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2015年の時計塔

文: 奈須きのこ

Clock Tower 2015

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Clock Tower of 2015

Although it was something that happened often, a magus was found dead this winter.

He was the director of a small research building, and his corpse was found in the Director's Room of that exact building. The cause of death was said to be hypovolemic shock secondary to dismemberment.

Even though the crime scene suggested murder, no one visited the site since the week prior. His death was thus deemed suicide, because there was no suspect.

The incident was incomprehensible, but as a magus, meeting such an end was not surprising.

Murder that looked like suicide, or suicide that looked like murder; such was the norm in the world of magi.

The mourners had no questions regarding the death, but everyone was puzzled when the deceased was buried.

On the tombstone prepared by the deceased before his death, there were three names.

01 Summer | Suburb of London | Clock Tower Eleventh District

Under the blazing afternoon sun, I squinted my eyes as I walked these old streets. The English climate was drier than that of Japan. Since the humidity was low, one did not get sweaty or uncomfortable despite the sunshine.

I took off my coat and headed to my destination with a map in hand.

The street was made of bricks and stone.

The buildings from the 12th Century were well-preserved, creating a juxtaposition of the Medieval and the modern.

The town consisted of over 40 student dormitories (called Colleges), over a hundred research buildings, as well as the business districts that supplied the residents.

This was the birthplace of the Magic Association; the centre of the modern world of magecraft; the Mecca of mages.

It had been a few years, I again walked into the city that inspired fear and awe --- "The Clock Tower".

"From here it's Rocks Road... The Eleventh Department really earned their name as the weakness, there's nothing on the streets. It certainly fits the impoverished lifestyle of the archaeologists."

The Clock Tower divided the city based on faculty and department. The architecture varied depending on the district.

The Magic Association divided mysticism into 12 domains. In other words, this city reflected the specialties of each faculty.

The Twelve Faculties were ruled by the Twelve Lords.

The twelve domains of mysticism included the critical General Fundamentals (encompassing basic knowledge, leyline studies, and mana studies), which was

designated as I, as well as Individual Fundamentals (II), Necromancy (III), Geology (IV), Zoology (V), Anthropology (VI), Botany (VII), Astronomy (VIII), Creation (IX), Curse (X), Archaeology (XI), and Modern Magecraft Theories (XII). These were the directions which dictated the ways of the magi.

Although Policies was the 13th item and was open to those who wish to pursue politics, it was a social science rather than a discipline in the pursue to mysticism.

As a result, it was not included in the Twelve Faculties.

The majority of the magi studied General Fundamentals for about 5 years (which included common magical knowledge, sympathetic magecraft, contagious magecraft, leyline studies, and mana studies), and then enter the Faculty that was associated with the lineage. Magi might also enroll in other Faculties as associates to help further his studies in his own Faculty.

My Faculty was Astronomy.

Although the Faculty was generalized as Astronomy, it included divisions such as Astrology, Planetology, and Divinity. It was rare to run into other magi who studied the same courses as myself.

Also, there was great unity within each dormitory (College). If an outsider stepped into the college, it was not uncommon for interpersonal conflicts to evolve into inter-college wars.

However, I never resided within the Clock Tower, so I was not territorial. Right now, I was just walking around the Rocks Road College.

If this was the college of a major Faculty (that of the Barthomeloi associates), then I would already be surrounded by private police. Rocks Road was an area distant from the power struggles of the Association, so such danger did not exist.

The people here were a group of pure academics who studied archaeology and nothing else. They were not the kind to arrest me and cause quarrel.

"Oh, here we are. Sir Flauros' research building.

Ooo, it was bigger than expected. He must have found a powerful backer."
After arriving at my destination, I began to survey the building standing in the garden on the other side of the fence.

I expected a small house, but here was a mansion larger than 200-tsubo. To a Japanese such as me, it looked like a small castle.

"He probably had co-researchers. If he had a workshop of such magnitude, he must be quite successful. Why would something like this happen ----"

I swallowed back the inauspiciousness I was about to utter.

The plaque on the gate said "No Visitors Before the End of the Month".

The mansion was surrounded by a tall fence.

I cleared my throat, adjusted my glasses, and pressed the door bell with lady-like elegance.

02 The Record of Leiv Uvall

-----The purpose of a magus' life was to serve the past.

It was afternoon in the laboratory.

Buried in a mountain of measuring apparatus and recording paper, Leiv Uvall was still perusing records of the past.

Leiv's job in this residence was a researcher.

He was a German male of Aryan descent. He hunched his long torso like a cat and paced back and forth in the cluttered room.

Although he was mocked as "research fanatic" or "the indoor chairman", he was in fact a prodigy who drew attention by attaining the Fourth Rank (read as: Fes) at the young age of 20.

In the subsequent 20 years, Leiv hid himself in the Eleventh Faculty (Rocks Road) and quietly performed his duties.

"Director, you've been invited by the Head of the Division this morning. It seems like he has important matters to discuss and requests your attendance. What do you think sir?"

The sound from the speaker in the laboratory was that of a nubile woman.

It was the voice of Leiv's secretary and caretaker. Leiv nervously scratched his head, and spoke seriously to the speaker:

"I don't have time for that, Ms. Norwich! Cancel all my external affairs. Such leisure activities are not something I can afford. All matters pertaining to myself will only be addressed on the last day of each month, and only during the four hours between evening and bed time. How many times do I need to repeat this!?" "But, but this time it is the Dean himself. It is such a great honour --"

"I don't care. Why don't you chase him away by feeding him those awful pies of yours! Furthermore, isn't the Dean a creature of urban legend who doesn't even

show up for school entrance ceremony? I stayed at the Clock Tower because of the promised unbridled freedom, yet these meaningless social occasions are growing more numerous year after year. This was contrary to what was advertised!"

"I agree completely, but you got to realize that such is life."

"Maybe for the normal men! For a social exile such as I, there's nothing to discuss with the rest of the world! Anyways, cancel it for me, and try your best not to bother me. At least for today, or the next 10 hours, just stop bothering me!"

"Yes sir. I will tell that to the Head of the District."

The speaker went silent.

Leiv sighed as he read the records in the grimoire. The disturbing part was, during the previous conversation, his eyes never stopped scanning the tome.

"Ahhh, the life of a magus is so brief. It would have been great if I were born with just the brain and nothing else."

Like what you just saw, Leiv was a pure academic magus.

All his efforts were poured solely into his theory and magecraft.

He cared naught of any other responsibilities, the application of his magecraft, his lineage, or building his faction.

From Leiv's perspective, those magi were the same as the plebians that were "normal people".

If one were to decipher the mystical, then he must sacrifice his humanity.

A magus was a creature with nothing but magecraft on his mind. There was no room for burdens such as "life".

To a magus, deciphering a grimoire was not just a matter of comprehension. It was for recreating a Mystery from eras past, and then redefining its meaning in the current era.

It was like translating Shakespeare into modern English.

If deciphering a page of the grimoire took an hour, then a five-hundred-page tome would take 20 some days. In the research building, there were 500 grimoire awaiting to be read. On average Leiv could read about 12 per year. It would take 4 to 5 years to finish reading all the tomes.

No, if that were the case, it would be a simple matter. Reading grimoire one by one was even easier.

However, Leiv Uvall's duty was not "deciphering a certain grimoire", but "deciphering a System". He must digest all concepts and comprehend all the interrelated phenomena.

If grimoire A and grimoire B had conflicting views on a certain item, then the content of A must be reviewed.

The more grimoire he read, the more time he needed to redefine concepts. The number was astronomical.

Of course, the cause of Leiv's grief was not "exhaustion from reading for so long". Rather, he was disgusted by the briefness of his life, which fell short of the time required to comprehensively analyze all the tomes.

"Short. O so short. My one life time will not suffice!"

Magecraft did indeed offer methods that slowed ageing or temporarily restored youth.

However, through these methods, one could only on average extend life to the orders of centuries. Even magi could not escape death.

They thus transferred their wishes to their descendants. The reason that magi raised offspring at all was to allow their children to inherit the unfulfilled wishes.

According to the sayings in the world of magi, a magus could only devote all of his effort to research until he was 50. After that, his life should be spent raising an heir... in other words, the "next runner".

"No. No, I don't want that. They neither have the talent nor will. Furthermore, I can't place my trust in my descendants. My duties can only be fulfilled by me... !" Leiv thus would not waste such time.

Even though his one life time was not enough, he still selflessly dedicated himself to research. To the observer, his determination was almost tragic. He was a fool who struggled to pursue his wish, despite its impossibility and futility.

"Ahhh, if only I had a body double, maybe I could then live a little!" Unconsciously, this had become Leiv's mantra.

"... I don't feel that way. You don't want to pass your duties to your heir because you want to keep the joy all to yourself."

"-----Mm"

There was a friend who thusly argued again Leiv's mantra.

The pace of Leiv's nonstop reading slowed.

The only thing he remembered from his time as a student, was eating lunch with her.

"Sorry to bother you, Director. Do you have a minute?"

"Wh, what!?! I am busy! I wasn't distracted at all!"

"Oh. There is an unfamiliar guest coming to visit, should I send her away?"

"Of course. Especially that I don't even know this person. I already sent the Dean away, you think I would waste time on some guy who didn't even make an appointment?"

"I just want to be sure. So the same as usual ---"

"Ah, wait. I want to be sure too. Who is this barbarian that did not even make an appointment? What is the name?"

"Ah. She calls herself Miss Aozaki. I never heard of such a person. Let me send her packing immediately."

"---- no, wait. I am coming! Invite her into the living room, no, the Director's Room! I will get changed and be there immediately! Listen, be courteous, and brew a pot of red tea! Oh, and don't you bring out your pies!"

Leiv rushed to the room next door and put on the suit that he had not worn in years.

He brushed his messy hair, took a deep breath, and walked out of the hallway.

His was nervous about meeting an old friend whom he had not seen in years, but he was also bursting with anticipation. His reminiscence just a while ago must be a sign.

Aozaki. The name of the only person that Leiv considered a friend.

She was designated for Sealing, and became a target of the Department of Execution. Not mentioning the Clock Tower, she risked her life by just setting foot in England. He had not heard about her in years. True talent induced jealousy even amongst your own kind.

Leiv thought he would never see her again. Now she unexpectedly returned to the Clock Tower and showed up at his door!

Just to clarify any misunderstanding, Leiv was incapable of love.

He was happy purely because a friend with similar thoughts and skills was visiting.

He was restless because he was looking forward to discussing magecraft with her in great length and details. Leiv had no experience to comprehend such luxuries as love.

"Welcome! It's been a while, your precision didn't drop, Miss Aozaki?"

Of course not! Welcome to Rocks Road! I am happy to see you!"

Leiv quickly knocked on the door of the Director's Room before opening it.

In the Director's Room, stood a woman barely 25 years old. She turned her head while taking off the trademark glasses like removing a nuisance. The woman smiled at Leiv.

"Hi~ Sorry to bother you, Mister Director. It happened so suddenly, but I ran out of travel fund. Can I borrow some cash?"

"It, it's the younger sister, noooooooooooooooooooooo!!!!!"

The 40 year old kicked the chair away like a child.

Leiv Uvall's dream dissolved before him even before nap time.

TS Note : Here start's Leftover's TL (it is continuation)

Miss Aozaki wore travel clothes

A plain t-shirt and worn out jeans. Long black hair that fell freely down her back. No makeup to bring out her femininity or a need to overdress.

And yet what struck one about this extremely charming woman was her cool aura and lovely figure.

A princess who casually went off on an adventure before her coronation.

That was Leiv's impression when he first saw her.

It was a thought that had not changed even 10 years after, unaffected by the passage of time.

"...My apologies, that was a childish outburst. Still, what is with those glasses. I understand your sentiment but I don't appreciate you imitating your sister."

"It's just a disguise though? I'm feeling so attacked right now."

"Is that so. Did you think you could pass yourself off with a pair of glasses? As always you fail in self-assessment. Take a cue from your sister's refinement and meticulousness."

"So should I imitate her or not?" Miss Aozaki pouts petulantly. In true sibling fashion, the gesture brought to mind the sister that Leiv had been expecting.

Although the sisters were polar opposites in their characters and ways of life, physically speaking the similarities were many, to the point that if you broke them down to little pieces and reassembled them you would once more end up with the exact same form.

"Regardless, why are you here? You should be aware that I dislike you. Ahh, but I believe that you've run out of travel funds. Lack of foresight would be characteristic of you, after all."

"The matter of pocket money is only incidental. Right, I'm actually surprised as well. When I heard that you're alive at the reception desk I thought, huh, that's not what I've heard."

"...me being alive is not what you've heard?"

"Right. Weren't you dead? I was notified with a letter and all. I was in the area so I dropped by to give my condolences and here you are alive and well."

Ahh, once again Leiv felt dizzy.

Not once venturing outside in however many years as Director had given rise to such rumours. How much more comfortable it would be if he could turn into a labworm, he sighed.

"It's a persistent rumour, nothing to take seriously. Who would send you a letter if I was dead in the first place?"

"Hm. Well, that's true."

Miss Aozaki replied while picking up a chess piece from the desk.

"You seem unconvinced. Fine, then let us check just to be sure. It's possible that I may have died and become a wraith without realising it. There is a mirror over there. Well? Is my figure reflected? See, a wraith's wouldn't but it looks like mine is, no?"

"Ah, so it is. Which is to say, you're obviously in good health. I'm relieved too. Though this turned out to be a huge waste of time."

"Good. I have only ill feelings towards you but I hold your sister in great affection as a colleague. Out of respect for her I will cover your return ticket. Is cash okay?"

"Enough to cover dinner is fine. That aside--are you still going on, decyphering?"

At Miss Aozaki's question, Leiv Uvall felt an unease he could not put into words.

She had shown no interest in his research to begin with.

Leiv did not acknowledge her methods at all either.

From their first meeting the two of them could not understand each other.

And yet why was she asking such a question at this point?

"If I'm not mistaken, your research aimed to measure the past?"

"That is correct. Unlike you, it is decidedly standard archaeology. Locating relics, examining them, and interpreting them in modern terms. Gathering evidence and putting together hypotheses on how things must have been until there is no room for debate. Archaeology is a discipline that accurately reconstructs and brings messages from the past back to life. It's the same with astronomy. When you observe the vastness of space, do you not measure distance using the light from the past?"

"It's actually the opposite. The only way to perceive the present is by observing the light from hundreds of millions of light years away. Because for current technology it's safer to rely on 'something that has existed in the past'."

"Ahh, then that is fine. Humans cannot even grasp the present, let alone the future. The only thing certain is the past. By receiving the records of the past we can ascertain 'why the present is here' and change it. The future is something like the answer column of a test; a blank space waiting for someone to fill it out. Worthless in itself, what matters is only the person who fills it."

Leiv Uvall's life was dedicated to filling that blank space.

Accurately receiving guidance from the past and disseminating it into this era.

Reproducing the world of the past and its rules in the present day.

That was Leiv's research. The unshakeable conviction that he had held since he was born.

"My research continues as always. Recording a past that has definitely existed, what I leave behind is my life. Beyond that———the future after the 22nd century is unworthy of consideration. After all, that would have nothing to do with me."

"Ah right, I remembered. That was why we got along terribly - me being more future-minded. I'd said something like, whether you skip over hundreds of years at a time in previous human history like you're playing Daruma otoshi^[1], the destination is similar."

"That is correct. You inherently look only towards the future. Although you're very popular with neophiliac magi, to me you're nothing short of a plague. I don't even want to imagine wasting my time for the sake of the future."

"It's the difference between making a heap until you end up reaching the sun and building from the ground up in order to reach the sun. That said, the fact that both are barbaric acts doesn't change."

"Is seeking after the truth barbaric?"

"In terms of exposing whatever is not known to you, it is."

She had a point there. A researcher's tenacity isn't because patience is required in their experiments but a result of their own stubbornness.

They never forsake their personal convenience. Their vehemence is like that of a zealot.

"...Hmm. Then I'm discounted as a researcher, as I am different. Delicate, not at all tough, and I can't bear to think about the future. Not even about my own circumstances. I simply cannot live in any other way."

His words spoke of his own shortcomings.

And yet Leiv was smiling.

Not in self-deprecation, but complete contentment in his own inhuman way of life.

She stared dumbfoundedly at such a face as that.

"Or rather, one that's having too much fun. Though you're definitely my exact opposite and I have my doubts about your research direction, seeing such an expression I can't really fault you. I came here in a tizzy because of a strange letter but it seems I shouldn't have worried."

Miss Aozaki returned the chess piece she had been playing with to the desk and made to leave the Director's room.

"How odious. What expression would that be?"

"The one I'm looking at right now. Really, it's because your words and your feelings don't match. From the looks of it you'll be working as long as you live, and you probably won't die until your research is complete."

"I wonder. Well, it may be so. Working as long as I live has a nice ring to it. Therein lies salvation. Yes, if that were to happen then come and leave me flowers someday. Consider it payment for lunch."

Shrugging his shoulders, Leiv walked out side by side with her to the cafeteria, and—

"But if you come again make sure to give your full name. If I had known the younger sister was the visitor, I would have at least treated you to tea."

--he spoke of an improbable future.

03 Autumn | Suburb of London | Clock Tower Eleventh District

Under the muted midday sunlight, I squinted my eyes as I walked these nostalgic streets.

I had gone for a casual look with flashy sunglasses and a long wig.

Having left my coat in the car I felt a little chilly in just a shirt.

It'd help that in a little while the sunlight would get stronger, but unfortunately my free time did not extend past the morning.

This was my second time visiting Rocks Road College. The mansion where the person I'd be meeting was hadn't changed since last time.

It was a time of intimate conversations, but that wouldn't be the case now. I would leave the flowers and be done with it.

"It can't be helped that I'm late. Rather, I'm still pretty early considering I'm like a fugitive returning to her prison."

When it was reported that he had died several months ago I was in the middle of shaking off a pursuer from the Clock Tower.

After confirming that they had lost me I snuck into England by sea, snapped up a Cobra^[1] that I ran across, and blazed through the highway to Rocks Road. By the way, I'm very glad that, unlike Japan, there are no tolls here.

The Clock Tower isn't after me because they hate me. On the contrary, I'm being chased because I am too highly regarded.

Given a special treatment that promised a worry-free life if I stayed, there would be no freedom in being confined to a single place no matter what they said, not that they could be trusted in the first place.

That was why I became a wanderer, leaving behind my numerous friends in the Clock Tower and only returning to this town many years later.

At any rate, the college atmosphere was very enjoyable.

The Eleventh District's, Rocks Road's atmosphere in particular.

"If only there were no Lords this place would be pretty liveable, pointless though it is to hope. They're even more stubborn than the vampire knockoff that's been running the Clock Tower for nearly a thousand years. Ah, but wasn't El-Melloi ruined? And I've heard the Mineralogy top brass have changed too."

While the Magic Association was founded in the 2nd century this town is said to have been established in the 12th.

The ones that offered the land, funded the city's construction and are still bankrolling it are the twelve magi families known as its monarchs. As the ones that manage the safeguarding, concealment, and decline of mystery in the modern era, it would be no exaggeration to call them the rulers of the magical world.

For convenience's sake there exists a Director above them - the founder of the Association - but he stays cooped up at the heart of the Clock Tower and rarely ever shows his face.

The Magic Association is divided in three institutions.

The Clock Tower here in London, the Sea of Estray in the North Atlantic, and Egypt's Atlas Mountains.

While equal in scale, many currently consider the Clock Tower to be synonymous with the Magic Association itself.

Regarding magecraft from the Age of Gods as supreme and scorning its Common Era counterpart as child's play, the Sea of Estray is currently engaged in a cold war with the Clock Tower.

Having no connection with the outside world to begin with, not even light can penetrate into the "living abyss", the Giant's Pit - Atlas Institute.

To belong in these two means to abandon the current era.

No one sees themselves eagerly becoming a relic of the past. As a result, ninety percent of all Western magi enroll in the Clock Tower.

This trend can no longer be reversed. If the Clock Tower ever were to fall from the center of the magical world it would virtually spell its demise on a global scale.

What's more, centuries of ideological conflict among the Lords has split them in two factions on the brink of internal strife.

"Well, not that I'm complaining if it's just the leaders that change. At the end of the day, this is an ideal environment as far as a researcher is concerned."

Compared to the anachronistic Sea of Estray, this place was full of new theories.

For me it was still a treasure trove of mysteries and romance.

Everyone has their own impression of the Magic Association.

For freelancers unaffiliated with the Association it's an authority structure embroiled in internal struggles, while fledgling magi yearn for the academic city that can fulfill their dreams of research and future prosperity, which the veterans absorbed in their research take as a fact of everyday life, insofar as being able to share in its facilities is convenient.

"Ah, here it is. Mister Flauros' research building. As always his garden is well looked after.....eh? Is it really being looked after...?"

In other words, did people even live in here...? The plaque on the gate read "No Visitors Before the End of the Month".

The mansion was surrounded by a tall iron fence.

Throwing the suitcase I held to the other side, I descended into the depths of the garden with lively steps.

04 The Record of Reinol Gusion

———The life of a magus is dedicated to the future.

It was a clear morning in the laboratory. With his daily routine over and done with, Reinol Gusion returned home whistling merrily.

A desk with a laptop on it, a fridge full of beer, and a big sofa used in place of a bed. That was all there was in the room. It's simple furnishing brought to mind an exhibition sample rather than a laboratory.

Reinol was a researcher residing in this mansion.

He was a German male of Aryan descent, thin and tall with rough mannerisms. From his wild expression and behaviour some people mistook him for the research building's bouncer. Not unreasonably, as Reinol was overall a confrontational and dynamic magus.

Upon hearing that a new magical theory had been developed in the West he would rush off and confront its creator. Upon hearing that a new leyline shift had occurred in the East he would rush off and stake his claim for the right to use it.

"These resources are wasted on you chumps."

He was denounced as a predatory and acquisitive magus in the Clock Tower for snatching up people's research and property under such pretenses. It was a complete misunderstanding of Reinol's real intentions, which were hard to explain to others. In truth, Reinol himself couldn't explain why it was so fun to shut down other people's enterprises and then legally acquire them. At times he was convinced he never would.

"Rather, I'm telling ya it's fine as long as there's a future ahead. I'm done with stupid shit like preserving tradition and the status quo. I guess money and the like is my stake in that future."

He opened the fridge with a curse, pulled out a beer bottle, and drank it in one gulp with relish. It was a small reward for his overnight struggles but that much was enough of an expense. For him, the smaller the cost of "the present" was, the better. A money-grubber, he recklessly squandered it on various expenses, almost none of which were for himself.

Most accomplished magi were eccentrics, and Reinol Gusion was one such person. Even though he was a diligent magus, in his private life he was the very image of a reckless youth. He was deservedly shunned as a scoundrel, and as a result he had many business partners but not a single friend.

"Nah, I don't need 'em. It's not like I'm lonely. There isn't even anyone I'd want to be friends———"

No, there was one, Reinol amended in the dreary room. There was a single aesthete who understood and was interested in Reinol's life's work.

A magus from a Far Eastern island country.

A good-natured person that denounced the evils of man wholeheartedly.

The woman who had picked a fight with the Association armed only with a suitcase, her shining hair streaking like a comet as she declared herself the strongest on the planet, had certainly stuck in his memory.

"Judging from her looks she's one foxy woman. If she turns out to be a virgin I'll laugh my ass off. If it were me I'd complain about not getting to do any X-rated stuff."

The lips that spewed those words were drawn in a grin. For the duty-driven Reinol it was a rare pleasant memory.

"Welcome back, Director. A fine morning to you. It's a bit sudden, but we've received an invoice and a demand for apology from the Department of Mineralogy. They're asking for an explanation about the excavation facility that you damaged the other day," a lively female voice resounded from the laboratory's speakers.

It was the voice of Reinol's secretary and caretaker.

"Seriously? I even snuck in through the back door, how the hell did you notice? Is there a camera in here?"

"I've rigged a lamp on my desk to turn on when that fridge opens, what of it?"

How clever of ya, Reinol spat out and flopped onto the sofa.

"It's your job to deal with the complaints. What else is a secretary good for? Listen, I'm gonna sleep. I'll definitely sleep today. It's been a week.....no, two weeks? Wait, is it three weeks? Anyway, I've got so many things to do I haven't had any

real sleep. Somehow I found two hours of free time so lemme go off to dreamland just this once."

"Sigh. But what if they're also seriously angry just this once? Even if I handle the negotiations, would you at least consider the possibility of showing up as your utmost gesture of goodwill?"

"I ain't got no goodwill for a lot that exploited kidnapped brats as a workforce. Just go with the usual. If we told them it's all on my secretary then things should work out peacefully, yeah?"

"I see, playing dumb it is. I shall handle them that way. If the matter is left to my discretion, would it be agreeable for the mystic codes that you stol- no, acquired, to be placed in my care?"

"Fine, fine. I've already forwarded the important stuff, I'll send ya the rest. Now I'm gonna sleep. I'll get up at the usual time so have the tea ready for then. And throw in those infernal pies of yours as usual, will ya?"

"Pies as sweet as heaven, understood."

The voice from the speaker fell silent. Reinol let out his breath in annoyance and closed his eyes.

A weightlessness as though floating in space, or perhaps like a plunging roller coaster in the grip of gravity. Though both were apt comparisons, he still remained conscious in his exhaustion.

"...what the hell, I can't even sleep properly. A magus' life's just too long. There's so many things to do I ain't even got time to nap. Shit, am I just gonna work like a horse 'til I'm dead?"

Resigning himself, Reinol sprang up from the sofa and sat at the desk for his next project.

Click-click, the keys softly resounded.

On his desk was a laptop, and he went over the freshly updated grades of the newcoming students which were displayed on the screen. It was his daily routine to find those among them that held promise, examine their background and present condition, and determine whether there was value in aiding them.

There are many magi in the Clock Tower whose talents are squandered merely because of a lack of funds. That is even more so for newcomers, who are always in search of a patron.

On the pretext of an assignment Reinol offered such students problems to solve, covering the expenses necessary to that end; the point being that randomly disseminating his research would indirectly foster a successor.

Blessed with neither family nor apprentices, Reinol chose to enact his succession by releasing his legacy into society.

Since long ago magecraft - the study of thaumaturgy - has been an expensive pursuit, a threshold that those without wealth could not cross, but this issue was somewhat alleviated at the start of the 20th century. The reason for that was the recognition of Modern Magecraft as the twelfth Department.

Modern Magecraft is a faculty that aims to summarise the thaumaturgy of the past centuries as a broader, shallower, more general magecraft that is "easier to use". Freely discussing and evaluating magecraft, even uploading images of it at times, it truly is a field for a new generation adapted to modern society, without the support or approval of the Lords.

The implicit assumption that "the gates of the Clock Tower are not open to lineages of less than five generations" was shattered by the establishment of the Department of Modern Magecraft. Thus many newcomers who had previously toiled in obscurity knocked on the door of the Clock Tower, and the city of magical academia recaptured its heyday of activity.

The fact that El Melloi II, who is considered the foremost of the new generation's leaders, became the Department Head of Modern Magecraft could also be seen as a sign of the times. Regardless, the degree of conflict between the new generation that "traced back a century or so at best" and the noble magi who "had more than ten centuries of history behind them" goes without saying.

The new generation is just a labour force, nothing more than drudges turning the gears of the Clock Tower's economy...such is the opinion of the Lords.

Reinol also assents to that, but talent knows no rank; to a magus, what must take precedence is the thesis rather than the pedigree.

The duty born within oneself.

Fulfilling a meaning that they themselves create.

It is for that purpose that the Clock Tower—that a magus exists.

History this and lineage that - Reinol Gusion felt that wasting time talking about such bygone things was in itself a blasphemy against the founding fathers of magecraft.

"Grooming a successor is a magus' duty. Twenty-five years are enough for my own research. That's when my abilities peak anyway. After that it's a waste of effort. Past that point a man's gotta relinquish his time to the future."

Reinol didn't start prioritising the future because he grew old. As far back as he could remember his only task had been to observe the future.

The past was just a foundation. The present was just a transient dream. A magus must aim only at the future.

"It's a laugh that I'm sitting here in Archaeology. Me, who doesn't give a toss about relics of the past and would rather wipe them all out. But what can I do, that's where measuring instruments are the cheapest to use after all!"

That had eventually become Reinol's stock phrase. And yet.

"...I don't think that's it. You hate the past because you know that learning the truth inevitably changes things. You treasure the future because it's something that you cannot change, right? Honestly, men are romantic to a fault."

"_____"

It must've been because of the memory from earlier.

His lips relaxing once more, Reinol went back to choosing his new investments and sending the introductory emails.

"Apologies for interrupting your Daddy-Long-Legs[1] impression, Director. Is this a good time?"

"The hell it is. I told you not to wake me up before noon, didn't I? You sure came back early anyway!"

"Taxi fare was included in the expenses. By the way, there is a guest waiting in the lobby. Since her shameless look matches yours, shall I have her wait at the usual storage room?"

"A female visitor? Probably made an appointment, not that I remember. I'll deal with her when I wake up so leave her in whichever empty room works. At worst, even if I oversleep, I'll still wake up before nightfall."

"Understood, same as usual it is. I was making sure just in case. Well then———"

".....wait a moment. I'll also ask just in case. You haven't raised an eyebrow even at a topless woman before, so what the hell kinda look do you call shameless? Well, whatever. What's her name?"

Could it be a nudist or something?

"About that. How do you read this noun, I wonder. Japanese really is difficult."

"If you can tell it's Japanese you should already know. What're ya acting coy for, huh?"

"This is just a guess, but it would be possible to read this as 'Miss Aozaki'."

"———show her to the Director's Room right now. Then you'll bugger right off to Mars or wherever, and you won't come back for at least half a day, you hear me!?"

Reinol bolted upright from his chair and rushed into the next room. He rinsed his sleepless, zombie-like face with cold water, arranged his hair, and relied on his memory to put on a shirt that matched her taste. Just for a moment he even considered a plan to go outside and pick out a complete outfit instead before changing his mind, thinking that in those thirty minutes she could very well disappear. She was a woman that drifted as free as a butterfly, after all.

As a result, he cut a dreary figure as he ran down the hallway. His face was filled with anxiety and the almost overflowing anticipation of meeting an acquaintance after several years. Perhaps the previous memory had been a sign from heaven.

Miss Aozaki. That was the only other name that existed for Reinol Gusion. She was an exceptionally unusual magus, a free spirit that belonged to no organisation and was shunned by all.

Although she wasn't wanted as a criminal, quite a few people were trying to make a name for themselves by taking her down. In fact, whenever she visited the Clock Tower she never once left in peace without an incident.

"I'm never coming back to such a rowdy city."

It had been several years already since she spat out those words and laid waste to the Sealing Designation division. The woman he thought he'd never see again had returned to the Clock Tower, and on top of that she came to visit him of her own accord!

Just to clarify any misunderstanding, Reinol was incapable of love. What he felt was a kind of pure passion, a determination to definitely win her over this time. After all, he had exhausted his capacity for something as human as love long ago.

"Yo! It's been a while but you're rocking as always, Miss Aozaki! No, I can tell even without looking, I'm sure you rock even harder than before! Speaking of which, welcome to Rocks Road! Coming to me for a favour, is it okay to feel flattered that you're giving me a last chance?"

Reinol opened the door of the Director's Room without even knocking.

In the daily cleaned but never used room stood a dignified woman in her mid-twenties. Turning around, she pulled the long-hair wig from her head and greeted Reinol with a smile.

"Good morning. It's been quite a while, Longshanks. My congratulations for your Directorship, belated as they are. Now, I know it's a bit sudden but I've used up my travel fund, and I was wondering if you could possibly lend me some money?"

"It's, it's the older sister, god dammiit!!!!"

The forty year old kicked the chair away like a child. The last chance that Reinol Gusion had dreamed of vanished even before night-time.

Chapter 5 left to translate