

Ch.7
Formidable Adversary ~ Multilingual Elder ~

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The anniversary of the siege of the castle fell exactly one week after I confided the plan to Shinji. The dignified Oryu Castle stood tall, bearing a clear blue hue as it looked down upon me.

“Good morning.”

Ignoring the gaze from the ticket booth attendant behind the acrylic panel, I headed towards the main gate. Since I had already paid the entrance fee, I hoped they would overlook this slight breach with a spirit of hospitality. The time was 10:55AM. I had managed to arrive exactly five minutes earlier than the designated time. Quite a feat by Japanese standards.

Oryu Castle, visible from all over the Joshu region, stood atop the mountain. Of course, I had used the shuttle bus. Climbing mountains, which were not even my hobby, was not something I did multiple times a year.

“Are you Ajima?”

“Huh?”

“You’re Ajima, right? Ms. Baba referred you to us.”

"Oh, yes. I’m Azuma.”

Noticing my unfamiliar behavior near the entrance, three elderly people approached. They were probably around the same age as my grandfather. This elderly gentleman, who appeared to be around 80, seemed to have difficulty pursing his lips due to his large dentures. I noticed a membership card hanging around his neck. Ah, this person must be—

“You must be Mr. Itami, right? Ms. Baba referred you to me. I’m Yu Azuma. I look forward to working with you starting today.”

“Likewise, I look forward to working with you.”

As I extended my right hand, Mr. Itami’s frail fingers, adorned with wrinkles, enveloped my hand. The other two gentlemen beside him also exchanged handshakes in succession.

“Well then, without further ado, I’ll go fetch the armbands. I’ll be back shortly.”

With those words, one of the gentlemen disappeared somewhere. His round eyes, rosy cheeks, and plump figure were quite charming.

“We need the armbands for this activity. Each person takes a turn, and today it’s his. The person on armband duty goes to the main gate to collect everyone’s armbands.”

“I see.”

For a moment, I had doubted the severity of the hierarchy, but Mr. Itami’s explanation about the duty rotation reassured me.

“By the way, have you ever been to the Kudamatsu Museum nearby?”

The sudden question didn’t come from Mr. Itami but from the other gentleman.

“The Kudamatsu Museum? No, I haven’t been there yet.”

“I see. You should check it out. Here, take a look at this picture I took when I went there last time. Pretty amazing, right?”

I was forcibly handed a photograph. In it, a broken fighter plane was depicted. Perhaps when one would get older, they would come to appreciate this charm.

“Hey, hey, you old man. Can’t you see Ajima is troubled? Your story can wait. I don’t understand why you suddenly brought out the picture.” Mr. Itami interjected sharply, prompting the military nerd gentleman to smoothly stow away the photo. It seemed Mr. Itami held a much higher position.

“By the way, Ajima, do you speak English?”

“Yes.”

“In that case, you might find today a bit boring. The guide for today is Spanish.”

“Spanish...”

Could it be that the guide would conduct the tour in Spanish?

At this moment, the gentleman who had left earlier to fetch the armbands hurried back.

“Sorry for the wait. Here are the armbands.”

“Thank you. Well then, see you later.”

The two gentlemen started walking towards the south gate, leaving only Mr. Itami and me behind. It seemed that the plan to move in a group of four had changed.

“Mr. Itami, where are they heading?”

“Since there's only one pre-booked visitor today, those who aren’t assigned will do some outreach at the gate. If they spot foreign tourists, they’ll ask if they need a guide.”

It may seem as daunting as hunting for a cut model, but this was exactly what I had imagined a volunteer guide to be like.

“But that old man can’t seem to read the mood.”

“Hahaha...”

It was easy to guess which old man he was referring to. It seemed that even in the senior society, there were dark sides.

The client appeared on time. I felt relieved at her gentle appearance. Hanna, the Spanish, was a 20-year-old college student. That was as much as I could gather, as from there, the conversation was initiated by the elderly Japanese, starting a Spanish exchange. Judging by Hanna’s cheerful responses, it seemed the conversation was going well.

“Before we enter the main castle tower, let me give you a brief history of Oryu Castle.”

Mr. Itami informed me, before switching back to Spanish from his denture-clad mouth. He then took out a file from his oversized shoulder bag, and finally, the volunteer tour began.

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