassins that might come for him one day. The people of the Duke Bürger House and the Viscount Basel House are guarding Cutthroat in the forest together. That means it's necessary to kill him after specifying the hut where he's hiding on that day while finding an opening in the surveillance network. You can say it worked out smoothly because it was the first attempt. People are weak when it comes to sudden incidents."

Having said that, only the attack on Dattol Stein succeeded. The assassination itself failed with Bruno dying in the process!

"That's what I've told you. Right now Dattol Stein and Duke Bürger should be very cautious. It's not

like Dattol Stein wasn't exposed to the danger of an assassination during the last 30 years. But, the attempts shouldn't have been that frequent either."

"True. Something like assassinating Dattol Stein is dangerous with its outcome being unknown, and on top of that, it won't become any kind of achievement either. I mean, in the end it's no more than murder."

Even if someone succeeded in killing Dattol Stein, it's impossible that they'd be able to show off that achievement with Duke Bürger being around. It'd become a life-threatening act of justice which would simply vanish silently within history.

"Why did Edgar Tretter accept the assassination mission then?"

He should be a very normal man who wishes for his reputation to suit his abilities. If he'd be unable to flaunt the success in the assassination as achievement, it should be meaningless for him to accept the mission in the first place.

"Officially it wouldn't turn into an achievement, but his evaluation for secret missions would go up among nobles, rich people, and the upper echelon of the adventurer's guild. He probably believed that he might be able to gain an assessment above that of Alfred Reinford if he combined this with his official achievements."

"Candy-dono?"

"I didn't tell this to Bruno-chan and you, Ron-chan, but...Edgar Tretter was worried."

"Even Edgar Tretter, who was the most famous magician at the prep school, was no more than a young, skilled magician after graduating. In addition, the one with highest fame among the current, young magicians is Alfred."

Hearing Cardinal Hohenheim's statement, Alfred-sama looks at him with a reproachful expression. It's only reasonable for him to do so since half of it sounds as if he's being told that they failed because of him.

Edgar Tretter failed because he couldn't properly grasp his own ability. He tried the impossible in an attempt to get assessed higher than Alfred-sama. That's all there is to it.

"Bruno, who noticed that, tried to stop him at first. However, in the end Edgar Tretter accepted the assassination mission. Unable to abandon him, Bruno decided to participate as the one to restrain him a bit, you are saying?"

"That's how it is. Even though it had been fine for Bruno-chan to just ignore someone like Edgar Tretter and turn down the mission..."

Bruno, you were a truly kind man. However, that kindness cost you your life.

"If he had refused, Edgar Tretter would have also...no, that's unlikely, I guess."

Indeed. Even without Bruno's participation, Edgar Tretter would have attempted the assassination

by himself in all likelihood. Knowing that Edfar would have no chance to win in a one-on-one, Bruno accepted the mission as well.

Bruno, you are an utter fool!

"I've understood the circumstances. So, what are you going to do about Dattol Stein? Are you going to give up on him this time as well?"

"Candy-dono, what do you mean by this time as well?"

"It's not really like the upper ranks of the Helmut Kingdom, the church, and adventurer guild are all brutes. So far they've planned Dattol Stein's assassination three times, failing each time. Last time it was a coalition of high-ranking nobles affiliated to the army who attempted it in secrecy. Ron-chan, your father participated as well. He also provided the funds."

"My father did?"

I'm hearing about this for the first time!

"You're rather well-informed, aren't you? Where did you get your hands on that information, leader of Twilight of Dawn?"

"That's a secret. Girls have many of those."

It seems like Candy-dono isn't just the leader of a famous adventurer party. Cardinal Hohenheim appears to be surprised, but Candy-dono cleverly covers for his source of information.

"Still, why haven't Dattol Stein, who is hated this much, and Duke Bürger, who is backing him, been punished yet? The problem should be solved by His Majesty punishing them."

"His Majesty is actually the problem here. He harbors complicated feelings about Duke Bürger."

"Complicated feelings?"

"No one knows the truth about the matter with the previous king. But, the number of nobles circulating speculations behind closed doors isn't low by any means. His Majesty is being doubted as well. They're asking whether Duke Bürger might be the proper heir to the crown."

I guess the king is thinking that he might trigger a state crisis as a result of cornering Dike Bürger on the matter of Dattol Stein.

"I feel like that's somewhat exaggerated, though."

"His Majesty is human as well, and thus he has things that trouble him at times. Anyway, even if he were summoned by His Majesty at this point in time, Duke Bürger wouldn't be judged. That's why

His Majesty's retainers have been trying to kill Dattol Stein in secrecy."

I guess the idea is to cut off Duke Bürger's personal connection and source of funds by assassinating Dattol Stein.

"It's not much of a help if they keep failing, though. The three past assassination attempts all ended with terrible results. At those times, remarkable, famous magicians died, allowing Dattol Stein to accumulate more and more experience and thus making him now very tough to deal with."

"It's problematic if you talk about this as if it's someone else's problem. Thanks to your failure, my first strategy has come to nothing."

"Come to nothing?"

"I was trying to somehow get other high-ranking magicians to join me in order to raise the probability of success. And now that I finally found a willing candidate, we have this situation on our hands. Dattol Stein and Duke Bürger should be on high alert now. It'll be very hard to attack them with two high-ranking magicians. Having said that, the chance for me to succeed alone has been cut down by 40%. Moreover, if I also fail..."

No other skilled magician, who could take on the assassination of Dattol Stein, would appear in the next ten years.

"You're right. Even without explicitly going on such a mission, you can happily live on while earning your money. The victims are all people of the slums, so it's not like there's any direct harm to us."

"Many nobles hate the slums, too. Some among them are covering Duke Bürger secretly, even if they're not going as far as supporting him personally."

"Even if they might be living in the slums, they are people just like us! Are you saying that it's okay for slum residents to be murdered in great numbers by a mass murderer?"

"It's certainly a terrible story, but that's what you call adult circumstances. What do you think, Cardinal Hohenheim?"

"Dattol Stein is a crazy mass murderer. I believe that it's proper to eliminate him. I don't plan to brandish some idealistic sense of justice at this point, but think about what's going to happen if this case is exposed to the public in the future. The citizen's distrust towards the Kingdom would skyrocket. I don't think that's desirable for the Kingdom."

"What do you think about the achievements of Dattol Stein then?"

"He's an excellent magician, no doubt. But, the demerit is simply too big. In the first place, the magician society is talking about prodigies as they come every few years or geniuses as they appear once in a decade every year. Even if Stein were to be gone, a new, superb magician is going to pop up soon anyway."

He's right. Counting precisely, I feel like geniuses, who are hailed to come around once in a decade,

appear every two or three years.

"Alfred, who's the other high-ranking magician?"

"As a matter of fact, it's my master, but now it's impossible for him."

"Burkhart!? Duke Bürger is already cautious of him."

"The same applies to me, but it won't be an issue as long as I act by myself. It'll be impossible for me to join up with others, though. However, although I'm a high-ranking magician, the risk is too big that I'll be defeated by Dattol Stein if I attack by myself. Therefore, I've given up on that idea. Either way, what's your take on this? It's very likely that I'll fail, but should I go anyway? Since I'm a carefree, unmarried man, I don't particularly mind dying, but please consider that no one capable of following up is going to appear for the next ten years."

Certainly, I don't believe that I or another magician will be able to kill a magician who defeated Alfred-sama.

"...This time..."

"Wait!"

"Klimt-kun?"

"I will do it together with you!"

Surely, I am still inexperienced as a magician. But, I'll act together with Alfred-sama!

"Klimt-dono, I'm sorry to be rude, but your abilities are..."

"True, it might be slightly reckless."

"Cardinal Hohenheim, Candy-dono, I would like you to let me do this!"

If Alfred-sama is with me, there should be a way to succeed with this! Besides, Dattol Stein is the murderer of my best friend!

"But, putting aside if it was Burkhart, with you who's merely an elementary magician..."

"It will be impossible to pull it off by myself, but if I group up with Alfred-sama, it can work depending on how we do this! My body is quite sturdy! I am alright going with a somewhat dangerous strategy!"

You won't know whether an assassination is going to succeed or fail by just adding the amount of mana of the participating magicians together. Alfred-sama said so himself! I'm willing to do this!

"Ron-chan, you... What do you think, Alfred-san?" Candy-dono asks Alfred-sama who's been silent on this matter so far.

He seems to be pondering about something.

"Klimt-kun, it's going to be quite dangerous. I don't know whether I'll be able to survive myself."

"Alfred-sama, your chance for survival should increase if I am with you!"

If I become a burden, I won't mind being used as a shield!

"Why do you want to participate? Revenge for your best friend?"

"Do I need any other reason? Can I call myself his friend if I cannot avenge Bruno here? That is all there is to it!"

I just want to avenge Bruno! Nothing else!

"You're saying you don't care about the victims so far or the political implications?"

"I will not say that I do not care, but right now avenging Bruno takes the highest priority for me!"

I've volunteered, following that very wish alone.

"Very well. Let me ask you for your assistance then."

"Alfred! Leaving you aside, if something happens to Klimt-dono..."

"Are you worrying about the Earl Armstrong House at this point in time? But, currently Klimt-kun has left home. Besides, the head of that family has also attempted to assassinate Dattol Stein in the past. Don't you think he'd approve of this as well?"

"..."

"What are your thoughts on this, Candy-dono?"

"I also think that it's dangerous, but I also feel like wanting to respect your will, Ron-chan. Besides..."

"Hmm?"

"I'll be troubled if you ask me for my reason, but I feel like it'll go smoothly. I guess it's what you call my intuition as an adventurer?"

"I see, intuition, huh?"

"Don't look down on a girl's intuition, okay?"

"That lowers the value of your opinion, doesn't it? Well then Klimt-kun and I will carry out the assassination tomorrow. The preparations..."

"I'll help out as well. As long as Cardinal Hohenheim resolved himself?"

"Got it, I shall get everything ready in advance."

It's decided. Alfred-sama and I will assassinate Dattol Stein.

"Seeing how it's been decided, I'll also see it to the end, Alfred, Klimt-dono."

"Pardon?"

"What?"

"If you feel like it's impossible, get away as quickly as possible. I'll handle the aftermath then."

"That's appreciated. You heard him, Klimt-kun."

"Humph! No need! We are going to kill Dattol Stein without fail!"

"How nice it is to be young. I suppose that's no line you say to someone going to assassinate a person soon, though."

This is how it was decided that Alfred-sama and I would undertake the assassination of Cutthroat Dattol Stein.