

Chapter 1 Part 4



Led by Selvas, Reid and Elria were guided into the castle. There, they entered a magnificent hall adorned with dazzling decorations and designs. It was likely originally used as a place where the upper echelons of society, such as nobles and wealthy merchants, gathered, or as a venue for private celebrations by members of the royal family.

After being solemnly led into such a place—

"—This is the first *'Battle to Determine Who Loves Elria More'!*!"

As Princess Chris declared loudly, the venue erupted with cheers and applause. It was a truly lively scene.

The people gathered in the venue were not dressed in formal attire or courtly garments. Some were even wearing plain clothes, and among them were individuals in work uniforms, such as serving staff. They were probably the people working within the castle.

Most of the castle's staff and soldiers seemed to have gathered there, as many people in the venue were enjoying themselves with food and drinks in hand. Moreover, an elaborately constructed grandiose tiered gallery was clearly prepared.

While standing on that tiered gallery, Reid spoke to Princess Chris, who was seated next to him.

"...Princess Chris, what is this about?"

"I already mentioned it earlier, didn't I? It's the *'Battle to Determine Who Loves Elria More'.*"

"Not that, but why are so many people gathered here?"

"We actually had plans to hold a party for the castle staff as a way to show our appreciation. So, as part of the entertainment, I invited you and Elria and took care of the planning and preparations."

"...As outsiders, Elria and I are supposed to be part of the entertainment?"

"Yes. Elria has been coming in and out of the royal castle since childhood, and those who have long served within the castle know her well. When someone like Elria suddenly gets engaged, it's only natural for people to be curious about her fiancé, don't you think?"

said Princess Chris, surveying the assembled crowd.

Indeed, it seemed that many gazes were directed toward Reid.

"You will also become part of the distinguished Caldwen family from now on. It's a good opportunity for others to become aware of the character and personality of the person who will stand above them."

Coming from a rural commoner background, with unclear abilities and an unknown identity, there would undoubtedly be some people who feel uneasy about someone like Reid marrying into the prominent household that has supported the country.

That was why Princess Chris thought it was necessary to make Reid's character known not only to the people and mages of the academy and a select few from the upper echelons of society but also to the people within the castle who are closer to the general population.

"We have already investigated you. Your behavior and reputation in your hometown and within the academy, your contribution to the village in a way that suits your abilities even with the stigma of being unable to use magic... I am neither young nor foolish enough to claim that you are unsuitable for Elria without considering those results."

As she evaluated Reid, Princess Chris nodded softly. And her head sank further and further down.

"Well, personally, I feel like Elria has been stolen from me...!!"

"...I apologize for that, in a way."

"It doesn't matter. The fact remains that Elria chose you... I have no intention of elevating you in front of everyone or deceiving them with words about testing your love."

As Princess Chris smiled with a hint of mischief, Selvas, holding a voice amplification magic device, climbed onto the stage and began the proceedings.

"This time, it will be a showdown between Princess Christia, who is famous for her excessive love for Elria-sama and her eccentric behavior, and Reid Frieden-sama, who has become Elria-sama's fiancé. I, Selvas, will have the honor of serving as the host and moderator."

"Wait a minute! I sense ill intentions in my introduction!!"

"For those working within the castle, it is a well-known fact. And precisely because everyone knows, there are high expectations for the valiant efforts of Reid-sama."

Ignoring Princess Chris's protest, Selvas calmly continued. Judging from his strangely accustomed manner, he must have often served as the host for such events.

"Lastly—the winner can truly be called Elria-sama's supporter."

As the audience focused on Reid, the tiered gallery was illuminated by magic lights devices. On top of it was a luxurious chair. And there sat—Elria, her face turning bright red as she lowered her head. Blushing up to her ears, she shrank herself and trembled.

"T-This is so embarrassing..."

"It's adorable to see Elria embarrassed!!"

"Princess Chris, please refrain from interrupting the proceedings to cheer for Elria-sama."

As Princess Chris rushed to Elria's side, Selvas immediately restrained her with chains created from magic. It was a treatment that seemed far from that of a princess.

"Now, Reid-sama, would you like to share your enthusiasm?"

"Umm... yes. Although I have only recently met Elria, as her fiancé, I will strive not only to meet her expectations but also the expectations of everyone in the audience."

"Thank you for your wonderful enthusiasm. Now, Princess Chris, please."

"Hmph! I have been with Elria since childhood! I can answer everything, from her likes and dislikes to the number and brands of teas she spilled during nap time!!"

"I hope that ability can be utilized for the sake of the country in the future."

Nodding gracefully, Selvas returned to the proceedings.

"The right to answer the questions lies with the magic button device on your seats. The one who lights up the button first will be given the opportunity to answer. And Elria-sama will be in charge of reading the questions and judging the answers."

"M-Me...? I have to do it?"

"I apologize for the trouble. However, there was a request to hear the gentle voice of quiet Elria-sama, so if you could kindly read the questions and make the judgments, I would appreciate it."

"G-Got it..."

"And whether the answer is correct or not, please use the buttons in front of you."

Selvas bowed deeply and handed Elria the prepared questions. However, due to nerves, her eyes were swirling as she glanced over the written questions. Elria then slowly took a deep breath—

"Th... the f-f-first q-question—"

She stuttered, just as expected. Her performance was so impeccable that she could not even reach the content of the question. Upon seeing Elria like that, Princess Chris enthusiastically hit the magic device.

"Elria is so adorableeee!!"

"Princess Chris, the question hasn't been read out yet."

"That was my instinct speaking!!"

"I see. However, I will have to revoke your right to answer from now on."

As the two exchanged such banter, Elria trembled, hiding her bright red face behind the question paper. If this continued, Elria might succumb to her embarrassment and collapse.

"...I'm sorry, can I leave the reading to Selvas-san?"

"Hmm... So, she still finds it difficult to speak in public. In that case, I will handle the reading, and Elria-sama will be in charge of judging the answers."

Adapting swiftly to the change in plans, Selvas proceeded to read the questions.

"Now, for the first question, Elria-sama's hob—"

But before he could finish reading, Princess Chris lit up the magic device.

"———Reading. She enjoys reading not only books but also research papers, primarily on magic."

As Elria nodded in agreement with the answer, the sound of the correct answer resonated throughout the venue. Amidst the audience's excitement once again, Princess Chris proudly puffed out her chest.

"Hehe, with questions like this, there's no need to listen till the end, right?"

".....I suppose so."

While replying to Princess Chris's words, Reid felt anxious internally.

What just happened was not a matter of simple knowledge or memory. The questions were not prepared by Elria, so it can be inferred that their contents are understandable to others.

Princess Chris watched Selvas's mouth movements as he read the question sheet and confirmed the word following '*hobby*' before answering.

Capturing such subtle movements is possible for Reid as well, but she likely speculates not only from Selvas's mouth movements but also from his intonations and habits during the reading. And undoubtedly—magic is involved.

When they first met, Princess Chris hugged Elria at an abnormal speed. Reid had witnessed a similar type of magic before. If it is the same type of magic, it would be possible to anticipate the questions based on Selvas's mouth movements and intonations, and also thoroughly consider the possibilities in advance.

In other words, Princess Chris is genuinely here to win.

"You wouldn't expect to end up without achieving any results as Elria's fiancé, would you?"

Princess Chris taunted Reid with a confident smile.

This was not just any event, but a serious match.

Reid was feeling anxious to the point of seriously considering the disparity in their respective strengths and the state of the match.

While pondering on such thoughts, he couldn't help but feel the weight of the tense atmosphere, knowing that losing this battle was not an option. Because—

"....."

Elria, sitting at the top, was staring at Reid intently. Her eyes were filled with sparkling anticipation. She had a look of wanting Reid to answer correctly so badly. Moreover, when their eyes met, she nodded back as if to encourage Reid, *"You can do it, Reid"*.

However, the match at hand is extremely unfavorable. He could not possibly beat Princess Chris in quick response rounds. And if he pressed the button before the question was confirmed and answered incorrectly, Elria would undoubtedly be disappointed. While pondering such thoughts—

"For the second question, when Elria-sama is sle—"

"Stuffed animals. Her favorite is a big, black dog named Vallee."

The correct answer sound echoed as Princess Chris continued to answer correctly.

Throughout his countless battles and desperate situations, Reid had never experienced a situation where the path to victory was so elusive. And when he looked at Elria again—

"....."

Her expression seemed a little dissatisfied. She pouted slightly. However, upon closer inspection, her gaze was not directed at Reid but at Princess Chris.

Elria probably realized that she was using magic, and from their long-standing relationship, she also noticed that Princess Chris was genuinely here to win.

"...Selvas, can I ask the questions?"

"I don't mind, but there's a possibility that Elria-sama might stutter in a cute manner—"

"T-That happened because I was reading the question sheet...! If I just ask the questions that I come up with on the spot, I can ask them without stuttering...!"

"I understand. In that case, let's have Elria-sama ask the questions."

As Elria desperately explained herself, the voice amplification magic device was once again handed to her.

"Um... the third question..."

Her voice trembled slightly, but she managed to articulate the question without stuttering.

"What is my favorite seasoning when I'm really tired?"

"...It's a very specific question, isn't it?"

"Not really. It just came to my mind."

Princess Chris seemed to sense something, but Elria vigorously shook her head and insisted. And naturally, Reid noticed it, too. It was obvious to anyone that Elria intended to ask a question that favored Reid.

As proof, she confidently sent him a gaze saying, "*This one will be fine!*". The people in the audience who were observing the whole situation also seemed to understand what was happening, showing expressions of realization.

In the midst of all this, Reid reached out with an unusually heavy hand and pressed the button.

"...A salty seasoning with a sprinkle of salt."

"!"

****Ding-dong, ding-dong****, Elria repeatedly triggered the correct answer sound with a look of immense joy. She then continued to ask more questions.

"For the fourth question, what criteria do I use when choosing a dish at the academy's dining hall?"

"You choose a different dish from the one I picked. The reason is that we'll share half of each other's dishes later."

"For the fifth question, what do I do after going to the large bath with Millis?"

"You stop by the dining hall and buy ice cream or sweets for both of us, then we eat them together in our room."

"For the sixth question, what do I do before going to sleep?"

"You roll around on the bed to check the distance where you can toss and turn without hitting me."

"Ugh...!! They're using the questions and answers to show off their close relationship...!!"

"And Reid-sama is answering without making any mistakes. It really brings to mind the harmonious atmosphere between the two during their academy life."

"I'm sure they even say 'ahh' to each other when they eat!"

"According to my research, it seems that they do that even in public places like the dining hall."

"That's not acceptable!! If people see Elria innocently opening her mouth and courteously moving it after putting the spoon in as she chews, the overwhelming cuteness would make the entire human race faint, you know!?"

"That may be true for Princess Chris, but I'm sure their fellow classmates would also be warmed by it, wouldn't they?"

Upon hearing such comments from the two, the audience laughed and smiled.

Though Reid usually didn't care about it, he felt embarrassed in front of a crowd. Sensing his discomfort, Selvas nodded before speaking up.

"Now, we'll move on to the last question. Reid-sama has already secured victory in terms of the number of correct answers, but since this is a match to show who loves Elria-sama more, let's aim for as many correct answers as possible."

After that preface, Selvas prompted Elria for the last question. However... Elria lowered her head slightly, as if contemplating something.

"Elria-sama? Is something the matter?"

"...Mm, I was thinking about what to ask."

After responding, Elria slowly opened her mouth—

"—What do I like?"

With just that short question, both Reid and Princess Chris were momentarily taken aback. They had assumed it would be a question that only Reid could answer, so their reactions were delayed. But Reid quickly snapped back to his senses and pressed the button—

"—Lukewarm milk tea."

That was his answer. However... **buzz**, the sound of a wrong answer buzzed for the first time.

"Oh...? It appears Reid-sama has given an incorrect answer. Elria-sama, would you be so kind as to tell us the correct answer?"

When Selvas prompted for the correct answer, Elria softly shook her head.

"I won't say it."

"I see. Is it alright if you don't reveal the correct answer?"

"Yeah, it's a secret."

Blushing slightly, Elria covered her mouth with the question sheet. However, her gaze was clearly directed at Reid. And when their eyes met, Elria happily narrowed her eyes and said to Reid once again—

"———It's a secret."